

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 352

### “Climb Mount Niitaka II”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

As the Japanese planes approached Oahu, they found most of the island shrouded in cloud. Fortunately for them, Pearl Harbor itself was clear under a bright morning sun. At 7:53 AM, the observer plane at the head of the incoming aircraft radioed, “*Tora, tora, tora!*” *Tora*, the Japanese word for tiger, was the agreed code signal that meant complete surprise had been achieved and the bombers should proceed immediately to their targets. It also fired one blue flare, a signal which meant the same thing for the benefit of the fighters, which did not have radios.

The Battle of Pearl Harbor had begun.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 352. Climb Mount Niitaka, part two.

Royal Vitousek, an attorney, a member of the Hawaii Territorial House of Representatives, and an aviation enthusiast was taking his teenage son on a pleasant Sunday morning flight over Honolulu in his private plane in the early morning hours of December 7, 1941, when he ran headlong into approaching Japanese Zeroes. The fighters took a few shots at his plane, but missed; Vitousek dove under the fighters and accelerated, hoping the Japanese wouldn't bother to chase down such an insignificant target. They didn't, and he landed his plane at the Honolulu airport as it was being bombed. He and his son were fortunate. Of the eight private planes known to have been in the air at the time of the attack, only two landed safely. As soon as he could get to a phone, he called the Army Air Corps headquarters at Wheeler Field to tell them Japanese planes had fired on him. They didn't believe it.

Once the Japanese realized they had achieved complete surprise, the slow and vulnerable torpedo bombers went in first. Their targets were the eight American ships moored at what was known as “Battleship Row.” The first wave of torpedo bombers flew in low across the water, dropped their

torpedoes, and climbed away. A few seconds later, a huge explosion tore a hole in the hull of USS *Oklahoma*.

Then came the second wave of torpedo bombers. Some of these had taken hits from American anti-aircraft guns and were on fire. The crews of those planes flew directly into American ships in suicide attacks.

The second run scored hits on USS *West Virginia* and *California*. Other bombers were attacking USS *Utah*, which was an older battleship converted into a training vessel. The pilots had been briefed to ignore *Utah*, but in their excitement, some of the Japanese mistook it for an aircraft carrier.

At 7:50 AM, even as Vitousek was trying to convince the Army he'd seen what he'd seen, bombs began falling on Wheeler Field. The base commander, Colonel William Flood, was awakened by the commotion. He went outside in his pajamas and looked up at the sight of approaching olive-drab airplanes that could easily be mistaken for American, but when they got close enough for him to see the round red suns painted on their wings, his stomach heaved. "Where's our Navy?" he called out. "Where're our fighters?"

A handful of US fighters took off, but they had no ammunition. The building that held the ammunition stockpile was on fire. The shells were popping one by one, like firecrackers.

At Hickam Field, fifteen miles away, two mechanics got up early to watch the huge B-17 bombers fly in from the mainland. Just before 8:00 they saw a V-formation of aircraft approach, but then the planes began to peel off and separate. "We're going to have an air show," one of them remarked. Seconds later, bombs began to explode around them.

At Pearl Harbor, sleepy sailors awoke to sirens, calls to General Quarters, and explosions. Just before eight, the radio transmitter on Ford Island broadcast "Air raid Pearl Harbor. This is not drill."

No torpedo bomber had attacked USS *Arizona*, but a few minutes later, bombs from a high-altitude bomber struck the ship. One of these bombs broke through the deck and fell into the ship's fuel storage. A fire broke out, which in turn set off 1600 pounds of black powder stored nearby. *Arizona* exploded. The ship broke apart and sank into the mud.

Along Battleship Row, there was so much fire and smoke, it was hard to tell which ships had been hit. Sailors dove into the water to escape the flames, but the water was covered with fuel oil, which soon was also set ablaze and killed them.

