

# Mitsuo Fuchida



From Pearl Harbour  
to Calvary



**Mitsuo Fuchida** (1902-1976) is best known for leading the devastating air attack on Pearl Harbour, 7 December 1941. After the war, Fuchida became a Christian Evangelist, who conducted Evangelistic outreaches throughout Japan, the United States and Europe.

## Japanese Naval Aviator

Fuchida was the son of the Master of the Primary School in Kashihara. His grandfather was a Samurai. Mitsuo Fuchida entered the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy in 1921, graduated as a mid-shipman in 1924, was promoted to Ensign in 1925 and sub-Lieutenant in 1927. He specialised in horizontal bombing and gained combat experience during the Sino-Japanese War, when he was assigned to the aircraft carrier, *Kaga*, in 1929. Promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1936, he was accepted into the Naval Staff College and joined the aircraft carrier *Akagi* in 1939, as Commander of the Air Group.

## Attack on Pearl Harbour

In October 1941, Fuchida was made Commander. Under the command of Vice Admiral Nagumo, with 6 aircraft carriers and 423 aircraft, Commander Fuchida was responsible for the co-ordination of the aerial attack

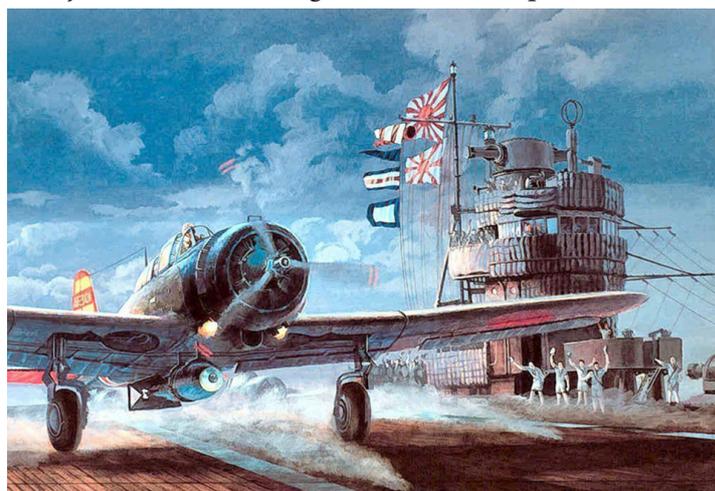
on the US Pacific Fleet. He was in the first wave of 183 dive-bombers, torpedo-bombers, level-bombers and fighters, which took off from carriers 370 km North of Oahu and targeted the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour. At 07:40 (Hawaiian Standard Time), Fuchida ordered “*Tenkai!*” (“Take attack position!”), slid back the canopy of his Nakajima *Kate* torpedo bomber and fired a green flare to signal attack. He then instructed his radio operator to send the coded signal “*To, to, to*” (“strike!”).

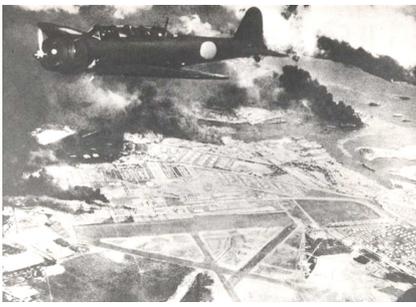
## Tora! Tora! Tora!

At 7:53, Fuchida sent the code words “*Tora! Tora! Tora!*” back to the carrier *Akagi*, the flagship, to report that complete surprise had been achieved. Tora was the acronym for *Tosugeki Raigeki* (torpedo attack) and in Japanese *Tora* means Tiger.

## Attack at Dawn

When the attack on Pearl Harbour hit, at 7:55am, many American sailors, or soldiers, were on leave, or sleeping late. 7 Battleships were lined up on battleship row. The *Oklahoma* capsized. The *West Virginia* and *California* was sunk. The *Nevada* was damaged and beached near the mouth of Pearl Harbour. *Tennessee*, *Maryland* and *Pennsylvania* were damaged. 10 Other ships were sunk





or seriously damaged. The *Arizona* sank with 2,000 sailors on board, after a stupendous explosion of its forward magazine. (Just 8 days earlier, the Americans had published a picture

of the *Arizona* with the words: “*It is significant that despite the claims of air enthusiasts, no battleship has yet been sunk by bombs.*” Pride goes before a fall.)

