



No One Avoided Danger: NAS Kaneohe Bay and the Japanese Attack of 7 December 1941 by J. Michael Wenger, Robert J. Cressman, and John F. Di Virgilio.

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In *No One Avoided Danger*,¹ military historians Michael Wenger,² Robert Cressman,³ and John Di Virgilio⁴ examine a largely overshadowed event of 7 December 1941—the attack on the recently constructed Naval Air Station (NAS) at Kaneohe Bay, on Oahu.

The first of the book's four chapters sketches the origin of NAS Kaneohe Bay, on which construction began in 1939 in response to the Navy's need for additional facilities for long-range patrol aircraft. The authors briefly introduce the station's senior officers, including Cdr. Harold M. Martin, its commanding officer. Martin had the respect of his men, possessing "a down-to-earth, rugged, and unpretentious character and a kindly appearance with eyes that were always smiling" (4). The authors profile a number of the men and aircraft of the Navy's Patrol Wing 1. They trace the activities of the Wing's three PBY⁵ squadrons in the months before the Japanese surprise attack. On the morning of 7 December, NAS Kaneohe Bay was almost completely undefended—"the Army had withdrawn elements of the 98th Coast Artillery (AA), placed there during the Hawaiian Department's No. 1 Alert Status" (19). That decision had fatal consequences for the air station's personnel.

The next two chapters, the heart of the book, recount the attacks upon Kaneohe Bay by fliers from the Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) carriers *Shōkaku*, *Zuikaku*, and *Sōryū*. Chapter 2 concerns the first assault, with its intense strafing runs. Chapter 3 focuses on the IJN's "second-wave" level-bombing attack by eighteen Nakajima B5N carrier bombers ("Kates," in US parlance) and renewed strafing runs by fighter aircraft.

Besides conducting interviews with veterans of the battle, both American and Japanese, the authors draw astutely on oral histories left by many of the base's personnel; these vividly convey their initial disbelief at the attack unfolding before their eyes (a feeling documented in many other accounts of the Pearl Harbor attack). Several of the air station's men at first assumed the low flying aircraft buzzing their base were Army planes on maneuvers; one officer casually remarked "This is the first time I've ever seen the Army working on Sunday" (25). Only when the base itself and PatWing 1's patrol bombers moored in the bay came under fire did the truth of the situation dawn on the base's defenders.

1. An installment in the Naval Institute's Pearl Harbor Tactical Studies Series.

2. Author or coauthor of ten books and the 2012 US Naval Institute "Author of the Year."

3. Recipient of the John Lyman Book Award (1999) and the Adm. Arthur W. Radford Award (2008). He and Wenger coauthored *Infamous Day: Marines at Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941* (Washington: History and Museums Div., HQ, US Marine Corps, 1992).

4. A resident of Hawaii, he also collaborated with Wegner and Cressman on *Steady Nerves and Stout Hearts: The Enterprise (CV6) Air Group and Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publ., 1989).

5. "PB representing 'Patrol Bomber' and Y being the code assigned to Consolidated Aircraft as its manufacturer"—*Wikipedia*, s.v. "Consolidated PBY Catalina."

The authors argue that strafing attacks by Japanese fighters inflicted most of the damage and casualties at Kaneohe Bay. The IJN's level-bombers were less effective, for three reasons: the comparatively low altitude of their runs; their pilots' unfamiliarity with the strong and unpredictable winds of the surrounding Mōkapu Peninsula; and the fierce, if mostly improvised, resistance by the base's defenders. The first squadron to attack the base missed most of its targets.

Despite the high drama on the ground, the immediate results of the run proved disappointing for the Japanese. Due to miscalculation related to their extremely low altitude and an inability to use their bombsights, [Lt. tatsuo] Ichihara's⁶ men dropped considerably short of the target—presumably Hangar 2—with half of the ordnance splashing into the water south of the aprons. As for the bombs that struck the parking apron, no one observed any direct hits on aircraft, although bits of concrete or fragments set at least one additional VP-12 aircraft afire (12-P-7) and possibly damaged three VP-14 machines parked near the construction site of the future Hangar 4 to the west. (89)

The second squadron's final bombing run did cause severe damage to the base's Hangar 1, but once again, it was the Japanese fighters that were most responsible for the suffering experienced by the defenders. In the course of the morning's attacks, the Zero pilots damaged or destroyed nearly all of PatWing 1's grounded PBVs, as well as inflicting substantial damage on the base's buildings and vehicles. At least in the short term, "Kaneohe had ceased to exist ... after the last Japanese planes had departed, at the midpoint of the forenoon watch, only the three PBVs still on patrol out [sic] were airworthy" (123).

The book's final chapter concentrates on the actions of the base's personnel in the hours and days following the attack. A climate of fear and uncertainty shrouded all of Hawaii and rumors of an imminent Japanese invasion were rampant; while "the station did its best to act upon the conflicting and contradictory information received at the Administration Building, the inevitable confusion made it almost impossible to effectively respond..." (137). Nonetheless, some useful work was done. The base personnel officer, Lt. John W. Steele, was dispatched to gather intelligence from the crash site of the lone Japanese plane downed in the attack, that of Lt. Iida Fusata, who flew in the second-wave attack. And, too, burial ceremonies were held for the nineteen men killed during the attack, as well as for Lieutenant Iida, whose grave is near those of the base's fallen defenders.

No One Avoided Danger is a handsome book enriched by scores of photographs showing both American and Japanese participants in the events of the infamous day. Many others show Kaneohe Bay and surrounding areas of Oahu during or immediately after the attack. A number of charts will help readers visualize the disposition of the base's aircraft and the flight paths of the *Shōkaku's* bombers, clarifying why that portion of the attack achieved such meager results.

Thanks to the authors' meticulous research in both US and Japanese records, their book offers an almost minute-by-minute account of the morning of the attack. It is a fitting testament to the heroism of the base's defenders who, though taken by surprise and lacking adequate defenses, to a man still rallied to protect their post, their aircraft, and one another. Indeed, the book's title comes from a post-battle report by Commander Martin, in which he praises his men's spirited resistance: "I thought a great deal about it. No one shirked, no one avoided danger, everyone did the job he was supposed to do" (150).

A couple minor reservations. I wish the authors had written something about the naval air station and PatWing 1 in the months and years after Pearl Harbor. While not strictly within the book's purview, this would have corroborated the determination of the base's personnel cited by Commander

6. Commander of the first squadron of the *Shōkaku's* Horizontal Bombing Unit.

Martin. Though the book's prose style is lucid and fluent, the overuse of abbreviations for ranks, particularly of enlisted personnel, will confuse nonspecialist readers, even though many are explained in a glossary.

These minor critiques aside, Wenger, Cressman, and Di Virgilio have produced an engaging and detailed yet succinct account of the fateful day when the Kaneohe Bay air station and, with it, the United States were unexpectedly plunged into war.