USS *West Virginia* was particularly hard hit. Japanese torpedoes blew two holes in the battleship and wrecked its rudder. A further torpedo entered the ship through one of the holes and exploded inside. The ship filled with water and began to list; it was in danger of capsizing, but the crew quickly counter-flooded the ship and it settled into the bottom upright.

The battleships on Battleship Row were doubled up. *West Virginia* was on the outside and USS *Tennessee* on the inside, where it was safe from torpedoes, but as the captain of *West Virginia*, Mervyn Bennion, was giving orders from the ship's conning tower, a bomb from a Japanese dive bomber struck *Tennessee*. A piece of shrapnel from that explosion struck Captain Bennion aboard *West Virginia*, mortally wounding him. He refused medical treatment and continued to issue orders until he died.

Also aboard *West Virginia* was an African-American mess attendant, the 22-year-old Doris Miller. At this time, African-Americans served aboard US Navy ships, but only in the role of preparing and serving meals to the crew. Miller reported for duty, and as he was a large man, was assigned to help move the dying Captain Bennion to safety. Once that was accomplished, two white junior officers ordered Miller to accompany them to an unmanned pair of anti-aircraft guns. Miller, who had no prior training on the weapons, got a quick rundown on how they worked. The officers intended for Miller to help reload the guns, but Miller instead took hold of one of them and began firing. He shot down at least two and possibly as many as six Japanese planes.

Three members of *West Virginia*'s crew found safety in a watertight compartment and awaited rescue. They waited there sixteen days until they died, just before Christmas. We know this because of the hash marks they scratched into the walls as they counted the days until a rescue that never came. Their corpses were only discovered much later.

Afterward, Captain Bennion was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor and Mess Attendant Second Class Miller was awarded the Navy Cross, which made him the first African-American sailor to receive this honor.

Five Japanese midget submarines, each with a crew of two and armed with two torpedoes, entered Pearl Harbor as the attack began. Four were sunk by US destroyers and one ran aground and was captured. It appears that four of the submarines failed to strike any targets at all. One submarine may have hit *West Virginia* and *Oklahoma* with one torpedo each, contributing to the heavy damage suffered by both ships, but it's hard to tell.

*Oklahoma* capsized, trapping a number of sailors below decks. Some were rescued by civilian yard workers who cut holes into the ship's hull to free them.

High overhead, squadrons of Japanese Zeroes, fighter planes, were covering the raid, watching for enemy planes. Not a single Navy plane and only six Army planes managed takeoff during the ninety minutes of the attack, but as the Zeroes patrolled, they spotted the first of the B-17s, arriving at last from California. The Japanese fired on them, forcing the bombers to break formation and flee.

The Zeroes next strafed the parked American planes at the Army's Hickam Field air base. Recall that General Short had thought he was being warned about Japanese sabotage. One of his

precautions was to park the planes at Hickam close together in the center of the field, far from the fences. This made them safer from saboteurs on the ground, but ideal targets for the strafing fighters.

At 8:55, about an hour after the first attack, a second wave of 170 Japanese planes appeared. By this time, Battleship Row was a nightmare of fire and smoke; it was hard to tell which of the ships, if any, had not yet been sunk.

But there remained one obvious target: USS *Nevada*, which had been struck by a single torpedo. Nevertheless, the Officer of the Deck, an ensign, had gotten the ship underway, and was attempting to escape the harbor for the open sea. *Nevada* took several hits from dive bombers in the second wave. The crew ran the ship aground to avoid it sinking in the harbor and becoming a navigation hazard.

By 8:30 AM, the attack was over. The US Navy lost 2,008 sailors killed and 710 wounded. Almost half of these losses were crew of USS *Arizona*. It is notable that most senior officers lived ashore. Most of the crew aboard the ships at the time would have been junior officers and enlisted seamen, meaning a large proportion of the victims would have been teenagers or at most in their early 20s. The Army lost 218 killed, 364 wounded. The Marine Corps lost 109 killed, 69 injured. Sixty-eight civilians were killed and 25 wounded. Nine of the civilian fatalities were members of the Honolulu Fire Department.

