Navy Tells Full Story of Pearl Harbor

Naval air station near Pearl Harbor was a scene of flame and wreckage following the Japanese attack Dec. 7, 1941.

Tomorrow, Dec. 7, is the first anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Marking that anniversary, the U. S. Navy Department has released for the first time the full story of the attack and the great damage it caused. The official story appears here, in full text. In addition, the Navy released a score of photographs, never before published. They appear on this and succeeding pages.

On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft temporarily disabled every battleship and most of the aircraft in the Hawaiian area. Other naval vessels, both combatant and auxiliary, were put out of action, and certain shore facilities, especially at the Naval Air Stations, Ford Island and Kaneohe Bay, were damaged. Most of these ships now are back with the Fleet. The aircraft were all replaced within a few days, and interference with facilities generally was limited to a matter of hours.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, two surface ship task forces of the Pacific Fleet were carrying out assigned missions at sea, and two such task forces were at their main base, following extensive operations at sea. Discounting small craft, 86 ships of the Pacific Fleet were moored at Pearl Harbor. Included in this force were eight battleships, seven cruisers, 28 destroyers and five submarines. No U. S. aircraft carriers were present.

As a result of the Japanese attack, five battleships, Arizona, Oklahoma, California, Nevada and West Virginia; three destroyers, Shaw, Cassin and Downes; the minelayer Oglala; the target ship Utah, and a large floating drydock were either sunk or damaged so severely that they would serve no military purpose for some time. In addition, three battleships, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Tennessee, three cruisers, Helena, Honolulu and Raleigh, the seaplane tender Curtiss, and the repair ship Vestal were damaged.

Of the 19 naval vessels listed above as sunk or damaged, the 26-year-old battleship Arizona will be the only one permanently and totally lost. Preparations for the righting of the Oklahoma are now in process, although final decision as to the wisdom of accomplishing this work at this time has not been made. The main and auxiliary machinery, approximately 50 per cent of the value, of the Cassin and Downes were saved. The other 15 vessels either have been or will be salvaged and repaired.

All the vessels described above as damaged, but not sunk, returned to the Fleet months ago. A number of the vessels described as having been in a sunken condition are now in full service, but certain others, which required extensive machinery and intricate electrical overhauling, as well as refloating and hull repairing, are not yet ready for battle action.

Naval repair yards are taking advantage of these inherent delays to install numerous modernization features and improvements. To designate these vessels by name now would give the enemy information vital to his war plans; similar information regarding enemy ships which our forces subsequently have damaged, but not destroyed, is denied to us.

On Dec. 15, only eight days after the Japanese attack and at a time when there was an immediate possibility of the enemy's coming back, the Secretary of the Navy announced that the Arizona, Shaw, Cassin, Downes, Utah and Oglala had been lost, that the Oklahoma had capsized and that other vessels had been damaged. Fortunately, the salvage and repair accomplishments at Pearl Harbor have exceeded the most hopeful expectations.

Eighty naval aircraft of all types were destroyed by the enemy. In addition, the Army lost 97 planes on Hickam and Wheeler Fields. Of these, 23 were bombers, 66 were fighters, and eight were other types.

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This is a closeup of the battleship West Virginia, burning amidships at Pearl Harbor. A seaman is being pulled from the water by the men in the small boat, who are risking the possibility of explosions to save lives. Damaged Tennessee is in background.

The most serious American losses were in personnel. As result of the Dec. 7 raid, 2117 officers and enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps were killed, 960 are still reported as missing and 876 were wounded, but survived. The Army casualties were as follows: 226 officers and enlisted men were killed or later died of wounds; 396 were wounded, most of whom have now recovered and have returned to duty.

At 7:55 a.m. on Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese dive bombers swarmed over the Army Air Base, Hickam Field, and the Naval Air Station on Ford Island. A few minutes earlier the Japanese had struck the Naval Air Station at Kaneohe Bay. Bare seconds later, enemy torpedo planes and dive bombers swung in from various sectors to concentrate their attack on the heavy ships at Pearl Harbor. The enemy attack, aided by the element of surprise and based on exact information, was very successful.

Torpedo planes, assisted effectively by dive bombers, constituted the major threat of the first phase of the Japanese attack, lasting approximately a half hour. Twenty-one torpedo planes made four attacks and 30 dive bombers came in eight waves during this period. Fifteen horizontal bombers also participated in this phase of the raid.

Although the Japanese launched their initial attack as a surprise, the battleships' ready machine guns opened fire at once and were progressively augmented by the remaining anti-aircraft batteries, as all hands promptly were called to general quarters. Machine guns brought down two and damaged others of the first wave of torpedo planes. Practically all battleship anti-aircraft batteries were firing within five minutes; cruisers, within an average time of four minutes, and destroyers, opening up machine guns almost immediately, averaged seven minutes in bringing all anti-aircraft guns into action.

From 8:25 to 8:40 a.m., there was a comparative lull in the raid, although air activity continued with sporadic attack by dive and horizontal bombers. This respite was terminated by the appearance of horizontal bombers which crossed and recrossed their targets from various directions and caused serious damage. While the horizontal bombers were continuing their raids, Japanese dive bombers reappeared, probably being the same ones that participated in earlier attacks; this phase, lasting about a half hour, was devoted largely to strafing. All enemy aircraft retired by 9:45 a.m.

