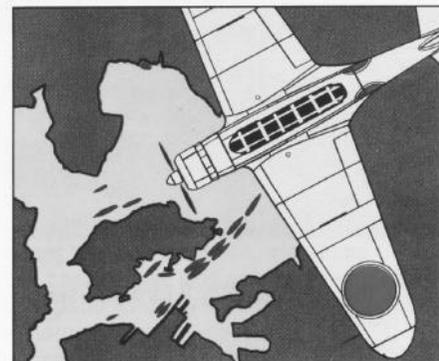


# “This is No Drill.”



## U.S. Naval Aviation and Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941

80-G-32835



In the wake of the first Japanese strafing attack on NAS Kaneohe Bay, officers and enlisted men strive to save a burning Catalina, while a dog (right of center) stands by. The second wave of attackers, however, destroyed the plane shortly thereafter.

By Robert J. Cressman and J. Michael Wenger

In the predawn darkness that cloaked the Pacific Ocean 200 miles north of Oahu on December 7, 1941, Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's First Air Fleet, formed around the aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku*, and *Zuikaku* – the most powerful concentration of such ships ever assembled – pressed inexorably southward. At 0550, the force commenced launch of 184 planes. A second strike would follow an hour later. Once airborne, the 51 *Vals*, 89 *Kates* and 43 *Zeroes* of the first wave droned toward the south at 0616. Ahead lay the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Army and Army Air Force bases that

existed to protect that fleet, and the U.S. Naval Aviation facilities on Oahu – at Pearl, Kaneohe Bay, and Ewa Mooring Mast Field.

Almost simultaneously, returning from ferrying F4Fs from VMF-211 to Wake Island, *Enterprise* (CV-6), with Task Force 8 under Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., was some 250 miles due west of Oahu. Between 0615 and 0629, *Enterprise* launched 18 SBDs. The nine two-plane sections were to search ahead of the ship to a distance of 150 miles and then proceed to NAS Pearl Harbor. Task Force 8, which had been operating on a war footing since it had departed

Pearl on November 28, was to make port that afternoon.

At 0630, some 200 miles to the east, the general stores issue ship *Antares* (AKS-3), standing toward Pearl, summoned the destroyer *Ward* (DD-139), on harbor entrance patrol, to investigate what looked like a small submarine 1,500 yards off *Antares*' starboard quarter. At about the same time, Ensign William P. Tanner, USNR, was taking off from NAS Kaneohe in 14-P-1, a PB-5 (BuNo 2419) armed with two depth charges; it was one of three *Catalinas* slated to patrol assigned Fleet Operating Areas off Oahu with orders to bomb any sub-

# 50th Anniversary - World War II

marine found outside regularly scheduled areas. Four other PBY-5s, from VP-24, were aloft for training.

Twenty minutes later, 14-P-1's crew spotted a submarine about a mile south of the entrance to Pearl's channel, with a destroyer steaming close astern. Initially thinking that he was seeing a friendly submarine in distress, being escorted by a destroyer, Tanner refrained from dropping his depth bombs and released two float lights instead to mark the sub's position. As 14-P-1's perplexed pilot looked on, however, *Ward* opened fire and then dropped depth charges on what proved to be a Japanese midget submarine. After *Ward's* attack, the submarine began to turn toward Pearl and submerge. Continuing his ap-

proach, now certain of the submersible's unfriendly nature, Tanner dropped two depth bombs ahead of the swirling water. Both *Ward* and *Ens. Tanner* reported the incident around 0700.

Elsewhere on Oahu, at 0702, two U.S. Army privates manning their scope at a mobile radar site at Opana Point, on the island's north coast, discovered an unusually large "blip," 136 miles to the north and closing. The officer on watch in the control center, however, dismissed the incoming planes picked up by the radar as inbound B-17s expected that morning at Hickam Field, the Army bomber base on Oahu.