Twenty-one Navy ships were struck in the attack, including all eight battleships. Eighteen ships were sunk or run aground, including five of the battleships. Ninety-two Navy planes were destroyed and 31 damaged; 77 Army planes were destroyed and 128 damaged, virtually all on the ground.

The Japanese lost those five midget subs, nine crew dead and one captured. Nine Japanese aircraft were lost in the first wave and 20 in the second wave. Seventy-four Japanese planes were damaged. Fifty-five Japanese air crew were killed and one captured.

The Japanese task force monitored radio traffic from Honolulu and understood that surprise had been achieved and the attack was a success. When the planes returned, there was discussion over launching a third strike. Pearl Harbor's oil tanks and submarine base remained unscathed; they were tempting targets. But the third wave would be no surprise, and if the task force lingered, the Americans might find it with their carriers, which remained unaccounted for. The strike force commander, Admiral Nagumo, ordered the task force to withdraw.

[music: Beethoven, *ō*]

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox was at his office in the Navy Department in Washington when Admiral Stark arrived with the radio message from Pearl Harbor. AIR RAID PEARL HARBOR. THIS

IS NOT DRILL. Knox thought it must be a miscommunication; surely it was the Philippines the Japanese would attack. Stark assured him it was truly Pearl Harbor.

Knox telephoned the White House. President Roosevelt was having lunch in the Oval Office with Harry Hopkins when Knox gave him the news. Hopkins also believed it must have been some kind of mistake, but Roosevelt told him this was “just the kind of unexpected thing the Japanese would do.” He lamented that he had hoped to complete his term of office without getting America into the war, but now it seemed the Japanese had taken that decision out of his hands.

The President telephoned Secretary of State Hull at the State Department to pass on the news. Hull told him that the Japanese ambassador had just arrived for a meeting and was waiting to see him. Roosevelt advised him to proceed with the meeting coolly, and not let on that he knew about the attack.

Hull would have preferred simply to send the ambassador away, but decided to follow Roosevelt’s advice. In the waiting room, Ambassador Nomura was sweating. He had been more than an hour late for his meeting with the American Secretary of State, and had barely had time to skim the fourteen-part message. It still contained several typos. The First Secretary had wanted to type it over once again, but the Ambassador vetoed that idea.

He was finally ushered into the Secretary of State’s office at 2:20 PM. Hull did not offer to shake hands nor invite the Ambassador to sit down. Nomura handed him the message and apologized for being late, noting that he had been instructed to deliver it at 1:00.

The anger on Hull’s face was unmistakable. He asked the ambassador why it should be delivered at 1:00 specifically. The ambassador answered that he did not know, which was true.

Hull paged through the message and angrily told Nomura that in all their dealings, he had never spoken one false word to the ambassador. In contrast, this Japanese message was full of lies and distortions. The ambassador began to reply, but Hull raised a hand to cut him off and gestured for him to leave. It was only after Nomura returned to the Embassy that he learned the reason for the American’s hostility.

Across the United States, radio news bulletins interrupted Sunday afternoon concerts and football games to deliver the shocking news. Movie theater patrons heard it announced between features.

In Tokyo, the Cabinet drafted an Imperial rescript before dawn and sent it to the Palace for the Emperor’s seal. NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, opened its 7:00 AM news broadcast with an announcement: “The Army and Navy divisions of Imperial Headquarters jointly announced at 6:00 this morning, December 8, that the Imperial Army and Navy forces have begun hostilities against the American and British forces in the Pacific at dawn today.”

At the Palace, the Privy Council met to receive the rescript. The only discussions were over why the Netherlands had not been included in the declaration of war, and why the rescript identified the enemies as “America” and “England,” when those were not the proper names of either country. Wasn’t that impolite? Prime Minister Tōjō had no patience for this discussion. Everyone would know what it meant.

