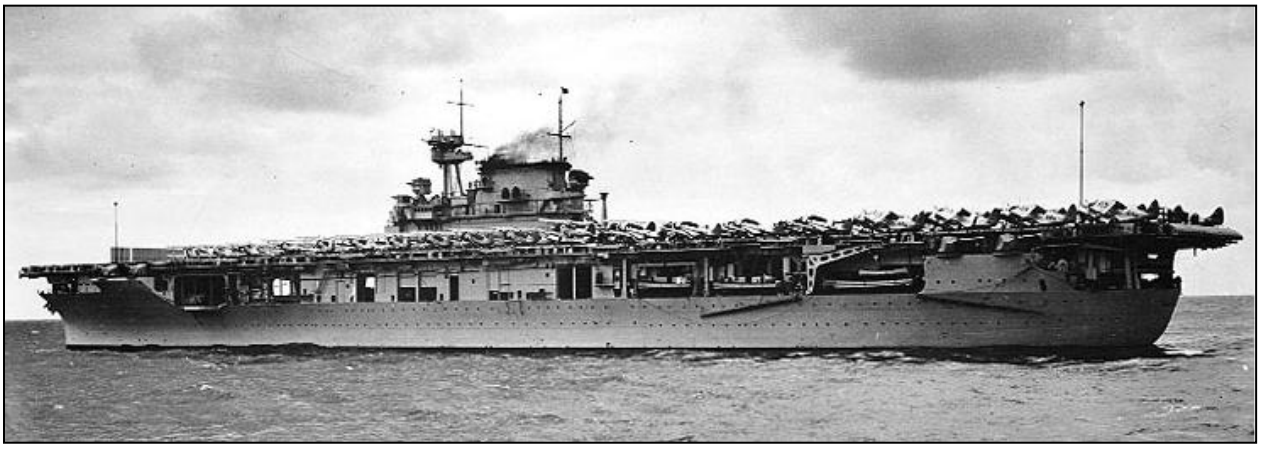
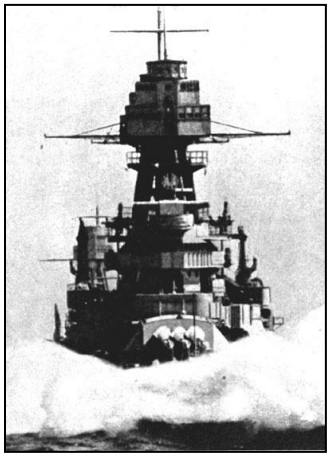
Countdown to 7 December 1941

28 November – 4 December 2011

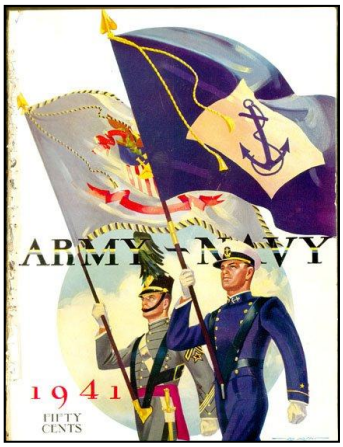
28 November 1941 The aircraft carrier ***USS Enterprise* and her escorts left Pearl Harbor** to reinforce Wake Island with a squadron of Marine F-4F fighters. The task force commander, Vice Admiral William Halsey, assumed that war would start before the Enterprise returned to Pearl Harbor. He placed his ships under combat conditions and directed aerial patrols out to 200 miles while underway. Below, Enterprise enroute to Pearl Harbor in 1939.



28 November 1941 General Hap Arnold (left), Chief of the Army Air Corps, sent a message for all Air Corps Commands to protect their forces from sabotage, espionage and subversion. Lt Gen Short, Commander of the Hawaiian Department, was reassured that the Army Staff in Washington, including the Air Corps, shared his **belief that sabotage was the primary threat**.



29 November 1941 The program for the **Army-Navy football game** included this photograph of the *U.S.S. Arizona* with the caption: "It is significant that despite the claims of air enthusiasts no battleship has yet been sunk by bombs." Eight days later, Japanese aircraft bombed and sank four U.S. battleships at Pearl Harbor, including *Arizona*, and heavily damaged four more.



