

National Archives Photo 80-G-179013

The Nells, Bettys, and Claudes of Japan

A formation of Mitsubishi G3M1 and G3M2 Type 96 bombers (Nell), above, fly in formation in 1942. The first models flew in 1935, and more than 250 were still serving in the Japanese land-based naval air arm in December 1941. Nells, instrumental in the reduction of Wake's defenses, served alongside the newer, more powerful Mitsubishi G4M1 Type 97 bombers (Betty)—earmarked to replace them in front-line service—in helping to sink the British capital ships HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, off Malaya on 10 December 1941.

Two 1,000-horsepower *Kinsei 45* engines enabled the Nell to reach a speed of 238 miles per hour at 9,840 feet. Normally crewed by seven men, the G3M2 model carried a

defensive armament of one 20-mm and two 7.7-mm machine guns, and a payload of either one 1,764-pound torpedo or 2,200 pounds of bombs.

Although Mitsubishi A5M4 Type '96 carrier fighters (Claude), also equipped the *Chitose Air Group*, none accompanied the group's Nells because of the long distances involved. Marine anti-aircraft or fighter aircraft gunfire at Wake destroyed at least four Nells during December 1941. Since the number of G3Ms engaged varied from raid to raid—no more than 34 or fewer than 17—so, too, did damage figures. On at least two occasions, though, as many as 12 returned to their base in the Marshalls damaged.

Two of the *Philippine Clipper's* crew were wounded.

Almost miraculously, though, the 26-ton *Clipper*, empty of both passengers and cargo but full of fuel, rode easily at her moorings at the end of the dock. A bomb had splashed 100 feet ahead of her without damaging her, and she received 23 bullet holes from the strafing attack—none had hit her large fuel

tanks. Captain Hamilton courageously proposed evacuating the passengers and Pan Am staff and Commander Cunningham assented. Stripped of all superfluous equipment and having embarked all of the passengers and the Caucasian Pan-Am employees, save one (who had been driving the atoll's only ambulance and thus had not heard the call to report for the plane's depart-

ure), the flying boat took off for Midway at 1330.

Although he had received a bullet wound in his left shoulder, Major Putnam immediately took over the terrible task of seeing to the many injured people at the field. His dedication to duty seemed to establish the precedent for many other instances of selflessness which occurred amidst the wreckage of the VMF-211 camp.

Sadly, the attack left five pilots and 10 enlisted men of VMF-211 wounded and 18 more dead, including most of the mechanics assigned to the squadron. On the materiel side, the squadron's tents were shot up and virtually no supplies—tools, spark plugs, tires, and sparse spare parts—escaped destruction. Both of the 25,000-gallon gasoline storage tanks had been demolished. Additionally, 25 civilian workmen had been killed.

As the bombers departed, Gunner Hamas called his men back from the bush, and set out to resume delivery of hand grenades. As he neared the airfield, though, he stopped to help wounded men board a truck that had escaped destruction. Then, he continued his journey and finally returned to Camp 1, where he found more civilian employees arriving to join the military effort.

Earlier, as they had returned to the vicinity of Wake at about noon, Kinney and Hamilton had been descending through the broken clouds about three miles from the atoll when the former spotted two formations of planes at an elevation of about 1,500 feet. He and Hamilton attempted unsuccessfully to catch the formations as they retired to the west through the overcast. Kinney and Hamilton remained aloft until after 1230, when they landed to find the destruction that defied description. Neither Elrod nor Davidson had seen the enemy.

In the wake of the terrible devastation wreaked upon his squadron, Putnam deemed it critical to the squadron's reorganization to keep the remaining planes operational. Since his engineering officer, Graves, had been killed, Putnam appointed Kinney to take his place. "We have four planes left," Putnam told him, "If you can keep them flying I'll see that you get a medal as big as a pie." "Okay, sir," Kinney responded, "if it is delivered in San Francisco."

Putnam established VMF-211's command post near the operations area. His men dug foxholes amidst



Author's Collection

1stLt John F. Kinney (seen here circa September 1941), became engineering officer for VMF-211 upon 1stLt Graves' death on 8 December, and, along with TSgt William H. Hamilton and AMM1c James F. Hesson, USN, kept Wake's dwindling number of battered Wildcats flying throughout the bitter 15-day siege.

brush and all of the physically capable officers and men stayed at the field. Putnam ordered that pistols, Thompson submachine guns, gas masks, and steel helmets be issued, and also directed that machine gun posts be established near each end of the runway and the command post. Meanwhile, the ground crews dispersed the serviceable planes into revetments, a task not without its risks. That afternoon, Captain Frank C. Tharin accidentally taxied 211-F-9 into an oil drum and ruined the propeller, reducing the serviceable planes to three. Captains Elrod and Tharin (the latter wounded superficially in the attack) later supervised efforts to construct "protective works" and also the mining of the landing strip with dynamite connected up to electric generators. Contractors bulldozed portions of the land bordering the field, in hopes that the rough ground would wreck any enemy planes that attempted to land there.

That afternoon, over at Battery D, Godbold's men repaired damaged emplacements, improved the director position, and accepted delivery of gas masks, hand grenades, and ammunition. Later that afternoon, 18

civilians reported for military duty. Godbold assigned 16 of them to serve under Sergeant Walter A. Bowsher, Jr., to man the previously idle Gun 3, and assigned the remaining pair to the director crew as lookouts. Under Bowsher's leadership, the men in Gun 3 were soon working their piece "in a manner comparable to the Marine-manned guns."

Gunner Hamas and his men, meanwhile, carted ammunition from the quartermaster shed and dispersed it into caches, each of about 20 to 25 boxes, west of Camp 1, near Wilkes Channel, and camouflaged them with coral sand. Next, they dispersed hundreds of boxes of .50- and .30-caliber ammunition in the bushes that lined the road that led to the airfield. Before nightfall, Hamas delivered .50-caliber ammunition and metal links to Captain Herbert C. Freuler and furnished him the keys to the bomb and ammunition magazines.

About 25 civilians with trucks responded to First Lieutenant Lewis' request for assistance in improving his battery's defensive position. Then, Lewis ordered his men to lay a telephone line from the battery command post (CP) to the battery's heightfinder so that he could obtain altitude readings for the incoming enemy bombers, and relay that information to the guns.

Commander Campbell Keene, Commander, Wake Base Detachment, meanwhile, reassigned his men to more critical combat duties. He sent Ensigns George E. Henshaw and Bernard J. Lauff to Cunningham's staff. Boatswain's Mate First Class James E. Barnes and 12 enlisted men joined the ranks of the defense battalion to drive trucks, serve in galley details, and stand security watches. One of the three enlisted men whom Commander Keene sent to VMF-211 was Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class James F. Hesson. Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton soon found the Pennsylvanian with light brown hair, who had

served in the Air Corps before he had joined the Navy and who had just turned 35 years of age, to be invaluable. VMF-211 also benefitted from the services of civilians Harry Yeager and "Doc" Stevenson, who reported to work as mechanics, and Pete Sorenson, who volunteered to drive a truck.

For the remainder of the day and on into the night, in the contractor's hospital in Camp 2, Naval Reserve Lieutenant Gustave M. Kahn, Medical Corps, and the contractors' physician, Dr. Lawton E. Shank, worked diligently to save as many men as possible. Some, though, were beyond help, and despite their best efforts, four of VMF-211's men – including Second Lieutenant Conderman – died that night.

At Peacock Point, that afternoon, just down the coast from the airfield, "Barney" Barninger's men had completed their foxholes – overhead cover, sandbags, and chunks of coral would come later. Later, at dusk, Barninger evidently sensed that the atoll might be in for a long siege. Thinking that they might not be in camp again for some time, he sent some of his men back to Camp 1 to obtain extra toilet gear and clothing. In the gathering darkness, he set his security watches and rotated beach patrols and observers. Those men not on watch slept fitfully in their foxholes.

That night, Wake's offshore guardians, *Tambor* to the north and *Triton* to the south, surfaced to recharge batteries, breathe fresh air, and listen to radio reports. From those reports the crews of the *Tambor* and *Triton* finally learned of the outbreak of war.