Meanwhile, Commander, Patrol Wing (ComPatWing) 1, one of the ad-



80-G-32497

Sailors on Ford Island belt ammunition, probably around the time of the attack by the second wave of Japanese planes on December 7, 1941.

dressees on Tanner's coded dispatch, requested confirmation at 0715. Tanner radioed back: "SUNK ONE ENEMY SUBMARINE ONE MILE SOUTH [OF] PEARL HARBOR." Word of the encounter with the midget submarine reached ComPatWing 2's staff duty officer at 0735 and went to the operations officer, Commander Logan C. Ramsey, two minutes later. By 0750, Ramsey had drafted a search plan.

At about 0757, Coast Guard Lieutenant Frank Erickson, the aviator assigned to the cutter *Taney*, and NAS Pearl Harbor's duty officer that morning, who had been in the process of seeing to morning colors, heard the sound of two heavy explosions – probably bombs dropped by the first *Vals* bombing the VP-22 hangars and patrol aircraft arrayed on the ramp. He looked out just in time to see a *Kate* fly past 1010 Dock and launch a torpedo at the nearby battleship *California* (BB-44). Soon thereafter, Captain James M. Shoemaker, the NAS C.O., having heard the explosions, telephoned Erickson, demanding: "What the hell kind of drills are you pulling down there?!" As the Japanese attack descended "like a thunderclap," a dispatch soon emanated from Ford Island: "AIR RAID PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NO DRILL."

Consolidated Catalinas of VP-14 in flight. Twelve of the squadron's PBY-5s arrived on Oahu on November 23, 1941; 14-P-1, in foreground, would bomb a Japanese midget submarine off the Pearl Harbor entrance channel on December 7.

80-G-279382





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At that moment, U.S. Naval Aviation assets on Oahu under Rear Admiral Patrick N. L. Bellinger, ComPatWing 2 and Carrier Task Force 9, consisted principally of 33 PBVs (-3s and -5s) from four squadrons: VPs 21, 22, 23, and 24 at Pearl; and 36 PBV-5s, from VPs 11, 12, and 14 at Kaneohe. Over at Ewa, under the C.O. of MAG-21, sat VMSB-231's seven spare SB2Us, left behind when the squadron deployed onboard *Lexington* (CV-2) bound for Midway, VMSB-232's 23 SBD-1s and 2s, and 11 F4F-3s from VMF-211. At both Navy and Marine air facilities there sat the usual utility planes, the target towers, and transport aircraft that the irreverent usually called "various junk" (VJ) - 31 at Pearl, one at Kaneohe, and eight at Ewa. Fortunately, no aircraft carriers lay in port that Sunday.

From the moment the first bomb exploded on Ford Island, the officers and men at both naval air stations battled back with any means at their disposal. Men grabbed rifles or improvised machine gun mounts and fired at the attackers, sometimes from the rear cockpits of Grumman J2F *Ducks*, heedless of their personal safety.

At Kaneohe, ACOM John W. Finn and RM2c Robert J. Peterson mounted .50-caliber machine guns on instruction stands and blazed away at whatever Japanese planes came within range. Finn, wounded several times, nevertheless stood his ground until ordered to have his wounds dressed. Peterson, after one attack, proceeded to a group of exploding PBVs and singlehandedly saved one plane by extinguishing a fire blazing in it. Finn, meanwhile, although still in pain, hobbled back to the squadron area after his wounds had been attended to and supervised the rearming of returning PBVs. For their heroism that morning, Peterson received the Navy Cross and Finn the Medal of Honor.

In addition, the tenders attached to the patrol wings - ranging from *Curtiss* (AV-4), *Tangier* (AV-8), and *Avocet* (AVP-4) moored off Ford Island; and *McFarland* (AVD-14), *Thornton* (AVD-11), and *Hulbert* (AVD-6) at the Submarine Base - added to the barrage put up in the face of the attacking Japanese. Over at Ewa Mooring Mast Field, Marines possessing little more

than rifles and small arms fired back at the strafing Japanese planes that destroyed or heavily damaged every aircraft on the mat.