OPR: PACAF/HO

Countdown to 7 December 1941

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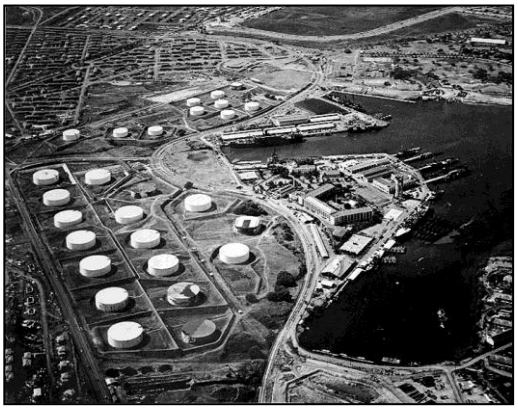
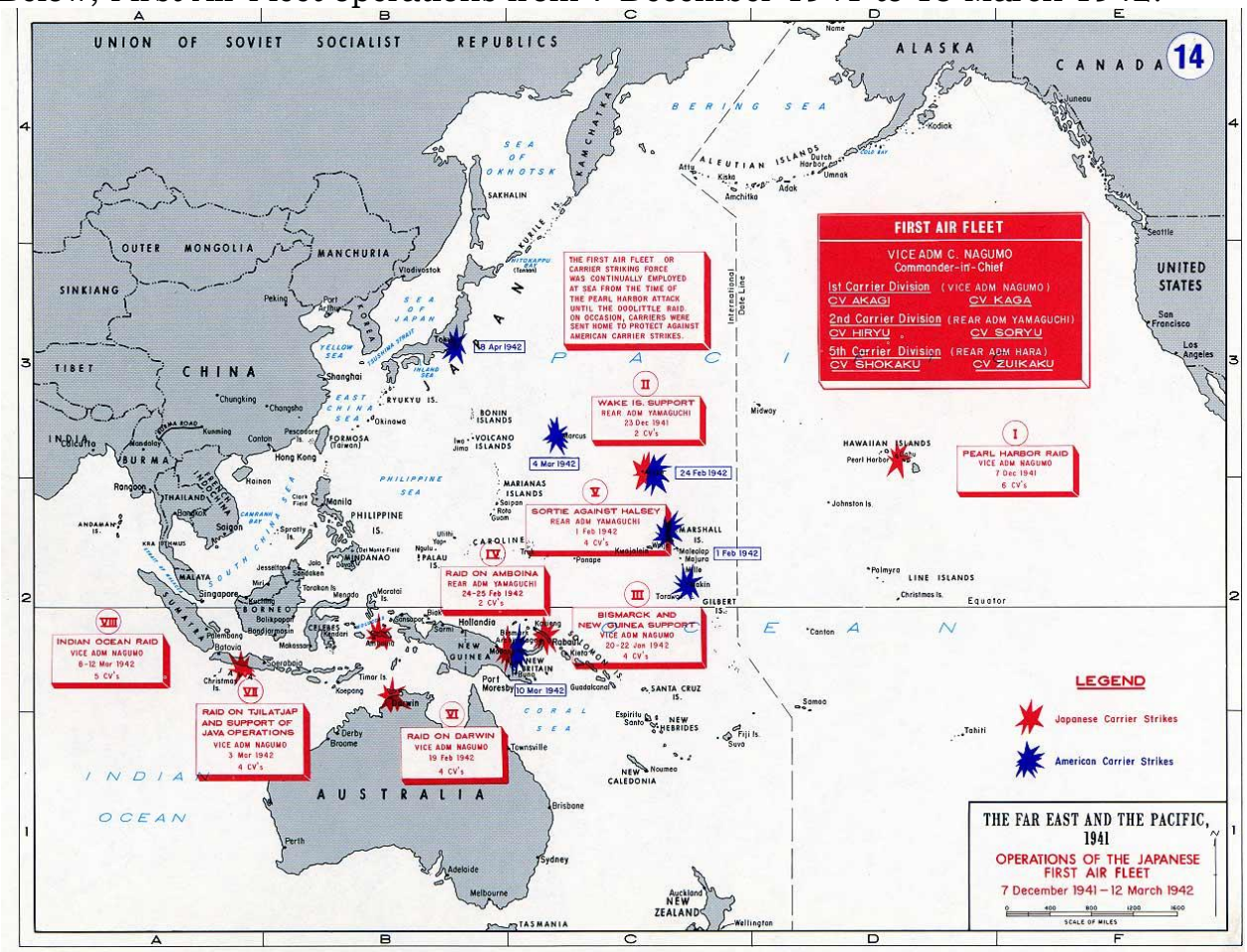
30 November 1941 Commander Genda, the First Air Fleet's chief planner for the *Hawaiian Operation*, was troubled by the **Imperial Navy's preoccupation with the safety of the aircraft carriers**. Genda urged Admiral Nagumo to fully exploit tactical opportunities after the opening strike. However, Nagumo insisted that he would return to Japan after only one attack of two waves on Oahu. Undeterred, Genda submitted options to return to Japan on more southerly routes and to conduct follow-up attacks on Pearl Harbor's infrastructure as well as U.S. warships in port or at sea. Genda hoped to eliminate any threat from the U.S. fleet and to give Japan an option to occupy the Hawaiian chain.