The 9th of December dawned with a clear sky overhead. Over at the airfield, three planes took off on the early morning patrol, while Kinney had a fourth (though without its reserve gas tank) ready by 0900. A test flight proved the fourth F4F to be "o.k.," since she withstood a 350 mph dive

"without a quiver." It was just in the nick of time, for at 1145 on the 9th, the *Chitose Air Group* struck again, as 27 Nells came in at 13,000 feet. Second Lieutenant David D. Kliewer and Technical Sergeant Hamilton attacked straggling bombers, and claimed one shot down. Battery D's number 2 and 4 guns, meanwhile, collectively fired 100 3-inch rounds. The Marines damaged 12 planes, but the enemy suffered only very light casualties: one man dead and another slightly wounded.



Author's Collection
Sgt William J. Hamilton, (seen here on 20 January 1938) was one of two enlisted pilots serving in VMF-211 at Wake, and not only flew patrols but helped keep the squadron's planes in the air.

Once more, though, the Japanese wreaked considerable havoc on the defenders. Most of their bombs fell near the edge of the lagoon, north of the airfield, and on Camp 2, demolishing the hospital and heavily damaging a warehouse and a metal shop. One wounded VMF-211 enlisted man perished in the bombing of the hospital while the three-man crew of one of the dispersed gasoline trucks died instantly when a bomb exploded in the foxhole in which they had sought shelter.

Doctors Kahn and Shank and their assistants evacuated the wounded and saved as much equipment as

they could. Shank carried injured men from the burning hospital, courageous actions that so impressed Marine Gunner Hamas (who had been trapped by the raid while carrying a load of projectiles and powder to gun positions on Peale) that he later recommended that Shank be awarded a Medal of Honor for his heroism. The hard-pressed medical people soon moved the wounded and what medical equipment they could into magazines 10 and 13, near the unfinished airstrip, and established two 21-bed wards.

Once the bombers had gone, the work of repairs and improving planes and positions resumed. That night, because the initial bombing had destroyed the mechanical loading machines, a crew of civilians helped load .50-caliber ammunition. That same evening, work crews dispersed food, medical supplies, water, and lumber to various points around the atoll, while the communications center and Wake's command post were moved.

Earlier that day from near the tip of Peacock Point, Marine Gunner Clarence B. McKinstry of Battery E had noted one bomber breaking off from the rest. Supposing that the plane had taken aerial photographs, he suggested that the battery be moved. That afternoon, First Lieutenant Lewis received orders to reposition his guns after dark; he was to leave two 3-inchers in place until the other two were emplaced, and then move the last two. Aided by about a hundred civilians with several trucks, Lewis and McKinstry succeeded in shifting the battery – guns, ammunition, and sandbags – to a new location some 1,500 yards to the northwest. Marines and workmen set up dummy guns in the old position.

As the 10th dawned, Marine Gunner McKinstry found himself with new duties, having received orders to proceed to Wilkes and report to Captain Wesley McC. Platt, commander of the Wilkes strongpoint. Battery F comprised four 3-inch guns, but

lacked crewmen, a heightfinder, or a director. Consequently, McKinstry could only fire the guns accurately at short or point-blank range, thus limiting them to beach protection. Assisted by one Marine and a crew of civilians, Gunner McKinstry moved his guns into battery just in time for the arrival of 26 Nells which flew over at 1020 and dropped their bombs on the airfield and those sea-coast installations at the tip of Wilkes.

While casualties were light—Battery L had one Marine killed and one wounded (one civilian suffered shell-shock)—the equipment and guns in the positions themselves received considerable damage. Further, 120 tons of dynamite which had been stored by the contractors near the site of the new channel exploded and stripped the 3-inch battery of its fresh camouflage. The gunners moved them closer to the shoreline and camouflaged them with burnt brush because they lacked sandbags with which to construct defensive shelters for the gun crews.

In a new position, which was up the coast from the old one, Battery E's 3-inchers managed to hurl 100 rounds skyward while bombs began

hitting near Peacock Point. The old position there was "very heavily bombed," and a direct hit set off a small ammunition dump, vindicating McKinstry's hunch about the photo-reconnaissance plane. Battery D's gunners, meanwhile, claimed hits on two bombers (one of which was seen to explode later). Although Captain Elrod, who single-handedly attacked the formation, claimed two of the raiders, only one Nell failed to return to its base.

That night, the itinerant Battery E shifted to a position on the toe of the horseshoe on the lagoon side of Wake. Their daily defensive preparations complete, Wake's defenders awaited what the next dawn would bring. They had endured three days of bombings. Some of Cunningham's men may have wondered when it would be their turn to wreak destruction upon the enemy.

'Humbled by Sizeable Casualties'

During the night of 10 December 1941, Wake's lookouts vigilantly scanned the horizon. Those of her defenders who were not on watch grabbed what sleep they could. Shortly before midnight, the *Triton*

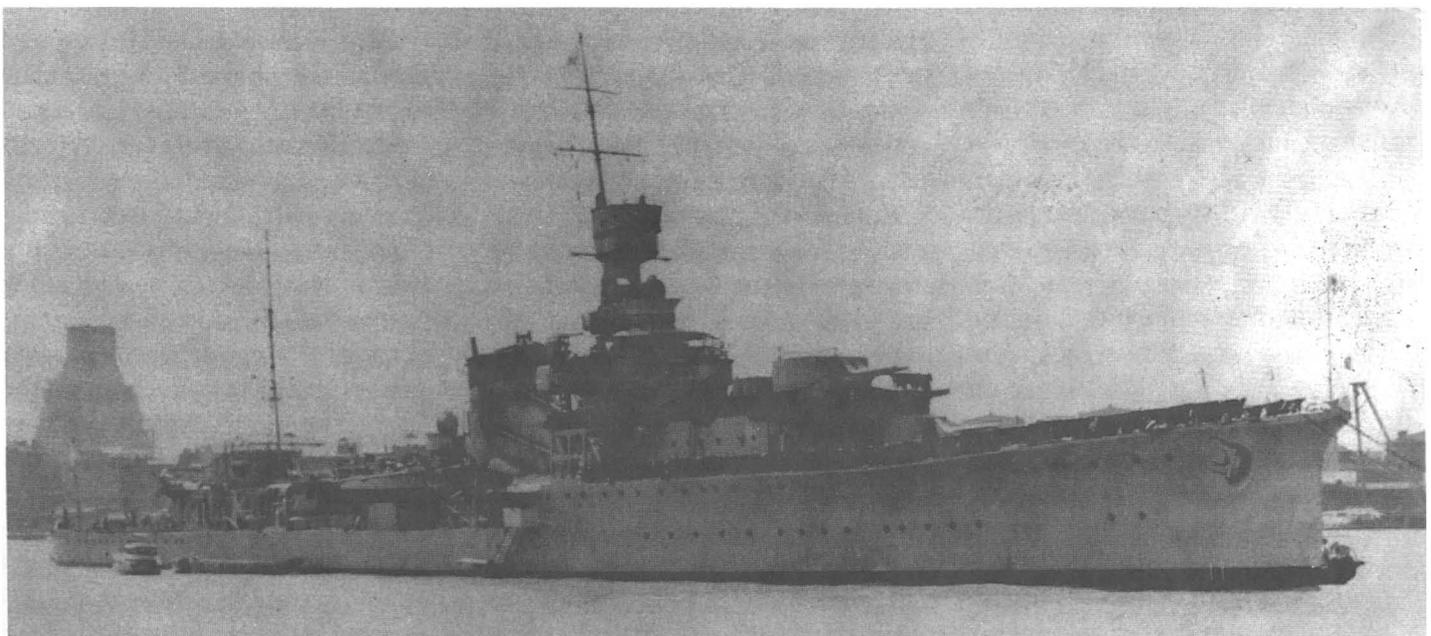
was south of the atoll, charging her batteries and patrolling on the surface. At 2315, her bridge lookouts spied "two flashes" and then the silhouette of what seemed to be a destroyer, dimly visible against the backdrop of heavy clouds that lay behind her. The *Triton* submerged quickly and tracked the unidentifiable ship; ultimately, she fired a salvo of four torpedoes from her stern tubes at 0017 on 11 December 1941—the first torpedoes fired from a Pacific Fleet submarine in World War II. Although the submariners heard a dull explosion, indicating what they thought was at least one probable hit, and propeller noises appeared to cease shortly thereafter, the *Triton's* apparent kill had not been confirmed. She resumed her patrol, submerged.

