

By Glenn A. Stephens

Huge black and grey clouds of smoke reached up to the B-17 as if to pluck it down. Great fires were burning right in its path and hundreds of anti-aircraft bursts began to dot the sky. The B-17 passed Maui, then Diamond Head. The plane was at 1,500 feet setting up for an approach for a landing. Suddenly six Japanese Mitsubishi's came streaking over the Flying Fortress.

A U.S. destroyer below on the left was burning and going in circles, its anti-aircraft guns adding to the flak already blackening the sky. Into this maelstrom of death and destruction 12 unarmed B-17s arrived at Pearl Harbor. This was to be the first fuel stop for a longer journey to the South Pacific. They had left Hamilton Air Base in California just 14 hours before with ideas of an entirely different reception.

High cumulus clouds floated over the parking apron at Hamilton as the 12 Flying Fortresses stood ready. The fuel trucks departed after filling all tanks. The gear loaded and lashed down. Many of the crates and boxes were labeled with the word "Plum", a code name for their destination. Some said it meant Burma, others Mindanao, because other flights like this had gone there before.

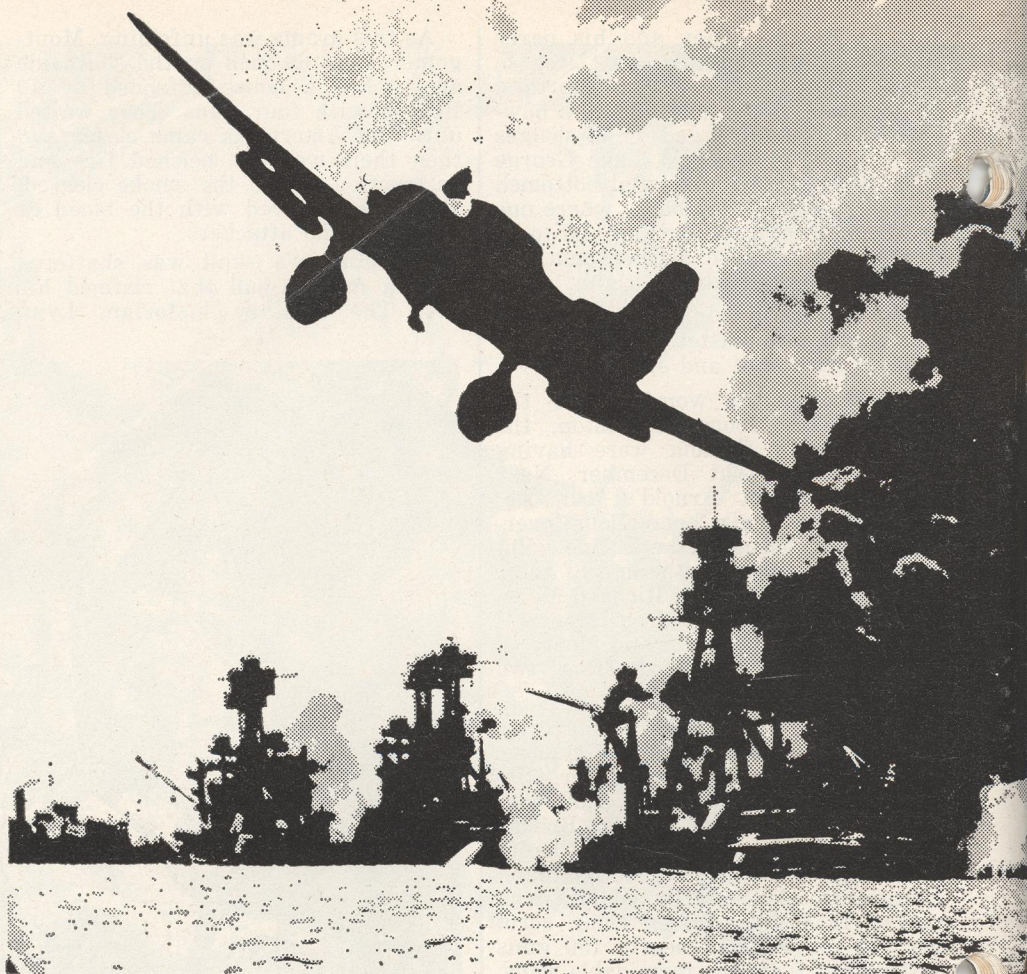
Most of this flight's crew members were from the old 5th Air Base, though actually detached at this time. Officially they were part of the 88th Reconnaissance Squadron, 7th Bomb Group. They had just recently been organized into crews, and, though strangers to each other, they would soon develop the loyalty and comradeship that comes with a closely knit crew.

