

Pearl Harbor Survivors
Association

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Fifty years after the event, a group of Pearl Harbor survivors are determined "to take the message to the country," in an effort to set the record straight about December 7, 1941.

Interview by Al Hemingway

RADAR SIGHTING

At exactly 7:02 a.m. on Sunday, December 7, 1941, Private George E. Elliott, manning the Opana mobile radar station at Kahuku, situated at the northernmost point of Oahu, one of the main islands in the Hawaiian chain, spotted "an unusually large response" on his scope. Neither he nor his partner, Private Joseph L. Lockard, the more experienced of the two on the 270-B radar unit, had seen anything quite so massive before. The "blip," meanwhile, was only 132 miles away...and approaching.

After some discussion, the pair decided to inform the information center at the military aircraft warning service at Fort Shafter. In time, Lockard reached U.S. Army Lieutenant Kermit A. Tyler, executive officer of the 78th Pursuit Squadron, the duty officer that morning. Not to worry, said the young officer, it probably was the flight of B-17s expected to be flying in from the United States.

Unfortunately, this story is true. The unimpressed Army Air Corps officer could not have been more mistaken. The "unusually large blips" that Privates Lockard and Elliott picked up that sleepy Sunday morning were not the American B-17s, but Japanese aircraft attacking from a carrier task force and bent upon destroying U.S. vessels moored in Battleship Row, the better part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The now infamous sneak attack of 50 years ago of course would plunge the United States into World War II. "Remember Pearl Harbor" would be the rallying cry for the American people throughout the war and after.

Jesse E. Pond, Jr., a fireman whose destroyer was anchored at the northeast end of Ford Island's U.S. Naval Air Station, was just ending his engine-room watch that serene Sunday

morning when the first wave of enemy planes strafed and bombed Pearl Harbor. For the next two hours, Pond and his shipmates operated the ship's 3-inch gun in an effort to repel the enemy's surprise air assault.

In the 50 years since, there have been many Pearl Harbor stories told, some true, some false. As president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, Pond is familiar with both varieties.

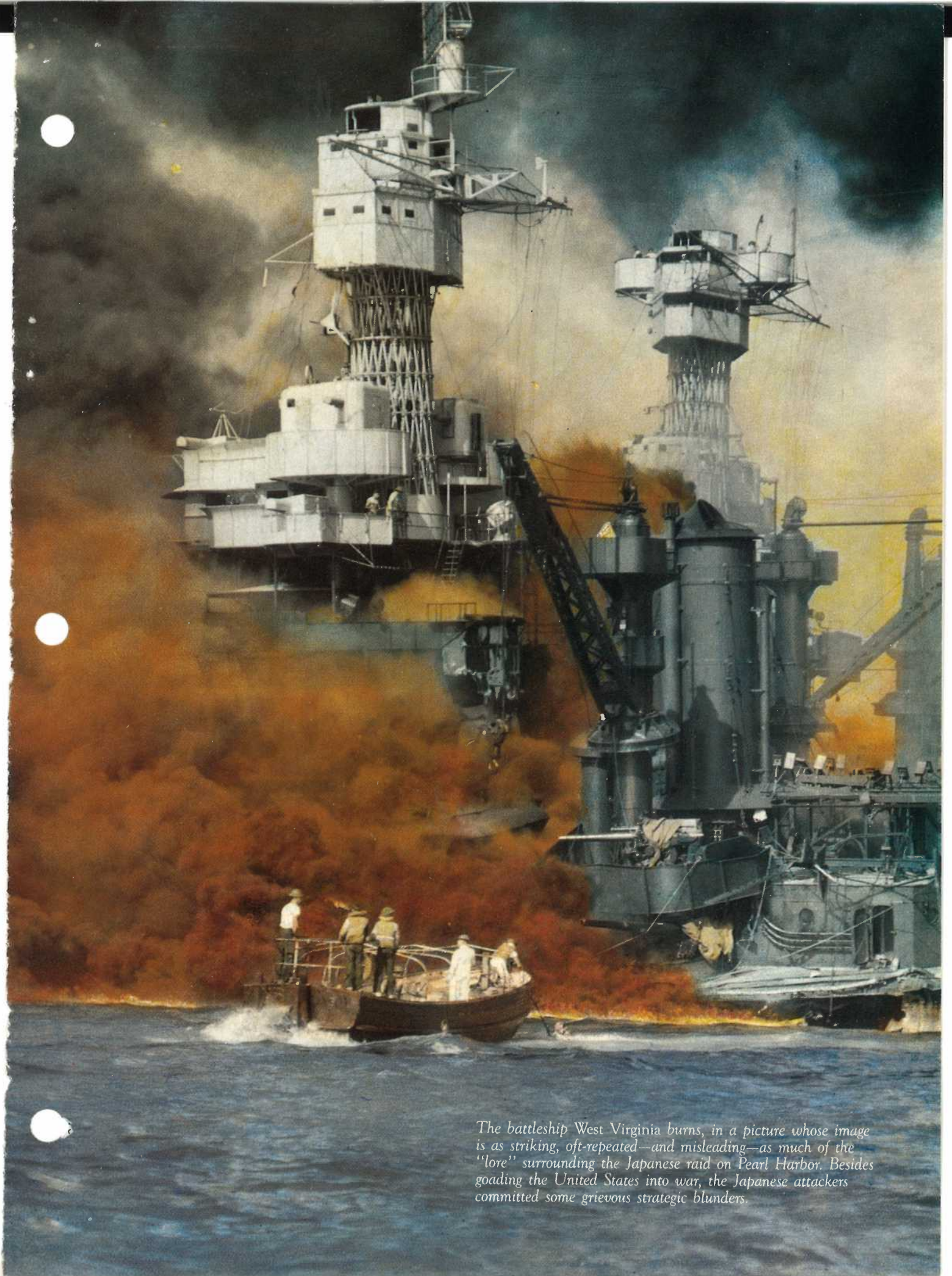
In 1985, in fact, Pond, together with other Pearl Harbor survivors, organized the Pearl Harbor History Associates, Inc. to promote the "education, research, and promulgation of historical data" surrounding that infamous day in U.S. history.