The ship that *Triton* had encountered off Wake's south coast was, most likely, the destroyer deployed as a picket 10 miles ahead of the invasion convoy steaming up from the south. Under Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, it had set out from Kwajalein, in the Marshalls, on 8 December. It consisted of the light cruiser *Yubari* (flagship), six destroyers—*Mutsuki*, *Kisaragi*, *Yay-*

The 3,587-ton light cruiser Yubari, seen here at Shanghai, China, in April 1937, was completed in July 1923. Armed with

5.5-inch guns, she served as Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka's flagship for the operations against Wake in December 1941.

Naval Historical Center Photo NH 82098





The Defense Battalion's 5-Inch Guns

In the photo above, a 5-inch/51 seacoast gun of Battery A, 1st Defense Battalion, rests at the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, on 21 October 1940, prior to its being deployed "beyond the seas." Private Edward F. Eaton, standing beside it, serves as a yardstick to give the viewer

an idea of the size of the gun that could hurl a 50-pound shell at 3,150 feet per second up to a range of 17,100 yards. These guns gave a good account of themselves at Wake Island, particularly in discouraging Admiral Kajioka's attempted landing in December 1941.

oi, *Mochizuki*, *Oite*, and *Hayate*—along with *Patrol Boat No. 32* and *Patrol Boat No. 33* (two ex-destroyers, each reconfigured in 1941 to launch a landing craft over a stern ramp) and two armed merchantmen, *Kongo Maru* and *Kinryu Maru*. To provide additional gunfire support, the Commander, *Fourth Fleet*, had also assigned the light cruisers *Tatsumi* and *Tenryu* to Kajioka's force.

Admiral Kajioka faced less than favorable weather for the endeavor. Deeming the northeast coastline unsuitable for that purpose, invasion planners had called for the converted destroyers to put 150 men ashore on Wilkes and 300 on Wake. If those numbers proved insufficient, Kajioka's supporting destroyers were to provide men to augment the landing force. If contrary winds threatened the assault, the troops would land on the northeastern and north coasts. Since the weather had moderated

enough by the 11th, though, the force was standing toward the atoll's south, or lee, shore in the pre-dawn hours, confident that two days of bombings had rendered the islands' defenses impotent.

Meanwhile, far to the east, at Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet continued to pick up the pieces after the shattering blow that the Japanese had delivered on the 7th. The enemy onslaught had forced Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), to revise his strategy completely. Kimmel wanted to relieve Wake, but deploying what remained of his fleet to protect sea communications, defend outlying bases, and protect far-flung territory, as well as to defend Oahu, would have required a wide dispersal of the very limited naval forces. By 10 December (11 December on Wake), the scattered positions of his aircraft carriers, which were at sea patrolling the

Oahu-Johnston-Palmyra triangle, militated against deploying them to support Wake. Cunningham's garrison, however, in a most striking fashion, would soon provide inspiration to the Pacific Fleet and the nation as well.

Wake's lookouts, like *Triton's*, had seen flickering lights in the distance. Gunner Hamas, on duty in the battalion command post, received the report of ships offshore from Captain Wesley McC. Platt, commander of the strongpoint on Wilkes, and notified Major Devereux, who, along with his executive officer, Major George H. Potter, stepped out into the moonlight and scanned the southern horizon. Hamas also telephoned Cunningham, who ordered the guns to hold fire until the ships closed on the island.

Cunningham then turned to Commander Keene and Lieutenant Commander Elmer B. Greey, resident

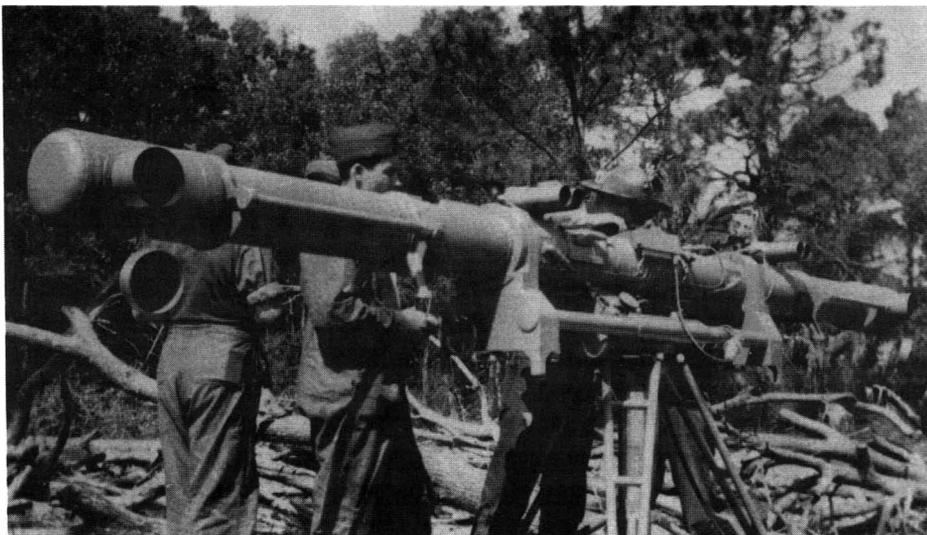
officer-in-charge of the construction programs at Wake, with whom he shared a cottage, and told them that lookouts had spotted ships, undoubtedly hostile ones, standing toward the atoll. He then directed the two officers to order an alert and immediately headed for the island's communications center in his pickup truck.

As the Japanese ships neared Wake, the Army radio unit on the atoll sent a message from Cunningham to Pearl Harbor at 0200 on the 11th, telling of the contractors' casualties, and, because of the danger that lay at Wake's doorstep, suggesting early evacuation of the civilians. Army communicators on Oahu who received the message noted that the Japanese had tried to jam the transmission.

At 0400, Major Putnam put VMF-211 on the alert, and soon thereafter he and Captains Elrod, Tharin, and Freuler manned the four operational F4Fs. The Wildcats, a 100-pound bomb under each wing, then taxied into position for take-off. Shortly before 0500, Kajioka's ships began their final run. At 0515, three Wildcats took off, followed after five minutes by the fourth. They rendezvoused at 12,000 feet above Toki Point. At 0522, the Japanese began shelling Wake.

A portable coincidence range-finder is like those used at Wake Island in conjunction with the 5-inch/51 caliber guns of Batteries A, B, and L. It was believed that they had been removed from decommissioned and deactivated battleships in the 1920s.

Charles A. Holmes Collection, MCHC



The Marines' guns, however, remained silent as Kajioka's ships "crept in, firing as they came." The first enemy projectiles set the oil tanks on the southwest portion of Wake ablaze while the two converted destroyers prepared to land their *Special Naval Landing Force* troops. The column of warships advanced westward, still unchallenged. Nearing the western tip of Wake 20 minutes later, Kajioka's flagship, the *Yubari*, closed to within 4,500 yards, seemingly "scouring the beach" with her 5.5-inch fire. At 0600, the light cruiser reversed course yet again, and closed the range still further.

The *Yubari's* maneuvering prompted the careful removal of the brush camouflage, and the Marines began to track the Japanese ships. As the distance decreased, and the reports came into Devereux's command post with that information, the major again told Gunner Hamas to relay the word to Commander Cunningham, who, by that point, had reached his command post. Cunningham upon receiving Hamas' report, responded, "What are we waiting for, open fire. Must be Jap ships all right." Devereux quickly relayed the order to his anxious artillerymen. At 0610, they commenced firing.

