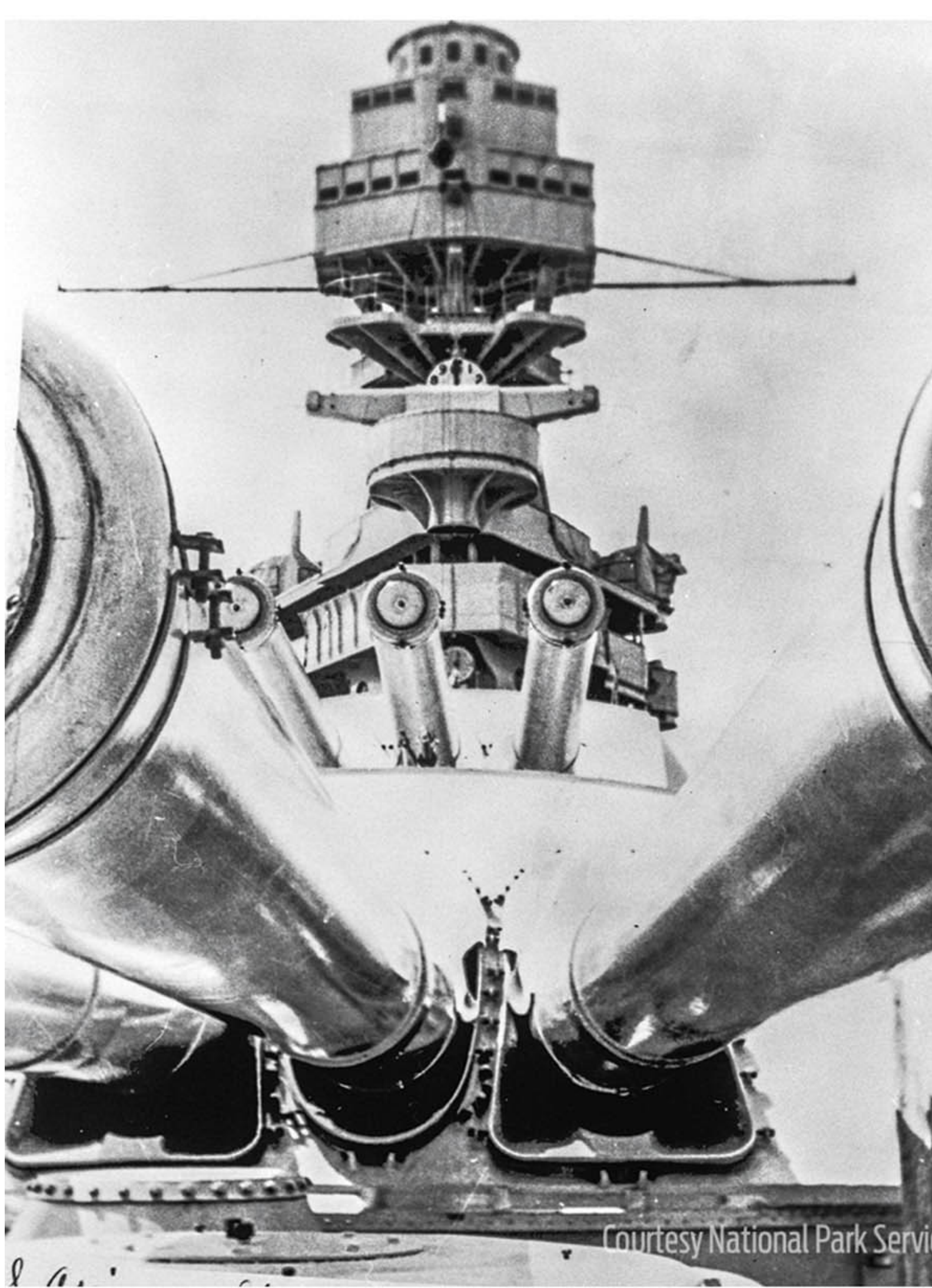


# Collier's

JUNE 14, 1941

## Impregnable Pearl Harbor

By Walter Davenport



Courtesy National Park Service

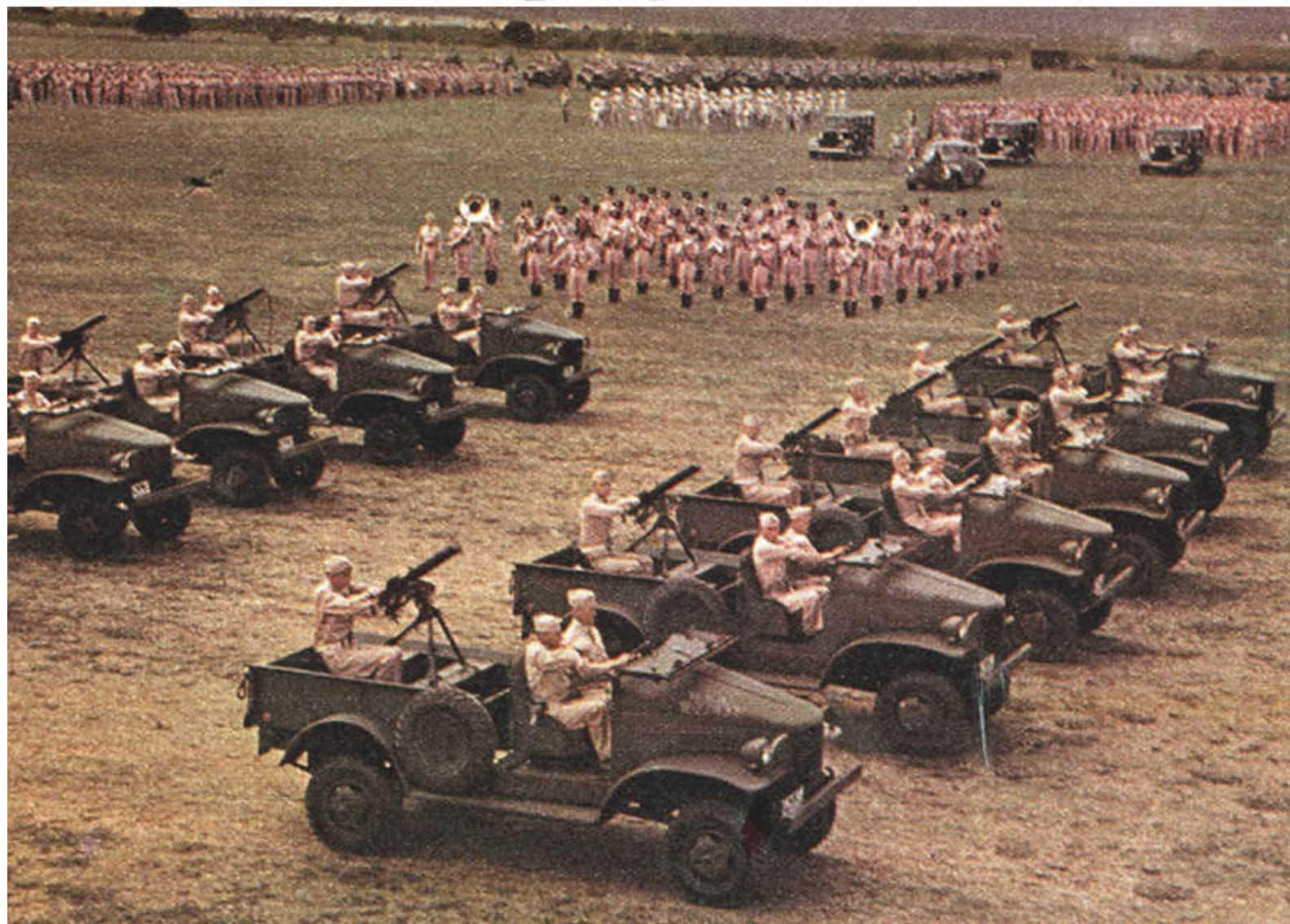
**W**E'RE sitting in Lousy Lui's on the two-bit end of the beach at Waikiki. We're drinking beer and talking Jap. Everybody in Honolulu talks Jap from the moment he opens his eyes upon Hawaii's jasmined morning until he turns in beneath the huge gloom of the semitropic night. Out here, sitting among these Pacific volcanoes, there are only two nations, the United States and Japan. England, Germany, the Mediterranean, the Middle East—that's another war.

The Hawaiian band is twanging *Ua Like No a Like* (*Oah Leekie No a Leekie*) and trying to swing it like Artie Shaw. It's like swinging an extra-dismal dirge. But no matter. Everything they play sounds like *Aloha Oe*, the most famous of all the Hawaiian moans, and after you've had several beers you want to cry. We're with Big Swede Nelson, the chief petty officer; Dazzy Monch, the gunner's mate; Boo Boo Wallace, the turret captain; Kack Kacinski, the chief aviation machinist's mate, and Mister Dooley, the warrant officer.