Soon after the first bombs exploded near VP-22's hangar, Cdr. Ramsey's search plan was promulgated. Having the means to carry it out, however, was another matter. RAdm. Bellinger arrived at Ford Island during the first attack, and as the first phase ended, learned that only two PBVs remained operational at Kaneohe - one at Pearl. He ordered the two from Kaneohe to patrol to the west northwest of Oahu, but wreckage, fires, and damaged planes prevented the only operable PBV on Ford Island from getting aloft. He also ordered available utility aircraft to look for the Japanese. The second wave of Japanese planes, however, attacked both stations and while the plane at Pearl miraculously escaped destruction, the two *Catalinas* at Kaneohe did not. Commander Knefler McGinnis, ComPatWing 1, at Kaneohe, unable to send them out to cover the west northwest sector, instead diverted two airborne PBVs - one of which was Ens. Tanner's - to cover the sector in question.

As the Japanese onslaught swept over the Naval Aviation facilities on Oahu, *Enterprise's* inbound aviators soon began encountering the enemy. A *Zero* attacked Lieutenant Commander Howard L. Young, *Enterprise's* air group commander, and his wingman, Ensign Perry L. Teaff, near Ewa. They evaded the *Zero* but had to weather a storm of friendly anti-aircraft fire to reach Ford Island. There, Young and his passenger, Lieutenant Commander Bromfield B. Nichol, VAdm. Halsey's tactical officer, headed by car and boat to the headquarters of Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, at the Submarine Base.

Sadly, however, not all of the SBD pilots enjoyed such good fortune. *Zeros* overwhelmed Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson and Ensign John R. McCarthy, USNR, who probably arrived near Ewa soon thereafter, and shot both Navy flyers down. Both pilots bailed out and survived. (Dickinson began a minor odyssey by foot and car to reach Ford Island, and McCarthy suffered a broken leg while trying to get out of the tree into which he had parachuted.) Their respective



passengers, RM1c William C. Miller and RM3c Mitchell Cohn, died. *Zeros* off Barbers Point likewise attacked Lieutenant (jg) Frank A. Patriarca and Ensign Walter M. Willis, USNR.

Patriarca managed to evade his antagonists, radioing a warning to *Enterprise* that the Japanese were attacking Pearl, but enemy fighters shot down Willis' SBD, killing him and his passenger, Coxswain Fred J. Ducolon. Patriarca searched in vain for *Enterprise* and later ended up at the Army's Burns Field on Kauai.

Ensign Fred T. Weber, USNR, had become separated from his section leader, Ensign Manuel Gonzalez, during the course of their search, thus leaving Gonzalez alone to encounter six *Vals* from *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* rendezvousing approximately 10 miles from Kaena Point to return to their ships. As the enemy planes approached, Gonzalez radioed at about 0833: "THIS IS 6-B-3, AN AMERICAN PLANE. DO NOT SHOOT." Some pilots heard him instruct his passenger, "STAND BY TO GET OUT THE RUBBER BOAT," but no one ever saw Gonzalez, nor his passenger, RM3c Leonard J. Kozelek, again.

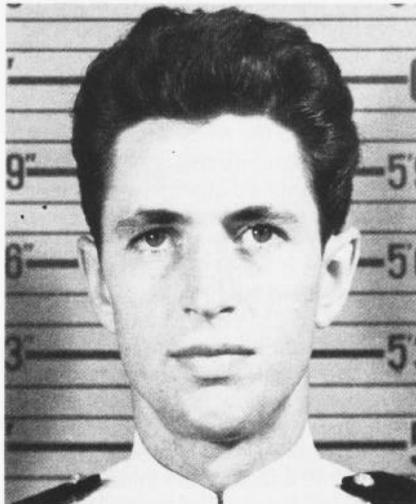


NH 60930

Having achieved surprise, Japanese planes go about the business of attacking Battleship Row and NAS Pearl Harbor. The geysers from torpedo explosions tower almost one-and-a-half times the masthead heights of the battleships. Smoke boils skyward at extreme right from fires among the PBYS parked near the VP-22 hangar.