Winston Churchill was spending the weekend at Chequers with the US Ambassador, John Winant, and W. Averell Harriman, appointed by President Roosevelt as special envoy to coordinate the Lend-Lease program. At 9:00 PM on Sunday evening, they listened to a BBC announcer summarize the day’s events in Europe. Only afterward did he add casually that the Japanese had attacked Hawaii.

Churchill went immediately to his office. He had publicly promised that if Japan declared war on the United States, the UK government would immediately declare war on Japan. The American ambassador followed him into the office and said, “Good God, you can’t declare war based on a radio announcement!”

“What shall I do?” asked Churchill. The ambassador asked permission to call the White House. He got through to the President and put Churchill on the line. “Mr. President, what’s this about Japan?”

“It’s quite true,” replied Roosevelt. “We are all in the same boat.”

“This actually simplifies things,” replied Churchill. “God be with you.”

In Manila, at 7:30 AM December 8, five hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Major General Lewis Brereton, commander of the American Far East Air Force, based at Clark Field, requested from his superior, Douglas MacArthur, permission to attack the Japanese-controlled island of Taiwan, six hundred miles north, with his force of B-17 bombers. The B-17 was a big four-engine bomber capable of carrying a large payload across a great distance and armed with six machine guns, which earned it the nickname “the Flying Fortress.”

MacArthur refused. His orders were not to make the first overt act.

Brereton demurred. Wasn’t the attack on Pearl Harbor an overt act?

MacArthur still refused. The Army had little reconnaissance information on Taiwan and the B-17s would as likely end up bombing rice paddies as anything else.

Brereton ordered his B-17s into the air, to prevent them being hit on the ground by a Japanese air strike, as had happened at Pearl Harbor. He also sent up fighters to protect them.

Meanwhile, 600 miles to the north, Japanese pilots were equally frustrated. They had orders to attack Clark Field, but their own air field was socked in by a morning fog. As they waited

impatiently for the fog to lift, they worried that the American B-17s would find them first and hit their planes as they sat on the runway.

Later that morning, a small unit of Japanese bombers struck targets north of Manila. Nothing important, but it was clear what was coming. Brereton telephoned MacArthur again and renewed his request to bomb Taiwan. MacArthur again refused.

Forty minutes later, a little after 10:00 AM, MacArthur changed his mind and gave Brereton permission to proceed with the strike. But first the B-17s needed to land, arm, and refuel before a strike was possible. Brereton ordered them to begin.

The fog had lifted in Taiwan. Reports began to come in from towns in northern Luzon of Japanese planes overhead, on their way south. A radio message to Clark Field went unanswered. Someone got the air base on the phone and told a junior officer about the reports; he said he would pass the information on to the base commander.

Unfortunately, he took his good old time about it. Overhead, the pilots of 27 approaching Japanese high-altitude bombers marveled at the neat rows of B-17s arrayed on the ground below them, glimmering in the tropical sun. Ten hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Americans were caught by surprise once again. Air raid sirens sounded. Bombs fell. Inexperienced anti-aircraft gunners fired back, unsuccessfully. A few P-40 fighters got into the air before bombs destroyed the rest. Their pilots had been told no Japanese fighter plane was worth anything; now they discovered first hand that the Japanese Zero was faster and more maneuverable than their own planes.

A few weeks earlier, Claire Chennault, the commander of the Flying Tigers in China, had sent a report to the US War Department, detailing how a P-40 pilot should go about attacking a Zero. No one at Clark Field had been shown that report.

After dispatching the American fighters, the Zeroes strafed the B-17s parked on the runway. Twelve of them were destroyed and three damaged. Only one of the bombers escaped unscathed. The Americans also lost 40 of their P-40 fighters and fifty older aircraft, which were mostly used for training and reconnaissance. The Japanese lost seven fighters.

The US Navy's Asiatic Fleet stationed at Manila included no capital ships. Those B-17s were supposed to be the Philippines' greatest offensive threat. Now they were smoldering wrecks. The commander of the US Army Air Corps, General Henry Arnold, telephoned Brereton later that day to ask him how the hell he was surprised ten hours after Pearl Harbor. But unlike Pearl Harbor, there would be far less attention paid to this lapse and no investigation into the attack on Clark Field.