Off and on, we're more than that. It's Saturday night. Hula girls sit in for a beer, drink it and leave us cold. They're all bat-nose beauties, some of them Polynesian brown, some of them on the yellow side. But they always leave us after a beer, giving us a sad, melting *aole hiki* smile and saying, "Yesss-nooo, yess-nooo, sooooreee aloha." Or other guys from Pearl Harbor stop by to buy one and talk Jap. *Aole hiki* means No Can Do.

OldMagazineArticles.com





**Schofield Barracks, about thirty miles from Honolulu, is the main U. S. Army base in Hawaii. Here, machine-gun units for mobile defense, mounted in light, speedy trucks, are on review.**

Lousy Lui's is owned by a Jap. He's a toothy, half-pint bow-bow mystery, smooth as cream, tightly buttoned, neat as a dove egg, soaped, burnished, pomaded. He was born in the islands, is therefore an American citizen. But his parents were born in Japan which, under Japanese law, makes him a Japanese citizen, too. Japan can sentence him to death as a traitor if he puts America first. They say he's a major in the Jap military intelligence. But you're a sap if you believe everything they tell you in the islands. He seldom shows up on Saturday nights when the going is apt to get rough and the lads from Pearl Harbor and Schofield Barracks become suckers for rumors.

The place is jam-packed. They've closed the doors. Bum Tishi, a Jap who talks English like a New York Bowery boy—foist, thoid, boid and earl for oil—stands guard against crashers. Two Honolulu cops and a dusky Amazon called Maui May stand by to lend the Bum the assistance he may need. Maui May is there to look at and after the women. Sailors sit with their mates and soldiers with soldiers.

But neither soldier nor sailor has much truck with the civilian. Every civilian is suspect. He may be a spy, a stool, an intelligence officer, an espionage agent or counterespionage. Honolulu is acrawl with them—and that's no rumor. They're the Navy Intelligence, the Army Intelligence, the F.B.I. The enlisted men lump them all together and call them the Gestapo. Honolulu's shushed and shadowed numb. They're black, yellow, brown and haole (white). They're Navy wives, hula dancers, prostitutes, telephone girls. They're doormen, barkeepers, beachcombers, waiters, taxi drivers, bellhops and barbers. They're Limeys from Singapore, Dutchmen from Borneo, Frogs from Hainan, Chinks from Shanghai and Dodgers from Brooklyn. Everybody from Brooklyn's a Dodger no matter what he's doing. The beautiful new heavy cruiser Brooklyn is called the Dodger.

The Gestapo works for the Army, the Navy, the F.B.I. They work for Britain, Japan, China, Russia, Germany. They know one another, spy on one another, swap information. They're as obvious



## Impregnable

as Diamond Head, the deadly rock that stands sentinel at Pearl Harbor's narrow mouth, but not as reliable. Within an hour after you, the freshly arrived civilian, get in, they've got a tail on you. You don't have to look for them. Stand still a few minutes and several of them will be in the near offing measuring you. You can't miss them. They stand out like a full-dress Kluxer at Father Divine's. Usually they speak pidgin—think pidgin, too.

"You're maybe Washington, maybe San Francisco. Hah? You like Honolulu. Hah? You maybe lookeeround. Hah? You maybe lookee friend and have drink. Hah? Beeeeeauuuutiful day."

## Some Practice Against M-Day

We were going fine in Lousy Lui's when it happened. The first inkling we got was that small, shrill wail from a table near the door. Otherwise no siren sounded. The shore patrol (the Navy cops), six of them swinging their billies but not using them, shoved Bum Tishi, the Honolulu law and Maui May aside and came in. They worked swiftly. They didn't raise their voices. They were calm, almost bored. They didn't argue, didn't explain, didn't repeat. They strode through the joint as if there wasn't a table in it, and they didn't knock any over either, as slick as Vought-Sikorskys flipping off the quarterdeck catapults—woosh, in the front door and out the back. Our chin was on our chest. The sailors took it like aloha.

"All out. All out. Report to your posts. Report to your ships. All out. All out."

As the shore went out the back, the military police came in, headed for the front.

"All out. All out. Report to your companies. Scram, soldier, scram."