One of the crew was Sgt. Robert K. Barnard, a native of Spencer, Iowa. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in September, 1939, shortly after graduation from high school. After basic training, radio school, and some MP duty, he heard of an overseas flight coming up. Bob managed an assignment to one crew as radioman-gunner.

On this trip there would be no ammunition for the guns. It was left behind to conserve weight so more fuel could be carried.

The first plane lifted off Hamilton Field at 10:45 p.m. on Dec. 6, 1941, for Hawaii. One by one the dozen Flying Fortresses roared off the runway and set course for Hawaii. In Bob's plane there was a moment of tension when the navigator headed them for the Aleutians, but after this the flight went smooth. About 3 a.m. a freighter was sighted and it flashed a clear weather signal.

Sgt. Barnard describes the events that followed:



hot reception pearl

"At 7:55 a.m. smoke appeared in the west where Pearl Harbor lay. The Island of Maui passed and then Diamond Head. By then the sky was thick with puffs of anti-aircraft fire. The intercom was jammed—'The Navy must be having some early morning practice.' 'I didn't think they got up that early on Sunday morning.'"

"'The Japs have hit Pearl Harbor!' was the word that came over the intercom. At this instant I looked up through the radio hatch and saw the six Mitsubishi's go over us. The anti-aircraft fire from the ground seemed to have no particular target, just aircraft."

"As we neared Hickam Field, we heard another pilot ask for landing instructions and he got an immediate reply. 'Land east to west, runway

2, wind 5 mph.—look out there's a Jap on your tail!' We circled Hickam three times and saw the great battleships burning, smoke and flames everywhere. Anti-aircraft fire kept us from landing."

"Our pilot, Lt. Harold N. (Newt) Chaffin, from Arkansas, told the copilot and engineer he did not like the looks of it down there. He repeated it three times. 'OK, let's get the hell out of here then,' said the engineer. 'Where to?' asked the pilot. 'You know we only have 15 or 20 minutes of fuel left, if we're lucky.'"

The engineer had spent a hitch in Oahu several years before and quickly told Chaffin he knew of a small fighter field over on Haleiwa Beach, but with a lighter load the plane might get in. Capt. Carmichael, the flight leader, and his plane joined. The two B-17s headed for Haleiwa right over

tion at harbor

the mountains, a hazardous maneuver because of the air currents.

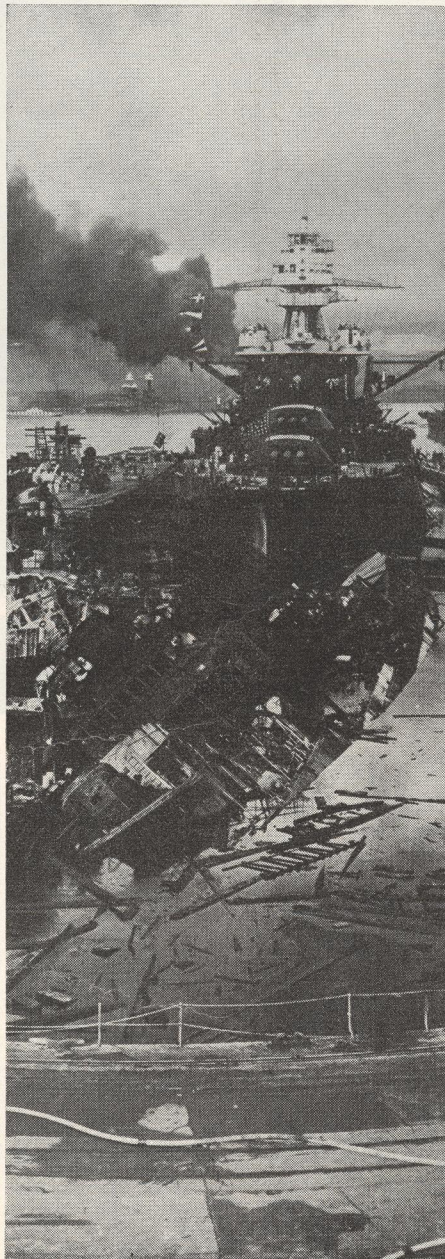
"We found the field, and coming in for our landing, we saw a car speeding toward the field," Barnard recalls.

