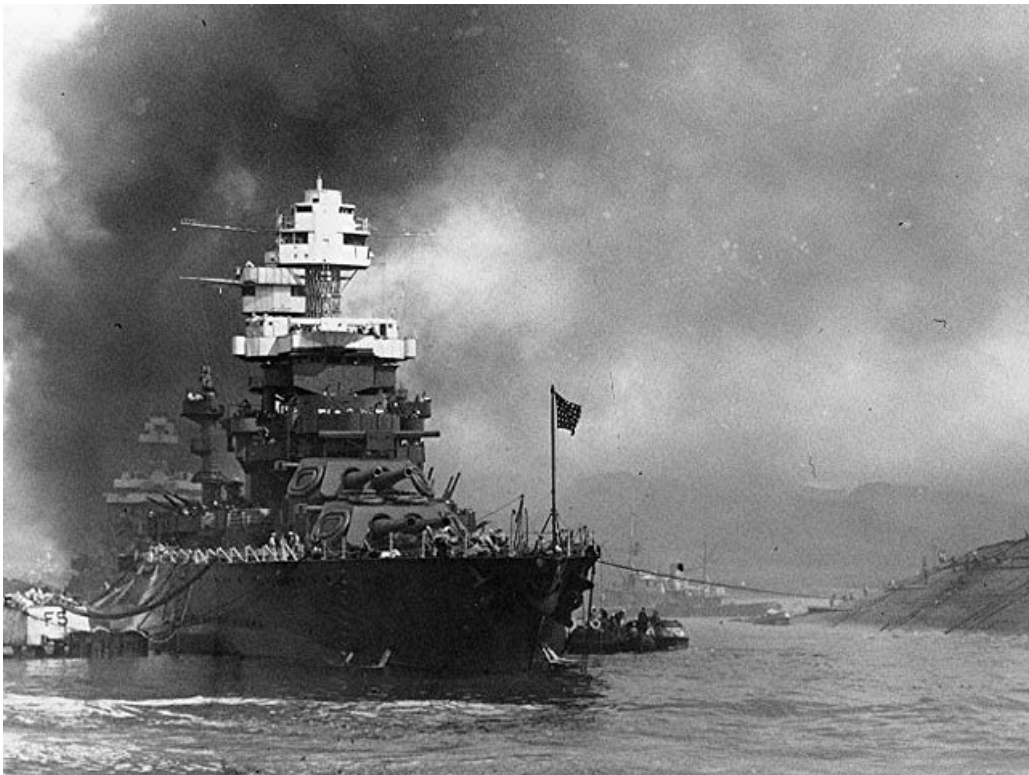




**MIKE ASHEY PRODUCTIONS**  
**PRESENTS**  
**SO WHAT COLORS WERE THE BATTLESHIPS**  
**AT**  
**PEARL HARBOR ON DECEMBER 7, 1941**  
**BY**  
**MIKE ASHEY**

There has been much debate over these many years amongst scale modelers as to what the actual colors were of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and in particular the battleships. There are many strong and loud opinions that the vertical color of the battleships were a very dark gray. Others say the color was a medium blue while still others claim the color was a very dark blue. When one looks at the many black and white photos of the ships after the attack two things stand out. All the battleships were painted the same vertical color and that color appears to be almost black. Since we all know and can agree that the ships were not painted black, the next logical conclusion would lead you to believe that the ships must have been a very dark gray.

However, there is one color transparency that provides evidence that the vertical color was a very dark blue.



These two photos of battleships show them to be a very dark color with very light, almost white colored tops. There is also a lot of smoke which can somewhat distort black and white photography.



These two photos were taken on an overcast day but there is no smoke. The pictures are very clear, sharp and detailed. Here again the battleships in these pictures are a very dark color. It is very easy to conclude that the ships were painted a very dark gray color based upon these photos.

The next two photos have been published many times, although almost never together, and yet most people familiar with the attack have seen them. I have presented them together. One is the original black and white photo and the other is the same photo that was color tinted sometime after the attack. The second color tinted photo is often mistaken as an actual color photo by many who have never seen the original black and white photo.

The fact that the tinted photo is not an actual color photo is not in dispute. We all accept the fact that it was tinted and therefore not an actual color photo.