What happened was efficiency. There was no excitement, no hesitation, no confusion.

We didn't clock it, but in incredibly short time Honolulu, from its water front to its lovely heights, from the red lights of Hotel Street to the no lights of Waikiki, was sailorless and soldierless. They grabbed at everything on wheels. In the streets had gone the word that M-day was dawning. Nobody knew for sure; nobody would know. In Hawaii

**Below, gobs from Pearl Harbor, the Navy base, besiege Hollywood's Dorothy Lamour on the beach at Waikiki, get photos that, viewed back home, help recruiting**





## Impregnable

there's a censorship unknown on the mainland. So maybe IT had come. Wherever they may have been bound, busses, trucks, private cars turned their noses toward Pearl Harbor, twelve miles away, Schofield Barracks, thirty miles inland, toward Diamond Head that would make Big Brother Gibraltar ashamed of itself, toward the dozen forts and airports that stud the mighty isle of Oahu and all were flat on their axles with soldiers and sailors wondering what the hell.

Honolulu lights went out—by blocks, hillsides, clusters, one by one. And presently the town was blotted out as if the vast clouds that bank the Koolau Range along the northeast coast of Oahu and the Waianae that make the southwest coast a precipice had folded in upon her. In the darkness half a hundred patrol bombers soared from Ford Island, the Navy's airfield in Pearl Harbor. From Hickam Field, the Army's best, rose the fighters and pursuit ships. The marines were soon in the air, zooming from their own field beyond. And out of the most modern of them all, the Kaneohe base, in the folds of the forbidding Koolaupoko Mountains, ten air miles from Pearl Harbor, came more Navy patrol bombers. Two airplane carriers, had speeded out of Pearl Harbor into the Pacific. From their decks soared forty planes to add to the roar that filled the skies—with more to come. Each ship carries seventy-six planes.