Hemingway: Why did you enlist in the Navy?

Pond: In April 1940, I joined the Naval Reserve for three reasons: one, to try and get a commission; two, to keep out of trench warfare; and three, to play on their basketball team.

Hemingway: How did you get stationed at Pearl Harbor?

Pond: My ship was the USS *Chew*, a four-stacker (destroyer) out of red-lead row in San Diego, California. We went to Hawaii for anti-submarine duty as a part of COM-14 (Commander, 14th Naval District). That was DESDIV-80 (Destroyer Division), in which all the destroyers were four-stackers. The first shots fired by our side on December 7, 1941, were by the USS *Ward* (DD-139), one of the ships in our division. She dropped depth charges against a submarine. It turned out to be one of the midget submarines launched by the Japanese during the attack. The *Ward* had relieved us on Saturday, December 6, and we went into Pearl. And here's a little-known fact: much later, the *Ward* was so badly damaged at Leyte Gulf, she had to be sunk. The date was December 7, 1944, three



The battleship West Virginia burns, in a picture whose image is as striking, oft-repeated—and misleading—as much of the “lore” surrounding the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor. Besides goading the United States into war, the Japanese attackers committed some grievous strategic blunders.



"Those guys were fliers," remarked Jesse Pond of the Japanese airmen, here depicted in action by Robert T. McCall, "No doubt about it." But, in their zeal to take out major warships, they neglected Pearl Harbor's vital fuel and power facilities.

years to the day after Pearl Harbor. Also, the ship that had to sink the *Ward* was commanded by a Lieutenant William Outerbridge, the very same officer who was in command of the *Ward* on December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor.

Hemingway: How ironic! And if it had been the *Chew* on duty that Sunday morning, it would have been your ship that would have fired the opening shots.

Pond: Well, we joked about that later . . . and the *Ward* was a good ship. She was manned by reservists from St. Paul and Minneapolis. By the way, our organization, Pearl Harbor History Associates, Inc., has all the records that tell who were regular Navy and who were fleet reserve at that time.

Hemingway: What happened to you in particular on December 7, 1941?

Pond: Well, as I said, we were relieved by the *Ward* and went into Pearl. All the battleships were tied up at the quays, big concrete mooring bases, along Battleship Row. The only exception was the USS *Pennsylvania* (BB-38), which was in dry dock No. 1. All the battleships were facing toward the entrance to the harbor, with the exception of the repair ship *Vestal* (AR-4), outboard of the USS *Arizona* (BB-39). She was facing in the opposite direction. We were sent to X-ray 5, the first berth beyond Battleship Row, northeast of Ford's Island. X-ray 5 had some barges, a few submarine caissons, those round white affairs, and the old hulk of the *Baltimore*, a Spanish-American warship. The USS *Allen* was against the *Baltimore*, and we were outboard of the *Allen* facing toward Battleship Row.

