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Air Raid Pearl Harbor!

This is No Drill!

by Hubert L. Koker

During one hour and 40 minutes on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese naval air forces, in a surprise attack on American military installations on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, achieved the seemingly impossible: they destroyed 165 aircraft, sunk or damaged eight battleships and killed 2,403 Americans.

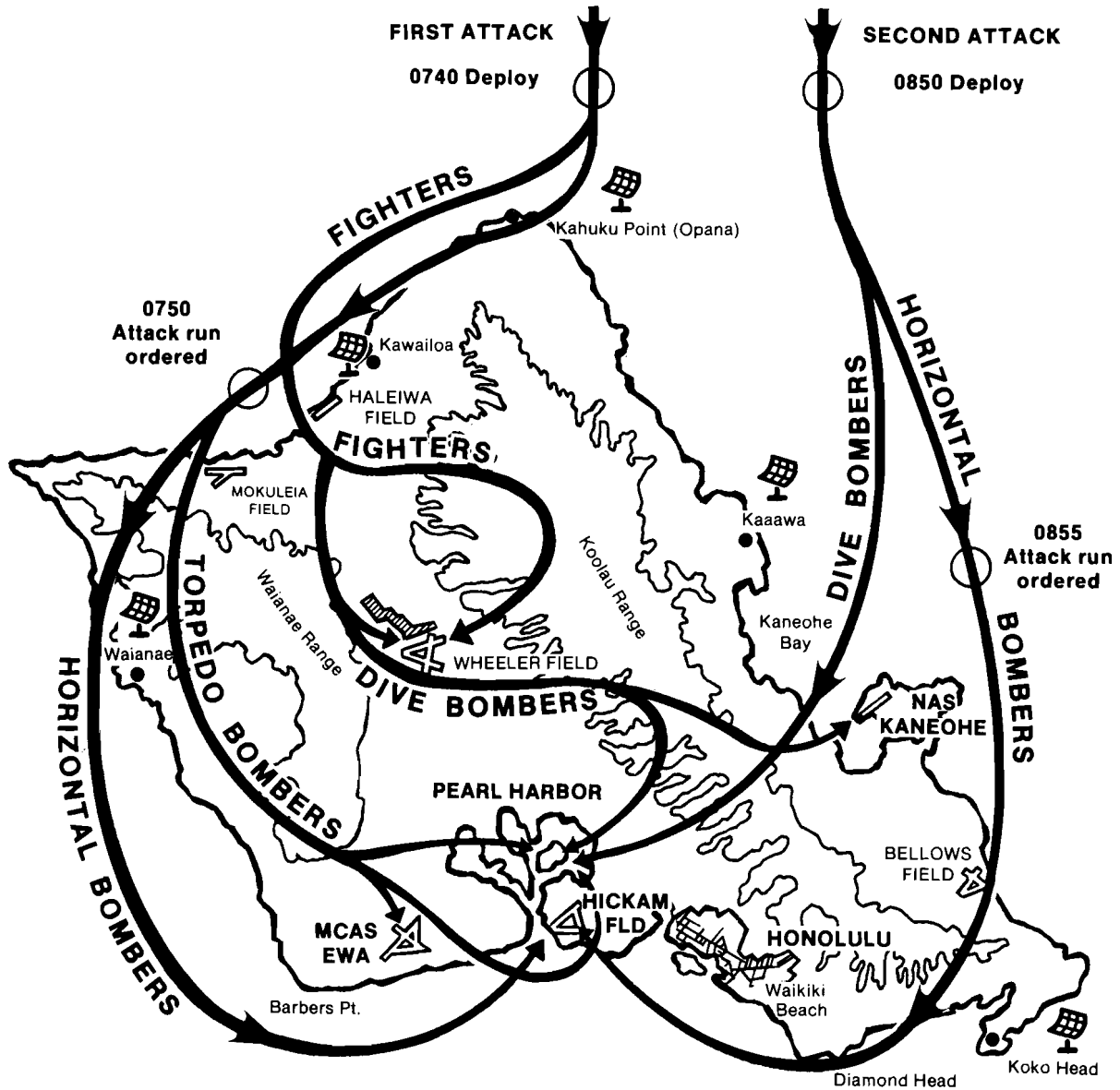
When the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor on that fateful Sunday morning, the Army had four coast artillery antiaircraft gun battalions and 140 fighter aircraft on the island. In addition to armed Navy patrol aircraft, there were literally hundreds of five-inch antiaircraft

