Pearl Harbor 2 Essay, Research Paper

Perl Harbor

In 1941, one of the largest American military defeats occurred. An entire naval fleet was destroyed, hundreds were killed, all before 09.00 on a Sunday. The US did not have any knowledge of this attack, partially because of ignorance, partially because of the military strategies of their Japanese opponents. The Japanese attack on the US naval base of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was a classic case of “It will not happen to me!” Although the US suspected Japanese actions, they did not take a defensive stance as they believed an attack would never touch their soil. Through an examination of military history, tactics and eye witness descriptions, it will be proven that the US had no knowledge of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In the years before 1941, the war saw little American military action. After the collapse of France, American President Roosevelt promised his county that no American troops would be sent to Europe to aid in the battle against Hitler and his powerful army. These promises caused Roosevelt to be criticized by his closest advisors for his indecisiveness about declaring war .

The President’s defense to these accusations was he did not want to out step public opinion. As well, he believed American intervention would cause a ‘mortal blow’ to the Allies cause. In reality, the advisors, as well as Roosevelt, knew that Britain could not win the war without American armed intervention. Two oceans to the East, Japan was deep into a war or her own. Japanese forces were concentrated on the Chinese front to conquer and obtain. As a result of her unpopular declaration of war on China, Japan’s fuel supply from the US was eliminated. Consequently, the Japanese turned to Indonesia to continue the supply of fuel for her war efforts. Fuel talks broke down as the Dutch, who were in control of the Indonesian fuel supply and, under heavy influence from the US, would not supply Japan with fuel. Desperately needing fuel to continue the war, Japan first thought of attacking Indonesia, but feared US intervention.

After some thought, Japanese leaders decided that an attack directly on the US would be more appropriate to bring the US to the fuel supplies negotiating table . The first acknowledgment that Japan was a war threat came on November 27, 1941 when Washington ordered a ‘War Warning’. The US feared a Japanese attack, not on America, but on the Philippines. American military leaders took little or no precautions upon the issue of warning. Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and Lt. General Walter C. Short of Pearl Harbor had done nothing to make the fleet or its defenses ready for Japanese attack . The commanding officers believed the warning to be no more than a possible threat of sabotage from the Japanese living on the island of Oahu. As a result, the officers ordered that all aircraft in the base be lined up at wing tip to be easily guarded. Defenses were on limited alert, with no long distance reconnaissance and no improvements on the limited anti-aircraft defenses. On board ships, only half of the anti-aircraft positions were stood at with the ammunition locked away . “In every reference I’ve seen and every Pearl Harbor survivor I’ve ever talked to, each referred to the attack as a surprise,” said PH1 Goodwin of Pearl Harbor in an Electronic-mail letter dated December 15, 1997. Mr. Goodwin’s comment is embarrassing at best, subsequently the American defense stance has been referred to as a ’shameful blunder’ . The lack of preparation for an attack demonstrated by the officers at Pearl Harbor portrayed the general attitude of ignorance in the American government.

The United States of America is the strongest, most powerful country in the world. A country such as Japan, which does not even have the resources to survive a lengthy war, could not possibly attack them . The result of the attack would have been much less serious had the American officers exercised more vigilance. The ignorance was so great that, on the day of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, several major and peculiar instances were noted and ignored by officers on duty. At 03.50 an unidentified periscope was seen and ignored at the entrance of the harbor. Also, the destroyer “Ward” depth-charged and sank an unidentified submarine at 06.37. The contact report was taken up much later and with no degree of urgency. Finally, two radar sightings of a large mass of aircraft 64 kilometers north of the island were dismissed by the commanding officer at 07.02 as a ‘probable’ flight of B-17s from the US west coast . These events, left utterly unacknowledged, led up to one of the great military defeats in US history. At 06.00, the 2 500 foot anti-torpedo gate that guarded the entrance to Pearl Harbor was opened in a customary morning maneuver unknowingly welcoming the attack. Three-hundred and sixty Japanese planes broke through the clouds above Pearl Harbor at 07.55. The planes attacked in rows of two or three, dropping torpedoes at 100 knots from 70 feet.

The first wave of planes destroyed US hangers and the planes in the neat, anti-sabotage rows. Other attacks in the first wave were on ‘Battleship Row’, cruisers and other auxiliary ships. Most ships had numerous torpedo hits. To complete the destruction of the war ships, six submarines aided in the sinking and destroying of what was not already certain. When torpedoing planes left the vicinity, bombers carrying 1 600 pound bombs were sent to destroy any remaining ships. Overlapping the first wave of attack at 08.40 was a second one. They concentrated on the not yet fully destroyed airfields. By 09.45 any ship of the US Pacific! Naval Fleet that was not on the Ocean floor was drifting helplessly. “It [the Arizona] sank like an earthquake had struck it,” a survivor remarked, 1 200 of his crew mates died. US troops returned from church or brunch to defend as best they could. Fighting until they drowned or were crushed by exploding debris, sailors, fliers and anti-aircraft gunners fought heroically to save their doomed naval base. By reason of the attack occurring in what Americans thought was peace time, much of the ammunition was locked away, leaving the defending US troops with little defense. In the end, the US had eight battleships, three cruisers and a large number of smaller vessels sink or rendered out of use. The Japanese lost 30 planes and five submarines.

Although the destruction was not total, Japanese foremost naval strategist, Yamamoto, found the result better than he had anticipated . Military records state that the attack sank or destroyed 6 ships, all of which were raised and rebuilt , except for the Arizona, Oklahoma and Utah . US casualties included 2 500 as well as over 1 000 wounded. The Japanese lost less than 30 aircraft and about 55 men. Unharmed or salvageable from the attack were land installation, power stations, all submarines and stores of gasoline. The gasoline enabled shipyards to repair all the salvageable ships. Primary targets for the Japanese were the US carriers Saratoga, Lexington and Enterprise. They weighed 33 000, 33 000 and 19 000 tones respectively. The carriers were out of port at the time of the bombing, performing deep sea maneuvers, thereby eluding the attack. The USS Enterpise was later present at the battle of Midway Island on June 4-6, 1942 The bombing of Pearl Harbor can be seen as a turning point in the war. Essentially, the war had been of mainly European involvement, now it took a global turn. The bombing prompted a US declaration of war on the following day, as well as great American shock and outrage tempered by anger. The attack was dubbed ‘a day of infamy’ by President Roosevelt, as no American could forgive or forget the actions of the Japanese nation. The Japanese could not have devised a better way to rally the American citizens into full support for Roosevelt and his government’s plan of US involvement in the war.

A previous promise between British Prime Minister, Winstin Churchill and President Roosevelt was honored when Britain declared war upon Japan two hours after the US declaration. The events surrounding the bombing of Pearl Harbor prove the US handled the situation very poorly. Many opposing tactics were noted and ignored. Warnings were thought of as routine. Even survivors, who were fully aware of the Japanese tendencies of war on China, the government war warnings and their country’s unprepared state, still describe the attack as a surprise. The Japanese military strategies were intelligent and well executed; although, the Japanese attack would not have been nearly as effective had the Americans not have been so blatantly ignorant. The US had no knowledge of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and it was their fault.