

Although the Imperial Japanese Fleet was in reality smaller than the combined sea power of the United States, it was concentrated in the Pacific, whereas our fleet had to be divided between two oceans. Of 216 major combat surface craft of the United States Navy - battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers - 114 were on the Atlantic side of the continent. The 102 others were ranged over the Pacific from the Philippines to South America, about two-thirds of them being based at Pearl Harbor.

Added to our 102 ships, the 50 combat surface craft of the Netherlands and nations of the British Commonwealth brought the total to 152. Japan had at least 180 fighting ships.

To the initial advantage of numerical superiority, Japan added the priceless ingredients of tactical position and surprise attack.

Two powerful Japanese Task Forces were sent against Pearl Harbor, the major elements of one lurking just over the horizon from the other.

The United States, too, had two task forces at sea, as Tokyo was well aware. One task force was returning from Midway and the other from Wake, with the whole chain of the Hawaiian Islands between them and the invaders. These two task forces aggregated 2 carriers, (the ENTERPRISE and the LEXINGTON), heavy cruisers and 14 destroyers. Berthed in Pearl Harbor were 8 of our 9 battleships of the Pacific Fleet, 9 cruisers and one-third of the Fleet's destroyers. The COLORADO was in overhaul at Bremerton and the third Pacific carrier, the SARATOGA, was in a mainland harbor. The other elements of the Pacific Fleet were widely dispersed throughout the Pacific.

The United States fleet aircraft carriers total in December 1941 was 6. The LEXINGTON, ENTERPRISE, SARATOGA of the Pacific Fleet; the WAMP, YORKTOWN and RANGER of the Atlantic Fleet, plus the newly commissioned HOUSTON.

No carrier was sunk or damaged at Pearl Harbor and these ships were later to become the spearhead of our attack on much stronger enemy forces.

The attack on Pearl Harbor began at 0755, December 7, 1941.

By noon the United States Navy's base at Pearl Harbor lay hidden, cloaked, under a heavy blanket of the smoke of war.

While Japanese aircraft were pouring destruction on Pearl Harbor similar action was being taken against Hong Kong, the Philippines, Wake, Guam and Malaya, even though the authorities in the Philippines knew that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japs several hours before the Japs actually struck Clark, Nichols fields and other installations.

As Japan's juggernaut of conquest crushed forward in the Pacific, from every corner of the world, and particularly from the United States, came the cry "Where is the American Navy?" From Tokyo, too, the query sounded jeeringly. Tokyo knew - or thought she knew - where our fleet was. As one Jap-English broadcast put it, "The U.S. Navy was destroyed to pieces."

The cry rose despairingly from the Philippines and from the crumbling United Nations forces in the East Indies, hoping, without believing, that a miraculously reconstituted fleet would come charging over the Eastern horizon.

But Admiral King and Admiral Nimitz had to be bitterly hard realists. The greater part of our Pacific Fleet at this time consisted of twenty-one ships, comprising two carrier task forces: With Admiral Halsey in the ENTERPRISE were three cruisers and six destroyers; with Admiral Fletcher in the old YORKTOWN were two cruisers and four destroyers. When, on 30 December 1941, Admiral King became Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, he and Admiral Nimitz (who became ComCpac on 31 December) knew that the primary necessity was not to stop the Japanese in their tracks on their southwesterly surge, but to prevent them from spreading eastward through the Equatorial Archipelago, thus cutting off the sea roads between the United States and Australia.