guns and many hundreds more 1.1-inch and .50-caliber automatic weapons on the ships being attacked. Yet of the 324 planes taking part in the attack, only 29 were shot down. What's amazing is not that so many planes were shot down but that, given the surprise and size of the attack, *any* planes were shot down.

In 1940 the War Department, showing concern over the aggression of Japan and the strength of its navy, reinforced Oahu. Among the arrivals was the 251st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment, the first National Guard unit to leave the United

States for overseas duty in World War II. Additional troops manned antiaircraft artillery guns already there, but this was still not enough. By September 1941, the Hawaiian Department had an impressive allotment of antiaircraft artillery guns; further, the department had four antiaircraft artillery regiments on Oahu and was scheduled to receive a fifth before the end of the year. Unfortunately, three of the four regiments were at little more than half strength, and the equipment on hand was considerably less than authorized: 60 mobile and 26 fixed three-inch guns, 109 anti-

Tora! Tora! Tora!



Commander Mitsuo Fuchida was able to signal the code words Tora! Tora! Tora! (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!), indicating that the Japanese had achieved complete surprise, because U.S. commanders doubted the Japanese Imperial Navy possessed the skill or audacity to launch a strike so far across the Pacific. However, both sides had underestimated the other. The Japanese failed to appreciate the strength of American resolve that the surprise attack would evoke. For both sides, the results were tragic.

aircraft machine guns and 20 37mm automatic weapons.

According to the Joint Army and Navy Coastal Frontier Defense Plan of April 11, 1941, the Army was responsible for the inshore air patrol and the installation of a radar net, and the Navy for inshore ship patrols and distant reconnaissance. On that morning no Army aircraft were in the air, and the few Navy aircraft airborne were only flying in areas of Navy operations.

Army antiaircraft artillery on Oahu had the ability, when deployed, to give some protection against high-flying bombers along the south coast (from Diamond Head to west of Pearl Harbor) and around Schofield Barracks and Wheeler Field. The 37mm guns had been in Hawaii for almost 10 months before ammunition for them arrived on Dec. 5. Ammunition was so limited for the antiaircraft machine guns that firing practice was out of the question. About half of the mobile three-inch guns were located on private property and, during the months before the Japanese attack, the crews were carefully kept from trespassing except during practice sessions with the guns. The regiments manning the guns were billeted some distance from their battle stations. After May 1941 ammunition for the guns remained in the Ordnance Depot at all times. However, only the fixed three-inch guns, with boxed ammunition close at hand, were ready for immediate action. The rest depended on getting several hours advance warning of an impending attack.

The possibility of advance warning was dubious. Installation of the Aircraft Warning Service's center and detectors was already delayed. Six fixed radar sets were authorized; of these, three had not arrived and the other three were in different stages of installation and not in service on Dec. 7. The six

authorized mobile sets were on hand, but in service for only a few hours each day. Five of these were out of service on the morning of Dec. 7. The sixth detected the approach of enemy aircraft, but higher headquarters never received the warning it relayed.

Communications between the radar operators and the information center was by commercial telephone. There were no communication lines from the Aircraft Warning Service information centers to the various operating centers, except for one telephone line to Wheeler Field. The Army's antiaircraft gun sites were not manned, nor was there a system of ground observers anywhere on the island.