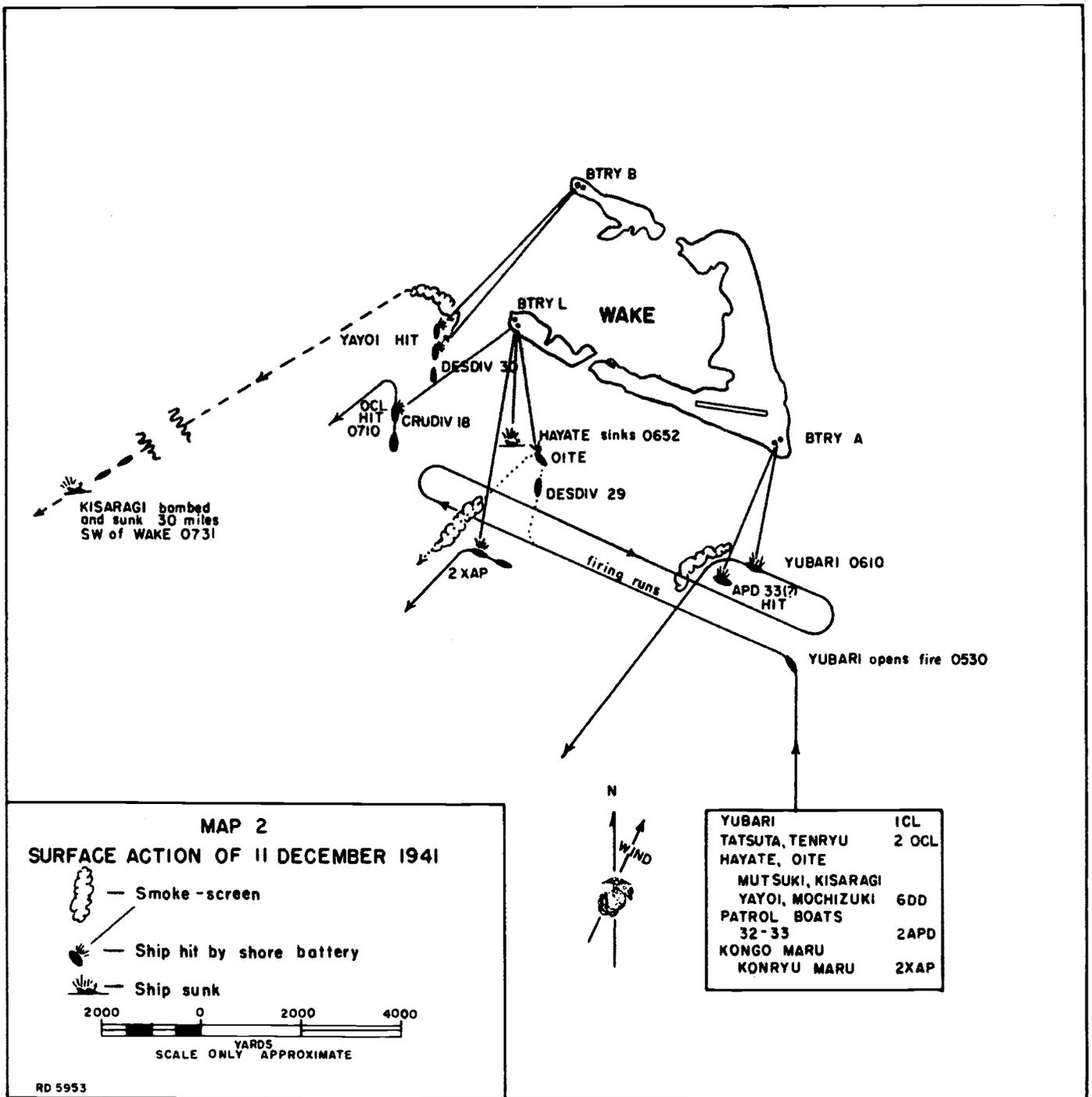
Barninger's 5-inchers at Peacock

Point, Wake's "high ground" behind them, boomed and sent the first 50-pound projectiles beyond their target. Adjusting the range quickly, the gunners soon scored what seemed to be hits on the *Yubari*. Although Barninger's guns had unavoidably revealed their location, the ships' counterfire proved woefully inaccurate. Kajioka's flagship managed to land only one shell in Battery B's vicinity, a projectile that burst some 150 feet from Barninger's command post. "The fire . . . continued to be over and then short throughout her firing," Barninger later reported. "She straddled continually, but none of the salvos came into the position." It was fortunate that the Japanese fire proved as poor as it was, for Barninger's guns lay completely unprotected, open save for camouflage. No sandbag protection existed!

Captain Platt, meanwhile, told Major Potter via phone that, since Battery L's rangefinder had been damaged in the bombing the previous day, First Lieutenant McAlister was having trouble obtaining the range. After Platt passed along Potter's order to McAlister to estimate it, Battery L opened fire and scored hits on one of the transports, prompting the escorting destroyers to stand toward the troublesome guns.

Platt carefully scrutinized the Japanese ship movements offshore, and noted with satisfaction that McAlister's 5-inchers sent three salvos slamming into the *Hayate*. She exploded immediately, killing all of her 167-man crew. McAlister's gunners cheered and then turned their attention to the *Oite* and the *Mochizuki*, which soon suffered hits from the same guns. The *Oite* sustained 14 wounded; the *Mochizuki* sustained an undetermined number of casualties.

First Lieutenant Kessler's Battery B, at the tip of Peale, meanwhile, duelled with the destroyers *Yayoi*, *Mutsuki*, and *Kisaragi*, as well as the *Tenryu* and the *Tatsuta*, and drew heavy



counterfire that disabled one gun. The crew of the inoperable mount shifted to that of a serviceable one, serving as ammunition passers, and after 10 rounds, Kessler's remaining gun scored a hit on the *Yayo'i's* stern, killing one man, wounding 17, and starting a fire. His gunners then shifted their attention to the next destroyer in column. The enemy's counterfire severed communications between Kessler's command post and the gun, but Battery B—the muzzle blast temporarily disabling the rangefinder—

continued with local fire control. As the Japanese warships stood to the south, Kessler's gun hurled two parting shots toward a transport, which proved to have been out of range.

The *Yubari's* action record reflects that although Wake had been pounded by land-based planes, the atoll's defenders still possessed enough coastal guns to mount a ferocious defense, which forced Kajioka to retire. As if the seacoast guns and the weather were not enough to frustrate the admiral's venture—the heavy seas

had overturned landing boats almost as soon as they were launched—the Japanese soon encountered a new foe. While Cunningham's cannoners had been trading shells with Kajioka's, Putnam's four Wildcats had climbed to 20,000 feet and maintained that altitude until daylight, when the major had ascertained that no Japanese planes were airborne. As the destroyers that had dueled Battery B opened the range and stood away from Wake, the Wildcats roared in.

Captain Henry T. Elrod (seen at right in the fall of 1941), VMF-211's executive officer, distinguished himself both in the air and in the ground fighting at Wake, with deeds which earned him a posthumous Medal of Honor. Born in Georgia in 1905, Elrod attended the University of Georgia and Yale University. Enlisting in the Corps in 1927, he received his commission in 1931. Elrod is the only Marine hero from Wake who has had a warship — a guided missile frigate — named in his honor.



nessed the *Kisaragi's* cataclysmic demise, he strafed another destroyer before returning to the field. Having been rearmed and refueled, he took off again at 0915, accompanied by Second Lieutenant Davidson, shortly before 17 Nells appeared to bomb Peale's batteries.

Davidson battled nine of the bombers, which had separated from the others and headed toward the southwest. Kinney tackled the other eight. Battery D, meanwhile, hurled 125 rounds at the bombers. Although some of the enemy's bombs fell near the battery position on Peale, the Japanese again inflicted neither damage nor casualties, and lost two Nells in the process. Eleven other G3M2s had been damaged; casualties included 15 dead and one slightly wounded. Putnam later credited Kinney and Davidson with shooting down one plane apiece.

Ordered to move Battery D's 3-inch guns the length of Peale during the night, Godbold reconnoitered the new position selected by Major Devereux, and at 1745, after securing all battery positions, began the shift. For the next 11 hours, the Marines, assisted by nearly 250 civilians, constructed new emplacements. By 0445 on 12 December, Godbold could again report: "Manned and ready." At Peacock Point, on the night of the 11th, Wally Lewis gave permission for all but two men at each gun, and at the director, to get some sleep — the first the men had had in three days.

Major Putnam saw at least one of Elrod's bombs hit the *Kisaragi*. Trailing oil and smoke, the damaged destroyer slowed to a stop but then managed to get underway again, internally afire. While she limped away to the south, Elrod, antiaircraft fire having perforated his plane's oil line, headed home. He managed to reach Wake and land on the rocky beach, but VMF 211's ground crew wrote off his F4F as a total loss. Meanwhile, *Tenryu* came under attack by Putnam, Tharin, and Freuler, who strafed her forward, near the number 1 torpedo tube mount, wounding five men and disabling three torpedoes.