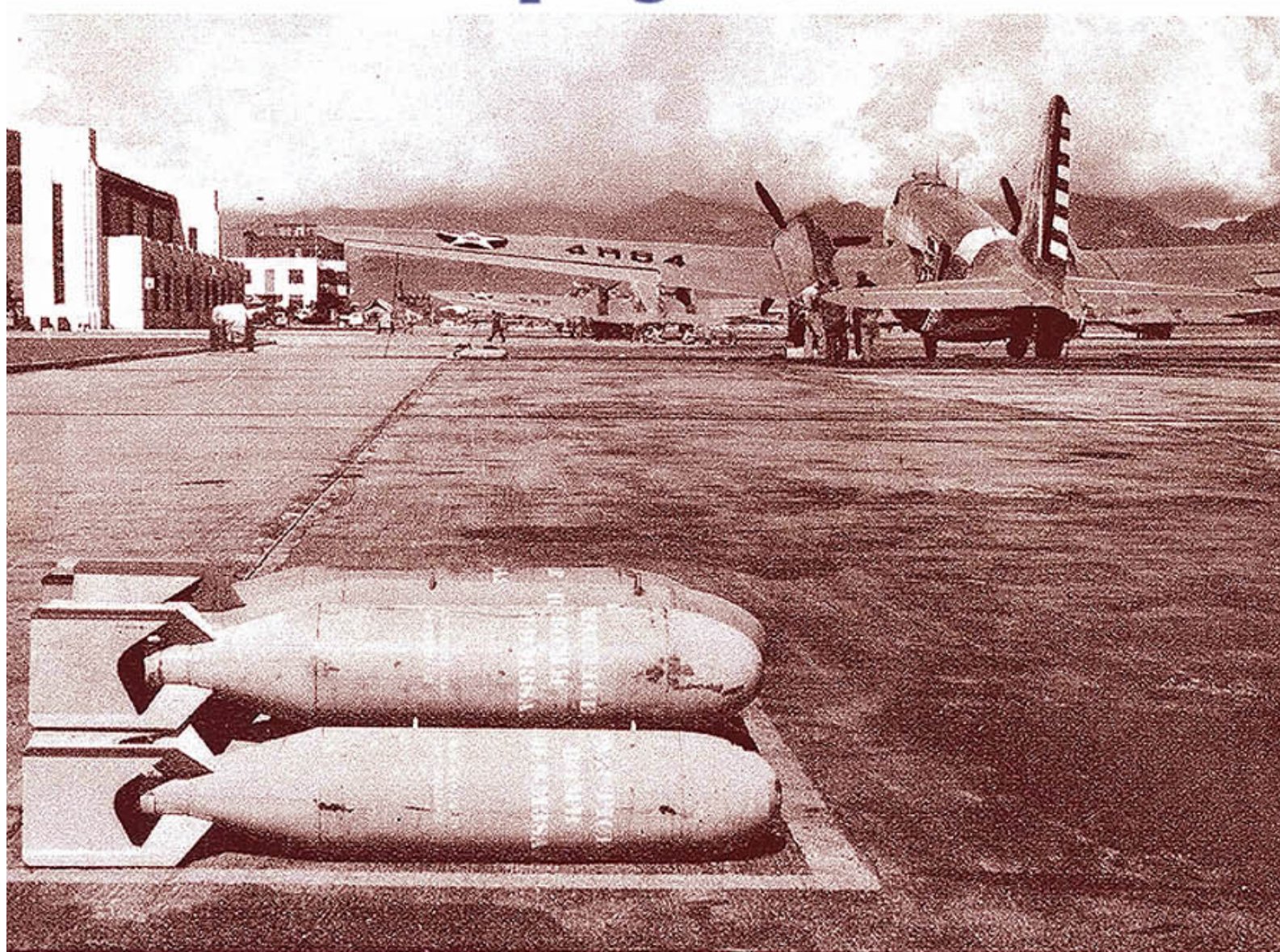
## No Place for Sissies

You've got to be pretty pessimistic to visualize any invader establishing himself on the island of Oahu, the fortress of the Hawaiian Archipelago. Singly and in concert they'd come to swift grief where the Koolaus and the Waianae rise starkly from the ocean. And they'd have to sink our fleet and smash our last plane to land on the southern shores. From Diamond Head, an extinct volcano, along the beach of Waikiki, and on to Barber Point, lay the hidden forts of Kamehameha, Shafter, De Russy and so on, blazing everything from five-inch antiaircraft guns to nine-, twelve- and sixteen-inch rifles. Big and little, they're mounted on wheels. They're hidden in the sugar-cane plantations, in the pineapple groves, among the hybrid vegetation of the back country—vegetation that looks as if nonirrigated Texas and Oklahoma had got together with southern California and Florida, with cactus and palm offspring fighting it out.

If an enemy's going to take Oahu and thus the Hawaiian Islands, chasing us out of the Pacific, he's got to land on the strand of the northwest or not at all. When the military police cleared Honolulu of soldiers that Saturday night, the defenses of that one open coast line went into action. At the west end of this open shore stand the upper heights of the Waianae Mountains. On the east end rises the end of the Koolauloa. On both, sweeping the beach between, they've mounted the American version of the



## Impregnable



The Army bases its aircraft at Hickam Field, its biggest and best Hawaiian air base. Flying fortresses, above, are loading practice bombs.

famous French seventy-fives, .50-caliber machine guns, howitzers. The only roads, tunnels, placements and wide places in the heights have been made by the Army. And they weren't created to make tourists happy. The Waianae and the Koolaus can be solid precipices of murderous fire. And back from this only possible invading beach, rank upon rank, are the field guns, the 240-mm. guns, the howitzers and big rifles. Maybe an enemy might make it, but the chances are vast that he'd be slaughtered on the beach as the British were at Gallipoli in that first war to make the world safe for democracy.

No enemy came by ship nor plane that Saturday night. None was expected. The whole thing was but a demonstration of how quickly the billion-dollar fist that America has built in the Pacific could deliver a smash. The Army's Hawaiian division, about 40,000 men — Regulars, California National Guardsmen, Hawaiian draftees—can be at their posts within thirty minutes, if they aren't there already. The Pacific Fleet of battleships, destroyers, cruisers, submarines and carriers are always within a few minutes of clearing for action.

### The Navy Isn't Worrying

Day and night, Navy and Army planes are droning down the warm skies in circles two hundred, five hundred, a thousand miles wide. They're dropping bombs from altitudes of twenty and thirty thousand feet and smashing tiny targets towed by swift destroyers. They can't see the targets, half the size of a life raft, but they're sinking them from aloft. And they're blasting them in dives. By radio they're hooked up with infantry, artillery, the Fleet, their brother fliers. The defense of Hawaii may not be impregnable. Ships can be sunk. Planes can be downed. Forts—even Diamond Head—may be razed. And serried ranks of big guns can be silenced. But neither the Army nor the Navy believes that there is any power or combination of powers existing today that can prove it in the islands.