Fears that the premature attack on the Kra Peninsula might tip off the Americans to the Pearl Harbor strike proved unwarranted, as news of the Japanese attack there had not reached Pearl

Harbor in time. Despite rain and rough seas, Japanese troops landed on both sides of the border, in northern Malaya and southern Thailand.

The Japanese were hoping the Thai would be willing to join their war against the British, but initially the Thai were uncooperative. Thai police and military fired on the Japanese in the early hours of the invasion, but before the sun set, the Thai government bowed to the inevitable and allowed the Japanese Army to operate from Thai territory.

Japanese soldiers in Malaya advanced on the airfield at the coastal town of Kota Bharu, which was in their hands the following day, as well as airfields in southern Thailand. Japanese bombers struck Singapore and airfields in Malaya. The British lost 60 aircraft on the first day of the invasion, most of them on the ground.

Japanese transports continued to unload troops in northeastern Malaya, though British air units were able to sink a few of them. The Japanese unloaded tanks and began to drive them down the east coast of Malaya. Japanese tanks were small, but their speed made them useful, while the British did not have a single tank in all of Malaya.

The Japanese also deployed bicycle infantry units to Malaya. This may sound odd, and it may sound even odder that they didn't waste transport space shipping the soldiers' bicycles with them. That was because Japanese spies in Malaya had reported bicycles were plentiful there, so the soldiers simply commandeered bicycles from individuals and shops. In inland Malaya there were few roads; people traveled through the jungle on footpaths. These Japanese bicycle infantry zipped along these paths far faster than the British, allowing the Japanese to outrun and encircle the defenders.

The Japanese had seized air superiority over Malaya and British ground forces were in retreat. But the British had Singapore, a deepwater port at a strategic location and protected by formidable naval defenses. The port facilities were ample and it stored enough diesel fuel to supply the entire Royal Navy for six months.

These features made it the cornerstone of British power in East Asia. Churchill liked to call it "The Gibraltar of the East." But impressive as its features were, it was still only a naval base. To be of any use, it needed ships. Britain's many economic problems with the gold standard and the Great Depression during the Twenties and Thirties made building a fleet to station in the Far East infeasible, so British naval leaders planned to rush the Home Fleet to Singapore in the event of a crisis in East Asia, a confrontation with Japan, for example.

But war against Germany meant the Home Fleet was needed to protect Britain and its foreign trade. War with Italy meant the Mediterranean Fleet was needed where it was, so there were few ships left to station at Singapore: four light cruisers and three destroyers, to be exact. When tensions with Japan began rising after the Japanese occupation of all Indochina in July 1941, Churchill saw a need to strengthen the British naval presence. He ordered reinforcements to



Singapore, in the form of three capital ships: the aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable*, the modern battleship *Prince of Wales*, and the First World War-era battlecruiser *Repulse*.

The British government publicly announced this redeployment and were not coy about the reason: it was to restrain Japan. Two battleships and an aircraft carrier could hardly take on the entire Japanese fleet, with its nine battleships and six aircraft carriers, but Churchill calculated they would serve as a fleet in being. As long as they were at Singapore, ready to attack, any Japanese naval force in the region would need a large escort, leaving fewer ships available for naval actions elsewhere.

The British also believed that in the event of a Japanese attack, they could count on the American Pacific Fleet to assist them.

Unfortunately, *Indomitable* accidentally ran aground at Kingston Harbor in Jamaica in November, and had to be sent to Norfolk, Virginia for repairs. *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* proceeded to Singapore anyway, arriving on December 2, six days before the Japanese attack. Admiral Sir Thomas Phillips was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Fleet. You'll recall we met Admiral Phillips last time, when he was in Manila asking for escort from the US Navy. At the age of 51, he was the youngest full admiral in the Royal Navy. He was also unusually short, at just 162 centimeters. That's 5'4", for the metrically challenged.