Hemingway: What happened when the first wave of Japanese planes came in?

Pond: I had been on the 4 to 8 a.m. watch in the after engine room. It was 7:45 a.m., and I had just been relieved 15 minutes early. It was a courtesy we did for each other. I came up topside and saw that it was a beautiful day. I was thinking of a way that I could get off the ship to play ball when the mess cook came by and told me to hurry up and get chow so he could catch the 8 a.m. liberty boat. Just then I saw a plane dive through the clouds but didn't pay any attention to it, I slid down the ladder into the compartment below, crashing into the deck plates. It was a Sunday morning; people were trying to sleep in and I was trying to wake some of them up. Well, as soon as I hit the deck plates, there was an explosion. The only thing I could think of was that the stupid pilot had accidentally dropped his bombs. Just then another explosion occurred. About that time, the mess cook stuck his head down the hatch and yelled, "The Japs are bombing us!" Then the alarm sounding general quarters went off. It was 7:55 a.m. I had taken off my denim jumper, and all I had on were wet pants and squishy shoes from being in the engine room half the night. I took off for my gun, which was on the forecastle. I was the pointer for this 3-inch gun. And I was the only one on board ship that day from my gun crew. Everybody else was on liberty.

Hemingway: How did you fire it?

Pond: I was all alone—no ammo—no nothing! We had heavy canvas awnings over everything that were tied down

at 1-foot intervals. I started pulling off the canvas gun cover, and soon 15 to 20 guys joined in. Then we began cutting away the awning. By this time, 15 to 20 bombs had already fallen. There were planes zooming by real low. I'm sure you have read accounts from eyewitnesses who stated they could see the faces of the Japanese pilots. Well, that is absolutely true!

Hemingway: That's flying low!

Pond: These guys were fliers. No doubt about it. We had a ready box nearby that contained about six shells in it—but no way to open it. Our skipper had the keys locked in his cabin and he was ashore. So, we cut it open with a bolt cutter. Some of the guys went down to the armory to get more ammunition. In the meantime, one guy said to me, "I'll throw a shell in the damn thing if you open it up." I showed another sailor with a pair of pliers in his pocket how to set the fuses. I made a quick calculation that 1½ seconds would do. That would be about 3,000 feet in the air. We slammed in a shell and fired. That was 8:03 a.m., according to the ship's log. So it took eight minutes from the time the first bomb was dropped for us to get the canvas and awnings off, and everybody got a fast education in how to operate a 3-inch gun—until we were in action!

Hemingway: Pretty fast for an inexperienced crew.

Pond: Not bad at all. After we fired about three or four shells, a Japanese plane landed in the water right off our bow, between us and the *Nevada*.

Hemingway: Did you shoot it down?

Pond: No. And it didn't actually crash, it just glided in the water and settled there. We could see two Japanese struggling to get out of the plane when somebody hollered to me: "Turn the gun on 'em!" But I thought, hell, he's down, and we've got other fish to fry with all these planes in the air. Later, when I looked, there was a ring of burning gasoline in the water. The plane had evidently sunk. Interestingly enough, they found this plane several years ago. It was a Kate (Nakajima B5N), one of their torpedo bombers. And here's another little-known fact: one of the pilots did get out and swam over to Ford's Island. He was found dead with bayonet wounds. Apparently, one of the Marines had killed him.

Hemingway: You found out later... meanwhile, what next?

Pond: Well... the *Vestal* went by us on fire and close to sinking. They ran her aground on Aiea Flats, which was right behind us. In all, we fired about 75 rounds. There were several hangfires (unexploded shells). I told the pointer to open the breech, and when he did I caught the damn things and threw them over the side. One shell weighed 40 pounds. It's amazing what you can do when you're in combat. Afterward, one of my shipmates told me that one of the shells had exploded after it had hit the water. However, I really don't recall that. There was so much going on.

Hemingway: Did you hit any planes?

Pond: Well, we thought we downed two and claimed half of another. But they credited us with only one. In all fairness though, some Japanese planes had two or three ships shooting at them, especially in the second wave.

Hemingway: Did the *Chew* get underway?