If it happens, that's the way it will go. For the present, ships loaded with munitions for Britain in the Middle East, for China, for Singapore are plowing across the Pacific. They're out of California





**The Japanese sampan fishing fleet at Kewalo Basin. Movements of sampans are sternly restricted; they are not allowed to enter Pearl Harbor and must stay well away from fortified Diamond Head**

ports twenty-five hundred miles to the east. They're coming from the Panama Canal, forty-six hundred miles away from Honolulu. They're carrying men and guns to Guam, thirty-four hundred miles from Pearl Harbor. They're heavy with defense stuff and men—freighters, tankers, transports—for Manila, forty-seven hundred miles from Waikiki.

The secrecy maintained at Pearl Harbor, at San Francisco and Seattle, at Guam and Manila, is so heavy that it almost betrays itself. All one has to do is to ask in all innocence whether the United States was convoying these widely scattered merchant ships and he'd be silenced with silence.

But there was no convoying in the Atlantic sense. Food and munitions ships were not steaming in huddles westward toward Asia, surrounded by armed speedsters and yearned over by planes. That sort of convoy isn't necessary and won't be in the Pacific. Compared to the Pacific, the Atlantic's a millpond. Moreover, the Japs, if they obey the wish of Hitler and send their cruisers and submarines after commerce, will have fewer naval bases than Germany in the Atlantic to operate from. Therefore, it will be much easier to check up on Jap movements.

The Pacific version of the convoy follows this pattern: American warships and American planes scout the ocean. They steam slowly, they fly low. There are rumors in great number that German raiders stalk the South Seas, although when we left the islands none had been sighted. And there are always the fears that a few individual Jap commanders would go to war without their government's blessing and sink a few American freighters for luck. Or at any moment Japan's war lords might quit stalling and start by sea for the prized East Indies, firing as they went.

All these possibilities make the way clear for the American Pacific Fleet, plus the Asiatic Fleet, plus England's men-o'-war in the Singapore area. Combined, these three made quite a respectable navy. In itself the Pacific Fleet is nothing to regard lightly—which is telling Japan nothing that it doesn't know. As far as what it should do in an emergency is concerned, our Pacific Fleet is pretty much on its own; in that emergency (an exceedingly flexible term) it is not required by the Navy Department that initial instructions be sought in Washington.



## **Impregnable**

### **The Navy Keeps Posted**

For example, Pearl Harbor, Manila and Singapore know from hour to hour where every American and British ship is, between the Americas and Asia, between the Panama Canal and the Red Sea. No cargo carrier is ever more than two or three hours' distant from a warship and less than that away from airplanes. Too, to the extent that we know how many fighting ships and planes Japan has, we're kept pretty well informed where they are and what they're up to. Totalitarian Japan's intelligence lines are neater, tighter and more numerous than ours, but our Pacific battle forces are not exactly groping around in the dark.

We were westbound on an American battleship, two days out of Pearl Harbor. This battlewagon presented a spectacle warranted to arrest attention. We were all but stripped for action. It wouldn't have taken more than thirty minutes to clear decks and go to it. That's the way our Navy plows around these days. We were loaded within an ounce of our floating capacity with food and munitions. And, while it didn't add much to our weight, we carried five million dollars in cash, the latter guarded day and night by Marines Tzrez, Krzyswiczky, Del Napoli, Goldenberg and Holloway among others. We were careful about those names. Anyway, we were so heavily laden that we wallowed.

A Jap—a tanker of perhaps six-thousand tons—was present to see us, probably trying to guess what the answer was. If she was armed, it wasn't noticeable. She appeared eastbound on the horizon, about fifteen miles dead ahead, directly on our course. And there she stopped, or slowed down to a crawl. Our radio told her she was on our course, adding that we were open to suggestions. She ignored that completely but did come back with a demand to know who we were, where we'd come from and whither we were bound. So we ignored that although we asked her again how about moving over a little. But the Jap didn't move over and we were getting a trifle jittery like the elephant confronted by an overconfident mouse.

We'd have done the moving over and our dignity would have done a nose dive had the pig boat not arrived at that immense moment. The submarine was sighted by our forward top, merely the eye of her periscope above the serene sea, about two hundred yards off our starboard bow. You could almost feel the battleship's nerves go taut. And for the few moments it took the submarine to come to the surface they grew tighter. She was a Yankee—one of the new pig boats, a big black murderer. We could have kissed her—and all her 21-inch torpedoes. That's how thump-thump we were.