Lieutenant Wilmer E. Gallaher, VS-6's X.O., whose wingman, Ensign William P. West, USNR, had an inoperative radio, had heard Patriarca's voice over the radio and then Gonzalez'. Seeing the heavy black smoke and antiaircraft fire spattering the sky over the harbor convinced Gallaher that something was dreadfully wrong.

Also approaching Barbers Point shortly after 0830 was VS-6's C.O., Lieutenant Hallsted L. Hopping, who had become separated from his wingman, Ensign John H. L. Vogt, USNR, when Hopping had gone down to scrutinize the Honolulu-bound tanker *SS Pat Doheny* off Oahu. Hop-



NH 102446

Ens. Theodore W. Marshall, circa 1941, who attempted to follow the Japanese in a type of plane he had never flown before – a Douglas TBD-1.

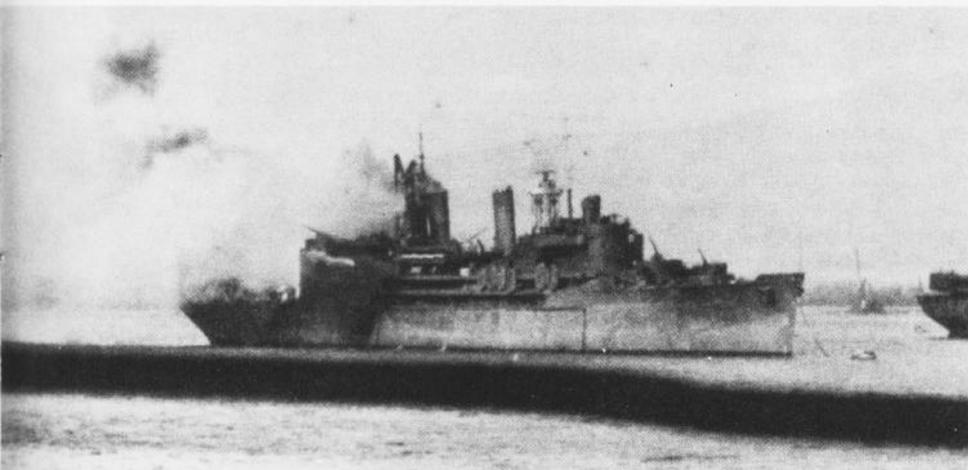
ping, too, had heard Gonzalez' message, and after he saw Ewa under attack, reported that Pearl was being attacked by Japanese planes. Then he, too, flew through a storm of antiaircraft fire over Pearl to land at Ford Island. Indications are that Ens. Vogt, meanwhile, had encountered a *Val* passing Ewa during its retirement from Pearl, and after a brief dogfight, collided with him. Vogt and his radio-gunner, RM3c Sidney Pierce, bailed out, but both died when they slammed into trees after their parachutes did not fully deploy.

Seeing the antiaircraft fire in the sky over Pearl, Ensign Edward T. Deacon, USNR, and Ensign Wilbur E. Roberts, USNR, sought safety at Hickam Field; however, eager but inaccurate gunners at Fort Weaver and the Fleet Machine Gun School shot down Deacon's SBD. Ditching in the shallows off Hickam, Deacon and his wounded radioman, RM3c Audrey G. Coslett, were picked up by an Army crash boat. Roberts, meanwhile, landed at the bomber base without further incident.

LCdrs. Young and Nichol, meanwhile, reached Adm. Kimmel's headquarters. After they had reported and informed those they found there that other planes were trying to get in, too, the Commandant of the 14th Naval District signaled all ships present at Pearl at 0908: "DO NOT FIRE ON OUR PLANES COMING IN."

In the proverbial heat of battle, though, it appeared that few paid attention. Gallaher and West, after seeing the flak over Pearl, circled between Barbers Point and Ewa, where Ens. Weber, having survived a brush with a Japanese plane near Kaena Point, joined them. Soon, Lieutenant (jg) H. Dale Hilton and Ensign Edwin J. Kroeger, USNR, and then Ensigns Carlton T. Fogg and Cleo J. Dobson, USNR, joined up, too. For several minutes, Gallaher's flock circled between Ewa and Barbers Point at an altitude of 400 to 500 feet, before Gallaher saw Japanese planes 3,500 feet above. Knowing that without armor or self-sealing gas tanks he and his men stood little chance in aerial combat, he led them 5 to 10 miles out to sea to await further developments.