As the first wave returned to the carriers, Fuchida remained over the target to assess damage and to observe the second wave attack. He returned to his carrier only after the second wave had completed its mission. 21 Large flack holes were found in his aircraft, the main control wires were barely holding together and it is incredible that he survived so many hits to his aircraft. The Japanese lost 29 aircraft in the attack on Pearl Harbour. The US Pacific Fleet lost 21 ships – including almost every battleship - 188 aircraft destroyed, another 159 damaged and 2,403 lives lost. In Fuchida’s *Memoirs*, he remarks being upset by the Admiral’s cancelling of the third wave attack, which would have destroyed Pearl Harbour’s fuel tanks and dry dock facilities. “*I was upset and thought, ‘What stupidity!’ But the decision belonged to the Commander. It would not do any good if I complained.*” Years later, Fuchida said that while he mourned those who died aboard the *USS Arizona* and other ships, he did not regret his role in the Pearl Harbour attack. “*It was war*”, he said. After the successful Pearl Harbour attack, Fuchida was granted an audience with the Emperor.

### Wounded at Midway

On 19 February 1942, Fuchida led the first of two waves of 188 aircraft in an air raid on Darwin, Australia. On 5 April, he led another series of air attacks against the Royal Navy bases in Ceylon. In June 1942, Fuchida was recovering from an emergency shipboard appendectomy, when he was wounded at the Battle of Midway. He was on the ship’s bridge during the morning attacks by US aircraft. As *Akagi* was hit, a chain reaction from the burning fuel and live bombs began the destruction of the ship. An explosion threw him to the deck and he broke his ankle.

### A Hand of Protection

After recuperation, Fuchida spent the rest of the war as a staff officer. Two weeks before the American invasion of Guam, Fuchida was ordered to Tokyo. When the Japanese failed to repel the invasion, Vice Admiral Kakuta and his staff chose *Seppuku*, the Samurai suicide ritual of disembowelment. “*Again the sword of death had missed me only by inches.*” Fuchida declared. “*What did it mean?*”

### Hiroshima Bombing

The day before the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, he was in that city to attend a conference. A long distance call from naval headquarters required him to return to Tokyo. As he ate breakfast in Yamato, 200km away, Fuchida learned that everyone he had been working with in Hiroshima had perished in the atomic explosion. The day after the atomic bombing, he returned to Hiroshima to assess the damage. Each of the Officers who had accompanied Fuchida to investigate the devastation in Hiroshima, showed strange signs of illness but Fuchida alone exhibited no symptoms.. One by one they died through radiation poisoning. As Fuchida returned to Kashirhara, to help his wife raise their children, he was depressed: “*Life had no taste, or meaning... I had missed death so many times and for what? What did it all mean?*”



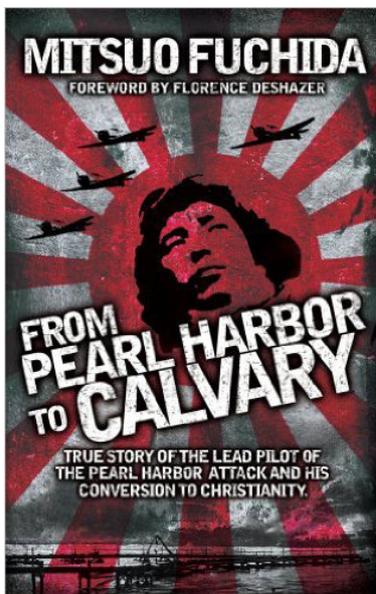
### War Crimes Trials

After the war, when General Douglas McArthur summoned Fuchida to testify in the Tokyo War Crimes trials, Captain Fuchida was disgusted and declared that everyone should know that “*War was war*” and that cruel acts occurred on both sides. The petty vindictiveness of the Allies infuriated him and he denounced the “*victor’s justice.*”

### Love for One’s Enemies

In 1947, he met his former flight engineer, Kazuo Kanegasaki, who he thought had died in the Battle of Midway. However Kanegasaki reported that a young Christian woman, Peggy Covell, had cared for them, in the prison camps, despite her Missionary parents having been killed by Japanese soldiers on the Island of Panay, in the Philippines. Peggy Covell’s parents were Missionary teachers in Japan until 1939. They then relocated to the Philippines. The Japanese conquered the





Philippines in 1941. They beheaded both of Peggy's parents on Sunday morning, 19 December 1943. To Fuchida, this love for one's enemies was inexplicable as the Bushido code required revenge against the murder of one's parents to restore honour. He became obsessed with trying to understand why anyone would treat their enemies with kindness and forgiveness.

