On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese naval air forces attacked US Navy and Army facilities at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Attempting to knock out the US Pacific Fleet in advance of a larger offensive in the Pacific, the surprise raid sank and damaged several dozen American warships. While the raid was devastating, the Navy quickly recovered and helped to galvanize our national resolve.
Understanding Place & Time

Timeline of the Attack

0620: 43 fighters, 49 high-level bombers, 51 dive bombers, and 40 torpedo bombers, comprising the first Japanese attack wave, leave as a group from their carriers

0715: The second attack wave—comprised of 35 fighters, 54 high-level bombers, and 78 dive bombers—starts taking off from their carriers

0755: Attack on Ford Island Naval Air Station and Hickam Field commences

0758: "AIR RAID, PEARL HARBOR. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!" message sent from Ford Island

0810: USS Arizona’s ammo magazine is hit by a high-explosive bomb and detonates, killing over a thousand of her sailors

0840: Second wave arrives at Oahu

0854: Second wave ordered to attack multiple targets, including naval air stations and the Navy Yard’s dry dock

1000: Second wave ends attack around this time

1300: Japanese strike force ships head for home
The Japanese planned extensively for the Pearl Harbor assault, spying daily on ship movements within the harbor and making a large-scale model of the sites for their aviators to study. When the aerial attack came, the Japanese scored a knockout blow, leaving the Navy bereft of battleships in the Pacific. The loss made it impossible for the United States to counter Japan’s advances against the Philippines and East Indies.

Background: Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor began, a Japanese air crewman took this aerial view showing the resulting damage. Oil covers the water, and smoke rises from damaged ships. Debris from torpedoes, which some believe were fired from a Japanese mini-sub, also appear on the water.

Left: USS West Virginia burns after taking six torpedo and two bomb hits. Despite valiant efforts from the crew, fires engulfed most of the ship for two days. Inboard of the sinking West Virginia is USS Tennessee, which sustained light damage.

Below: Wreckage from Battleship Row surrounds the fleet tanker USS Neosho, right center, as it escapes the attack, while on the left USS California is seen in danger. The capsized hull of USS Oklahoma can be seen in the background.

Above: USS Maryland, left, which sustained little damage from the attack, fired at the enemy and sent two convoys overseas for the damaged ships. Moored alongside Maryland was Oklahoma, which capsized after being struck by four torpedoes. Smoke in the background is from fires on board USS Arizona.

Right: A rare frame from a color motion picture released soon after the attack shows the exploding forward magazines of USS Arizona.
In 1941, the Navy Yard at Pearl Harbor – today called the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard – was the most important base for American ships in the Pacific. Although the shipyard suffered extensive damage, its major repair facilities were largely untouched in the December 7 attack. The facilities proved crucial in the aftermath of the assault since the Japanese had destroyed two major American warships and damaged nineteen others. Most of the latter were repaired and served in the war.

Background: Pearl Harbor Navy Yard three days after the attack: the Yard Floating Drydock Number Two holds the destroyer USS Shaw; Drydock Number Two, center, has the cruiser USS Helena; to the left, the battleship USS Pennsylvania; to the right, the destroyers USS Cassin and USS Downes; background is USS Helena and USS Pennsylvania. The dark lines surrounding the docks are oil slicks from the damaged ships.

Above: Shaw seen from Ford Island. Shaw’s forward magazines exploded during the second wave of the attack. Shaw’s stern is seen to the left, along with the bow of USS Nevada and the tugboat USS Hoga fighting the fires.

Left: The destroyers Cassin and Downes were in Drydock Number One during the attack. Both sustained heavy damage, and Cassin capsized against Downes. Pennsylvania is in the sunken USS Arizona.

Above: Shaw burns in Yard Floating Drydock Number Two after being attacked by Japanese dive bombers. To the right, Nevada is on fire. The smoke from Nevada can be seen on the left.
Naval Air Station Ford Island, in the center of Pearl Harbor, was chiefly used to station seaplanes. Between the air base and the battleships moored near its southeastern shore, the island became a major attack point. Japanese air strikes destroyed 33 of the 70 airplanes based on the island and many of their hangars.

Background: A Japanese photograph shows most of the Pacific Fleet surrounding Ford Island. Japanese fighter planes also appear in the center and right.

Above: The first wave of Japanese raiders hit Naval Air Station Ford Island, causing Catalina patrol planes and hangars to burst into flames. Sailors, in the lower left, hold rifles, preparing for more enemy attacks.

Right: Sailors look on from amidst plane wreckage on Ford Island as the destroyer USS Shaw explodes in the center background.

Left: A view of Ford Island on December 8, 1941.

Below: Sailors man the antiaircraft machine gun emplacements on Ford Island, while a Catalina search plane takes off in the background.
The Japanese pilots had strict orders to target the battleships, aircraft carriers and the navy yard, as well as nearby airfields. That did not mean other ships escaped damage. The light cruiser USS Raleigh, the destroyer USS Helm, seaplane tender USS Curtiss, and the target ship (ex-battleship) USS Utah were all hit. Only the target ship was a total loss, and it remains in Pearl Harbor as the second memorial ship.