The three serviceable Wildcats then shuttled back and forth to be rearmed and refueled. Putnam and Kinney later saw the *Kisaragi* — which had been carrying an extra supply of depth charges because of the American submarine threat — blow up and sink, killing her entire

crew of 167 men. Freuler, Putnam, and Hamilton strafed the *Kongo Maru*, igniting barrels of gasoline stowed in one of her holds, killing three Japanese sailors, and wounding 19. Two more men were listed as missing. Freuler's Wildcat took a bullet in the engine but managed to return to the field. Technical Sergeant Hamilton reached the field despite a perforated tail section.

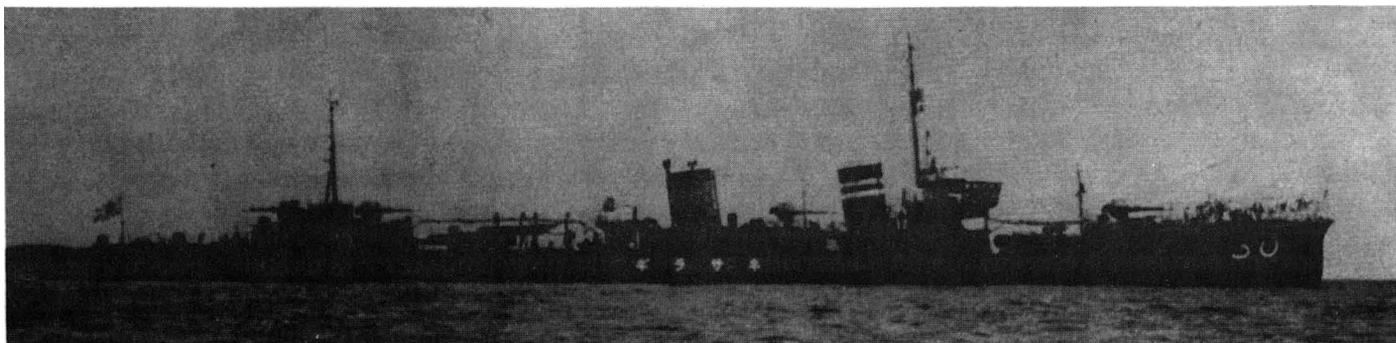
The *Triton*, which had not made contact with an enemy ship since firing at the unidentified ship during the pre-dawn hours, did not participate in the action that morning. Neither did her sistership, the *Tambor*. The latter attempted to approach the enemy ships she observed firing at the atoll, until they appeared to be standing away from Wake. Then, she reversed course and proceeded north, well away from the retiring Japanese, to avoid penetrating the *Triton's* patrol area.

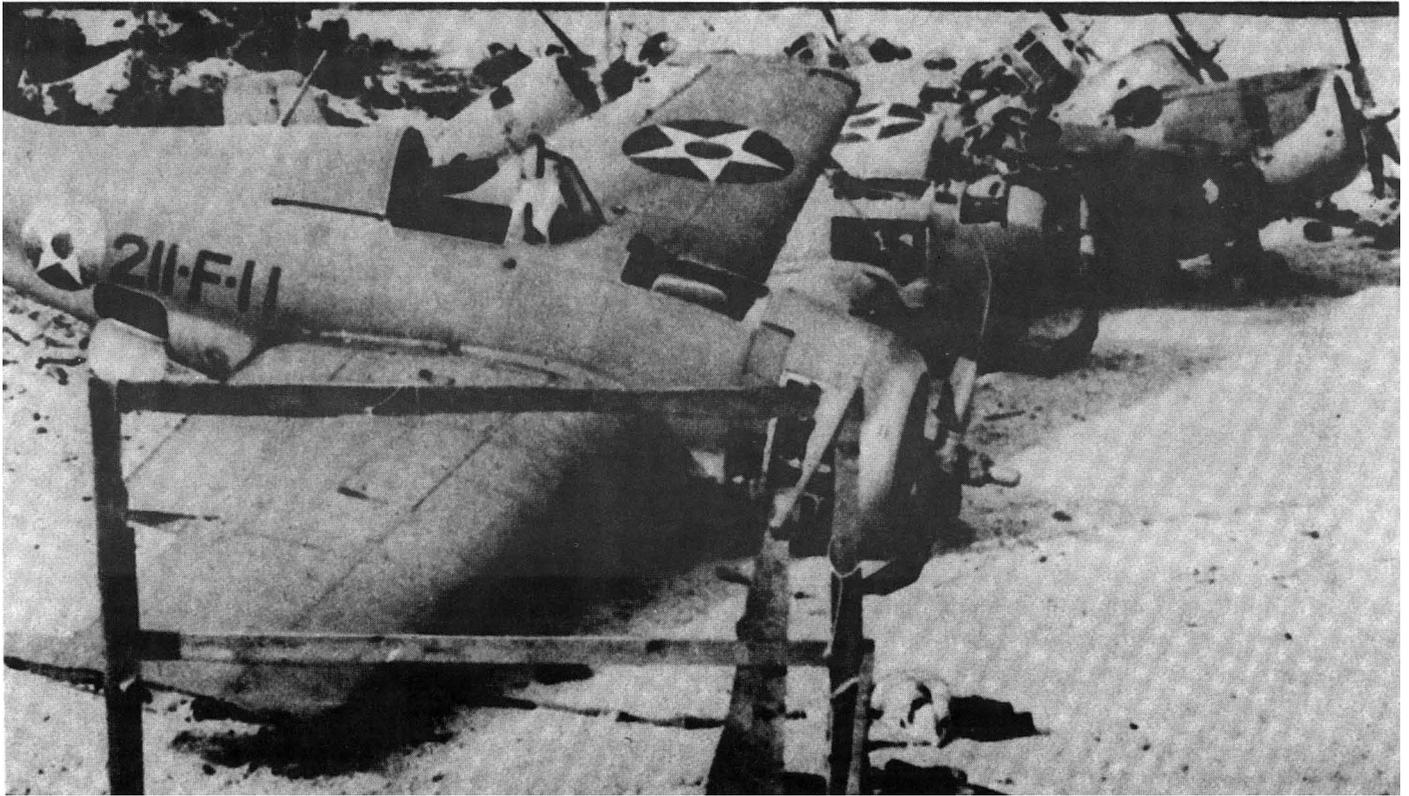
Meanwhile, after Kinney wit-

A pre-war view of the destroyer *Kisaragi*, sunk as the result of damage inflicted by two 100-pound bombs dropped by

Capt Henry T. Elrod on the morning of 11 December 1941. Out of the crew of 167 men, not one sailor survived.

Naval Historical Center Photo NH 3065





National Archives Photo 80-G-179006

Wrecked Grumman F4F-3s from VMF-211 near the airstrip on Wake (photographed after the Japanese took the island). The Wildcat in the foreground, 211-F-11, was flown on 11 Decem-

ber by Capt Elrod in the attack that sank the Japanese destroyer Kisaragi. Having suffered such damage as to make it unserviceable, 211-F-11 was ultimately cannibalized for spares.

The Japanese force, meanwhile, ". . . humbled by sizeable casualties," withdrew to the Marshalls, having requested aircraft carrier reinforcement. Hundreds of miles away, at Pearl Harbor, elements of the 4th Defense Battalion received orders to begin preparing for an operation, the destination of which was closely held. The Marines of the battalion fervently desired to assist their comrades on Wake Island and many of them probably concluded, "We're headed for Wake!"

'Still No Help'

Well before dawn on 12 December, unsynchronized engines heralded the approach of a Japanese flying boat. Captains Freuler and Tharin scrambled their planes to intercept it. The enemy plane—a Kawanishi H6K Type 97 reconnaissance flying boat (Mavis) from the *Yokohama Air Group* dropped its bombs on the edge of the lagoon and then sought cover in the overcast and rain squalls. Tharin, although untrained in night

aerial combat techniques, chased and "splashed" it. None of its nine-man crew survived.

