

PEARL HARBOR

The Japanese attack on the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii on December 7, 1941, was the precipitating event that brought the United States into World War II. In that attack eight battleships, three destroyers, three cruisers, and four smaller vessels were sunk or badly damaged, and nearly 200 planes were destroyed, most of them at nearby Hickam and Wheeler fields. Around 2,400 sailors, soldiers, and airmen were killed and nearly 1,200 wounded. The Japanese had launched the attack from a naval flotilla positioned 220 miles north of Oahu (the island on which Pearl Harbor is located). Japanese losses amounted to 29 downed planes and 74 damaged ones, along with the sinking of a few midget submarines and one regular submarine.

Although the attack was a complete surprise at the

time, tensions were high between the United States and Japan. Several rounds of diplomacy seemed only to emphasize the gulf separating the two parties, and the latest proposal from the United States was expected to be answered militarily by Japan. Nevertheless, the swiftness of the attack, and its location, caught the Americans off guard. Although later researchers would claim that President Roosevelt knew of the attack in advance yet hid it to draw the United States into war (to hush his isolationist critics), the consensus is that any information regarding an attack on the United States was inconclusive at best. Today, military historians suggest that commanders in charge of security in the Pacific region should have been better prepared and ready to respond with defensive measures.

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