However, with that said consider this and please keep in mind that I am making an assumption based upon logic. The people who tinted the black and white photo would have wanted the colors to be an accurate representation of what the actual scene looked like. The smoke, the fire, the men in the boat coming to the rescue of the sailor in the water and the colors of the ships.

Look at the men in the boat. Three are wearing dark navy colored pants, which was the work uniform of sailors then just like it is today. Two of them also have on red/orange life jackets, which were the colors then and still are the colors of life jackets today. The ship's towers do not appear white like they do in the 4 photos presented earlier but a very light gray and of course the ships are a very dark blue.

The question is not whether the colors are accurate, the question is how did the people who tinted the black and white photo know what colors to use on the vertical sides of the ships.

I believe the answer is simple. They were either at Pearl Harbor sometime after the attack and witnessed first hand what the colors were. They talked to people who were there or they came to Pearl Harbor long after the attack when most of the ships were already gone, but there was at least one wreck that remained and which still had its original dark blue color- the USS Arizona.





**On the next two pages I took color digital photos of some of my models and using Microsoft “Picture It” software version 10, I converted the color images to black and white images. I was curious to see how the software would interpret the various colors and convert them to shades of gray, which is what a black and white photo is.**

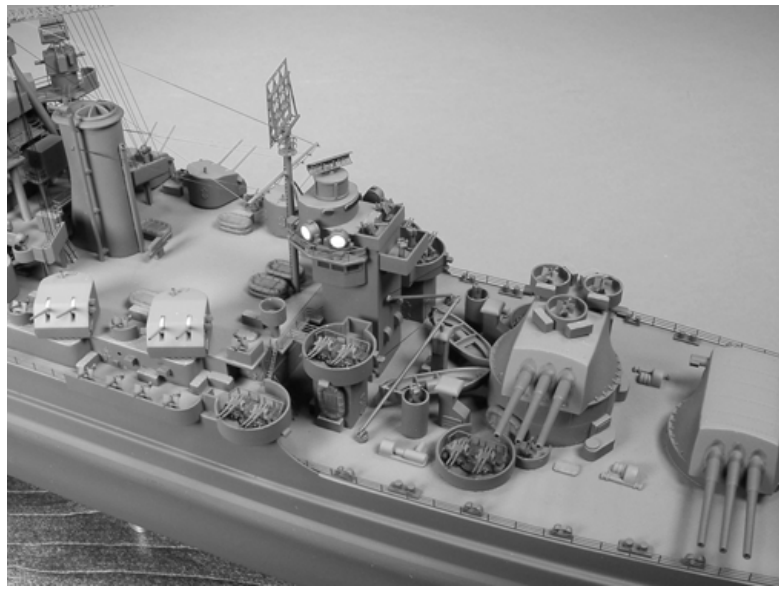
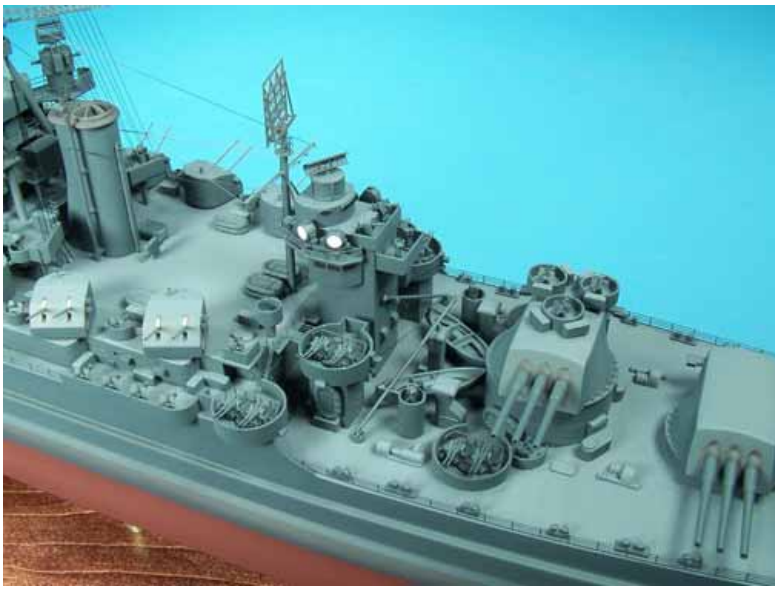
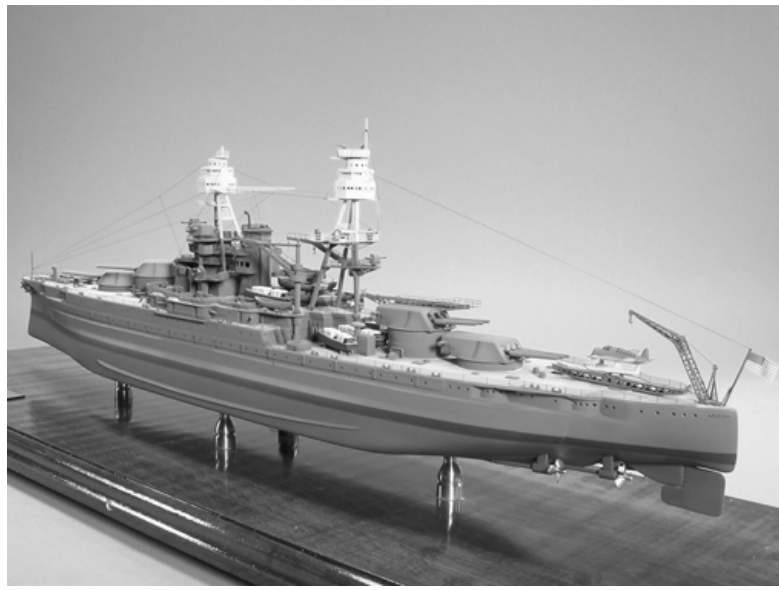
**The 1/350 scale Arizona is painted a medium gray color and the black and white photo is a similar gray. The next photo is the 1/350 scale battleship Pennsylvania painted in medium blue colors. The software converted the image to medium gray colors similar to the converted Arizona photo.**