*Repulse* was of First World War vintage and nothing to brag about, but *Prince of Wales* had only been commissioned in January of this year. You may recall this was the ship entrusted with the job of transporting the prime minister to his summit meeting with Franklin Roosevelt a few months ago. It was equipped with surface radar to detect enemy ships and radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns that fired two-pound shells.

In the afternoon of December 8, just hours after Japanese troops began their landings in northern Malaya, Admiral Phillips ordered *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, and a destroyer escort on a course up the eastern coast of Malaya, to search for and attack the Japanese transports. He had no carrier available, and land-based RAF units already had their hands full, which meant that air cover for this force, dubbed Force Z, would be iffy at best.

In view of what is going to happen, many people have asked why Admiral Phillips proceeded in the face of the obvious danger of Japanese air attack. It seems probable that he was relying on the potent anti-aircraft guns on *Prince of Wales* for protection. It also seems that he felt the need to do something. British Army soldiers and RAF pilots were giving their lives for King and Empire; was the Royal Navy supposed to hunker down in Singapore like a group of frightened children when they had the ability—potentially—to drive away the invasion force and isolate the Japanese soldiers already landed?

And don't forget as well, that Phillips, like most British and American military commanders, seriously underestimated the Japanese.

There were some who questioned the wisdom of sending *Prince of Wales* to Singapore. The ship was mighty, but it had not been designed for operations in the tropics. It had no air conditioning, for one thing, and this took its toll on the crew. The radar equipment often malfunctioned in the hot, humid environment, which also caused the ship's store of two-pound anti-aircraft shells to deteriorate.

On the morning of December 10, the Japanese, who had desperately been trying to locate Force Z by air before it reached their transports, finally found it. At 11:40 that morning, two squadrons of torpedo bombers based in Indochina attacked the two battleships. They scored no hits on *Repulse*, but one torpedo struck *Prince of Wales* at just the point where its port propeller shaft exited the hull. The hit bent the shaft and ruptured the watertight seal between the shaft and the hull. With only one operating propeller, *Prince of Wales*' speed dropped from 28 knots to 16 knots, making the ship an easier target, and seawater was now rushing in through the ruptured seal.

This water entering the ship caused it to list to port 12 degrees, which raised the starboard anti-aircraft guns too high to be able to fire at low-flying planes. Power was lost to a good portion of the ship, meaning some of its bilge pumps and some of its guns were put out of action.

Forty minutes later, a second wave of torpedo bombers attacked. Three more torpedoes struck *Prince of Wales*, and four struck *Repulse*. The captain of *Repulse* ordered the crew to abandon ship; just minutes later it capsized and sank.

Next came a wave of high-altitude bombers. One of these was able to drop a bomb on *Prince of Wales* that landed squarely amidships and exploded below the main deck. The crew were ordered to abandon ship; minutes later, *Prince of Wales* also capsized and sank. A Japanese reconnaissance plane was able to return to Indochina with the news as the Japanese were preparing a third strike on the battleships, which was then cancelled.

The destroyers moved in to rescue the survivors, including the captain of *Repulse*. The captain of *Prince of Wales* and Admiral Phillips went down with their ship. Admiral Phillips would become one of the highest-ranking Allied commanders to lose his life in the Second World War. Between the two ships, a total of 840 British sailors died.

As the destroyers returned to Singapore with the rescued survivors, they passed the four American destroyers Admiral Phillips had requested, headed north to join Force Z. The British ships informed them of what had happened; the Americans chose to continue on and search for more survivors. They found none.

The next day, Japanese planes dropped two wreaths at the site of the battle. One was to honor the memory of the Japanese dead; the other in remembrance of the British sailors killed.