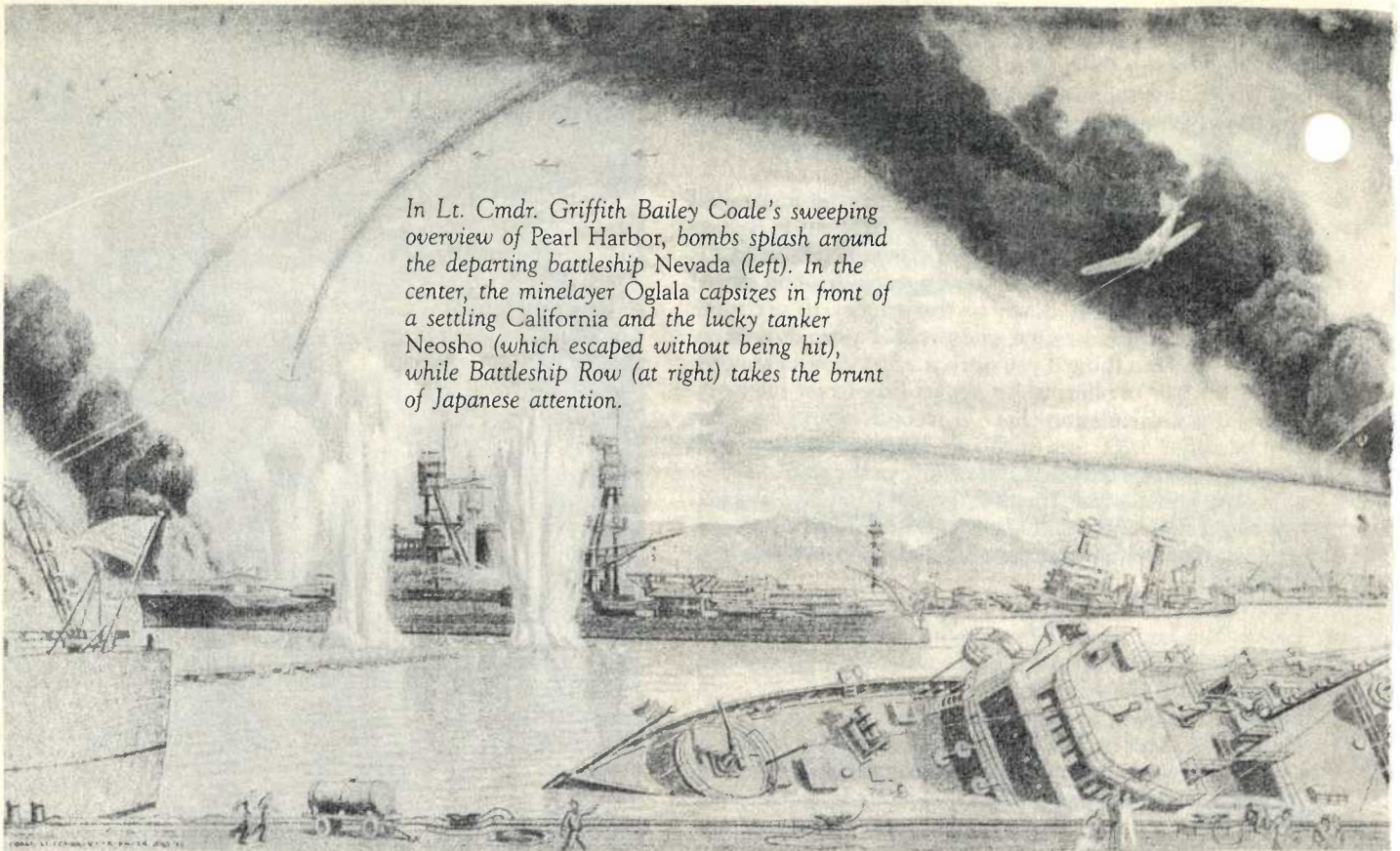
Pond: We thought we were going to and we also thought we were going to lay a smokescreen as we ran past Battleship Row. At 8:17 a.m., we lifted all four of our safeties on the boilers. That scared the hell out of everybody! We thought we got hit. Luckily, no bombs landed near us. They were after the battleships. We did get strafed several times but nobody was killed or wounded. Sadly, we lost two of our men on Ten Dock, where the *Pennsylvania* was berthed. They were part of a church party fighting fires in Dry Dock No. 1.

Hemingway: And then?

Pond: At 9:45 a.m., the Japanese withdrew, and our captain came aboard at 10 a.m. Finally we got underway and went around Ford Island, near the northern part where the light



TOP: Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats burn in the wake of an attack on Kaneohe Bay Naval Air Station. ABOVE: By 1945, when this photograph of Jesse E. Pond, Jr., was taken, the ultimate legacy of Pearl Harbor had come around full circle—with the unconditional surrender of Japan.



