

Remembering Pearl Harbor

FROM THE OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

December 7th marks the 75th anniversary of the surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by forces of the Imperial Japanese Navy. This seminal event in American history will soon pass from living memory with the dwindling ranks of the World War II generation, but there is an artifact that resides in the executive office spaces of the Office of Naval Intelligence that provides a physical link to that fateful day and the conflict that followed. It is the ship's bell from the Mahan Class destroyer, USS *Cassin* (DD 372). ONI personnel may have heard it rung in official ceremonies at the NMIC, but may not know the inspirational story of the ship from which it came.

Cassin was in drydock at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, alongside another destroyer, USS *Downes* (DD 375) and forward of the battleship USS *Pennsylvania* (BB 38) when an incendiary bomb exploded *Downes'* fuel tanks, causing uncontrollable fires on board both vessels. *Cassin's* enraged crew attempted to return fire against the attackers, but were compelled to abandon ship as the flames spread. The ship's hull was so badly damaged that the ship was decommissioned that day.

Seven ships and a floating drydock were sunk. Three ships were total losses; USS *Arizona* (BB 39), USS *Oklahoma* (BB 37), and USS *Utah* (AG 16). In addition to *Cassin* and *Downes*, 11 other ships sustained varying levels of damage. The human toll was grim; 2,008 Sailors, 218 Soldiers, 109 Marines and 68 civilians. The horrific newsreel footage of burning ships and destroyed aircraft stunned and outraged the American public. On 15 December, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox publicly acknowledged the loss of six ships, including *Cassin* and *Downes*. He also stated that damage sustained to other vessels "varies from ships which have been already repaired and are ready for sea, or which have gone to sea, to a few ships that will take from a week to several months to repair. This statement was met with considerable skepticism by the press, which demanded the "true story."

In fact, over the next two years, the Navy successfully executed a remarkable salvage and repair operation, resurrecting most of the ships severely damaged or sunk at Pearl Harbor to put them back into the fight in time to help defeat Imperial Japan. Within a year after the attack, the Navy issued a progress report, noting "The damage suffered by the United States Pacific Fleet . . . was most serious, but the repair job now is nearly completed, and thanks to the inspired and unceasing efforts of the naval and civilian personnel attached to the various repair yards, especially at Pearl Harbor itself, this initial handicap will soon be erased forever."

Most of USS *Cassin's* weapons, machinery and equipment were recovered, repaired, and installed in a new hull. In February 1944 *Cassin* was recommissioned with the same hull number, and subsequently earned six battle stars for operations in the Pacific Theater, including supporting the assaults on Leyte and Iwo Jima. USS *Downes* was also returned to service.

So when you hear *Cassin's* bell ring out, remember the story behind it and the legacy of courage, sacrifice, and resilience that enabled the Navy to emerge from tragedy to triumph in the greatest conflict of the 20th century.



The ship's bell from USS *Cassin* (DD 372) plays an honored role in official ceremonies at the NMIC

