

Pearl Harbor

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In 2016 my wife (Eileen) and I visited Hawaii. We stayed in the resort of Waikiki Beach near Honolulu. As expected it was a very smart resort, but we arrived at our hotel having made a classic mistake in my planning. We had flown from Australia on 6 March and travelled overnight. Our hotel in Hawaii was therefore booked for 7 March. I had made the same mistake as Jules Vernes' character, Phineas Fogg, in his book *Around the World in 80 Days*. We had actually arrived on 6 March having crossed the international dateline. The extra day meant that Phineas Fogg won his bet. Our extra day was very costly for us. Not only had I to pay for an extra night but had to pay over £200 for the night at the rack rate instead of the just over £100 per night paid in my advance booking. Eileen was very understanding!!

One of the main reasons I wanted to go to Hawaii was to make a visit to Pearl Harbor Navy base.



Me at Pearl Harbor

This, of course, was the site of attack on the United States Pacific Fleet by the Japanese Imperial Navy on December 7, 1941. This attack brought the USA into the Second World War. The attack made victory for the Allies very likely, indeed some say almost inevitable, given the size and industrial power of the USA. It was certainly Churchill's opinion. Pearl Harbor was about 15 miles from our hotel, and I set about arranging a tour. Tour companies around the resort were offering tours ranging from \$40 to over \$100 each. Quite steep, but I was going anyway. In our hotel we began searching for the best deal. Our research revealed that Pearl Harbor is a US national monument and as such was free to enter. In addition the local bus service, numbers 20 or 42, charged \$2.50 each

way. During our tour we met some people from a cruise liner who had paid \$125 each for their day tour. (Courtesy of Dick Turpin Tours no doubt).

I have a strong interest in military history and found the visit to the base fascinating and Eileen also thought it one of our best trips. Although the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the USA formally into the war the USA was already unofficially deeply involved ranging from the 'lend-lease' of war material to Britain to the escorting of Atlantic convoys half way to Britain. An excerpt from *Encyclopedia Britannica* illustrates the tension with Japan:

In July 1939 the U.S. announced the termination of the 1911 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation with Japan. Beginning in the summer of 1940, the U.S. began to restrict the export to Japan of materials useful in war. Between June 1940 and the fateful crisis of December 1941, the tension constantly mounted. In July 1941, by which time the Japanese had occupied all of Indochina and had entered into an alliance with the Axis Powers (Germany and Italy), the U.S. government severed all commercial and financial relations with Japan. Japanese assets were frozen, and an embargo was declared on shipments to Japan of petroleum and other vital war materials. Militarists were steadily gaining in influence in the Tokyo government; they bitterly resented U.S. aid to China, which by this time had been stepped up. They saw in the German invasion of the Soviet Union an unrivalled understanding between the United States and Japan took place through the autumn of 1941, and not until near the end of November did it become clear that no agreement was possible.

President Roosevelt was convinced the USA must become involved in the war but was facing a strongly isolationist public opinion in the USA. As a result of these tensions the Pacific Fleet was moved from its main base in San Diego, California to Pearl Harbor in the summer of 1940. The attack on Pearl Harbor was a huge gamble for Japan, but was taken since the leaders of Japan judged that the USA lacked the will to fight a long war. The attack was also made without a declaration of war. Americans were outraged. Their response was to demand, and force, the unconditional surrender of Japan culminating in the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. *Encyclopedia Britannica* outlines the attack on Pearl Harbor (abridged):

The first Japanese wave of nearly 200 aircraft attacked the U.S. military aircraft which were packed tightly together. Of the 126 planes on the ground, 42 were totally destroyed, 41 were damaged, and only 43 were left fit for service. Only six U.S. planes got into the air to repel the attackers in the first wave. In total, more than 180 aircraft were destroyed. The ships anchored in the harbour (sic) made perfect targets for the Japanese bombers, and, because it was Sunday morning (a time chosen by the Japanese for maximum surprise), they were not fully manned. The Arizona and the Oklahoma were destroyed with great loss of life, and six other battleships suffered varying degrees of damage. Three cruisers, three destroyers, and other vessels were also damaged. U.S. military casualties totaled more than 3,400, including more than 2,300 killed. The Japanese lost from 29 to 60 planes, five midget submarines, perhaps one or two fleet submarines, and

fewer than 100 men. The Japanese task force retired from the theatre of battle without being attacked.

