

THE PEARL HARBOR BOMBINGS



At nearly eight on the calm Sunday morning of 7th December 1941, the first of over three hundred Japanese bombers approached the US Pacific Naval Base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Within long, the surrounding area was dive-bombed, strafed and ships were destroyed as part of a surprise aircraft and submarine attack. The cause of this ambush culminated from rising tensions between the USA and Japan, and the event shocked American citizens. It would lead to them joining World War II the next day.

During the 1930s, Japan conducted military skirmishes and invasions of China as part of their Southern Operation. The Japs believed that to preserve the strength of the nation and their industry, it was necessary to capture and take control of China's import trade routes. However, an established friendship existed between China and America, who sent them important military equipment and

parts, as well as helping them with funds and contracts. Although Japan also took part in passive trade with the West, it was not on the same supportive level as China. This differences between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan caused aggression.

In 1937, a collision at Marco Polo Bridge converted this aggression to active war, with the Second Sino-Japanese War commencing on the 7th of July. To expand their territory and boost their economy, Japan took French Indochina in 1940. France had already been almost entirely captured by the Nazis, so it seemed as if the invasion of France's Asian territory was a hint at Japan's possible involvement in the war. America did not want to support Japan if they were going to use imported resources to attack France, with who they had a decent relationship. Attempting to stop them from continuing their ways, America imposed sanctions on Japan and cancelled shipping of war materials. Additionally, they begun to quit their oil trade to the Empire, as they knew that oil was one material the Japs depended on highly.



Build-up of American forces in the South Pacific began in the early years of World War II. Ships, resources and men were sent to posts across the Philippines. In April of 1940, the main base of the US Pacific Naval force was moved from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Observing from a short distance, Japan realised that America would have to be prevented from increasing their naval power in the Philippines otherwise the Empire's plans of invasion and territorial capture would be close to impossible. To capture the Dutch East Indies and ship oil from them, their transport route would have to pass straight past the Philippines and the eyes of the Americans. As peace negotiations came to a close, Japan prepared their task force for a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, with the intentions of destroying or disabling their main battleships and causing such a devastating loss of naval power that America would ultimately agree to a treaty with Japan.

Japan sent a final proposal to the Embassy in Washington demanding that the UK, Netherlands and US relieve the sanctions and stop their military support of China. At around the same time, the USA sent commands to Japan to remove all forces from China. The "Hull Code" didn't arrive in time and the aeroplanes had already left Japanese air bases. Also, America couldn't fully decipher the code they had been sent in time before the attack. Last minute peace was no longer an option.

Pearl Harbor was a natural target for Japanese diver bombers, subs and fighter planes. Lieutenant General Short, who was in a position of shared command at the Harbor, all but ignored the multiple warnings that war might break out. Therefore, anti-offensive measures were not taken, and the officers on the island didn't believe that they would be in the crosshairs of the Japs.



For ten months, full training had been underway for pilots, sailors and technicians and the surprise ambush had begun being planned in early 1941. As the day of the bombing was Sunday, the majority of servicemen were on break and the ships were not heavily manned.

The first wave arrived above Pearl Harbor and split up from their greater formation into smaller divisions to carry out their specific tasks. There were eight US battleships around site on the 7th of December. The first half an hour of the assault was the most intense. America couldn't launch any fighters to combat the surprise offensive, and eventually every battleship was either sunk or damaged by torpedos, gunners and bombs. Six Japanese pilots mistakenly attacked the Utah battleship instead of the carriers which they had intended to target, as they were out of dock at that day. Utah capsized and Raleigh almost suffered the same fate when a torpedo which went off track slammed into its side. Air attack divisions then began their advance from the other side of the

Harbor, only able to target directly Oklahoma and West Virginia. One bomber swerved off track and torpedoed the California.

Oklahoma capsized after being hit by twelve torpedoes that had been modified so that they were effective in the shallow, Hawaiian waters. Groups of five bomber planes soared over the side of Battleship Row and managed to make some strikes.

Arizona was struck two times – one closer to the front and another closer to the back. This caused a huge magazine explosion which shook Battleship Row and caused flaming pieces of wood and metal to be propelled into the air. Arizona held the highest casualty rate, with over 1,000 deaths.

At about 8.50, 167 aircraft of the second wave descended into Pearl Harbor. USS Nevada tried to escape the attack but was struck five times. Increasingly powerful AA fire from the defenders made it difficult for the operation to go to plan. Consequently, highly trained pilots veered from their initial plans and headed for auxiliaries and other ships that seemed like good targets at the time.



When Japanese pilots believed that the Destroyer Shaw was a main ship or large target, fifteen bombers made an assault. She went down in an enormous fireball.

Across more than an hour, over ships were targeted by torpedoes, bombs and suicide crashes by the Japs. At 9AM, they withdrew from the combat zone after inflicting several tragic sinks and fires on the US naval base.

Three and a half thousand casualties were suffered by America in the bombing of Pearl Habor, compared to the one hundred on the Japanese side. However, the ambush hardly succeeded as much as it could have done. Rather than attacking targets according to their flight plans, they went directly for the bigger battleships and jumped on opportunities – such as sinking Nevada to block the escape channel from Battleship Row. In this way they missed out on more potential, devastating

bombings where dock buildings and closely packed cruisers could have been torpedoed. There was additionally a chance to hit and take out oil storage facilities. Arizona and Oklahoma were the only ships that weren't repaired and sent back into service; the Japanese only temporarily disarmed the most part of the battleships.

Although Japan hampered the build-up of American forces in the Pacific, the US formally declared war on 8th December after a Congress vote. In 1945, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were attacked by nuclear bombs, putting Japan out of its war against America. 52% of American citizens had said that they believed war with Japan would break out, and although the intentions of the surprise Pearl Harbor attack was to force the USA into peace with Japan, it caused two sides of the world to eventually get involved in the Second World War.