AWESOME stories

THE FLEET AT PEARL HARBOR



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In this aerial view of Pearl Harbor, looking southwest, we see the U.S. Naval Operating Base on the Hawaiian island of Oahu as it appeared around six weeks before the Japanese attack. In the center of the photo is Ford Island Naval Air Station with the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard across the channel. The U.S. Army's Hickam Field is at the upper left-center of the image. The photo was taken on October 30, 1941. U.S. Navy photograph 80-G-182874, online via the U.S. National Archives. Click on the image for a better view.

Deployed from San Diego to the Hawaiian Territory in May 1940, the American fleet boasted impressive aircraft carriers and battleships. The move brought U.S. naval power closer to British interests.

President Roosevelt sent a secret memo, dated June 30, 1940, instructing an aide to get a message to Churchill. In it, FDR expresses his opinion that having the fleet in Hawaii is "vital." Not everyone (like Admiral James O. Richardson, for example) agreed the fleet would be safe there.

Strategically located between the U.S. mainland and East Asia, Pearl Harbor is a naturally protected safe haven. With eight of America's best battleships lined up along Ford Island, and numerous other ships scattered throughout the harbor, it was an impressive sight. Several aircraft carriers also called Pearl Harbor home. So did planes based at Hickam Field.

Yamamoto wanted to destroy that impressive array. He assigned "Operation Hawaii" (code-named "Operation Z") to his able assistant, Lt. Commander Minoru Genda who suggested the use of massed aircraft carriers instead of battleships.

The Pearl Harbor attack plan was ready by October 31, 1941. It was amazingly similar to the "Martin-Bellinger Report," prepared by two Americans during the spring of that year.

Assigned to assess U.S. vulnerabilities at Pearl Harbor, General Martin and Admiral Bellinger made the following observation on March 31, 1941 (in the "Possible Enemy Action" section):

> *In a dawn air attack, there is a high probability that it could be delivered as a complete surprise in spite of any patrols we might be using and that it might find us in a condition of readiness under which pursuit would be slow to start...*

Both sides had assessed identical risks. But there was something more in the on-target report. Referring to Japan as "Orange," the report stresses:

In the past Orange has never preceded hostile actions by a declaration of war.

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
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Media Stream



Fleet at Pearl Harbor - May, 1940

Photo and quoted passage, courtesy U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center.
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Ford Island and East Lock - Pearl Harbor

Photo and quoted passage, courtesy U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center.
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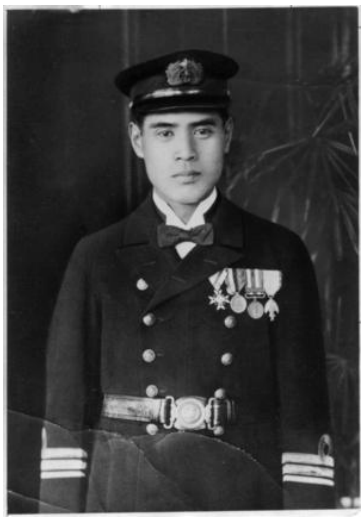
Admiral J.O. Richardson - Predicted War with Japan

Photo, courtesy U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center.
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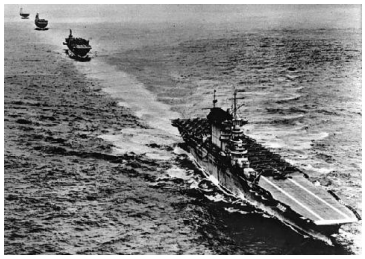
Hickam Field at Pearl Habor - May, 1941

Photo, courtesy U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center.
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Minoru Genda - Planned the Carrier-Based Attack

Photo, courtesy National Archives.
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U.S. Aircraft Carriers - Target of Pearl Attack

Photo, published in the *Illustrated London News* on December 13, 1941.

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