

WAKE AS WE SEE IT*

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MAY I tell you first who "we" are. We are known as "Photographic Interpreters," a group of most carefully chosen, mainly young officers trained to extract military information from vertical photographs.

Taking photographs from the air started in the last war and was continued during the after-war years for surveys, mapping, fire control studies, and many other uses; but came into its own as an exact science in this war.

It is a known fact that the Germans made wide use of it as they swept through Europe in the early dark days of this war.

The British developed it by necessity when, after Dunkerque and their departure from the European continent, their sources of ground information gradually ceased.

Then by camera they endeavored to get the story that could no longer be gotten from spies and which was too inaccurate for safe use when supplied by pilots and aerial observers.

Soon fighter planes armed with cameras only and with the sole mission of shooting pictures started to watch the enemy. A plane so equipped could, from a height of five miles, take a photograph which depicted over four square miles of ground surface on a 7"×7" print; and could take over two hundred of them in a single run—the operation being entirely automatic.

These photos taken with a generous overlap could then be studied with a stereoscope and, with the third dimension now apparent infinite detail could be recorded.

It was my privilege to fly over by clipper and spend several months working and studying with the British on this work. Then after a short visit to Iceland I came home and was assigned, as a member, to a small staff of three to help select, train and organize "Photographic Interpreters" for the U. S. Navy.

Of all the jobs in the war there could have been no more thrilling assignment given me.

Now these young officers—interpreters—are scattered wherever we are carrying the war to the enemy. Our efforts in selection and training are being richly repaid by the splendid work they are doing.

Our fighters and B-17's, specially equipped with cameras, now get us the pictures and we carefully analyze them.

Most of our equipment, if not all, is made by your members—stereoscopes, height finders, comparagraphs, contour finders, etc. So you're part of our team.

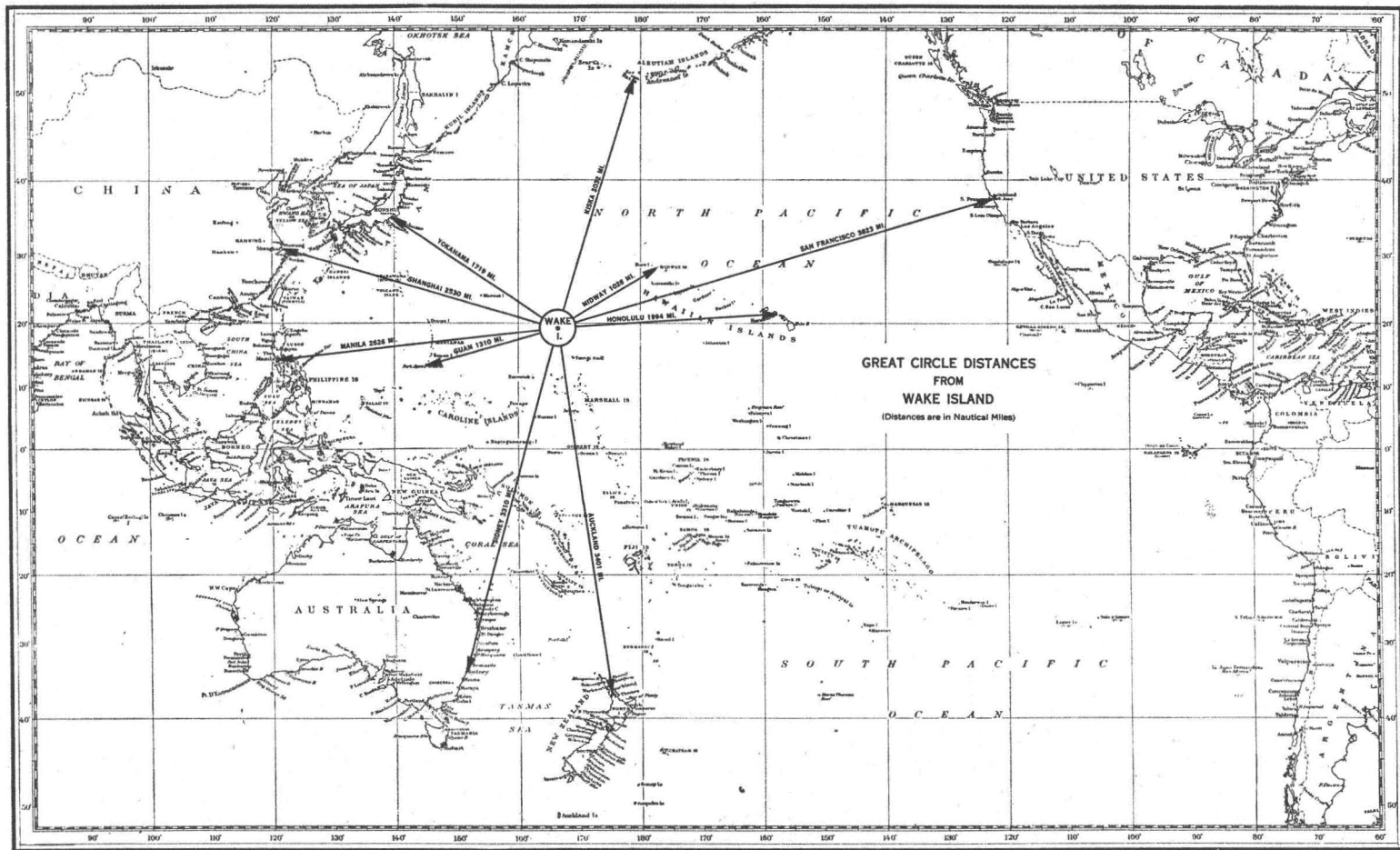
It's our job to watch and know Tojo's every move. We record what he has done and what he is doing, so that we can anticipate what he is going to do, and thereby rob him of his "element of surprise."

