By Ross Stanton

"December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."[i] Although the United States resisted valiantly and heroically, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor devastated the American people, with losses of 2,343 military personnel, 960 missing, and 1,272 wounded.[ii] Japanese forces brought destruction upon the United States Navy, crippling its air and naval forces stationed at the harbor.[iii] Most notably, the sinking of the U.S.S. Arizona—a 600-foot long, 31,400-ton battleship, which was the site of over half of the total casualties from the attack.[iv] Today, the U.S.S. Arizona acts as a resting place of those trapped within its bulkheads.[v] Despite the possibility of recovering the remains,[vi] the United States erected a memorial over the sunken ship in 1962 and declared it a national landmark in 1989.[vii] Proponents of the United States' decision to not disturb the ship, or those within it, see the ship as a "fitting resting place for [those] who died on board."[viii] After carefully considering all factors at play and the sensitive nature of this issue, I say raise the ship.

The memorial poses several concerns. Those who travel to Pearl Harbor to visit the memorial may observe a charming, rainbow sheen on the surface of the water.[ix] However, this sheen arises due to a steady leak of approximately two quarts of oil per day seeping from the ship into the waters of the Pacific.[x] While seemingly minute and manageable, scientists estimate an additional 500,000 gallons remain within the ship.[xi] Over time, the elements may corrode the ship’s hull and free the remaining oil into the surrounding waters.[xii] Should this happen, scientists predict catastrophic consequences to both naval operations and the environment.[xiii] Moreover, years of exposure and decay increasingly hinder identification of the deceased. Fortunately, advances in forensic science and technology have improved the ability to identify remains.[xiv] Nonetheless, every year the United States does not proactively try to identify the remains of the deceased, chances for their identification decrease.[xv]
Considering the aforementioned concerns, the question arises: why preserve the memorial? Perhaps the United States wishes to avoid the costs of raising the ship. Although, these ultimately preemptive costs seem minimal considering the extensive costs likely associated with the environmental cleanup following the release of 500,000 gallons of oil into the waters of the Pacific. Perhaps the United States maintains this macabre tribute because it desires to retain the profits generated from tourism. This rationale, fortunately, seems unlikely considering the National Park Service does not charge an admission fee to see the memorial.[xvii] It is likely, the United States simply wishes to preserve the ship as the final resting place of the heroes who lost their lives on board. In response, I propose an alternative. The United States should raise the U.S.S. Arizona—preemptively addressing the environmental concerns and proactively attempting to identify the remains of the deceased—and erect a new memorial at the same location using salvaged metal from the ship. This way, the United States could prevent an environmental catastrophe, attempt to return the remains to the families of the deceased, and still pay homage—through a memorial—to the American heroes who lost their lives at Pearl Harbor.


[ii] Id.

[iii] Id. (referring to the loss of 151 U.S. planes and damage to, or the sinking of, all eight U.S. battleships anchored at Pearl Harbor).


[vi] Id.


[x] Id.

[xi] Id.

[xii] Id.
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