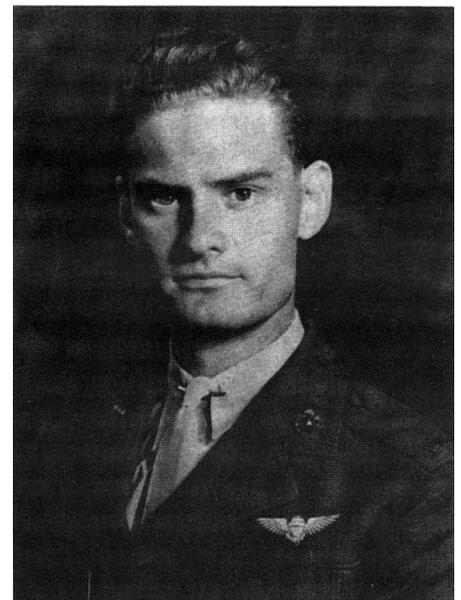
Later that same day, 26 *Chitose Air Group* Nells bombed Wake Island. Returning aircrewmembers claimed damage to a warehouse and an anti-aircraft gun in the "western sector." Anti-aircraft fire shot down one plane and damaged four; Japanese casualties included eight men killed. Once the bombers had departed, "Barney" Barninger's men continued working on their foxholes, freshened the camouflage, cleaned the guns, and tried to catch some sleep. The daily bombings, he wrote later, "were becoming an old story, and it was a relief from waiting when the raid was over."

Weathering bombing attacks, taking the enemy's blows, was one thing, but striking at the Japanese was something else—something to boost morale. At about 1600 on the 12th, Second Lieutenant Kliewer, while patrolling, spotted a surfaced subma-

rine 25 miles southwest of Wake. With the sun behind him, he dove from 10,000 feet. Convinced that the submarine was Japanese, Kliewer

Capt Frank C. Tharin (seen here as a first lieutenant, 8 August 1939) would earn a Silver Star Medal, a Distinguished Flying Cross, and two Air Medals for his performance of duty at Wake Island.

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Marine Corps Historical Collection
2dLt David D. Kliever (seen here circa September 1941), a minister's son, would be awarded a Bronze Star Medal and two Air Medals for his service at Wake.

fired his four .50-calibers broadside into the submarine. Turning to the right, and seeking to increase his chances of scoring maximum damage on the enemy, he dove and dropped his two 100-pounders at such a low altitude that bomb fragments ripped large holes in his wings and tail surfaces. Emptying his guns into the submarine on his next pass, he looked behind him and saw her submerge. Major Putnam flew out to verify that the sub had been sunk and spotted an oil slick at the spot Kliever indicated.

That night, a stateside radio report praised Wake's Marines. It stated that for security reasons it could not mention the size of the garrison defending the atoll, but noted that "we know the number is very small."

"Nothing like letting the enemy know our status," Kinney noted sardonically in his diary. "Still no help."

Although help was a subject very much on the minds of Admiral Kimmel and his staff back at Pearl Harbor, by 11 December plans to reinforce Wake had not yet "crystallized." Nor could they, until the carriers around which any task forces could be formed could be marshalled for the task. As Captain Charles H. "Soc" McMorris, Kimmel's war plans officer, had estimated, all of the near-

ly 1,500 people on Wake could be accommodated very rapidly on board the seaplane tender *Tangier* (AV-8) if they either destroyed or abandoned their personal belongings. *Tangier* would be crowded, but he believed it could be done. Protecting the tender, though, was key. "She should not go," McMorris wrote, "until air protection is available." If the evacuation of Wake was decided upon—and he recommended against it—the "promptest measure" would be to have *Tangier* assigned to a task force formed around the aircraft carrier *Lexington* (CV-2). Then, accompanied by destroyers, she could evacuate Wake's garrison while *Lexington's* planes provided cover. Even as the people at Pearl Harbor considered plans for her employment, however, "Lady Lex" and her consorts were encountering difficulty refueling in the heavy seas northwest of Oahu. Ultimately, Task Force 12 had to put into Pearl to complete the refueling.

The following day, 13 December, found VMF-211 conducting its patrols as usual with three available aircraft. Meanwhile, ground crews dragged Captain Elrod's old plane over from the beach and propped it up across the runway to serve as a decoy. The contractors promised Kinney that a light-proof hangar would be finished that night.

Listening to the radio that evening provided little inspiration. As Kinney noted in his diary, Kay Kyser, the reknowned bandleader, had dedicated a song to the "Wake Marines," while commentators noted that Wake's defenders, when asked what they required, had said "Send us more Japs."

"We began to figure out," Kinney wrote, "that the U.S. was not going to reinforce us."

At Pearl Harbor, however, efforts proceeded apace to disprove those who despaired of relief: the *Tangier* began discharging aviation gasoline to a barge alongside, as she prepared for her impending mission. Early the

following morning, she began unloading warheads and torpedoes and commenced loading aviation stores earmarked for Wake. Later, she shifted to the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, where she continued discharging gasoline and unloading torpedoes. "Wake Island," Rear Admiral Claude Bloch, the Commandant of the 14th Naval District, wrote on 12 December (13 December on Wake) "is putting up a magnificent fight. Kimmel is doing his best to devise means for reinforcing it and getting out the civilians . . ." The *Lexington* and her consorts entered Pearl to fuel on 13 December, while *Saratoga* (CV-3) and her escorts (three old destroyers) steamed toward Oahu—also delayed by heavy weather.

The enemy, meanwhile, maintained aerial pressure on the atoll. Three flying boats bombed the island at 0437 on Sunday, 14 December, but did not damage anything. The Marines, sailors, and contractors went about their daily business of improving their defensive positions. The artillerymen replaced the natural camouflage with fresh foliage.

Wake had little need for "more Japs," despite media claims. It did, however, need tools with which it could defend itself. Cunningham radioed to the Commandant of the 14th Naval District a lengthy list of supplies—including fire control radars—required by his 5- and 3-inch batteries, as well as by the machine gun and searchlight batteries.

At the airfield, the 14th dawned with just two planes in service. Kinney determined, though, that one of those, an F4F "bought" from VF-6 (embarked on the USS *Enterprise*), required an engine replacement. They would scavenge the parts required from two irreparably damaged planes. As a work crew tackled that task, 30 Nells from the *Chitose Air Group* began sowing destruction across Wake. One bomb hit one of the aircraft shelters and set afire an F4F.



National Archives Photo 19-N-25360

The seaplane tender *Tangier* (AV-8) (seen here off Mare Island, California, in August 1941), a converted freighter, had elements of the 4th Defense Battalion embarked as well as vitally needed ammunition and equipment, including radar.

Scrambling over to that Wildcat after the raid had ended, Kinney saw that the enemy ordnance had hit close to the tail but had damaged only the oil tank and intercoolers. Since that was the squadron's best engine, Kinney knew that it must be removed, mount and all. Kinney used an improvised hoist to lift the plane by its nose.

With only the single makeshift hoist, Kinney and his crew removed one engine and attached the other mount by nightfall, fortified only by a gallon of ice cream which Pete Sorenson, one of the contractors, had thoughtfully brought them. Since the hangar was not complete, they had to work quickly to avoid the blackout.

Kinney instructed the civilian foreman to call him as soon as the hangar was ready to receive the plane. He sent Hamilton to bed at 0800, and retired, himself, to be awakened an hour and a half later. With Hamilton in tow, he awoke the three civilians who had been helping them, and all went to the hangar. With a bit more effort, they were ready for the aircraft at 1130. Kinney and his civilian helpers completed installing the engine by 0330 on the 15th.

The failure to have the hangars completed, meanwhile, proved to be a sore point for Major Putnam. Commander Cunningham differed with his Marine subordinate over just how much pressure to apply to the

civilians, eschewing the use of armed force in favor of addressing the workers in small groups and appealing to them to lend a hand.

Annoyed that Cunningham seemed to be using only "moral suasion" on the contractors, Putnam, on 14 December, personally persuaded the contractors to work on the underground shelters—no work having been done for the previous 24 hours—and the civilians turned out in force ("about 300 when only 50 could work," Kinney noted).

The enthusiastic turnout, however, had an unexpected effect. Curiosity moved many workmen to line the airstrip to watch the take-off of the evening patrol. The surging crowd caused Captain Freuler to ease his plane to the left to avoid hitting any men, and in so doing found that he had aimed the plane toward a crane which sat on the north side of the airfield. Continuing to the left, Freuler tried to miss the piece of heavy equipment but instead "ground-looped" his F4F into the "boondocks," wrecking it. Hauled back to the runway, the damaged Wildcat served, thereafter, as a decoy.