In Lt. Cmdr. Griffith Bailey Coale's sweeping overview of Pearl Harbor, bombs splash around the departing battleship Nevada (left). In the center, the minelayer Oglala capsizes in front of a settling California and the lucky tanker Neosho (which escaped without being hit), while Battleship Row (at right) takes the brunt of Japanese attention.

cruiser Raleigh (CL-7) was. She was down at her stern. There was a fire on the Curtiss (AV-4), a seaplane tender. The Nevada (BB-36) had gotten underway and by that time was beached at Hospital Point. We made it to the entrance of the harbor doing 25 knots—our skipper was real gung-ho. As soon as we got outside the entrance, we dropped a pair of depth charges because we picked up a submarine. It was 10:20 a.m. We were supposed to head south and chase the Japanese fleet. The St. Louis (CL-49) was already out there, plus a couple of other tin cans. However, we were ordered back because of the alleged submarine threat. We got back at dark and suddenly realized what a licking we had taken. I still didn't have a shirt on, and we were wearing those WWI helmets that resembled tin plates. There were fires everywhere and occasionally you'd hear an explosion.

Hemingway: What about some of the facts and fallacies concerning Pearl Harbor? First, you were situated near the Arizona—did you see what actually hit her?

Pond: No, but I felt it. We were on the forecastle, as I said earlier, right next to the Arizona. However, we were firing over toward the Detroit, on the other side of Ford's Island. So, we wouldn't be looking at the Arizona. But . . . we had an officer who was spotting for us, Ensign Gex, and he witnessed the bombing. He said it was a dive bomber and saw the bomb being released from the plane, hitting the Arizona. It wasn't down the stack or anything like that. There was a small explosion. Then, a few seconds later, there was a tremendous eruption that seemed to be in midair, over the ship. Then there was another one after that from the ship's magazine that cut her in half. Gex retired as a captain and wrote what he saw for the U.S. Naval Academy's *Alumni Bulletin*. It's an excellent and accurate description. He's allowing me to quote it in a book I'm writing about my experiences in the Navy during World War II.

Hemingway: You mentioned midget submarines before. What happened to them?

Pond: The Japanese launched five midget submarines, and they were all lost. The only one that wasn't destroyed

belonged to Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, who was captured at Bellows Field.

Hemingway: Wasn't he the first Japanese POW captured by the Americans?

Pond: That's absolutely correct. He was POW Number One.

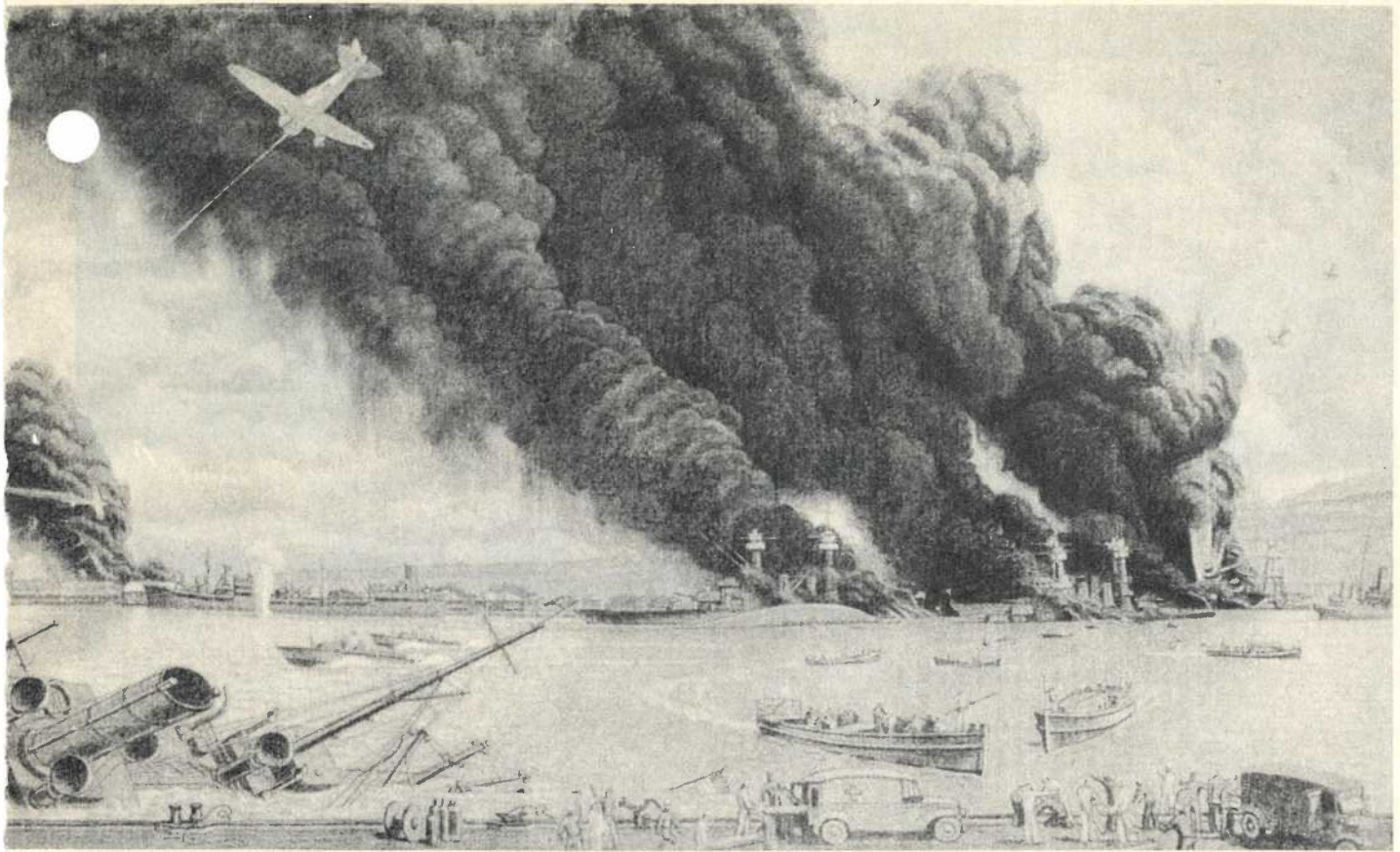
Hemingway: Also, one of the soldiers that captured him was named Sergeant David M. Akui. By chance, was he also Japanese?

