

Free research paper on japanese mistakes on their attack at pearl harbor

[War](#), [World War 2](#)



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\n[[Table of Contents](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Background](#) \n \t
2. [Country/Location](#) \n \t
3. [Mistakes of the Japanese](#) \n \t
4. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
5. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Background

The attack on Pearl Harbor on which happened on December 7th of 1941 was one of the major turning points in the 19th century history of Japan and America (Walter, 1957). Over 2000 Americans the day that the Japanese launched a surprise attack on the almost unsuspecting bay. Most of the people who died or got injured were U. S Navies or those who are employed by the U. S government for maintenance and other types of jobs (Prange, 1981). Almost all of the sea vessels, especially the battle ships that were stationed at Pearl Harbor during that incident either got damaged or were completely destroyed. Air Strips, including the aircrafts stationed inside, and buildings, especially the ones that are located near the battle ships were also damaged (Wallin, 1968). This paper will thoroughly cover more details about the Pearl Harbor incident.

Pearl Harbor is basically a lagoon-type harbor located at Oahu Hawaii (Anonymous, 2000). One of the main reasons why the harbor was built is

because it was intended to be used as a headquarters for the United States Navy particularly the U. S Pacific Fleet; and one of the reasons why a U. S Fleet has been decided to be stationed there is because America have always regarded the Hawaiian Islands to be a strategic location in case a war between the U. S and another country situated in the Pacific breaks out. The U. S did not really have any intention to participate in the ongoing and upcoming rumored wars in the Pacific but it sure has prepared contingency and backup plans for unexpected and insidious cases; and that's why Pearl Harbor was built although Pearl Harbor had already been operational even before it was used as a U. S Navy Headquarters. Troops and fleets that are mostly composed of ships were stationed there usually for maintenance, harboring and repair purposes. Hawaii is under the U. S jurisdiction and actually belongs to the U. S (Gailey, 1997). It is made up of several islands which could be easily spotted in a map and the most remarkable characteristic of this island is its distance from other locations or countries in Asia that the U. S also deems as strategic. These countries and their distance from Pearl Harbor are listed in a table below (Marchex, 2012).

Country/Location

Distance from Hawaii (mi.)

The Attack on Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor happened on the 7th of December 1941 (Gailey, 1997). Approximately 2, 403 died, 188 American planes were destroyed, and

8 either damaged or destroyed battleships were some of the major casualties in the attack (Gilbert, 2009).

The Japanese really intended the attack on Pearl Harbor to be a surprise attack. They never intended to give the naval fleet and air force stationed at Pearl Harbor a chance to prepare for an attack because part of their plan was to cripple the Pearl Harbor defenses in order to keep the stationed military units from executing a counter-attack (Goldstein, 2000). Japan thought that the U. S could be a threat to the success of their plans of invading the pacific countries to increase the territory covered by the Japanese Empire. They thought of ways how they could prevent the U. S from entering the war, in case one may break out after they started executing their invasive plans; and they have come up with attacking Pearl Harbor, as an answer (Morson, 2001).

There are several reasons why they chose Pearl Harbor as their initial target. Firstly, the distance between Japan and Pearl Harbor is only a matter of 3800 miles by sea (Marchex, 2012). The Japanese forces could easily launch a surprise attack at Pearl Harbor which could increase their chances of success. Pearl Harbor is like the U. S' back door because they cannot easily discover an upcoming attack because no one will really be able to give them an intelligence report but themselves because Hawaii is the only archipelago that exists in its location. If Japanese aircraft carriers have chosen to travel westwards on their way to Hawaii or any other U. S State for a surprise attack, they will surely be spotted easily by other countries and such countries will be likely to send Intel reports to the U. S about an upcoming

attack force from Japan. U. S at that time has several alliances (e. g. France, England, etc.) (Hakim, 1995) and these countries will surely aide their ally (U. S) any way they can; so the Japanese could not afford to choose that route and include it to their attack plan. Secondly, U. S aircraft carriers are stationed in Pearl Harbor and these aircraft carriers are the actual targets of the Japanese. They thought that without these aircraft carriers, the U. S forces will be at a great disadvantage and therefore will not dare to participate in any upcoming wars anymore (Hixson, 2003). From that statement, it could be inferred that the main reason why Japan launched an attack at Pearl Harbor was to demoralize the U. S and keep them from joining the war and hindering Japan's plan for expansion. If the Japanese forces will be able to succeed in demoralizing the U. S, everything will be almost perfect for their plans and their success in invading their target countries will be guaranteed.