At Pearl Harbor, at 1231 on 14 December (0901 15 December, on Wake), Task Force 11 (formerly Task Force 12) stood out to sea. Its commander, Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, had been ordered to raid Jaluit to divert attention away from

Task Force 14, which was to sortie the following day and proceed to Wake. Brown's force was to conduct the raid on Jaluit—reckoned to be the center of Japanese operations in the Marshalls—and then to retire toward Pearl Harbor the day before Task Force 14, under Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, was to reach Wake.

Fletcher's task, meanwhile, was to see that the *Tangier* reached her objective. The *Saratoga*, with VMF-221 embarked, was to launch the Marine fighters to fly into Wake while the seaplane tender was to moor offshore to begin the process of putting ashore reinforcements, ammunition, provisions, and equipment—including an important radar set. The *Tangier* was then to embark approximately 650 civilians and all of the wounded men and return to Pearl Harbor. Kimmel and his staff had estimated that the process of unloading and debarkation would take at least two days; embarking all the people at Wake could be accomplished in less than one. Unfavorable weather, however, could lengthen the time considerably. At 1331 (at Pearl Harbor), on 15 December Kimmel informed the Chief of Naval Operations (Admiral Harold R. Stark) of the relief expedition he had just launched. He received Admiral Stark's concurrence early the following morning.

Meanwhile, during the day on the 15th, Dan Godbold's men observed

the usual routine, starting the day at full alert and replacing the natural camouflage before reducing the alert status at 0700. His men completed the shelters near the guns during the day and began work on a shelter at the heightfinder position. They stopped work at 1700 to return to full alert. A half hour later, however, battery lookouts reported a plane lurking amongst the low clouds to the east, and Godbold reported the presence of the intruder to the island command post. At 1800, four flying boats came in at 1,000 feet and dropped bombs on what their crews thought was the "barracks area (Camp 1) on the northern part of the island." They also strafed the area near Batteries D and B. The Japanese reported their bombing as having been "effective," but it inflicted no material damage. One civilian workman was killed. From his vantage point, Marine Gunner McKinstry, in Battery E, thought all of the bombs landed in the ocean.

The next day, the 16th, 33 Nells raided Wake Island at 1340. The Marines, however, greeted the Japanese fliers with novel fire control methods. Kinney and Kliever, aloft on patrol, spotted the incoming formations closing on the atoll at 18,000 feet, almost 10 minutes before they reached Wake's airspace. The U.S. pilots radioed the enemy's altitude to the gun batteries. The early warning permitted Lewis to enter the data into the M-4 director and pass the solution to Godbold. Battery D hurled 95 rounds skyward. Battery E's first shots seemed to explode ahead of the formation, but Gunner McKinstry reported that the lead plane in one of the formations dropped, smoking, to the rear of the formation. He estimated that at least four other planes cleared the island trailing smoke. Godbold estimated that four planes had been damaged and one had crashed some distance from the island. Japanese accounts, however, provide no support for Godbold's es-

timate, acknowledging neither losses nor damage to Japanese aircraft during the attack that day. Kliever and Kinney each attacked the formations of planes, but with little effect, partly because only one of Kinney's four machine guns functioned.

That day, as half of Wake's submarine support—the *Tambor*—retired toward Oahu because of an irreparable leak in her forward torpedo room, Kinney returned to the task of keeping the planes ready to fight with field expedient repairs and borrowed gear. Kinney and his helpers fashioned gun cleaning rods from welding rods. The pervasive, intrusive coral sand threatened to cause severe mechanical damage to the planes. Kinney borrowed a compressor from PanAm (two previous compressors had been "strafed out of commission") to try to keep the planes clean by blasting a mixture of air and kerosene to blow out the accumulations of grit.

To help Kinney and Hamilton and

Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, the commander of Task Force 14, is the subject of much historical "Monday morning quarterbacking." All these commentators have the benefit of something neither Pye, the overall commander, nor Fletcher, on the scene, had—hindsight. As "Soc" McMorris (Admiral Kimmel's war plans officer) put it, "We had no more idea'n a billygoat," about what Japanese forces lay off Wake. The welter of message traffic linking CruDivs, CarDivs, and BatDivs with land-based air painted a formidable picture of what might be encountered by a single U.S. Navy carrier task force. While the Navy pilots may have been well trained, *Saratoga's* embarked fighter squadron was understrength, having only 13 operational Wildcats.

Nor could the Marines of VMF-221 (bound for Wake) have been counted on as an effective adjunct to *Saratoga's* squadron, since they had not operated from a carrier. An even more compelling argument for how VMF-221 would have performed in the emergency is that Major General Ross Rowell, command-

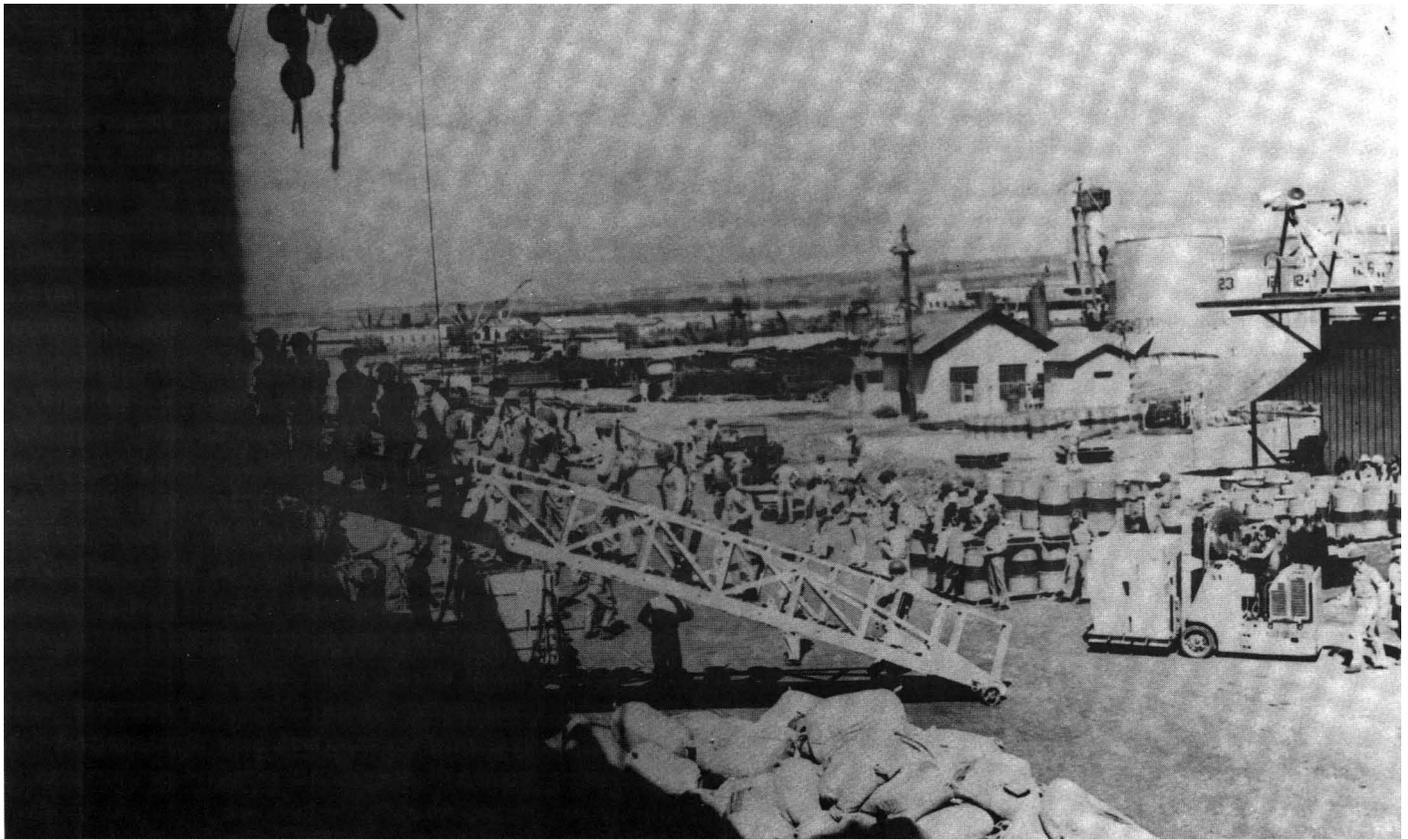
ing the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, knowing of 221's manpower and operational deficiencies, lamented having to send "[Major Verne] McCaul's half-baked outfit into that mess." Rowell knew that maintaining the temperamental Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo fighters at a stateside air base with all the conveniences had been a chore—let alone having to operate the F2A-3 at an advance base (especially one that had been so badly cut-up as Wake had been) or at sea on a carrier (where the F2A's performance—especially with landing gear failures—was nearly infamous).