Pond: No, he was Hawaiian and a member of the U.S. Army Reserves. A friend of mine stationed at Bellows Field was in on the capture of that midget sub. They tied ropes to it and pulled it from the water. Another friend of mine was a radioman who was assigned the task of checking out its communications equipment. As a result of all that, he wrote a book on midget submarines and even corresponded with Sakamaki.

Hemingway: Wasn't there a flight of B-17s arriving from California at about the same time the attack was in progress?

Pond: Yes, and they got caught up in the attack. I saw one of them coming in real low. He was attempting to land at Hickam Field. There have been reports that stated the Japanese had four-engine planes at Pearl that day. And there is another story involving their Betty Bomber. The only planes the Japanese had were Kates, Vals and Zekes. One of the Pearl Harbor survivors claimed he shot down a twin-engine plane and the dead Japanese pilot had a McKinley High School ring on his finger. Now . . . if one of the Martin Bombers did get off from Hickam Field and was shot down, and the body of its American pilot was burnt beyond recognition, then I can see how the tale of the McKinley High School ring got started. Another story that emerged said all the pilots were actual blond Germans because no "Jap" could fly that well. Also—and this one is somewhere in the National Archives—there was a report that the Japanese had landed wearing blue coveralls! All of these stories are false. None can be substantiated. In fact, one of our association members has a list of every

FACTS
&
FALLACIES



Japanese pilot, his ship, the type of aircraft he was flying that day, and even his radioman's name.

Hemingway: One of the Japanese pilots crashed on a nearby island and was later killed by the inhabitants. What's the truth behind that episode?

Pond: Ironically, I went to college with the guy whose family owns the island—his name is Russ Robinson. The island was Niihau. The Robinsons also own a large part of Kauai. What happened was the Japanese aviator crashed on Niihau, and a Japanese national who lived there came to his aid. They decided that they were going to seize the island. How, I can't imagine, but they set out to do it. Well, the Japanese pilot ended up shooting a man named Bene Kanahale. And that made Bene mad. So, he hit the pilot in the head with a rock and killed him. The Japanese national was so upset, he committed suicide, probably fearing for his life.

Hemingway: Another twist in the day's events was the sending of a top-secret message from U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to Lt. Gen. Walter C. Short, commanding general of the Hawaiian Department. It contained information about an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor and was supposedly delivered by a Japanese. What about this event?

Pond: That's true! The Japanese individual was a Western Union deliveryman. There was a big screw-up in Washington, D.C., about sending that notice out. Instead of using the telephone, which they had done on numerous other occasions, the person in charge of transmitting the message decided to send it Western Union.

Hemingway: And this was a top-secret message, right?

Pond: That's correct. It went to Honolulu and they gave it to the Japanese guy on the bicycle. And he delivered it on the afternoon of December 7. Too late!