Back at Ford Island, VP-21's Ensign Theodore W. Marshall, USNR, at the BOQ when the attack started, commandeered a squadron truck. After driving it between the quarters, the en-



NH 96660

Curtiss (AV-4), one of the seaplane tenders assigned to the Pacific Fleet, afire after being crashed by a *Val* on December 7, as seen from Tangier (AV-8)



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listed barracks, and NAS Pearl Harbor, ferrying officers and men to their battle stations – practically oblivious to the bomb fragments and strafing that nearly riddled the vehicle – Marshall proceeded to the flight line. Although unfamiliar with landplanes, he climbed into a Grumman F4F. Finding that it had been damaged by strafing, Marshall, undaunted, spotted a Douglas TBD-1 (BuNo 0289, an *Enterprise* machine that had been assigned to the Battle Force pool on November 18), climbed in, and coaxed the engine into life. Despite being as unfamiliar with a *Devastator* as he had been with a *Wildcat*, Marshall took off and attempted to track the Japanese planes as they retired from Pearl. For 150 miles, he tried to keep up with the enemy, until his flagging fuel state compelled him to return to Ford Island, where he managed to land the lumbering plane successfully. For his heroism that day, Marshall was awarded the Silver Star.

In the meantime, the airborne PBVs also searched for the enemy. Ensign Otto F. Meyer, Jr., commanded 14-P-2, one of the two PBVs dispatched by ComPatWing-1 to search north of Oahu. Around 1000, a formation of about nine planes crossed his bow. When they turned menacingly toward 14-P-2 and then attacked, Meyer's gunners returned the fire. One of the PBV's tormentors headed north, trailing a thin wisp of smoke, while the other eight gave up and turned away, too. Meyer kept 14-P-2 – which had been holed 14 times – heading back toward Oahu until the last of the Japanese disappeared in the haze. At that point, he wheeled the *Catalina* around and resumed the search, ultimately flying out 380 miles without sighting anything but clouds and whitecaps.

Ensigns Raphael Semmes, Jr., and Maurice Thornton, USNR, meanwhile, from the aviation unit of the light cruiser *St. Louis* (CL-49), took off in their obsolete Curtiss SOC biplanes during the raid and attacked – unsuccessfully – a formation of *Vals*. Neither man had taken along a radio-gunner, and Thornton ran out of gas during the return flight, necessitating his rescue by a destroyer on December 9.

The courage evidenced by Ensigns Marshall, Semmes, and Thornton matched that of the pilots of the utility

squadrons who took off in VJ-1's Sikorsky JRS-1s. Ensign John P. Edwards, USNR, took up the first, followed by Lieutenant (jg) James W. Robb, Jr., USNR, Lieutenant Gordon E. Bolser, USNR, and Ensign Nils R. Larson, USNR. Lieutenant (jg) Wesley H. Ruth, USNR, with ACMM (Naval Aviation Pilot) Emery C. Geise as his copilot in JRS-1 (BuNo 1063), encountered a *Zero* from *Shokaku* 200 miles off Oahu in what was probably the last aerial engagement between U.S. Navy and Japanese planes on December 7. For courageously piloting utility amphibians armed with only Springfield rifles, Edwards, Robb, Bolser, Larson, and Ruth were all awarded the Navy Cross. While the brave men who accompanied them in their scratch crews received appropriate commendations, too, only one – Sgt. Thomas E. Hailey, USMC – would receive the Navy Cross. Hailey had quit *Oklahoma* (BB-37) after she had been ordered abandoned, helped rescue his shipmates from the oily water, and then manned an anti-aircraft gun on board *Maryland* (BB-46). Once on Ford Island, he unhesitatingly volunteered to go up in one of the Sikorskys, armed with only a rifle and still wearing only the skivvies in which he had swam away from the capsized battleship.