**The last color photo is of the cruiser Quincy which is also a 1/350 scale model. The Quincy’s hull is a medium gray and a very dark blue. The software converted these colors to dark gray colors with the dark blue appearing almost black.**

**If the three black and white photos were shown to someone before seeing the color photos they would assume that the ships were painted various shades of gray. A logical conclusion based on the photos.**

**While this may not prove much, it does illustrate that digital photo conversion technology, like black and white photography can convert darker blue colors to darker gray colors.**





**In 1950 Admiral Radford, Commander of the Pacific Fleet ordered that a flagpole be attached to the wreck of the USS Arizona thus beginning a tradition of raising and lower the American flag over the wreck. In that same year a small temporary memorial was built above the ship.**

**Sometime between the time the flag was erected and the present memorial was built and which was completed in May of 1962, a TIME MAGAZINE photographer snapped some color transparencies of sailors either raising or lower the flag over the wreck of the USS Arizona.**

**From the vantage point of the photographer he or she also captured a considerable portion of the Arizona still above water and still wearing her paint colors. Not only is the dark blue color interesting but if you look along the edges of the remaining paint you can see that the paint is fading to its base color mixture which included gray. Years ago when I was working at China Lake Naval Air Station in the high desert of California there was an aircraft bone yard of B-29's. I have many photos of them and when crawling through them I noticed that where the interior did not get direct sunlight, the interior green color was almost as good as new. In other interior areas where the sun baked the paint, it faded to a light gray. This is consistent with what the color transparency shows of the Arizona.**

**The top photo was found amongst the thousands of photos that LIFE MAGAZINE has published on the web in concert with Google. The link is:**

**<http://images.google.com/hosted/life>**

**Once you are on the page type:**

***Pearl harbor source:life***

**in the search engine box.**

**Then go to page 5**

**The second photo is cropped to provide a closer look at the paint colors. The third photo is the same as the second one except it was converted to black and white. Note that the areas where there is blue paint is now a very dark gray, almost black color.**

**When I get my Trumpeter 1/200 scale USS Arizona and build it this winter, she will be painted dark blue for all vertical sides, a very light gray for the towers, dark gray for the steel decks and natural wood for the wood decks.**