Hemingway: Amazing. Speaking of General Short, both he and Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, were censured because of the Pearl Harbor attack. As a result, both their careers were ruined. Was this unfair in your opinion?

Pond: It was very unfair. I know Kimmel's son. I was an honorary pallbearer at his father's funeral in 1969. I'm not trying to protect Kimmel and Short. They were in command but... they did get a raw deal.

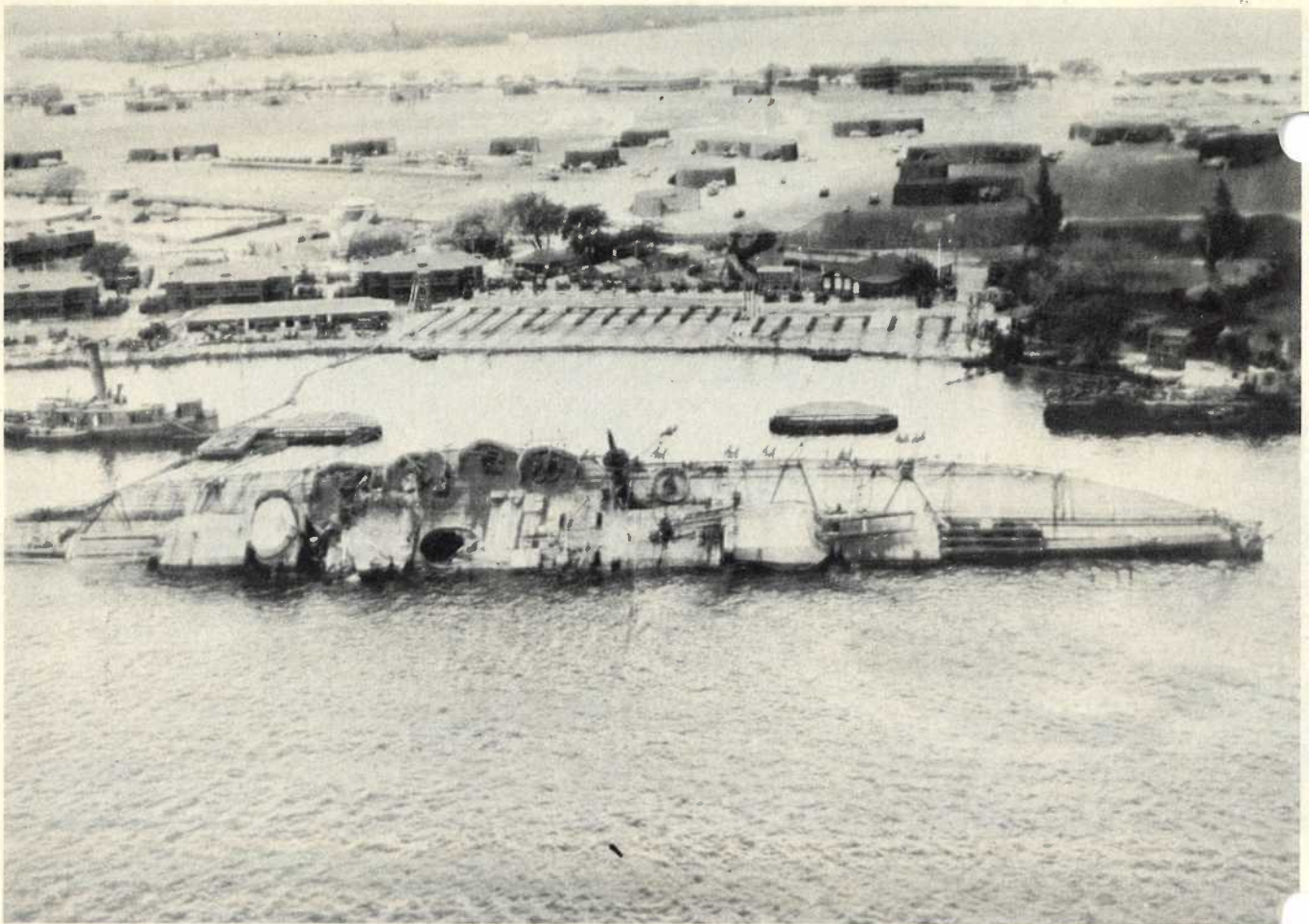
Hemingway: Would you agree that the Japanese made a serious mistake in not following up the attack? *Yop mistakes*

