

The attack on Pearl Harbor attack may have been a surprise to the sailors stationed at Pearl Harbor that Sunday morning, but it was anything but unpredictable. In fact, just that morning at 3:42, a Navy minesweeper came into contact with a Japanese midget submarine in the entrance to Pearl Harbor and alerted the destroyer *USS Ward*.

Meanwhile, the *Ward* met and sank a different submarine, making those shots the first ones fired between the US and Japan in the Pacific Theater. Then another submarine missed two torpedo shots on two other US Navy ships, before being sunk. Three other submarines were also grounded or destroyed that morning, yet the Commander of the United States Fleet and the Pacific Fleet, Husband Edward Kimmel, refused to believe the reports and failed to act in any way. In fact, 10 days prior he had been ordered to initiate a defensive deployment of the Fleet. He ignored these orders, too, although his defenders believe it wouldn't have made much of a difference in any case. Kimmel was later removed from command and demoted but exonerated by the US Senate in 1999.

Then just before the attack began, two US Army privates about to turn off their radar system that morning saw a collection of unreported planes approaching the island. Confused, they called the army's information center, who reassured them it was just an incoming fleet of American B-17's. Had the Army command showed more concern or been more diligent, the Pacific Fleet may have been able to somewhat escape, and the planes may have been moved out of the way, or fighters scrambled to meet the incoming enemies. But the morning of Pearl Harbor and before was full of missed opportunities.

The United States intelligence agencies in Washington, DC cracked the Japanese codes in messages send to its embassies and consulates in the US. The messages told the Japanese officials to prepare for war and burn all documents in their buildings. Diplomatic tensions were growing as the US expected Japan to take advantage of the war in Europe to continue its expansion at the expense of the Western powers. The US government strongly expected some attack of happening, they just didn't know when or where.

In fact, the Japanese carrier fleet, escorted by battleships and destroyers, embarked on a twelve-day mission in complete secrecy across the whole of the Pacific, to get to Pearl Harbor. At any time, it could have been caught, and the entire attack would have failed. But this never happened. Not so much as a merchant vessel came across the massive Japanese fleet. One can only wonder how different history would have played out had this happened.

One may wonder what led Japan's high command to believe that attacking the United States, without a declaration of war for that matter, was a good idea. Why would they have provoked a sleeping giant, an industrial powerhouse with many times the population and capacity to make war? Firstly, they did send a declaration of war, except

it reached the United States after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a serious error. This would later lead to a War Crimes conviction in the post-War Tokyo Trials. Secondly, not everybody in the Japanese military and civilian government believed it a good idea. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, had studied in America and knew the industrial capacity and extreme levels of patriotism possessed by the United States. Meanwhile, the more insular-looking military commanders in the Japanese government simply failed to understand their enemy. Yamamoto was forced to stand down and make plans for an attack on the United States. Thirdly, Japan believed the United States, the country who elected several presidents on a platform of isolationism, would be reluctant to fight in another major global war, and would give Japan what it wanted, to stay out of the Pacific.

The Japanese government thought a devastating preemptive attack that crippled the US Navy and airpower, the pride of the American people, would weaken their morale. Lastly, Japan had little choice in the matter. While they should in no way be excused for the attack on Pearl Harbor that took the lives of thousands of Americans, military and civilian, without a declaration of war, Japan was in an existential crisis. When faced with the choice of relinquishing all their gains in the Pacific and China after the US Oil Embargo or doubling down to conquer new sources of oil, they chose to invade the Dutch East Indies, the oil capital of the Pacific. Japan, a small island bursting at the seams with a population it could not feed, needed to secure resources at an unsustainable rate. While Japan did eventually get its oil from the Dutch East Indies, they could not have done so without getting past the Philippines, an American territory. And the only way, in their minds, to efficiently take America's territories in the Pacific was to launch an all-out, preemptive attack. The naval and air base at Pearl Harbor was the jewel of the Pacific for America, a fruit ripe for the picking. If they could neutralize the navy and air forces there on day 1, they stood a chance of keeping America out of their way. The opportunity was so great for Japan that they had their pilots practice with a smaller model and toy planes, requiring each one to memorize the layout of Pearl Harbor.

In the end, the great Japanese gamble backfired tremendously as Americans united around the flag, volunteering in droves to win the war. All ships but the *USS Arizona* were later raised, with six of them returning to combat in the War.