There was hardly enough room to land, but Lt. Chaffin was an excellent pilot and put the plane down easily.

"The car made it to the field and two passengers were at a pair of P-40s frantically helping to get the two fighters armed and airborne. The ammunition had been under lock and key so it took time to get it. Finally, the two planes were able to take off.

"Meantime, a fuel truck came up and we got our B-17s refueled. An unfamiliar sounding aircraft engine startled us and we heard a lot of yells to head for the ditch. A Japanese fighter plane came down the length of the field with guns blazing as it strafed the old P-36 trainer planes

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a devastating attack on the U.S. Pacific fleet moored at Pearl Harbor. At left is battleship row with the USS Arizona ablaze. Below is more wreckage from the attack.



parked on the edge of the strip.

"The aircrews and the men at the field had only sidearms and rifles to shoot with, but they did fire at the Japs with gusto. One Japanese Val type dive bomber came in and strafed us. As he passed us, he did a chandelle,

stood on his tail for an instant and then headed out to sea. In just a few seconds a P-40 came by and went after the Val.

"Shortly after we heard the crackle of .50 caliber machine gun fire, a huge ball of smoke plummeted into the sea. One less Val. The P-40 returned to Haleiwa Field. The pilot was Lt. George Welch, one of the passengers in the speeding car. He and the other pilot, Lt. Ken Taylor, had been to an all night poker party and it was there they heard of the raid. Taylor shot down two planes that day and Welch shot down four.

"Someone got the idea of taking one of the .30 caliber guns out of the nose of our B-17 and holding it cushioned with flight jackets to fire it at strafing Jap planes. A couple of belts of ammunition were obtained from the Army there. No more attacks were made, so we did not get a chance to fire the gun. We did fully arm the guns in the bombers with fresh ammunition."

Barnard continued: "When things quieted down somewhat, we called Hickam tower and they told us to come on over. Our flight was scattered all over the island."

Some had managed to get into Hickam Field, Wheeler Field and Bellows Field. Capt. Raymond Swenson's plane was hit by Japanese fighters as it came in to land. Fires started in the flare storage caused his plane to burn. When Swenson and the crew ran from the burning plane, they were strafed by the Japanese and Flight Surgeon William Schick was killed. Lt. Frank Bostrom landed his B-17 at the golf course when it ran out of fuel.

Barnard said that when they arrived at Hickam Field, two of the B-17s in their flight had been loaded with bombs. They were on the runway ready for takeoff, as the crew thought they might know where the Japanese were. But orders came to "cut your engines, taxi back and park your aircraft." The feeling was that sending two B17s against the whole enemy fleet would be useless.

During the first few days afterward, there was no more action except for the civilian plane that came in from the States or one of the islands to land and was greeted by a barrage of flak.

The B-17 Group patrolled out of Hawaii for six weeks following the attack. A plane would fly a course 800 miles out, a 100-mile leg and 800 miles back. None of the patrols spotted any sign of the enemy.

Two of the damaged planes were replaced and crews added. The flight continued on, eventually ending up at Townsville, Australia.

The coded parcels marked "Plum" never got to Mindanao. ■