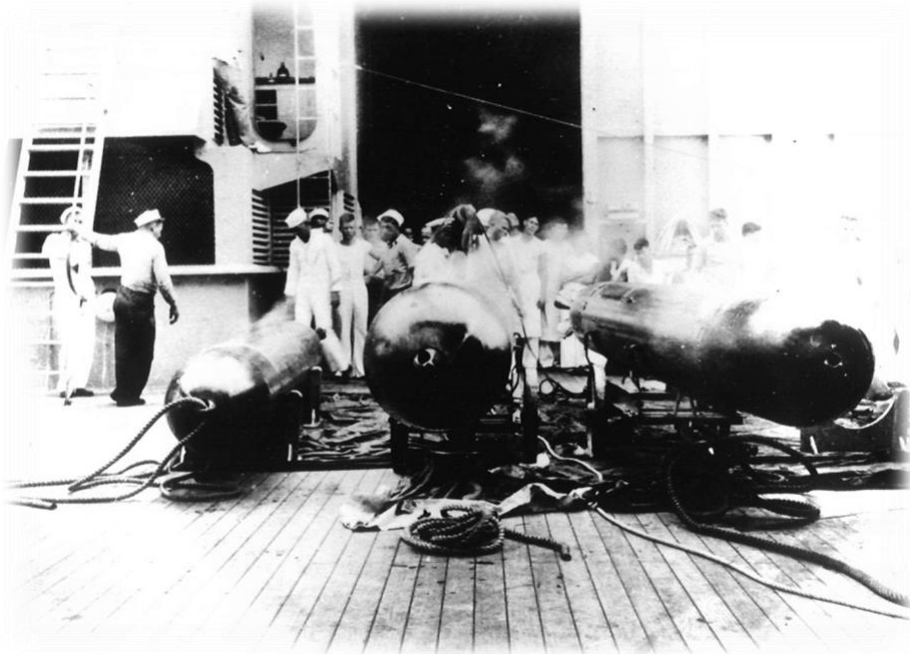


1941: Hectic final months of peace

In the summer of 1941, the ships of the Asiatic Fleet received their annual evaluations from ADM Hart. His report, which was submitted later in September, stated that *Houston's* Engineering Department was "very good" and the cruiser had "no known defects or deficiencies that will prevent operating at maximum speed for prolonged periods." The ship was still capable of about 31.5 knots, down a knot from her previous top speed due to "an increase of displacement incident to the additional guns, splinter protection, etc., installed during the last navy yard overhaul." Hart noted the unsatisfactory condition of exposed cables within the ship, which lacked adequate protection—associated with power, light, and fire control—and that these concerns had been made to BuShips in late 1939 and addressed once again in April 1941. The degaussing gear installed on the hull of the cruiser "just below the weather deck edge" was also not liked. It was too exposed, "...having been damaged twice since installation, once due to heavy seas and once while going alongside a tanker." Hart wanted these problems to be corrected during CA-30's next scheduled yard time at Cavite (set for Oct.-Nov.1941). The admiral was only too aware of the slowness and limitations of that yard's workforce and acknowledged that "...only part of this work can be completed."



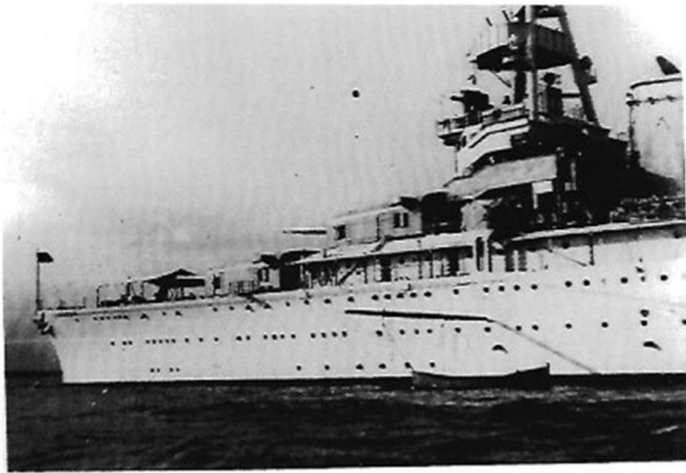
Navy concerns about usefulness and the potential danger of warhead explosions led to *Houston* having her 21" torpedoes (shown here) removed in the mid-Thirties.