Crucially, the most powerful elements of the US Pacific Fleet, the three American aircraft carriers, were not present and formed the core of the fleet that destroyed four Japanese carriers at the battle of Midway in June 1942.

We went to Pearl harbor using the local bus. The journey to took us through Honolulu and parts of Honolulu not often see on US TV or movies. All US cities have deprived areas, and Honolulu is no different.

Americans display their patriotism far more openly and regularly than we are used to in most parts of Western Europe. This can be seen at the beginning of all sports events and at the beginning of each school day when Americans pledge allegiance to their country. It is also seen in more mundane ways. For example, we were very regular visitors to the USA when one of our sons and his family lived in Houston, Texas and I recall a visit to a local suburban supermarket and watched as two soldiers in uniform did some shopping. When near them I heard two different people approach the soldiers and say, "Thank you for your service," and walk on. This attitude is amplified in their relationship to their National Monuments. We saw it very clearly a year before when we visited Arlington National Cemetery near Washington DC. The same reverence was evident at Pearl Harbor.

The tour had two main elements. The first was the shore installations, including the museum, which outlined the story of the attack from the lead-up to the aftermath. The second element, and undoubtedly the highlight, was the visit to the *Arizona* memorial which sits above the sunken battleship *USS Arizona*. The reason the focus is upon *USS Arizona* was because of its fate during the attack. Of the 2300 Americans killed on 7 December 1177 were aboard the *Arizona*. Film footage of the attack (*below*) was taken, and probably the most striking was the explosion of the magazines on the *Arizona* as the crew struggled to save the ship.



USS Arizona exploding

The condition of the ship after it sank was so bad that it was deemed too dangerous to send in divers to recover the bodies. As a result it was declared a war grave containing the bodies of 948 sailors.

Visitors are taken out to the site by launch and then step onto the memorial, which is placed at a 90-degree angle above the wreck of the *Arizona*.



The Arizona memorial.

There are several notable features. The circular placements for the big guns protrude above the water and can be seen in the photograph below.



The gun placement with the oil in the foreground

On the memorial there is a large stone listing the names of all who died that day and whose remains are still in the ship. In addition to those who died on 7 December is a separate smaller stone which contains the names of those sailors who survived the attack but who, on their death many years later were interred with their comrades, according to their instructions. The latest was dated 2004. Probably the most moving feature is the slick of oil which has risen from the sunken ship every day since the attack.

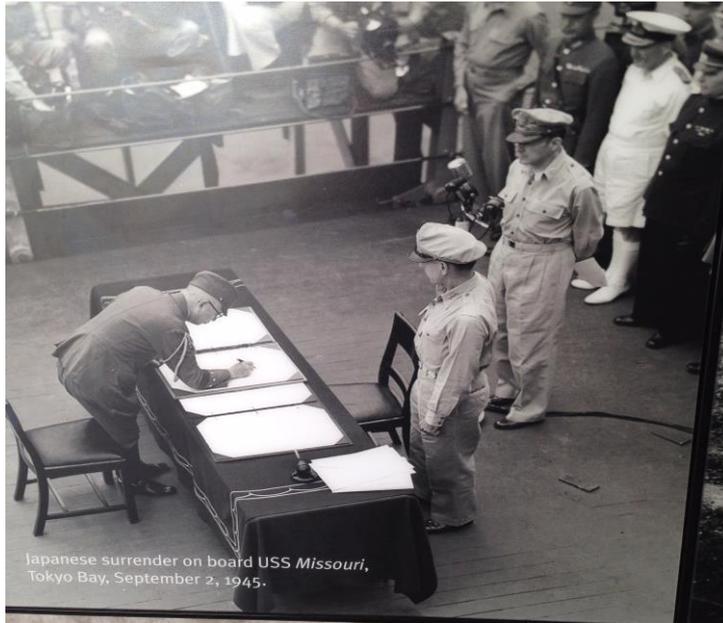


The oil rising from the Arizona

Our guide pointed out that 'one quart' of oil surfaced each day and this slick can be clearly seen in my photograph above. I saw one of our fellow visitors in tears as she observed the oil. I suspect she was, like me, imaging what the oil represented. The guide called the oil 'the black tears'.



*The memorial sitting above the sunken Arizona.
USS Missouri is immediately behind.
The beginning and the end of the war.*



Japanese surrender on board USS *Missouri*,
Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945.

*The formal surrender of
Japan*

The *Missouri* was not in Pearl Harbor but was used by General Douglas McArthur in Tokyo Bay in 1945 to accept the formal surrender of Japan.