



ASC HISTORY Newsletter

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Remember Pearl Harbor

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Because of that attack, the United States finally entered WWII as a belligerent, eventually destroying the Japanese military and assisting in the destruction of the German and Italian fascist states. Most history lessons about Pearl Harbor focus on the horrific losses suffered by the US Navy. However, the Army's experiences at Pearl Harbor offer lessons for today's Army as well.

One well known incident in the attack at Pearl Harbor, replayed in many movies, was that radar operators picked up the approach of Japanese scout aircraft about an hour before the main attack. Those 3 radar sets were manned by the Army. The soldiers on duty reported the incoming aircraft and the officer in charge conferred with his Navy counterparts. Unfortunately, both the Army and the Navy were expecting incoming friendly aircraft-- the Navy from scouts returning and the Army from B-17s scheduled to arrive from California-- and all early warning was lost. In addition to targeting the Navy's warships anchored in Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had two other major targets-- the Army Air Corps planes and Hickam and Wheeler Fields.

While most of the first wave of aircraft was attacking Battleship Row, other dive bombers and attack craft hit Hickam and Wheeler Fields. The at-

tacks continued in the second wave.

Hickam housed the Army bombers in Hawaii. The Japanese destroyed or damaged beyond combat use over half the aircraft at Hickam to include 8 of 12 B-17s, 7 of 12 A-20s and 22 of 33 B-18s. An additional 4 B-17s were destroyed or damaged while landing as they arrived from the US just as the attack started. These were in the flight that confused the radar operators.

At Wheeler Airfield, Army pursuit aircraft were attacked, which resulted in the destruction or serious damage of 62 of 87 P40B Kittyhawks, 10 of 12 P-40C Tomahawks, and 23 of 39 P-36 Mohawks. Of the 223 Army bombers and pursuit aircraft engaged at Pearl Harbor, only 77 were combat ready the next day and 14 of these were the completely obsolete P-26 Peashooter. Part of the reason aircraft losses were so high is that the Army had parked them wingtip to wingtip in response to sabotage threats. A total of 8 pursuit aircraft were able to launch during the attack and are credited with shooting down at least 10 Japanese aircraft. In addition to aircraft losses, the Army took heavy personnel losses as Japanese bombs hit the barracks areas around Hickam. 228 soldier-airmen were killed and another 468 were wounded.

In large part, the Army was unready because Army units had failed to anticipate an air attack. The War Department had sent out a warning in late No-

vember, but specifically warned against subversion and sabotage. The Army in Hawaii did not prepare for more than those possibilities. This is what led to the aircraft being packed so closely together as fewer guards were needed to observe all the aviation assets. In addition to not going further than preparing against sabotage, Army leadership failed to fully coordinate with the Navy leadership at Pearl Harbor. The Navy prepared for an attack from the Japanese Navy as well as subversion, but both services failed to envision an air attack.

It is easy to criticize the actions taken in Hawaii prior to 7 December 1941. Hindsight shows us many things that should have been done differently. What does not change in hindsight is the loss of 228 soldier-airmen on that day and the huge cost the Army and Nation paid to restore order in the world from then until September 1945. Remember Pearl Harbor!



This MONTH in military history...

- **1776:** Washington wins first major US victory at Trenton
- **1803:** The French surrender Orleans to the U.S.
- **1864:** Confederate General Gracie killed at Petersburg
- **1914:** The Christmas Truce
- **1917:** Psychiatrist reports on the phenomenon of shell shock
- **1941:** "A date which will live in infamy." 70th Anniversary
- **1941:** US declares war on Japan
- **1944:** Battle of the Bulge begins
- **1945:** Senate approves US participation in the United Nations
- **1945:** Aircraft squadron lost in the Bermuda Triangle
- **1964:** Operation Barrel Roll begins
- **1992:** Bush orders US troops to Somalia

Christmas Day, 1911

The meal started with scalloped oysters and celery and ended with coffee and cigars. In between were all the traditional dishes-- roast turkey with cranberry sauce, roast pork in brown gravy, and boiled ham; apple sauce, browned potatoes, sweet potatoes, French peas and sweet corn; cucumber pickles, olives, mixed pickles, preserved pears, bread with butter; pumpkin, jelly, apple, and raisin pies; apples, bananas, grapes, oranges, and mixed nuts. A meal fit for a king! Or, in reality, for some young soldiers assigned to Rock Island Arsenal.

On Christmas, 1911 Captain Harry Jordan, Commander of the Rock Island Arsenal Ordnance Detachment sat down to Christmas dinner in the Rock Island Arsenal Mess Hall with over 100 Ordnance and Quartermaster NCOs and Soldiers. They enjoyed a meal that was the best the Army could offer. One can imagine the chatter and laughter, the ting of silverware on plates, and the clouds of smoke as the cigars were enjoyed at the end of the meal. It was a festive occasion that would make the men dream of home, family, wives, and

girlfriends. They would compare the dishes to how their own mother or wife would have prepared them. They would have thought of past times and past assignments; of good times; and of times and new assignments to come. This spectacular meal was not a one-time event. The same men would have had a similar Thanksgiving Dinner just a month before. Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners in the Army have always been extravaganzas-- a way to comfort the troops who cannot get home to family, especially in the days of limited transportation or during wartime when they would work the day before and the day after the holiday. Meals, holiday and regular, were a time of bonding and a way of joining together the community.

The RIA museum has Thanksgiving and Christmas menus from as early as 1908 and as late as 1931, but the tradition started long before and lasts even today in the Army. In 1816 the US Army built Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. Some 300 soldiers were assigned here until 1936 when the fort was turned over to a civilian caretaker. They were fed every day in a unit mess hall, or dining facility

to use modern terms. Even then the Army strove to provide a special meal at Christmas. Again in 1862 Soldiers were assigned here and they stayed until sometime after the Korean War when the detachment grew so small that the barracks were closed. During all of that time Army cooks used Army recipes to provide Army meals. Much of this fare was bland and rather industrial in preparation. However, there were always special cooks who tried to do more and would buy additional ingredients, spices, and side dishes to break the monotony. These cooks were almost always seen in a brighter light and gained greater stature with the unit because they took the extra steps to make a meal a feast.

While the Army has changed much since the last mess hall closed at Rock Island, the centralizing and bonding nature of food and shared meals remains. Our work units have pot lucks and special holiday meals together to celebrate. Our Soldiers remain, often, far from home. Cooks who can turn a dish into a feast still have stature and are asked for their recipes.