Do you remember George Arliss in that grand play called "The Man Who Played God"? About a great composer who lost his hearing and learned to read lips and from his penthouse vantage spot, using glasses, watched people in conversation way below him in Central Park. As he found people in dire trouble who needed help, he would dispatch his butler with the money or help necessary to the astonished talkers.

We are like that:—in fact when we struggled for a suitable title for this talk I suggested "Wake By God!"

Now for Wake—

* Presented at the Annual Meeting, 1943.



DISTANCE CHART FROM WAKE ISLAND

Section of Hydrographic Office Chart No. 1262a

WAKE AS WE SEE IT

Wake is a tiny atoll in the Pacific surrounded by a coral barrier reef. It is roughly wishbone in shape, facing southeast. It is comprised of three islands really; Peale, to the northwest, Wake proper on the east, and Wilkes on the Southwest.

It totals four and a half miles long and is two and a quarter miles wide, has a total land area of only three square miles.

A few facts of interest about it are—it has an average mean temperature of 82° and average yearly rainfall of 37". Its beaches vary from sandy, to stretches scattered with coral boulders three to five feet high. Its average elevation is only twelve feet though its maximum elevation is twenty-one feet.

Surrounding it is a coral barrier reef. Wake is covered with a rough growth of tropical brush and squat buka trees.

Its location on the mileage chart is of interest. It is roughly 2000 miles from Honolulu, 1000 miles from Midway, 1300 miles from Guam and 1700 miles from Yokohama!

The United States acquired Wake in 1900 but it was not till 1934 that we moved in. Although there were evidences of Japanese shacks on the islands, we disturbed only the birds. Pan American Airways started then to establish a base for trans-Pacific flights.

Shortly before Pearl Harbor some four hundred and fifty Marines arrived on the Island. Its defenses were organized and an airfield was started on the SE corner of the Island. An EW and NS runway were planned, each to be 500' wide by 6000' long.

Our photo story fortunately started with a fine coverage of the entire island on December 2, 1941. From this it was possible to establish, with accuracy, the state of progress of the construction work on buildings, roads, defenses, and landing field.

It's history now that at 11:58 A.M. on December 8, 1941, the Jap hit Wake with twenty-four bombers, and every day from twenty-four to forty-one planes hit the Island except for two days; on one a probable photographic plane went over and the other day had bad weather. On the 24th the Island fell to the Jap.

On January 2 we got our first coverage after the enemy took over; and were able to accurately assess the damage. We saw all our fortified points heavily pock-marked with craters. We saw and recorded damage to the Pan American Buildings, destroyed sections of the construction camp, bomb marked runways, a badly burned and hit area where the Marines had been camped, and damage to oil and water tanks.

On February 14 photographic coverage was obtained again of the Island, and a careful check was made. The comparison immediately disclosed the Jap was busy clearing away wreckage, rebuilding, stretching wire on beaches, digging trenches and placing guns. He had already repaired and enlarged the runways. Two of his own destroyers, probably part of the heavy warship toll taken by the Marines, were beached, and roads had been cut to them through the coral so that their armament etc. might be salvaged for shore use.

Armed with this information a Navy task force suddenly struck Wake on February 24. During the attack additional photographic coverage was made of the Island.

And again we quietly went to work to study Tojo's footprints. Again by comparison we could determine how much damage we had done to him during the raid.

We checked him in detail as to his plans for the defense of the Island. By his works we wrote them down.