Winston Churchill received the news by telephone in the early morning hours, whilst he was still in bed. He later recalled it to be the greatest shock he had received over the entire course of the war. The US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, American air units at Clark Field, and the British Far Eastern Fleet at Singapore represented the three linchpins of Allied power in the Pacific. All three of these forces had been deployed to restrain the Japanese. In barely two days, the Japanese had destroyed all three of them. There was no longer a single operational Allied battleship anywhere in the Pacific or Indian Oceans, and the Imperial Japanese Navy was now free to sail where it pleased. Or, as Churchill would put it, “Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked.”

The Japanese attack on Force Z was the first time in naval history that aircraft alone sank battleships on the open sea. Battleships had been damaged or sunk at Taranto and Pearl Harbor, but ships in port are different. They are unprepared for battle and can't maneuver.

Take note too, that the battleships at Pearl Harbor were old. They were First World War leftovers, for the most part. The newest of them, USS *West Virginia*, had been commissioned in 1923. *Prince of Wales*, on the other hand, had only been commissioned in January 1941. It was state of the art, armed with modern radar and anti-aircraft weapons, but these advantages weren't enough to save it.

Right up to this moment, naval commanders in all the world's navies believed the battleship was still queen of the sea, in spite of growing evidence to the contrary, such as Taranto, and the sinking of *Bismarck*, which was sunk by other battleships, but its sinking was only possible because a successful air strike had wounded it.

It was a matter of disappointment for the Japanese, and great good fortune for the Americans, that they lost only aging battleships, but none of their three Pacific aircraft carriers, of which, for one reason or another, none were at Pearl Harbor on that fateful day.

USS *Lexington* was on its way to Midway Island at the time of the attack. It was transporting fighter planes to the island, another part of the American effort to beef up air power in the Pacific. The mission was canceled and *Lexington* ordered to return at once to Pearl Harbor.

USS *Saratoga* had just completed a lengthy refit and was at San Diego to pick up its air group before returning to service in the Pacific.

USS *Enterprise*, the newest American carrier in the Pacific, had completed a delivery of planes to Wake Island and was on its way back to Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack. In fact, *Enterprise* was originally scheduled to return to Pearl Harbor on December 6, but was delayed by bad weather. On the morning of the seventh, *Enterprise* launched some of its planes to do routine reconnaissance, then sent them on to land at Pearl Harbor. They arrived during the attack. Seven of the eighteen planes were shot down, either by the Japanese or by friendly anti-aircraft fire. Later in the day, three out of six additional fighters arriving from *Enterprise* were also shot

down over Pearl Harbor by trigger-happy anti-aircraft gunners, hours after the Japanese attack had ended.

After *Enterprise* received the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, it launched planes to scout to the south and west for the Japanese task force. But you know and I know the Japanese task force was actually north of Hawaii.

*Enterprise* arrived at Pearl Harbor on December 8. The carrier was immediately refueled, rearmed, and sent back out on patrol, to guard against any further attacks on Hawaii.

Lacking battleships in the Pacific, the US Navy was forced to rely on these carriers. If there were any admirals who still hadn't learned their lesson about the importance of air power in modern naval warfare, these three carriers would prove excellent teachers.

It is sometimes mistakenly said that the Japanese ambassador in Washington was delivering a declaration of war, which was intended to be received just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, but this is not true. He was merely delivering a message that the Japanese were breaking off negotiations. Admiral Yamamoto had argued strenuously that Japan should formally declare war before the Pearl Harbor strike, but he was overruled by more senior Army and Navy commanders who were quite happy to use the negotiations as cover for their surprise attacks.

Yamamoto, better than his superiors, understood the anger and the thirst for revenge that a surprise strike on Pearl Harbor would engender in America. Yamamoto is widely quoted as having said, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." In fact, there is no evidence Yamamoto ever said this, although whether or not he did, it is an accurate summary of his views.

Another Yamamoto quote, this one authentic, comes from a few months before the attack. He told the Japanese prime minister, "In the first six to twelve months of a war with the United States and Great Britain, I will run wild and win victory upon victory. But then, if war continues after that, I have no expectation of success." This prediction was right on the money.