And, too, the three carriers committed to the relief expedition were all there were in the Pacific. There were no reserves. Even though the Japanese harbored no ideas of conquest of Hawaii at that time—they were through with Oahu for the time being—Pye and his advisors had no way of knowing that. What intelligence existed pointed toward a potential disaster for an island where the issue was, as Cunningham correctly perceived; very much in doubt!

When asked in 1970 if the relief expe-

dition's arrival would have made any difference in the outcome at Wake, retired Brigadier General Devereux answered: "I rather doubt that that particular task force, with its size and composition, could have been very effective . . . I think it was wise . . . to pull back."





National Archives Photo 80-G-266632

Marines from the 4th Defense Battalion embark in Tangier (AV-8) at Pearl Harbor, 15 December 1941, bound for Wake. Barely visible beyond the first Marine at the head of the gangway is a sobering reminder of the events of eight days before: the mainmast of the sunken Arizona (BB-39). Tank farm spared by the Japanese on that day lies at right background.

their small but dedicated band of civilians, Aviation Machinist's Mate Hesson, who had been wounded on the 14th, violated doctor's orders and returned to duty. He resumed work on the planes, carrying on as effectively as ever in spite of his injuries. Putnam later recalled Hesson's service as being "the very foundation of the entire aerial defense of Wake Island."

At Pearl Harbor, in the lengthening shadows of 15 December (16 December on Wake), the relief expedition made ready to sail. The *Tangier*, the oiler *Neches* (AO-5) and four destroyers sailed at 1730 on the 15th (On Wake, 1400 on 16 December.). The *Saratoga* and the remainder of the escort—delayed by the time it took to fuel the carrier—were to sail the following day. "The twilight sortie," First Lieutenant Robert D. Heinl, Jr., as commander of Battery F, 3-Inch Antiaircraft Group, wrote of the *Tangier's* sailing, "dramatized the

adventure." The ships steamed past somber reminders of 7 December—the beached battleship *Nevada* and a Douglas SBD Dauntless from the *Enterprise* that had been shot down by "friendly fire" off Fort Kamehameha. "The waters beyond sight of Oahu," First Lieutenant Heinl noted, "seemed very lonely waters indeed . . . Columbus' men, sailing westward in hourly apprehension of toppling off the edge of a square earth, could not have felt the seas to be more inscrutable and less friendly."

Wake's dogged defense caused Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue, Commander, *South Seas Force* (*Fourth Fleet*), to seek help. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the Commander in Chief of the *Combined Fleet*, responded by assigning a force under the command of Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe, Commander, *8th Cruiser Division*, consisting of carriers *Hiryu* and *Soryu* and escorting ships, to reinforce Inoue. At 1630 on 16 December, the

two carriers (with 118 aircraft), screened by the heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma* and the destroyers *Tanikaze* and *Urakaze*, detached from their *Pearl Harbor Striking Force*, and headed toward Wake.

As Abe's ships steamed toward Wake, U.S. Navy radio intelligence operators intercepted Japanese radio transmissions. The messages, when decoded, caused the intelligence analysts to suspect that connections existed among the Japanese *Fourth Fleet* operations "CruDiv 8" (the *Tone* and the *Chikuma*), "Cardiv 2" (the *Soryu* and the *Hiryu*), and "Airon 24 (24th Flotilla). Aerial reconnaissance flights from the Marshalls followed.

The following afternoon Rear Admiral Bloch sent a message that must have seemed a trifle unrealistic to Cunningham, who was primarily concerned with defending the atoll and keeping his men alive. The message stated that it was "highly desirable" that the dredging of the channel

across Wilkes continue and inquired about the feasibility "under present conditions" of finishing the work with equipment at hand. It requested an estimated date of completion.

On 17 December, something occurred at Pearl Harbor which harbored ill portents for the Wake Island relief operation. Admiral Kimmel was relieved of command. In a perfunctory ceremony at the Submarine Base, Kimmel relinquished command to Vice Admiral William S. Pye, who would serve as the acting commander until Admiral Chester W. Nimitz arrived to assume command. Pye inherited an operation about which he would soon harbor many reservations. The next day (18 December), CinCPac's radio intelligence men noted again that . . . "Cardiv and Crudiv 8 continued to be associated with the Fourth Fleet in communications."

While the acting CinCPac digested that latest disquieting intelligence and sent it along to Fletcher and Brown, Wake's defenders endured another air raid. On the 19th, 27 Nells came in from the northwest at 1135, and dropped bombs on the remainder of the PanAm facility on Peale and on Camp 1 on Wake. Battery D fired 70 rounds at the attacking planes, and both Godbold and Marine Gunner McKinstry reported seeing one plane leaving the sky over the atoll, trailing a plume of smoke behind it. An aviator, they said, drifted down in his parachute some distance from land. Wake's gunners had actually done far better than they had thought. Of 27 planes engaged, 12 had been hit by antiaircraft fire.

Cunningham responded to Bloch's message of the previous day that up to that point he had been concerned only with defending the island and preserving lives. He addressed the completion of the channel by listing the difficulties associated with the task. He pointed out that blackout conditions militated working at night, and that Japanese air raids,

which came without warning, reduced the amount of work which could be accomplished during the day. But working during the day was hazardous, he said, because noisy equipment prevented workmen from being alerted to the incoming planes in time for them to take cover. Furthermore, the amount of contractor's equipment was being continually reduced by the bombings. Additionally, continuing the projects would require the immediate replenishment of diesel oil and dynamite. With morale of the civilian workmen generally low, Cunningham could not predict, under the prevailing conditions, when the construction projects would be completed. He further declared that "relief from raids would improve [the] outlook." After recording, in a second message the damage inflicted by the Japanese on the base on Peale, the atoll commander noted that, since the outbreak of war, the efforts involved in assisting in the defense and salvage operations had fully occupied all of the contractors' men. Cunningham continued by noting the additional numbers of dead or missing civilians since his earlier dispatch on the subject, and described the civilians' morale as "extremely low." He reiterated his request to consider evacuating the civilians, since the large number of them who were not contributing to the defensive efforts required sustenance, which drew on the stores required by those actively engaged in the defensive operations.

In the meantime, Vice Admiral Pye had passed on to Brown information pointing toward Japan's establishment of an air base in the Gilberts and the existence of a submarine force at Jaluit. Most disturbing of all was the news that CinCPac's intelligence people knew of "no definite location of [the] force which attacked Oahu." For all anyone knew, the Japanese carriers whose planes had bombed Pearl Harbor could be lurking almost anywhere!

Considering the newly established enemy air bases that he would have to pass en route to Jaluit, Brown could see that Japanese air searches from those places might spot Task Force 11 before it reached its objective. He began fueling his ships on the 18th—the same day that Rear Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr.'s Task Force 8 sailed from Pearl to support Task Forces 11 and 14—and informed the task force of its objective. Brown completed the fueling operations on the 19th. That done, he detached his oiler, the *Neosho* (AO-23), to stand out of danger, and contemplated what lay ahead.

Fletcher's Task Force 14, meanwhile, pressed westward. At noon on the 19th, the *Saratoga* and her consorts were 1,020 miles east of Wake. D-Day had been set for the 24th.

'All Hands Have Behaved Splendidly'

Shortly before 1600 on 20 December, scrutinized by Wake Island's only serviceable F4F, a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat bearing mail landed in the lagoon. It arrived in the midst of a rain squall, but the defenders welcomed the precipitation because it worsened the flying weather and inhibited the Japanese bombing efforts. Commander Keene's sailors moored the Catalina and fueled it for the next morning's flight.

As "Barney" Barninger observed, the flying boat's arrival "set the island on end with scuttlebutt." Most men surmised that the civilians would be evacuated. The scuttlebutt was partially correct. From the secret orders carried on board the PBY, Cunningham learned that he was to prepare all but 350 civilians (those to be selected "by specific trades to continue the more important of the projects," one of which was the completion of the ship channel between Wake and Wilkes) for evacuation. He was also notified that fire control, radar, and other equipment was being