On the last day of August 1941, the ship underwent a change-of-command ceremony while anchored at TuTu Bay. CAPT Jesse B. Oldendorf, that “*big, good-natured Swede*” as he was remembered by Al Kopp (a CA-30 Pharmacist Mate), turned the ship over to CAPT Albert H. Rooks. A number of other junior officers also joined the cruiser at that time, including LT Bob Fulton (USNA 1932), an Engineer in the ship’s complex propulsion systems. Fulton later recalled taking the long boat ride out across TuTu Bay to the ship along with CAPT Rooks and others. He remembered how silent they all were, as the seriousness of their situation was becoming more clear every day to those men assigned to the lonely and remote Asiatic Station.

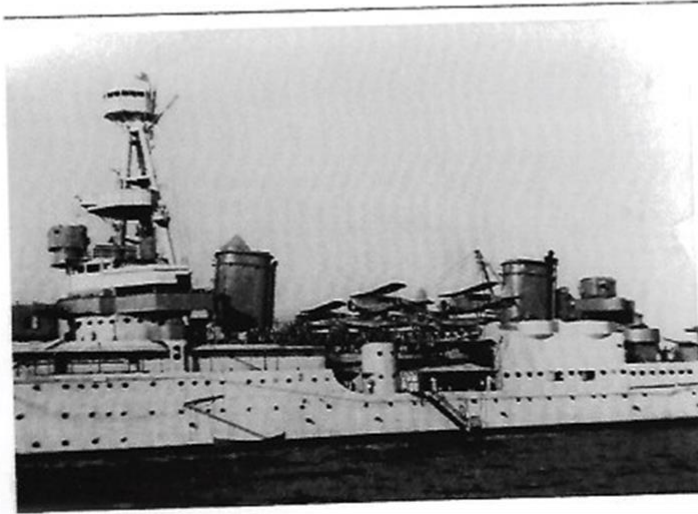


LT Bob Fulton (USNA 1932), Jr. Engineer Officer on CA-30.

Six months prior to the war, in late June 1941, ADM Hart was able to move into new Asiatic Fleet headquarters ashore in Manila and take his flag staff off the cruiser. Fleet HQs were situated in the Marsman Building near Pier 7 on the Manila waterfront. This came as a relief to all concerned, very much including the old admiral. Ironically, Hart’s personal quarters



were located in the Manila Hotel just below the swanky top-floor penthouse of the family of the Philippine Army's brilliant but narcissistic Field Marshal, Douglas MacArthur.



USS Houston (CA-30) undergoing repainting off Cavite, ca. 1941.

Throughout the rest of 1941, it was increasingly clear to Hart—along with other force commanders in the Pacific and senior naval leaders in Washington—that the

United States would eventually find herself in a shooting war with Japan. With US-Japanese diplomatic negotiations in Washington, DC, fumbling along to no useful end, in late November, Hart, too, received the stern 'War Warning' issued by the Chief of Naval Operations to all major commands. As a precaution, fearing Japan could soon target the Cavite Navy Yard as well as Manila, within hours, he ordered *Houston* to depart and head south, out of range of Japanese bombers.

So instructed, and with several important upgrades still incomplete—including new searchlights that were never installed—CA-30 departed her Cavite anchorage on the morning of December 1. After several hours on the degaussing range and making last-minute transfers of personnel, she left Manila Bay in the afternoon at a good clip. For the next twenty hours or so, *Houston* averaged 15-20 knots as she steamed south for her destination, some 300 miles distant.

Several other Asiatic Fleet units left for various southern regions in this same period. And most—but not all—of Hart's submarines went to their predesignated stations in anticipation of enemy troop movements against the Philippines.

The following afternoon (December 2) at 1257 hours, **CA-30** dropped the hook at Iloilo, a small port on the island of Panay in the Philippines. For the next several days she remained anchored in Iloilo Bay, with her SOC floatplanes flying daily air patrols. At 0345 hours in the pre-dawn of December 8, 1941, while still at Iloilo, CAPT Rooks received word that the United States was at war with Japan. Reaching the bridge, his response to *Houston's* officer of the deck (LT Jack Lamade) was simple and direct: "*Prepare the ship for war.*"