The Japanese believed, or hoped, that the war would last no longer than a year. They would spend that year consolidating their hold on the Western Pacific until the British and the Americans would bow to the inevitable and choose peace over the lengthy, ugly, bloody combat that would be necessary to reclaim what had been lost. In this they seriously misjudged the American mood. The sleeping giant was instead filled with a terrible resolve.

It was because the Japanese were thinking primarily about the first year of the conflict that the Pearl Harbor strike was directed at the battleships of the Pacific Fleet. If they had been thinking longer term, they might have focused more on the base's docking and repair facilities. Had those been seriously damaged, the war might have lasted much longer. That was the opinion of US Admiral Chester Nimitz. More about him in future episodes.

Nimitz also believed there could have been worse outcomes. Had the US Pacific Fleet left Pearl Harbor to go to the defense of Singapore or the Philippines, say, the ships might have been sunk by Japanese air attack in the open sea, as were *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*, which would have meant much higher casualties and the sunken ships would have been irretrievable. As it was, six of the eight battleships sunk or damaged at Pearl Harbor were eventually refloated, repaired, and put back into service.

I'll give the last word to Japanese Admiral Hara Chuichi, who would later sum up the results of the attack in these words: "We won a great tactical victory at Pearl Harbor, and thereby lost the war."

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Morgan for his kind donation, and thank you to Gene for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Morgan and Gene help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we consider the political and diplomatic fallout from the Japanese declaration of war. A date that will live in infamy, in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. There were, and are, various conspiracy theories which allege that leading figures in the government of the United States, and possibly also the United Kingdom, had advance knowledge of the attack on Pearl Harbor and allowed it to happen, or even encouraged it, in order to bring the United States into the war. Allegations to this effect began to be aired publicly even before the war was over.

The biggest problem with such theories is that the United States was already in what might fairly be called an undeclared war with Germany at the time of the attack. The evidence suggests this was precisely where President Roosevelt wanted America to be: as close to a British ally as possible without entering into combat. If Roosevelt had wanted to provoke all-out war with Germany, inviting a Japanese attack would have been a peculiar way of going about it. War with

Japan would have limited, not increased, the ability of the United States to assist the UK and the USSR in Europe. Nor was it inevitable that war with Japan would lead to war with Germany.

The US public was not in a mood to go to war in 1941. Roosevelt understood this and believed America would not, and perhaps should not, strike the first blow, but he also believed it was likely that either Germany or Japan would attack the United States sooner or later.

It is clear he did not believe that first attack would strike Pearl Harbor, or that it would be so devastating. Roosevelt was more likely envisioning something like a German U-boat firing on an American destroyer, or Japanese troops landing in the Philippines.

Any suggestion that Pearl Harbor was deliberately left vulnerable runs up against the demonstrable fact that General Walter Short, the officer in command of the US Army's Hawaiian Department and therefore the person in charge of the defense of Hawaii, including the Pearl Harbor Naval Station, had received warning on November 27<sup>th</sup> that a Japanese attack was possible and was ordered to prepare for the eventuality. The most charitable interpretation you can make of Short's actions afterward would be that his orders were not clearly worded and he misapprehended them. When the attack came, the anti-aircraft guns were unmanned and Army planes were clustered together in ways that made them easier to attack and harder for their pilots to get into them and take off, but these were General Short's decisions; they were not made in Washington.

CBS radio correspondent Edward R. Murrow was at the White House on the evening of December 7, for a previously scheduled dinner with the Roosevelts. Because of the emergency, the President did not attend the dinner, but he did talk with Murrow, and Murrow observed most of the top officials of the Administration, of Congress, and of the Army and Navy coming and going from the White House that evening. He said later of these people, "If they were *not* surprised by the news from Pearl Harbor, then that group of elderly men were putting on a performance which would have excited the admiration of any experienced actor... There was amazement and anger written large on most of the faces."

[music: Closing War Theme]