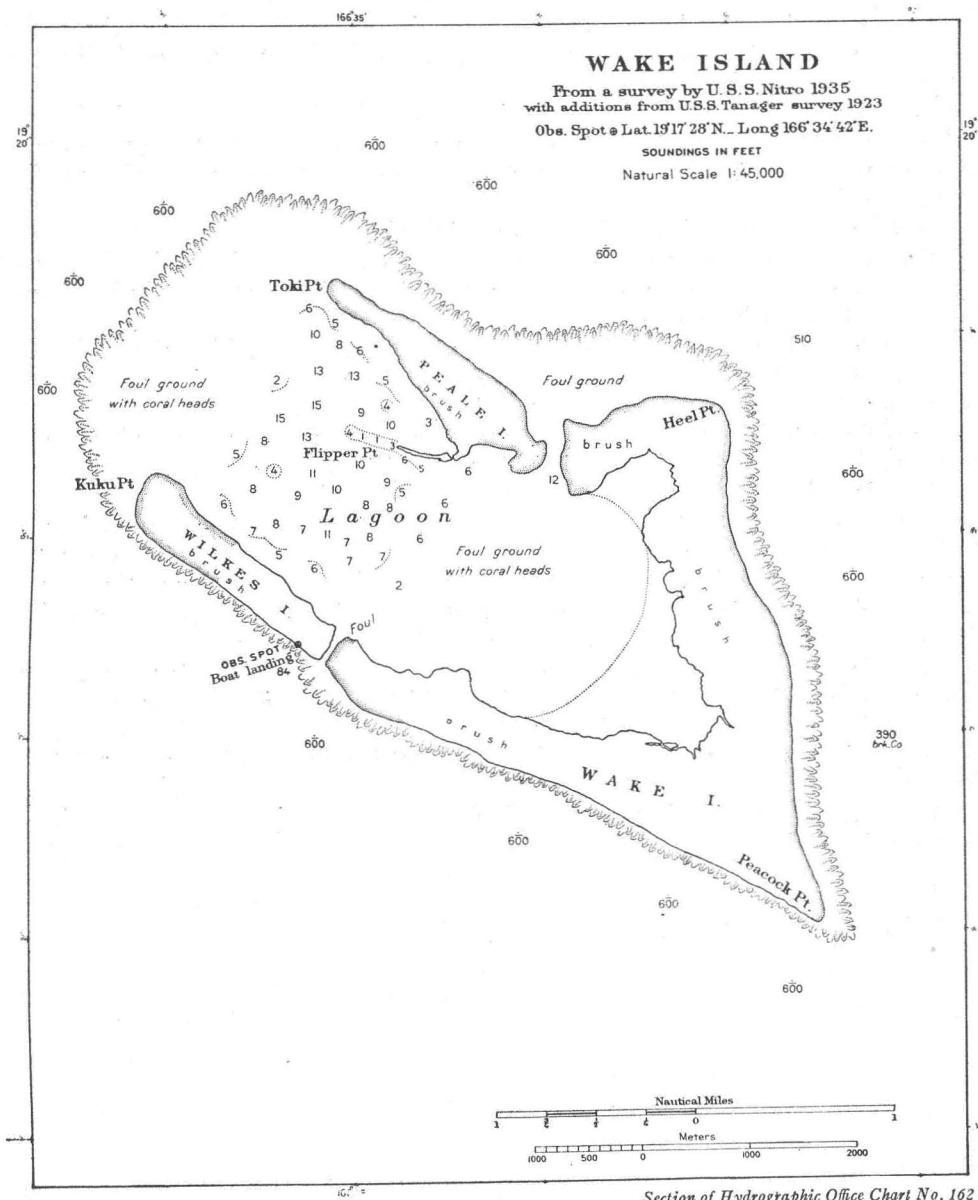


CHART OF WAKE ISLAND

On July 31 we got one more superb coverage of the Island. It was accomplished by three quick flights over the Island. Had we sent Tojo a questionnaire form to fill out—one of those long difficult ones with which we are all familiar today!—he could not have given us more answers. Yes, sir, we got him cold.

First the photographs were minutely checked for changes—alterations and new work, and all carefully recorded. The amount of work done and the time it was done in, coupled with the quarters now used, are a good formula to the number of Japs on the Island.

We found the Island now nearly surrounded by barbed wire—and a trench system supported by foxholes, machine guns, coastal defense, and anti-aircraft guns.

We found he had greatly increased his road network to permit quick dispersal and concentrations of troops. He had made many new shelters and magazines for ammunition storage and was now in the process of camouflaging many of these points.

But it's too late, Tojo, we have them pin pointed.

We checked and recorded for later use many details such as his efforts to string new wire communications. We saw where he had dug post holes—was hauling poles to them and was erecting them.

We watched him building his trenches always carefully piling the spoil, on the front low side of the trench. He made another mistake which we caught. You know how carefully we are trained in fire and air raid drills. Well, if you were an observer during a drill and took up your post to see where people go and how long it takes, by the time the drill was over you'd have the whole story.

In this July 31 coverage, which was as I have said accomplished in three sweeps, Tojo rushed for his prepared positions along carefully ordered and trained plans. We were able thereby to note his quick and successful efforts to get seven fighters in the air between the 1st and 2nd sweep. But more than that we were able to see in these three sweeps, Tojo race by cars at the first pass to his concentration points—his command and operations centers.

All this we write down and record to perfectly guide and inform our attacks such as the attack on Wake the other night which came swiftly and silently out of the night to strike scientific death to the nerve centers of the enemy.

No, Tojo can lie, camouflage and scheme but if he moves he leaves a track for us to record.

We are only a cog on the great wheel of our war efforts but we're pretty close to where it pinches.