### Inspiring Example

The extraordinary example of Peggy Covell and Jacob De Shazer inspired Fuchida to know more about the God of the Christians. When Japanese Prisoners of War asked the young 18-year-old Peggy Covell why she volunteered to help them, her reply was: "Because Japanese soldiers killed my parents." When Peggy considered her parents sacrificial service for the Kingdom of God and their love for the Japanese people, she was convinced that she must continue their Mission, reaching Japanese for Christ. As Fuchida researched from every source in the Philippines that knew the Covells, he learned that they had been forced to their knees by their captives and they had prayed together as they were about to be beheaded. They had prayed for the Japanese!

### Literature Evangelism

In 1948, as Fuchida was passing by the bronze statue of Hachiko at the Shibuya station, he was handed a pamphlet about the life of Jacob De Shazer, a member of the Doolittle Raid, who was captured when his B-25 bomber ran out of fuel in occupied China. In the pamphlet: "I was a Prisoner of Japan", De Shazer, a former US Army Air Force staff sergeant and bombardier, related his testimony of imprisonment, torture and awakening to God.

### Doolittle Raid Bombers

Jacob De Shazer was the bombardier of B-25 No.16. After taking off from USS Hornet and dropping bombs on Nagoya, Japan, they flew to China, but ran out of fuel over Japanese controlled China. They were captured after parachuting to the ground. De Shazer was imprisoned for 40 months, 34 of these months in solitary confinement. He was beaten, malnourished and 3 of his crew were executed by firing squad. The fourth member, Lt. Bob Meder died of starvation. After 25 months of hating his captors, a Bible came into his hands, for only three weeks, but it changed his life

completely. He began to learn Japanese and to treat his captors with respect. He resolved to bring the Message of Christ to Japan. After returning to the USA, De Shazer attended Seattle Pacific College and returned to Japan to preach the Gospel. He established a church in Nagoya, the very city he had bombed years before. Fuchida became intrigued with the Christian Faith. The shocking examples of Christians able to forgive their enemies staggered Fuchida. "That's when I met Jesus. Looking back I can see now that the Lord had laid His Hand upon me so that I might serve Him."

### The Power of the Printed Page

Fuchida read the tract on the spot and on the train he saw an advertisement for a book with the same title. When he disembarked, he headed for a book store and purchased it. De Shazer's story engrossed Fuchida. Determined to understand what had motivated De Shazer, Fuchida bought a Bible from a Japanese man on the street. When he read "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:24) Fuchida realised that this was what the Covells had been praying before their execution.

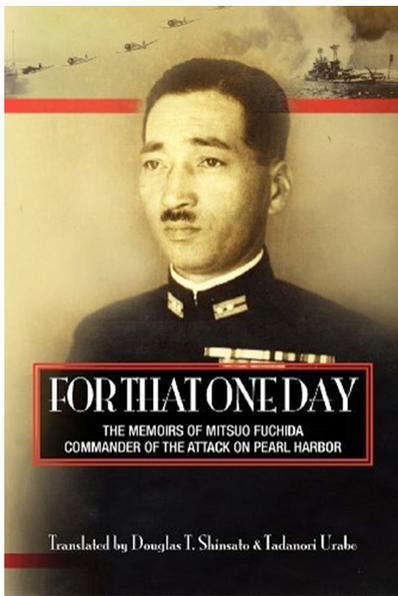
### Faith Comes From Hearing the Word

In 1949, Fuchida purchased a Bible at the same Shibuya station where he had received a pamphlet. As he read the Gospels he came to understand the reason for the life of forgiveness and mercy that motivated Peggy and Jacob. It was the crucifixion of Jesus and His Words in the Gospel: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." On 14th April 1950, he surrendered to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

### The Power of God

By the time he had completed reading the Gospel of Luke, Fuchida had become a Christian. He knew no Christians, but now he began to declare himself to be a Christian. As Christianity was considered the "occupation religion" in Japan, this brought him much reproach from





his former friends and family. Pietsch and Glenn Wagner, of the Pocket Testament League of Japan met with Fuchida and encouraged him to join them in open air outreach.