6 Aircraft carriers (Akagi, Kaga, Hiryu, Soryu, Shokaku, & Zuikaku) were used to carry out the operation at Pearl Harbor (Hoyt, 2000). All in all, there were a total of 408 aircrafts intended to be used for the operation. 360 aircrafts were launched for several attack waves and the remaining 48 aircrafts were reserved for defensive purposes. Midget submarines were also used in the operation although these underwater vessels generally failed to fulfill their purpose (Peattie, 2001). In the end, the 360 aircrafts were able to destroy a total of 8 U. S battle ships while the submarines took care of smaller destroyers. A considerable number of midget submarines deployed were easily spotted and destroyed by the U. S forces thanks to the help of their

destroyers (Peattie, 2001). So it cannot really be called a success for the midget submarines operations.

The attack was intended to be carried approximately 30 minutes after the Japanese declaration of war has been sent for the U. S to be informed but the declaration of war never came 30 minutes or even the last minute before the carrying of the attack (Willmott, 1983). It came a day or two after the attack. The “ 14 part message” which contains the declaration of war was actually sent over to the Japanese embassy at Washington at the intended time but since it usually takes time to encode even a short message back then, the Japanese ambassador in charge of delivering the message from the Japanese failed to forward the “ 14 part message’ in time. It was believed that U. S code-crackers were already able to crack the message even before they were sent over to the Japanese Embassy in Washington but even so, it still took time for the code-cracker team to encode and forward the 5000-word message containing the declaration of war.

Mistakes of the Japanese

Even though it may look like a complete victory for the Japanese, their two-waved attack at Pearl Harbor could not actually be considered a success because of several reasons. Firstly, the goals of the attack were clearly not met. The goal of the attack was to exterminate the 3 aircraft carriers stationed at Pearl Harbor. Several hours before the carrying of the attack, the Japanese officer in charge received intelligence reports stating that their main targets, the 3 Aircraft carriers, were not currently at Pearl Harbor and that the 3 aircraft carriers are probably on their way to another port for

maintenance and repairs. Even with that information, the officer still carried on and proceeded with their original plan. The pilots was then instructed to attack the most highly-valued battleships instead—because these ships are the pride of the U. S Navy and they believe that destroying them could greatly demoralize the U. S forces and discourage them from joining an upcoming war. The pilots were also instructed to attack airstrips and all aircrafts within their sight to prevent a counterattack.

Secondly, because of the desire of the pilots to attack only the highest-valued U. S battleships, airstrips, and aircrafts, they failed to consider attacking vital infrastructures and buildings situated at Pearl Harbor. Of course, battleships are not the only asset of the U. S Navy. Because of such strategic error, they failed to destroy, or at least, inflict considerable damages to vital U. S buildings such as the shipyards responsible for repairing damaged ships and the fuel tanks which are located only a few Kilometers away from the battleships. With the U. S; ship-repairing capability unscathed, they could easily salvage and repair any nearby damaged ship. The Japanese failed to consider that the battleships are currently anchored at shallow waters and it will be easy for the U. S to extract the damage battleships and do repairs. The U. S forces should have been crippled for half a year if only even one of the Japanese pilots considered bombing the huge tank of fuel that contains the entire fuel supply of U. S ships and aircrafts for 6 months. In fact, the entire operation could still be regarded as a success even if they have failed to exterminate and destroy their main targets if only

they were able to incapacitate the U. S by clearing out their military fuel supply (Morson, 2001).

The smaller details of their plans and goals were not followed and met and it is clear that they have failed to fulfill their mission—to demoralize the U. S and keep them from intervening in Japan's plans for expansion in the Pacific. Their insidious actions plus their failure to notify the U. S authorities about their war declaration amidst the U. S' and other countries' efforts to negotiate unified the whole U. S and inspired them to enter the war instead. The resulting scenario was totally not what they expected and planned.

Conclusion

While most people regarded the attack at Pearl Harbor as a decisive victory for Japan, it was clear, based on the evidences gathered, that Japan failed to meet their ultimate goal which was to demoralize the U. S and prevent them from entering the battlefield. It even triggered a scenario that was the opposite of what they have planned for and anticipated. Some of the factors that lead to their failure were the Japanese's failure to destroy the 3 U. S aircraft carriers stationed at Pearl Harbor (their main targets) and the fuel tanks and warehouse buildings which contained vital war resources, and lastly, their failure to deliver the message containing their declaration of war in time. With the U. S entering the war and with the Japanese having encountered heavy loss of lives from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing after they attacked Pearl Harbor, it is clear that Japan could not push through their plans to expand the Japanese Empire anymore.

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