In addition, pilots of other SOCs proved that courage and initiative were not just the preserve of the fighter pilot. Lieutenant Malcolm C. Reeves and Ensign Frank H. Covington, USNR, from the heavy cruiser *Norhampton* (CA-26) in Task Force 8,

Lt. James W. Robb, Jr., April 13, 1942, one of five JRS pilots awarded the Navy Cross for seeking out the Japanese carriers on December 7.

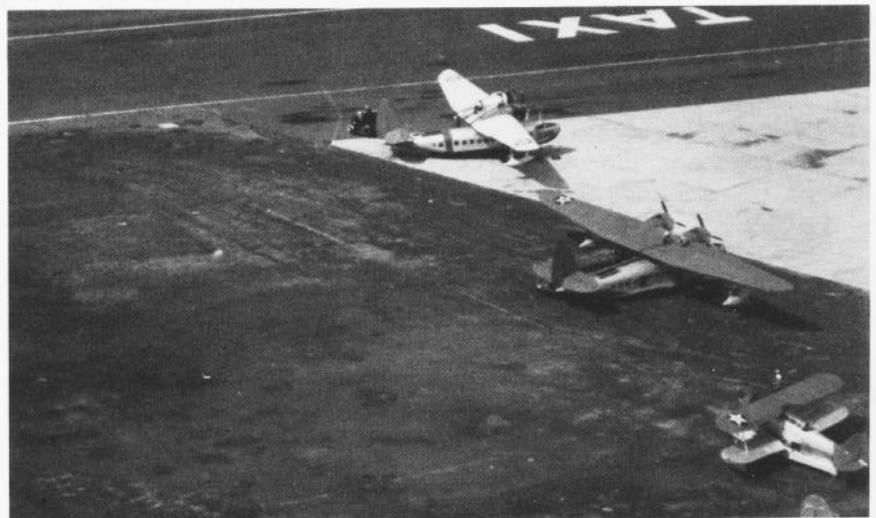
NH 102551



Ford Island, December 8, 1941. The gutted Hangar No. 6 looms beside a collection of SOCs, OS2Us, and PBVs. The planes parked near the hangar were among the first targets hit by Japanese aircraft the day before.

searching for the Japanese west of Oahu, experienced more success in the unaccustomed role of dogfighters as they battled a *Zero* and sent it away trailing smoke.

As the day wore on, there was little rest for the *Enterprise* aviators, who had flown into the middle of hostilities with no warning. LCdr. Hopping, shot at by American guns as he took off,



Ford Island, December 8, 1941. Two Sikorsky JRS-1s share the warming up platform. One appears to have been hastily camouflaged. 80-G-32481, Courtesy of J. Michael Wenger



80-G-32943

**NAS Kaneohe Bay on December 9, 1941, two days after the Japanese attack on the station. Note wrecked hangar at center of photo, and at least six PBV Catalina flying boats around the ramp and hangar areas.**



**Ens. Raphael Semmes, Jr. circa 1941, the great grandson of the celebrated captain of CSS Alabama of Civil War fame, one of the two SOC pilots from St. Louis (CL-49) who attacked Japanese dive-bombers on December 7.**

NH 102304

had investigated reports of two Japanese carriers southwest or west of Barbers Point between 25 and 40 miles on a mid-morning solo reconnaissance flight. RAdm. Bellinger then ordered Hopping to take a nine-plane group out to 175 miles to search from the north-northeast to the north-northwest of Oahu and to attack any enemy forces encountered. Remaining available planes were to investigate reports of hostile surface ships and sampans south of Barbers Point.

## 50 Years Ago — WW II

December 10: Aircraft from *Enterprise* (CV-6) attacked and sank the Japanese submarine *I-70* in waters north of the Hawaiian Islands. This was the first Japanese combatant ship sunk by U.S. aircraft during WW II.

December 10: Antisubmarine patrols over the South Atlantic were initiated by Patrol Squadron 52, equipped with PBV *Catalinas* operating from Natal, Brazil.

December 12: The Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) was established under the Chief of Naval Operations to provide rapid air delivery of critical equipment, spare parts, and

Around noon, Hopping and his group took off.