Pond: They made several serious mistakes. Tactically, Pearl Harbor was a great success for them, but, as you said, they didn't follow it up. Their attack leader, Mitsuo Fuchida, wanted to send in a third wave of planes. Of course, they would have lost more aircraft because their element of surprise was gone. But, more important, our entire fuel oil docks, Navy yard and gasoline tanks had been left untouched. If memory serves me correctly, there were only two power plants on the whole island of Oahu at that time. One was in Honolulu and the other was in the Navy Yard. If the Japanese had opted to send in another wave of planes or to disembark a landing force, they could have done some tremendous damage! All the U.S. Navy had back then were five commissioned tankers. And they weren't too big, either. They were 10,000 tons at most. In fact, I believe the *Neosho* (AO-23) was only 8,000 tons. If the Japanese destroyed *them*, it would have really set us back! That was a strategic error on their part. Also, quite a few Americans wanted to remain neutral and were against joining the war (in Europe and the Far East). The attack on Pearl Harbor really united the country.

Hemingway: When did you start the Pearl Harbor History Associates? *PH Survivors Assoc*

Pond: In 1982. All of us who organized it were former national officers of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. The association is a social group, which is fine, but we wanted to do something about the historical aspect of Pearl Harbor. Nobody is taking care of the records and getting the truth out, especially to the younger generation, on what really happened that day. So, nine of us got together and formed the group and incorporated. In addition, we received non-profit status. We've printed 20,000 fact brochures and handed

KIMMEL & SHORT - Treated unfairly!



Although the Oklahoma was raised, she was judged not worth repairing and was scrapped. The only other ships to be put permanently out of commission as a result of the Pearl Harbor attack were the battleship Arizona and the minelayer Oglala.

out all of them. The brochure contains eight pages of facts about Pearl Harbor, such as the number of Medal of Honor recipients (16), Navy Cross recipients (51) and Silver Star recipients (53). Also included are the number and breakdown of Japanese aircraft, U.S. ships damaged, breakdown of U.S. casualties and so forth.

Hemingway: How many members are in your group?

Pond: Close to 400. And any person interested in Pearl Harbor can be a member. We have high-school students and teachers who belong to the History Associates. We charge a fee for joining. I've reviewed six books so far this year and written a foreword for another about Pearl Harbor. I received a fee for that and put it in the general fund. Another way we raise money is by selling a chart of Pearl Harbor showing the location of all the ships on the morning of December 7. When I was first married, I was working for the Navy in San Francisco. One of our submarines had just returned from the A-bomb blast in the Bikini Atoll. It was my job, as a computer technician, to repair the torpedo data computer on this sub. Anyway...up over the top of the computer was a navigational chart of Pearl Harbor. So, I took it home to show my new bride and started marking ship locations on it. Unbeknownst to me, two other fellows were doing the same thing. So, we accumulated all of our information and put it on this chart. We reproduced it and now sell it to raise funds for the associates group. And it has everything on it—water barges, garbage barges, ferryboats, you name it. On some charts, I've seen the ships facing in the wrong direction. To the best of my knowledge, this is the most accurate description of where the vessels were on that day. Also, an artist from Stratford, Connecticut, Robert Bracci,

drew a diorama of the Japanese planes swooping down to attack. It's fantastic and accurate—right down to the numbers on the planes! We use the center section of his diorama as the cover for our facts brochure.

Hemingway: So, you're saying a lot of what is published is plain wrong?

Pond: Yes! Several books have been written that are based on oral histories and they're very inaccurate. I've had to review several of them. For example, one guy said the bow was blown off the *Maryland* (BB-46). Well, that didn't happen. So, they take my comments and footnote them at the bottom when they reprint the book. Also, I'm writing my own book, entitled *The Square Peg*, on my experiences at Pearl Harbor and in the Navy during World War II.

Hemingway: How many casualties did the U.S. suffer at Pearl Harbor?

Pond: The total is over 3,000. The fact brochure has the breakdown by service. There were also about 100 civilian casualties. Of course the Navy had the vast majority, but the Marines and the Army suffered casualties also. In fact, I played basketball in the former mess hall at Hickam Field after the war had started. They had a big flag hanging there with more than 200 gold stars on it to commemorate those soldiers who had died on December 7. That will definitely bring a lump to your throat. □

Contributing editor Al Hemingway asked Jesse Pond to recommend the best additional reading on Pearl Harbor. His picks: "Walter Lord's Day of Infamy is pretty good. But for my money Gorden Prange's At Dawn We Slept and Dec. 7, 1941: The Day the Japanese Attacked Pearl Harbor are the best."