

THE PEARL HARBOR STORY



Naval Air Station at Pearl Harbor following Japanese attack. In background an explosion sends flames and smoke high above wrecked planes.

ON the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft temporarily disabled every battleship and most of the aircraft in the Hawaiian area."

This matter-of-fact sentence starts off the Navy communique that everyone has been waiting for: the whole story of what happened at Pearl Harbor. Until now the Navy has issued no final, complete statement on the Hawaiian disaster for the same, and good, reason that other losses are frequently kept secret for a long time. The enemy rarely has a chance to see clearly how much damage he has done on a raid, and we are certainly not going to hand him that information on the cuff.

Now, one year afterward, the story can be told. We took a shellacking at Pearl Harbor. The Japs pasted us all over the lot. They sunk or damaged 19 warships and 177 Army and Navy planes. They killed 2,117 officers and enlisted men in the Navy and Marine Corps; 876 more were wounded and 960 are still missing. They killed 226 Army officers and men, and wounded 396 more.

As everyone knows by now, it started at 7:55 A.M. on a Sunday morning when Jap dive bombers appeared over the Army Air Base, Hickam Field and the Naval Air Station on Ford Island. We were caught with our pants down. Before the planes could get off the ground they were blasted off the field. At the same time the Japs also struck the Naval Air Station at Kaneohe Bay, repeating the procedure.

The attack went like clockwork. With our planes wrecked, the Japs proceeded at their leisure to the fleet. There were 86 ships moored at Pearl Harbor at the time—including eight battleships, seven cruisers, 28 destroyers and five submarines. No aircraft carriers were around. The score of 19 out of 86 will do as par for that course, considering that all eight battleships were hit.

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Judging from above picture you'd think the battleship West Virginia was a total loss. She burns as small boat rescues a seaman.

The first phase of the attack lasted 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 came along, and not just for the ride.

The attack was a complete surprise, but within seven minutes all naval anti-aircraft guns were in operation. Machine guns brought down two Jap planes and damaged others in this first phase. Of the 202 Naval aircraft on the island, only 38 were able to get into the air, and they were hopelessly outnumbered. Altogether we managed to account for 28 of the 105 Jap planes used in the raid, plus three Japanese submarines, each one weighing 45 tons.

From 8:25 to 8:40 A. M. there was a comparative lull in the action, although Jap dive and horizontal bombers made occasional attacks. This was terminated by the appearance of more horizontal bombers which proceeded to a systematic checkerboard bombing of installations. These were aided by the dive bombers, concentrating on strafing. All enemy aircraft left at 9:45 A.M.

"The enemy attack," says the Navy communique, "was very successful."

When the smoke had cleared away, civilians and service men set about clearing the debris and evaluating the damage. Nineteen vessels were sunk or damaged severely: five battleships, Arizona, Oklahoma, California, Nevada, and West Virginia; three destroyers, one minelayer, the targetship Utah, and a floating dry-dock. In addition three more battleships, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Tennessee; three other cruisers, a seaplane tender and a repair ship were damaged. But of the 19 Naval vessels hit, only the 26-year-old bat-

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Three battleships put out of action by the Japs: the West Virginia (left), severely damaged; the Tennessee and the Arizona, sunk. In all, the attackers hit eight U.S. battleships in their December 7 attack.

Battleship Arizona will be permanently and totally lost. The rest are now either back with the fleet or salvaged at least in part. The planes were all replaced within a few days and interference with facilities generally limited to a matter of hours.

It was a tough blow, but far from fatal.



(Image added)

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