**Background:** This photograph, taken two months before the attack, shows an aerial view of the West Channel area.

**Left:** The target ship Utah took two Japanese torpedoes before it started to sink and then rolled to its side. Thirty-four men and officers died in the attack. Utah is visible in the ship. The hull of the ship remains partially submerged in Pearl Harbor as a war grave.

**Above:** The cruiser Raleigh was hit by a torpedo and a bomb during the attack and almost capsized. Its crew fought bravely and helped to destroy five Japanese planes. The capsized hull of Utah is in the background.

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Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor, a partially assembled mobile hospital, and the hospital ship USS Solace constituted the main naval medical facilities at Pearl Harbor. On December 7, makeshift holding rooms for casualties sprang up throughout the base, especially after the naval hospital was damaged. The undamaged auxiliary USS Argonne also treated many patients, with many then sent to a “field hospital” at the Navy Yard Officers’ Club. About 60 percent of all wounded were burn victims, while hospital staff also treated compound fractures, flesh wounds, and shell shock victims. Almost a thousand patients received care in these hospitals on the first day of the attack.

Background: This photograph shows an aerial view of Hospital Point.

The Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor was not protected from attacks by enemy aircraft. Japanese aircraft fired at the building. One downed Japanese plane also crashed into the hospital.
While the Imperial Japanese Navy focused its first two attack waves on the American battleships and airfields, the third wave, which was not launched, would have seriously limited the US response by attacking the oil tank farm and the submarine base. Destruction of the oil tank farm would have forced the US Pacific Fleet to retreat to San Francisco.

**Background:** This photograph, taken two months before the attack, gives an aerial view of the submarine base, right center, and the fuel farm, left.

In 1941, Pearl City was a mixed residential community where housing ranged from small rental units to estate vacation properties. Many non-commissioned Navy and Army officers lived in rented housing with their families and commuted to Ford Island by boat.

During the attack, some Japanese planes shot at Pearl City, hitting civilians driving their cars. Ironically, the greatest damage to the area occurred after the attack, when friendly fire shot down a plane returning from USS Enterprise, which crashed into and destroyed a house. Damage to the area, along with the fires and explosions in the harbor, led most of the population to flee to the nearby hills.

**Background:** This photograph, taken two months before the attack, gives an aerial view of the submarine base, right center, and the fuel farm, left.
Established in 1935 on the southeastern shore of Pearl Harbor, the US Army Air Forces used Hickam Airfield as its Hawaii bomber base. During the attack Japanese fighters bombed it in an attempt to prevent an American aerial response. The attack destroyed almost half of the airplanes on the field and caused extensive casualties.

Background: This photo, taken on May 3, 1940, depicts an aerial view of Hickam Army Airfield.

Above: A B-17E lands safely at Hickam Army Airfield during the Japanese attack. Smoke from the burning ships at Pearl Harbor rises in the background.

Right: Men at the airfield set up machine gun entrenchments, seen in the right foreground of this photo. The airfield sustained significant damage to multiple hangars and airplanes, limiting the number of planes that could become effective.

Above: A burned B-17C bomber sits on Hickam Army Airfield after the attack.
Lieutenant Ruth Erickson was a nurse stationed at Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor. In an interview, Erickson recalled: "I leaped out of my chair and dashed to the nearest window in the corridor. Right there, those planes flew directly over the top of our quarters. ... It denoted the enemy. My heart was racing, the telephone was ringing, the chief nurse, Gertrude Arnest, was saying, 'Girls, get into your uniforms at once.' That is the first thing they did [in the ward]."

Erickson went on to serve as chief nurse at the Naval Training Hospital on Ford Island in 1952, becoming the Director of the Navy Nurse Corps. She retired from the Navy in 1966.

Chief Boatswain’s Mate Frank M. Ruby was assigned to Fuel Oil Barge 30, which was moored along Merry Point at the time of the attack. Before being wounded, he was on a pier at the submarine base when he saw the Japanese fighters overhead. The next thing he knew, he awoke in the infirmary on Ford Island after the attack with no recollection as to how he came to be there. Ruby, who served for nine years, celebrated his 99th birthday on Nov. 1, 2016.

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Lieutenant Ted Marshall was an assistant flight officer stationed on Ford Island. He commandeered a truck and transported men from all over the island to their stations. Then he flew in his two seaplane airplanes, neither of which he had ever flown before. He was shot down, destroyed the first plane while he was trying to land, and was wounded. After being hit by the second and followed the retreating Japanese for over 150 miles. Unable to overtake the Japanese airplanes and with his fuel dwindling, he returned to Pearl Harbor. For his heroism, he received the Silver Star. Marshall retired from the Navy in 1959.

Lieutenant Cassin Young was the skipper of the repair ship USS Vestal. During the attack, he stayed on board his ship, manning a 3-inch antiaircraft gun against enemy planes. After being hit by the explosion of USS Arizona, he returned to his ship and refused to abandon the ship. He successfully beached the ship and supervised the Mideast of honor for his actions. Young was killed in action in the Battle of Guadalcanal on November 13, 1942.

Pearl Harbor Casualties & Losses

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Japan</th>
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<tr>
<td>Military personnel losses</td>
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<td>Civilian casualties</td>
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<td>Vessel losses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aircraft losses</td>
<td>188 destroyed, 159 damaged</td>
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