Security at Wheeler Field, where the fighters were stationed, was practically nonexistent. Wheeler had no antiaircraft guns, no air raid shelters and no trenches. As a result of a Dec. 3 sabotage alert, aircraft were parked wingtip to wingtip, with the ammunition removed to make them easier to guard.

At Pearl Harbor, 96 ships of the Pacific Fleet rode quietly at anchor in the morning sun. Fortunately, the aircraft carriers were at sea. Although submarine nets protected the entrance to Pearl Harbor, no torpedo nets protected the warships.

Except for necessary guards and details to man the physical plant, servicemen in Hawaii were at home, in their bunks or slowly beginning a quiet Sunday morning. There was no sense of urgency or fear of an air attack anywhere on the island.

Not so with the Japanese Navy. At 0600, in heavy seas 200 miles north of Oahu, the Japanese carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* began launching a seaborne air armada the likes of which the world had never before seen: 324 torpedo bombers, level bombers, dive bombers and fighters. The first wave of 103 aircraft

began its flight to the sleeping island at 0620. Still undetected as an enemy force, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida gave the word to his flight leaders to attack at 0749. Convinced they had caught the American fleet by surprise, Fuchida ordered his radio operator, Petty Officer Tokunobu Mizuki, to tap out the now famous *Tora! Tora! Tora!* code word to Tokyo. The war had begun.

The attacking planes buzzed like maddened bees in the warm morning air. Fighters and some dive bombers peeled off to attack Wheeler and Schofield. Others split into groups, turned east and struck Kaneohe from the northwest. Still others proceeded south until they were northeast of Hickam and attacked from the east. Within minutes the planes had attacked every major military airfield on the island. They all met at Pearl.

The reality of enemy planes attacking without warning was hard to believe. Many servicemen, surprised at seeing planes flying so low, watched in a stupor until the noise of impacting bombs or bullets jarred them into action. Once the reality of the attack became apparent, training and anger took over their actions. In most cases there was no warning or alarm given or even the command to commence firing. The rule of self-defense was paramount.

The antiaircraft artillery defenses in Hawaii never got the advance warning they needed. None of the mobile three-inch batteries were in position. When they did reach their field positions, ammunition had to be requisitioned from the Ordnance Depot. The Hawaiian Coast Artillery Command alerted units of the 53rd Coast Artillery Brigade (Antiaircraft) at 0810, at least 20 minutes after the raids began. However, within three or four minutes, antiaircraft batteries at Fort Kamehameha (next to Hickam) and at Fort Weaver (on the other side of the

Pearl Harbor entrance) opened fire with small arms. At 0830 a fixed three-inch battery at Weaver began to fire, and similar batteries at Kamameha and Sand Island (in Honolulu Harbor) opened up against Japanese planes. The Sand Island battery claimed two kills.

Lts. George S. Welch and Kenneth M. Taylor, whose P-40 squadron had spent the night on a dirt strip near Wheeler Field, managed to get their P-40s airborne. They were the only U.S. fighters airborne during the attack. They accounted for four of the Japanese fighters shot down. Theirs were the only two P-40s to survive the attack.

Lt. Fred McKinstry, duty officer of the 98th Coast Artillery (Antiaircraft), was leaving his building at Schofield Barracks when the Japanese planes came through Kolekole Pass on their way to Wheeler Field, the P-40 fighter base.

"They were very low. As a matter of fact, I was actually shooting at them with my pistol with some hopes of hitting them. A two-seater

came in very low, strafing the parade field. Staff Sergeant Lowell V. Klatt and Second Lieutenant Stephen G. Saltzman had Browning automatic rifles and both fired at this plane. One of them shot the pilot through the head and the plane bellied into our regimental area where it caught fire. That was supposedly the first Japanese plane shot down in World War II," said McKinstry.

At the main part of Schofield Barracks, where the 24th Division was sleeping after returning from maneuvers the day before, men ran from the barracks and began firing at the planes. They shot down five fighters during the raid — a very good record for small arms.