Above, an October, 1941photo of Pearl Harbor's submarine base and oil tanks.
Below, First Air Fleet operations from 7 December 1941 to 13 March 1942.



OPR: PACAF/HO

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28 November – 4 December 2011

1 December 1941 **The Japanese Navy changed its call signs** after just one month. Previously, the Imperial Navy had changed call signs only once every six months. U.S. intelligence interpreted the change as one more indication of major Japanese military operations in the near future.

2 December 1941 **War plans** were briefed to Emperor Hirohito as Japanese forces moved into positions to invade the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong, Thailand and, later, Timor and Burma. The main body of the Combined Fleet, with six battleships, remained in Japan's Inland Sea to protect the home islands and any endangered flank. All these forces had strict orders to wait for the execution of the *Hawaiian Operation*. **American intelligence agencies** were tracking the movements of some of these forces but **remained totally unaware of Nagumo's task force**.

Map below courtesy of United States Military Academy Department of History.

OPR: PACAF/HO

Countdown to 7 December 1941

28 November – 4 December 2011

2 December 1941 When briefed on the unusual change of Japanese Navy call signs, Admiral Kimmel asked PACFLT intelligence for an **estimate on the locations of Japanese naval forces**. The estimate did not list the Japanese Navy's Carrier Division One or Two because those units had not been heard from in several weeks. Kimmel responded, "Do you mean to say that they could be rounding Diamond Head and you wouldn't know it?"

2 December 1941 **Japan ordered its diplomatic missions** in North America, East Asia, the South Seas and Hawaii to **burn all secret documents and all but two of their secret codes**. A wiretap on a telephone in Japan's Honolulu Consulate revealed the classified destruction to U.S. intelligence.

2 December 1941 **Espionage orders** from Japan to its Honolulu Consulate stressed the "utmost importance" of information on aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, obstruction balloons and anti-torpedo nets deployed at Pearl Harbor. The orders were intercepted by U.S. intelligence but routed through routine processes and **not translated until 30 December 1941**.

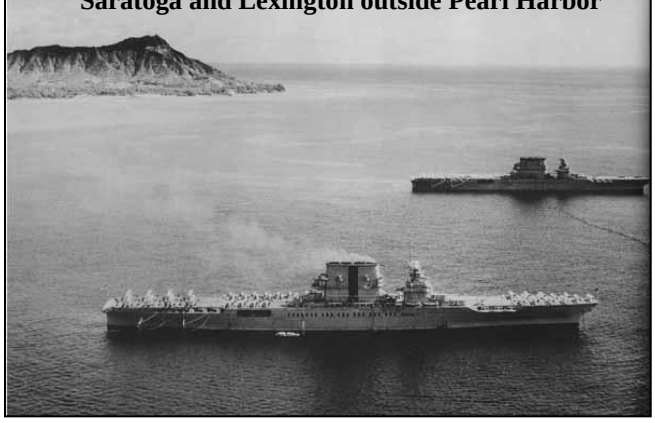
2 December 1941 The Imperial Japanese Navy dispatched a message to the Combined Fleet – "***Climb Mount Niitaka, 1208***" – a code to begin offensive operations on December 8th (December 7th in Hawaii). Mount Niitaka on Formosa was the highest peak in the Japanese empire.

3 December 1941 The Hawaiian Operation task force completed its final refueling prior to the attack on Hawaii. **The Japanese carriers and their escorts turned south and set course for Oahu**.