### **Thanks to a Pig Boat**

Being no sailor, we don't know what that Jap oilcan did in technical terms. But in our landsman eyes it literally



## Impregnable

spun on its narrow tail and got going—probably blown about by the combined sigh of relief from the battleship's bridge. It doesn't matter. She got out of our way, passed us eastbound, a little more than egg-throwing distance away. From her bridge, her bow and stern she shot pictures of us—still and movie. We don't blame her; we probably looked like a rummage sale carrying twelve fourteen inch guns for luck. We said thanks to the pig boat and she grinned back. Then she submerged again, going east with the Jap.

On our new cruisers—the heavies carrying nine 8-inch guns and the lights swinging fifteen sixes—the stern, below decks, is an airplane hangar. With a punch of your finger the deck slides forward. And there, wings folded, lie three scout-observation planes. Within five minutes all three can be snaked out of the hold and flipped into the air. We saw them do it and caught ourselves whistling Columbia the Gem of the Ocean. It's a magnificent sight.

How many of the Navy's secrets are preservable in a group of eight intimately related islands in the territory of Hawaii is something that even the Navy doesn't know. Not all the islands—a chain of more than a thousand miles—are included in the territory. But of a population of 423,000 on the eight islands of which Oahu is the core as well as the site of Pearl Harbor, about 156,000 are Japanese. Nearly 40,000 of them are aliens, the rest first- or second-generation American citizens. The pure Hawaiian is a vanishing race—about 21,000 of them in the territory. There are 28,600 Chinese, all but 4,000 of whom are American born. The rest of the population are Koreans, Filipinos, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans and what we have come popularly to know as Nordics—English, Scots, Germans and Yankees. Neither the Army nor the Navy personnel is included in these figures.

Naturally the Japanese population is regarded with more suspicion than the others—particularly by the Navy. No other element of the population, however, conducts itself with greater outward circumspection, the Navy preferring to call it guile. To state the Japanese case fairly, with authority, would require much more study than we have given the situation. Therefore we'll tell you briefly what the Navy is doing to protect itself against a people it does not trust and let it go at that. The Japanese sampan fleet, for example.

The sampan fleet uses Kewalo Basin as its base. Kewalo Basin is a sheltered cove just around from the entrance to Honolulu Harbor, twelve miles from Pearl Harbor. The sampans are husky fishing ships, some of them eighty feet long, Diesel-engined, capable of ranging as far as five hundred miles to sea in pursuit of tuna. They're manned by tough Jap fishermen, are combined into a hard-boiled federation which until recently has defied all outside authority from the Navy up and down. Repeatedly they barged into restricted waters while the Navy was on maneuvers, al-



### Impregnable

ways with a smile, forever ready with apology. Right or wrong, the Navy accuses them of being eyes for the Japanese admiralty, that they have kept Germany informed of developments at Pearl Harbor, and that they have—in the past at least—been in regular communication with passing Japanese freighters and tankers, and perhaps warships. They're accused, too, of taking Japanese army, navy and intelligence officers off passing ships and fetching them, disguised as fishermen, to Honolulu. This operation requires only that a fisherman be left on the ship that the sampan might not return to the islands with more crew than she left. Who's Who in the Jap colony in Honolulu can be all but a complete mystery. But naturally no Jap, citizen or not, is permitted within the limits of Pearl Harbor in any circumstance. With the Army it's somewhat different; the Hawaiian militia and its draftee soldiers are overwhelmingly Japanese. They're out at Schofield Barracks marching, saluting, eating, thinking, playing and sleeping at attention. They even have a few Japanese officers—neat, dignified, efficient brass hats like Second Lieutenant Bert Nobru of the 299th Infantry. He's a military product of the Officers Reserve Corps of McKinley High School, locally known as Tokyo University, and of the University of Hawaii. The 299th's band, better than most but strictly aloha, has exactly one white man in it—a pink-cheeked, blue-eyed Scot who talks Hawaiian with a burr. This has to be heard to be appreciated. He also plays a tuba. The others are practically everything east of Suez—Polynesians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Sumatrans, a couple of Hindus and Hawaiians in pure and mixed combinations. There is a French horn who has virtually everything—Japanese, Chinese, Javanese and Jewish. We asked him how he felt. He said Jewish.