### Open Air Preaching **The Turning Point**

In the business section of Osaka, as the Americans stood to speak, fewer than 40 Japanese would stop to listen. But when

published Fuchida's story of the attack on Pearl Harbour. Fuchida wrote - *From Pearl Harbour to Golgotha* (later renamed - *From Pearl Harbour to Calvary*) and a 1955 expansion of his book: *Midway - The Battle that Doomed Japan, the Japanese Navy Story*. His autobiography - *For That One Day, The Memoirs of Mitsuo Fuchida, Commander of the Attack on Pearl Harbour*, was published in Japan, in 2007, and translated into English and published in 2011.

In *Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan*, Fuchida wrote: "Five minutes! Who would have believed that the tide of battle would shift in that brief interval of time? ... We have been caught flat-footed in the most vulnerable position possible, decks loaded with planes armed and fuelled for attack."

Fuchida, Hero of Pearl Harbour, was introduced, the crowd swelled rapidly. Rush hour traffic stopped. Hundreds gathered, even the police listened in.

### Japan for Christ

This was the beginning of Fuchida's new career as an Evangelist. Soon he filled an auditorium in Osaka, 500 Japanese came forward at that rally. Almost every newspaper in Japan reported on it: He described his conversion as "It was like having the sun rise." He preached against Japanese-egocentrism and xenophobia. Like Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34), he used Japanese cultural examples to communicate the Gospel of Christ. Captain Fuchida went from being a vital part of Japan's military attack on the United States, to being a vital part of God's Missionary offensive into the hearts, minds and souls of Japanese, and later Americans and Europeans too.

### Fuchida and De Shazer

In May 1950, Fuchida and De Shazer met for the first time. In May he visited De Shazer, knocked on his door and said: "I have desired to meet you, Mr De Shazer. My name is Mitsuo Fuchida." De Shazer recognised the name and said: "Come in! Come in!" The former enemies embraced as brothers in Christ.



### War Author

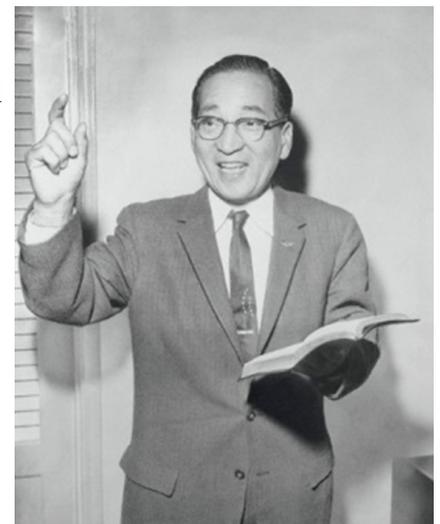
In 1951, Fuchida published an account of the Battle of Midway and in 1952 he toured the United States as a member of the Worldwide Christian Missionary Army of Sky Pilots. In February 1954, Readers Digest

### Courage and Self-Sacrifice

Fuchida turned down an offer from the Japanese government to organise their new Air Force. He faced down an angry pilot who pulled a knife and threatened to kill him. This man later came to Christ. Fuchida ministered in prisons and led people to Christ, even in the cells of condemned murderers. He formed *Calvary Clubs* in prisons.

### The Blood of the Martyrs

Mitsuo Fuchida related the testimony of Peggy Covell and her brave parents all over Japan. He quoted her testimony: "But the Holy Spirit has washed away my hatred and has replaced it with love." The Covells had gone to their death singing hymns joyfully and praying for the conversion of their enemies. The Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Mitsuo Fuchida was one of the fruit of their Faith.



Fuchida spent the rest of his life as an Evangelist, taking the Gospel of Christ throughout Japan, the United States of America and Europe.



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