4 December 1941 Admiral Kimmel ordered the *USS Lexington* to ferry reinforcements to Midway. With the *USS Enterprise* reinforcing Wake and the *USS Saratoga* being overhauled on the U.S. west coast, Lexington's departure on December 5th left **no aircraft carriers in Pearl Harbor**.

Below, the *USS Lexington* and her compliment of aircraft.

Saratoga and Lexington outside Pearl Harbor



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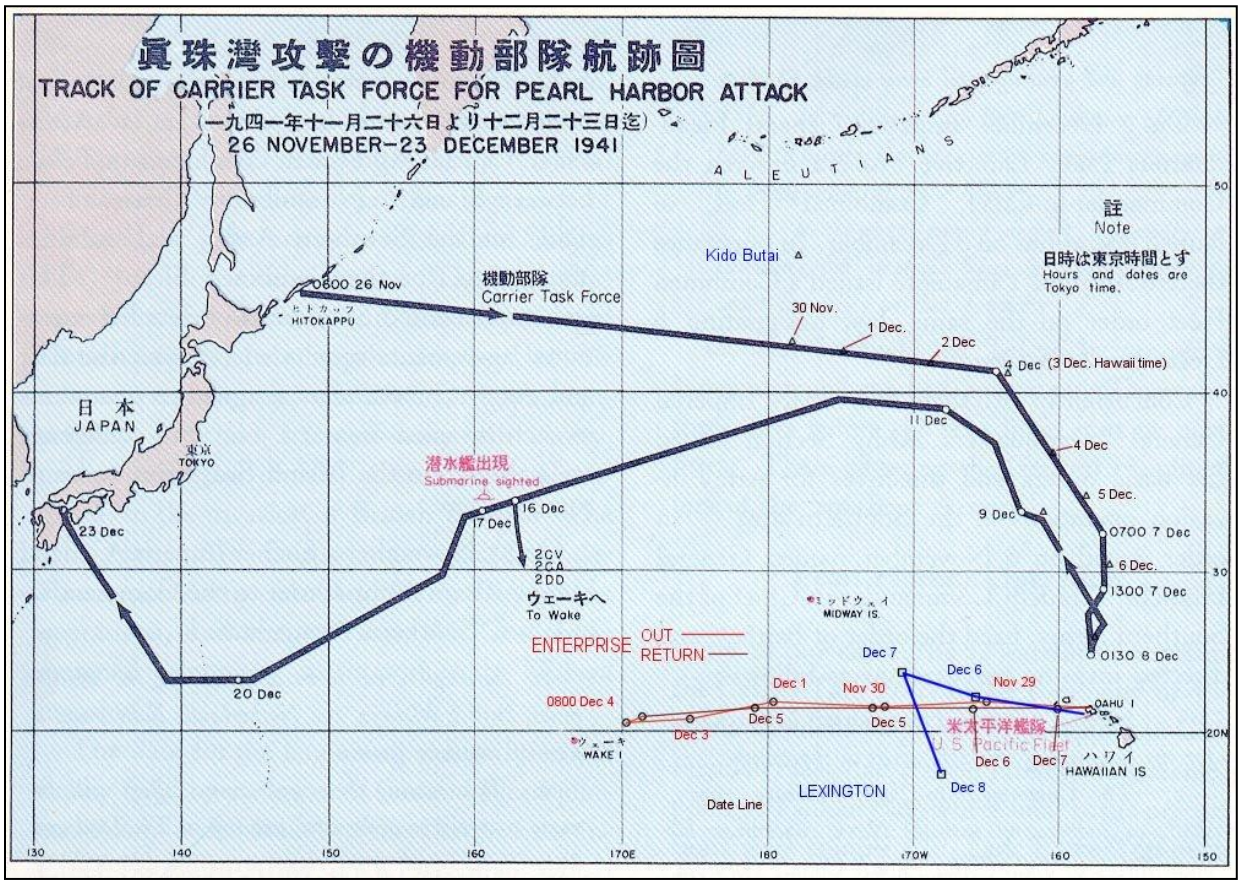
USS Lexington (CV-2) leaving San Diego, Calif., 14 Oct. 1941. Planes parked on her flight deck include F2A-1 fighters (parked forward), SBD scout-bombers (amidships) and TBD-1 torpedo planes (aft). Note the false bow wave painted on her hull, forward, and badly chalked condition of the hull's camouflage paint. Official U.S. Navy photo, now in the collections of the National Archives. [80-G-416362]



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