### The Navy Takes No Chances

But the Navy, contending correctly that it had much more to hide than the Army, makes no pretense to a liberal attitude toward the Japs. It is taking no chances that the stingy mouth of Pearl Harbor (width: one ship at a time) be stoppered even temporarily by an intentional sinking. So American destroyers patrol the southern and eastern coasts of Oahu twenty-four hours a day, and patrol bombers soar around and over as much on the alert as though war were actual instead of pending. All ships trespassing within three miles of Pearl Harbor are stopped, questioned and sometimes boarded just to make sure. Today, if a sampan barges into the forbidden zone or butts into maneuver waters, she's escorted to Honolulu. Her crew is taken to court. They're fined heavily or even jailed. The Japs don't like it much, but neither does the Navy.

Out of this Navy vigilance the Army manages to extract a certain amount of amusement. While no Jap may work within the Naval reservations and no



## Impregnable

Jap is left in any doubt of the Navy's suspicion, many of the Navy wives have Japanese maids—cooks, waitresses, chambermaids. At Navy dinner tables discussion of the day at Pearl Island and departmental gossip is very likely to be free and in detail. In the cafés and restaurants we were able to detect no particular reticence even when Japanese waiters were standing, stony-faced, near by. None of these public and private servants were deaf and dumb, either. Moreover, Chinese and Polynesians who spend most of their leisure hours in Japanese society are working inside the Navy Yard, on the Navy airfields and even the secret munitions and fuel dumps.

In the meantime, Honolulu and other towns on the adjacent islands of Maui, Molokai and Hawaii, are preparing against attack. Their medical, sanitary, first-aid and other emergency agencies are drilling daily. Food is being stored in the hills. Each family, each individual, has been instructed what to do and where to go when the war arrives and if Japanese bombers come roaring down the Hawaiian skies.

The Territorial Legislature, all but controlled by the Japanese, has voted gentle Governor Joe Poindexter powers to confiscate property—from radios to public utilities—to suspend laws, ration food and clothing, requisition personal services, erect and equip air-raid shelters, imprison persons regarded as dangerous, promulgate emergency rules and regulations by fiat, declare quarantine areas, close whole sections to traffic, and so on indefinitely. For violation of any such orders from the governor's office during a declared emergency, persons may be fined as much as \$5,000 and sent to jail for a year. For launching false rumors the monger may be fined up to \$10,000 and imprisoned for twenty years. Even today you've got to be careful what you start. For example,

if you were to start the rumor that an emergency has been proclaimed when it hasn't, they can cast you into jail for a year or two. The Navy declares all this to be as it should be but is otherwise not concerned. The Navy will be at sea. But the Army, which will still be on the islands defending them against invasion, will see to it that the governor's pronouncements are respected. In fact it was Lieutenant General Walter Short, commanding the Hawaiian division, who did most of the thinking preceding the drawing of these emergency measures.

## Candidates for Oblivion

That the shutdown may be complete, the Army and Navy Intelligence sections and the F.B.I. have their hands outstretched ready at a signal to grab individuals whom they contend would be anything but pro-American from M-day on. They say that these ladies and gentlemen are not noticeably pro-American now, but that it serves a better purpose to let them roam free—



## Impregnable

under surveillance. If the war comes, individuals and whole cliques and groups will be hustled off into concentration camps. Secret Jap societies will be forbidden to meet publicly or privately. Foreign-language newspapers will be closed down if so much as an ambiguous phrase appears. Pre-emergency censorship in the islands is tough, but it will be Hitlerian should M-day come.

In the continental United States there may be some doubt about our readiness to fight. But none exists in Hawaii. Battleships, steam up and all but stripped, ride in the harbor or plow the ocean practicing gunnery, wary as lions on the prowl. Aircraft carriers, each toting seventy-five planes on its back, are momentarily ready to go. Around them, between them and beyond are squadrons of swift destroyers, cruisers, submarines, mine layers. They're the battle force, the scouting force, the base force.

Their battle orders are written. All they wait for is the word from Washington or an incident in the Pacific. If the latter comes first, the Pacific Fleet will notify Washington that the war is on. And if what one hears at Pearl Island is dependable the only displeasure arising from Washington will come from the throats of the isolationist group in Congress. Otherwise one hears little in the islands about Congress. What the battle orders are we don't know. Nor would we write them down here if we did.



# Collier's

OldMagazineArticles.com