At the Marine Barracks, a change of guard was taking place when the Japanese attacked. The men laid on their backs on the parade field and began firing their rifles at the planes. They shot down one enemy plane.

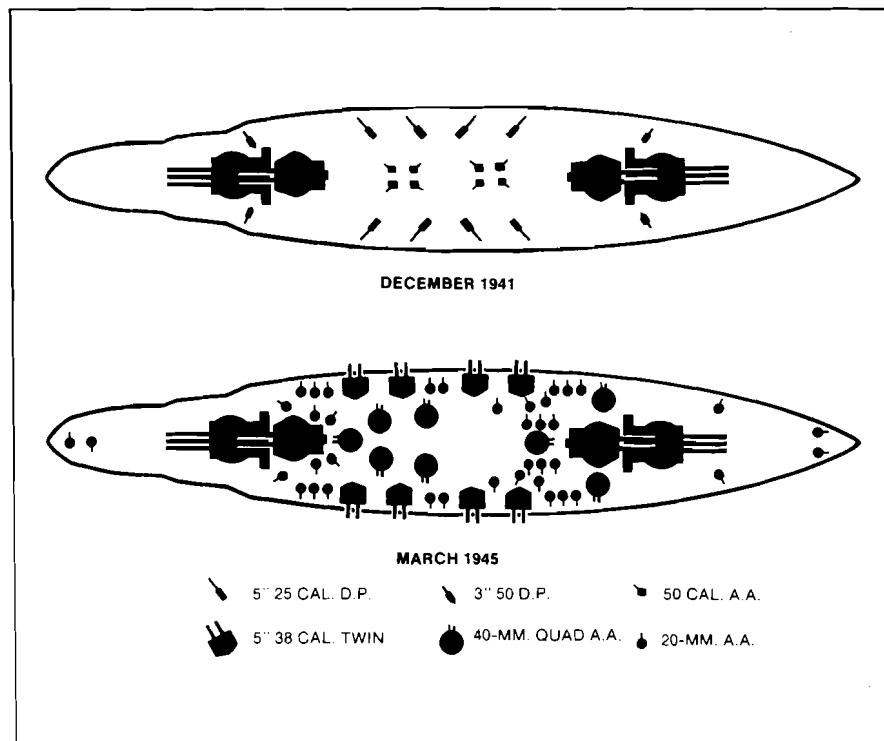
Although air defense at Pearl Harbor was the responsibility of the

Army, no story of the air defense of Pearl Harbor can be told without including the air defense of the fleet by the ships themselves.

Within four minutes after the alarm, "AIR RAID PEARL HARBOR! THIS IS NO DRILL!" went out to all the ships in the harbor, the fleet's guns went into action. The fleet's rapid-fire antiaircraft guns, assisted by Lewis machine guns, automatic rifles and pistols, sent up a formidable, lethal umbrella barrage. However, the battleships were immobile and anchored closely together. Torpedo planes came in so close to the water that guns on the ships were often masked by other ships and shore installations. Still, by 0802, the ships in Pearl Harbor had shot down five of the torpedo bombers. By the time the level bombers came over, the sky was filled with antiaircraft shell bursts. With each passing minute, Pearl Harbor became a more perilous death trap for Japanese airmen.

"AA fire was so thick in places you could almost walk on it," said bomber pilot Sub. Lt. Iyozo Fujita. One bomber, which crashed in the Naval Hospital grounds during the second attack about 0900, was struck by shells and machine gun bullets from as many as 14 different ships.

By 1000 it was over, and the Japanese returned to their carriers. Only a small fraction of the Army's antiaircraft artillery had been brought into play that fateful morning, so its contribution, when needed most, was insignificant. For the Navy, the addition of more air defense guns to battleships after Pearl Harbor made a difference. Not a single U.S. battleship was lost during the remainder of the war.



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