Soon thereafter, Ens. Teaff noted alarming oil temperature in his SBD's engine. Although Hopping authorized him to return at his own discretion, Teaff remained with the group as it sought the enemy for over three hours. On the return leg, his Wright Cyclone began to "miss" badly, and he found it difficult to lower the landing gear. After landing, he discovered damage to the engine and hydraulic system. Teaff's courageously continuing the search, when little chance for rescue existed, earned him the Navy Cross.

A search launched from *Enterprise* late that afternoon was equally futile. In response to a sighting of "Japanese ships" off Oahu, the carrier launched a 31-plane strike group of TBDs, SBDs, and F4Fs under Lieutenant Eugene E. Lindsey, C.O. of VT-6, late that afternoon. The group returned to the ship not having sighted any enemy warships; *Enterprise* recovered the scouts and the torpedo planes but directed the fighters to fly to Ford Island, which lit up in expectation of their arrival. Jittery gunners opened fire, however, as Lieutenant (jg) Francis F. Hebel of VF-6 brought in his six F4Fs, shooting down four; three pilots, including Hebel, died. Two *Enterprise* SBDs ended up landing at Kaneohe despite the attempts by the men at that base to render the landing mat unusable by parking vehicles on it!

Not all acts of heroism on December 7, 1941, were performed strictly in contact with or search of the enemy. An OS2U-3 from *Maryland*, one of six

specialist personnel to naval activities and fleet forces all over the world.

December 16: The Secretary of the Navy approved an expansion of the pilot training program from the existing schedule of assigning 800 students per month to one calling for 2,500 per month, thereby leading to a production of 20,000 pilots annually by mid-1943.

December 17: Seventeen SB2U-3 *Vindicators* of VMSB-231, led by a PBV of Patrol Wing 1, successfully made the 1,137-mile flight from Oahu to Midway in 9 hours, 45 minutes. It was the longest single-engine landplane massed flight on record.

such aircraft dispatched after 1400, piloted by Lieutenant (jg) James B. Ginn, with RM2c William R. Roberts as his radioman-gunner, crashed in heavy seas at around 2000 about eight miles off Barbers Point on the way back to Pearl; the impact knocked both men unconscious.

Regaining his senses, Roberts freed himself from the after cockpit, inflated his life jacket, and in the blackness, located the unconscious Ginn trapped in the front cockpit with his right leg pinned between the seat and the fuselage side. Freeing him, Roberts inflated Ginn's life jacket, placed him on a wing float, and then, after repeated dives, succeeded in freeing the rubber boat from its housing. Placing the pilot in the boat, Roberts paddled toward Barbers Point where the surf capsized it. In the turbulent, crashing water, Ginn momentarily disappeared, but after the radioman located him, he dragged him ashore, made him as comfortable as possible, and then hiked inland in search of a truck — no mean feat given the state of tension on Oahu. Roberts succeeded in locating help but too late for Ginn, who died of his severe injuries. Nevertheless, for his heroic exertions to save his pilot's life, Roberts received the Navy Cross.

In the stygian darkness on the night of December 7, 1941, Naval Aviators reflected on the tumultuous events of the day. Although surprised by a resourceful foe, the officers and men at Pearl and Kaneohe had fought back resolutely, exhibiting their own brand of bravery. Fortunately, the Japanese had not caught any carriers in port, *Enterprise* and *Lexington* providentially at sea when the blow fell. They, like the base itself which had escaped destruction due to the Japanese emphasis on sinking the battle line, would prove a part of the means by which the United States Navy would begin to battle back in the Pacific and take the war to the enemy who had begun the conflict with such swift and terrible suddenness. U.S. Naval Aviation would indeed "Remember Pearl Harbor." ■

*Mr. Cressman is a historian in the Ships' History Branch of the Naval Historical Center. Mr. Wenger is a materials analyst for the Square D Company, Raleigh, N.C. They collaborated on the book, Steady Nerves and Stout Hearts: The Enterprise (CV-6) Air Group and Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941.*