

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR
SIXTY YEARS LATER
 DECEMBER 7, 1941



J02 Jim Williams image

The aircraft operations tower on Ford Island, dating from pre-World War III, is a well-known landmark.



J02 Jim Williams photo

Known as the John Wayne house, scenes from "In Harm's Way" were filmed here.



PH2 Chad McNeely photo

Above: Lee Soucy, a USS Utah survivor, stands on the Utah Memorial and gazes at the skeleton of the battleship. Entombed in the Utah are 58 men.

Right: The dispensary, constructed in 1940, still stands. A plaque in the building's courtyard commemorates the spot where a delayed-action bomb was dropped. The bomb, apparently intended for the USS California, never exploded.

Ford Island: Journey back into history

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A visit to Ford Island is like a journey into the past – for it is a place where time seems to have stood still since World War II. Many of the landmarks on Ford Island are reminiscent of a bygone era – and a time when the Navy's Pacific Fleet endured the ravages of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Other sites on the island – such as the USS Utah Memorial and the Navy Club Memorial – remember the Dec. 7, 1941 attack 60 years ago and honor those who died defending America's freedom.

One of the island's most important roles during World War II was as an aviation field and the imposing red-and-white candy-striped aircraft operations tower still stands south of the runway. The lower half of the landing tower is still used by the FAA.

At Hangar 38, constructed in 1932, is a line of bullet holes which extend to the end of the building. Japanese machine gun strafing marks, bullet holes and bomb splatter still mark many places across the island – serving as a grim reminder of the events of Dec. 7, 1941.

Near the hangar are five-foot wide concrete blocks that extend from the water line into the water, indicating the spots where belly boards for biplane seaplanes once were docked.

Another silent witness to the destruction of war, the dispensary which was constructed in 1940 still stands. A plaque in the building's courtyard commemorates the spot where a delayed-action bomb was dropped. The bomb, apparently intended for the USS California, never exploded but caused slight structural damage to the building and severe damage to the pavement in the courtyard.

At the end of the runway and past a grassy area, a 50-foot length of the main mast of the USS Oklahoma is still visible in the water offshore. After it was hit by nine Japanese torpedoes, the 29,000-ton Oklahoma capsized in a short eight minutes. The second largest loss of life after the Arizona, 429 men were trapped onboard the ship.

The Oklahoma was later refloated and on May 18, 1947, it was lost at sea about 540 miles northeast of Pearl Harbor while being towed back to the mainland for salvage.

Situated at the southeastern portion of the island beneath a canopy of trees sits a small bungalow, Quarters 30, also known as the John Wayne house. The house was famous for its role in the movie "In Harm's Way" and was moved to its current spot for the filming of the movie after it's original construction as part of enlisted housing. The USS Arizona Memorial rests only yards away in the waters of the harbor, an ever-present reminder of the Dec. 7 tragedy.

The USS Utah Memorial, located on the northeastern side of the island, extends into the azure water, overlooking the rusting skeleton of the mighty Utah battleship which rests in the harbor. Still entombed in the Utah are 58 men

who were trapped when the ship was attacked.

On the opposite side of the island, the USS Missouri Memorial is moored – from a vantage point, which overlooks the USS Arizona Memorial. It was on the decks of the Mighty Mo, on Sept. 2, 1945, that General Douglas MacArthur accepted the Japanese surrender, bringing an end to World War II.

Other remnants of the pre-war and World War II era, including hangars, barracks and officers' bungalows, are scattered throughout the island.

Through the years, Ford Island has often served as a setting for Hollywood as motion pictures and television shows have attempted to depict that day of infamy. Films such as "In Harm's Way" which featured John "The Duke" Wayne to "Tora! Tora! Tora!" have documented the events of World War II.

"Baywatch Hawaii" filmed a show in 1999 which brought "The Last Rescue", a story about the USS Utah, to television audiences. More recently, numerous scenes from Disney's epic World War II saga "Pearl Harbor" were filmed on Ford Island as well as other military installations around the island.

A parcel of land only about a mile and a quarter long and half as wide, Ford Island has also been known by other names – Rabbit Island, Marin's Island and Little Goats Island. However, to the early Hawaiians, it was Mokuumeume, the Island of Strife. Dr. Seth Porter Ford, for whom the island is now named, purchased the island in 1866. Dr. Ford, one of the eminent doctors of that time, was a physician for the Hawaiian Insane Asylum and the U.S. Marine Hospital.

The island became a military holding when the United States, with a watchful eye to security in the Pacific during World War I, completed negotiations for the transfer of the land to the U.S. Army.

The Pacific Air Detachment was the first Navy unit to operate from Ford Island, beginning in 1923. As both the Army and Navy units were constantly expanding, negotiations were completed in November 1936 to transfer the Army to Hickam Field, leaving the Navy in complete control of Ford Island.

Although the role that Ford Island played during World War II dominates its history, the island has also played host to other historical events. In July 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the island and was rendered honors.

In 1936, Pan American Clipper Aircraft began to use Ford Island as a terminus, pioneering air routes to Manila. Amelia Earhart crashed her plane on the landing field as she began the second leg of her attempted flight around the world in March 1936 – and walked away unharmed.

Much of Ford Island still looks very much like it did in 1941 – offering a nostalgic glimpse at an era long gone but not forgotten. And for many Pearl Harbor survivors who visit the island annually, it is a time to relive poignant memories and take a journey back into history.



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