Prior to the Japanese attack, 202 U. S. Naval aircraft of all types on the Island of Oahu were in flying condition, but 150 of these were permanently or temporarily disabled by the enemy's concentrated assault, most of them in the first few minutes of the raid. Of the 52 remaining naval aircraft, 38 took to the air on Dec. 7, 1941, the other 14 being ready too late in the day or being blocked from take-off positions. Of necessity, therefore, the Navy was compelled to depend on anti-aircraft fire for its primary defensive weapon, and this condition exposed the Fleet to continuous air attack. By coincidence, 18 scout bombing planes from a U. S. aircraft carrier en route arrived at Pearl Harbor during the raid. These are included in the foregoing figures. Four of these scout bombers were shot down, 13 of the remaining 14 taking off again in search of the enemy. Seven patrol planes were in the air when the attack started.

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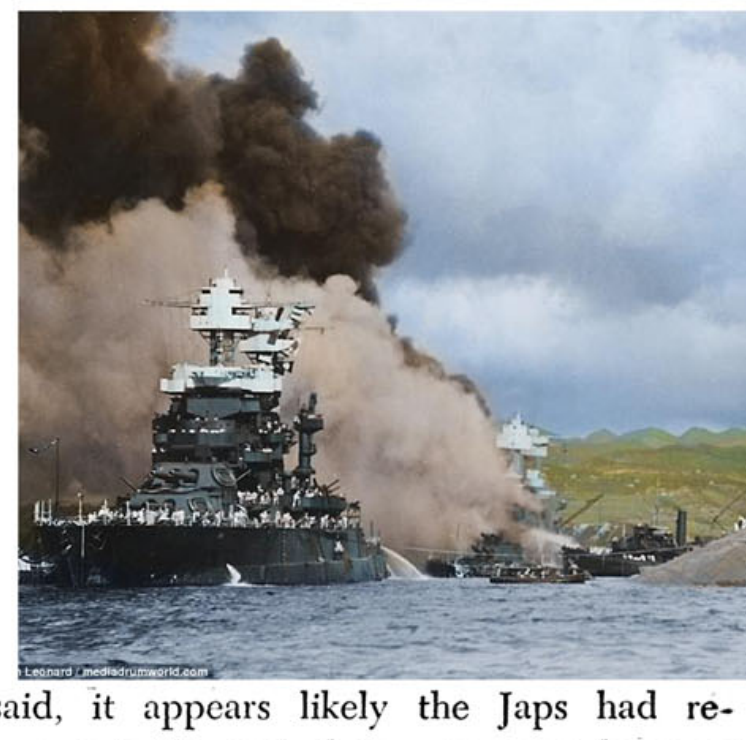
It is difficult to determine the total number of enemy aircraft participating in the raid, but careful analysis of all reports makes it possible to estimate the number as 21 torpedo planes, 48 dive bombers and 36 horizontal bombers, totaling 105 of all types. Undoubtedly certain fighter planes also were present, but these are not distinguished by types and are included in the above figures.

The enemy lost 28 aircraft due to Navy action. In addition, three submarines, of 45 tons each, were accounted for.

The damage suffered by the U. S. Pacific Fleet as a result of the Japanese attack on Dec. 7, 1941, was most serious, but the repair job now is nearly completed. Thanks to the inspired and unceasing efforts of the naval and civilian personnel attached to the various repair yards, especially at Pearl Harbor itself, this initial handicap soon will be erased forever.



In 110 flaming minutes on the morning of Dec. 7, one year ago tomorrow, Japanese warplanes virtually wiped out the U.S.A.'s first line of defense in the Pacific Ocean—Pearl Harbor.

Nearly our entire Pacific fleet was in the Harbor—86 ships, exclusive of smaller craft. The Japs hit every one. They crippled eight battleships—half the number of battleships in the entire U.S. Navy—and 11 other major naval vessels and they destroyed 177 Army and Navy warplanes.

The Japanese warplanes also smashed the Navy's air stations on Ford Island and Kaneohe Bay and the Army's bases at Hickam and Wheeler fields. So great was the damage that only 38 naval planes and very few Army planes were able to get into the air.

An estimated 105 Japanese planes took part in the raid. Forty-eight were knocked down, mostly by anti-aircraft fire.

This, in brief, is the story of what happened at Pearl Harbor, the story the Navy refused to reveal until yesterday, despite rumors, charges, and denunciations by critics of U. S. war policy. And, in revealing it, the Navy also made clear why it had withheld the information.

The Japanese raid left Pearl Harbor all but defenseless. If transports had accompanied the raiders, the Japanese might have been able to seize the Hawaiian Islands with ease.

If the Japanese had known the full extent of the damage they inflicted, they would have been able to send another force and drive the U. S. A. completely from the Pacific.

If they had known, they might even have dared to attack California—and they might have succeeded in capturing at least part of that state.

The Navy is able to reveal the losses now because nearly all have been repaired. Of the 19 major U. S. vessels sunk or damaged in the attack, the Navy said yesterday, only the 62-year-old battleship Arizona will be "permanently and totally lost."

The hulls of two other ships—the destroyers Cassin and Downes—were so badly damaged they could not be repaired; but their machinery was saved. In addition, the capsized battleship Oklahoma still lies bottom side up, and the Navy has not decided whether to right her in the near future.

However, at least nine of the remaining 15 damaged ships not only have been repaired but already have returned to action with the fleet. And the rest are in process of repair and modernization.

A Navy spokesman, explaining details of the report to newspapermen in Washington, estimated the Japanese had used three and possibly four aircraft carriers in the attack.

So perfectly executed was the assault, he said, it appears likely the Japs had rehearsed it for weeks "like a Hollywood movie." He said they may even have set up a replica of Pearl Harbor in a restricted area off Japan to practice.

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