

This book has many pages describing how our government, by cutting off oil, caused Japan to attack Pearl Harbor.

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far-flung military onslaught. In the same hours as the attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Japanese were bombing and blockading Hong Kong, bombing Singapore, bombing the Philippines, bombarding the islands of Wake and Guam, taking over Thailand, invading Malaya on the way to Singapore—and preparing to invade the East Indies. The operation against Pearl Harbor was meant to protect the flank—to safeguard the Japanese invasion of the Indies and the rest of Southeast Asia by incapacitating the American fleet and, thereafter, to protect the sea lanes, particularly the tanker routes from Sumatra and Borneo to the home islands. The primary target of this huge campaign remained the oil fields of the East Indies.

Thus, Operation Hawaii was essential to Japan's larger vision. And a critical element in its success—luck—had been with the Japanese attackers right up to the last moment. Indeed, the Japanese far exceeded even their own ambitions. The extent of the surprise and the incapacity of American defenses at Pearl Harbor were both much greater than the Japanese had anticipated. In their attack on Pearl Harbor, two waves of Japanese aircraft succeeded in sinking, capsizing, or severely damaging eight battleships, three light cruisers, three destroyers, and four auxiliary craft. Hundreds of American planes were destroyed or damaged. And 2,335 American servicemen and 68 civilians were killed. All this added up to, perhaps, the most devastating shock in American history. The American aircraft carriers survived only because they happened to be out on missions at sea. The Japanese lost a total of only twenty-nine planes. Admiral Yamamoto's gamble had paid off, handsomely.

Yamamoto himself might well have taken one more chance, but he was thousands of miles away, monitoring events from his flagship, off Japan. The commander of the Hawaiian task force, Chuichi Nagumo, was a far more cautious man; indeed, he had actually opposed the entire operation. Now, despite the entreaties of his emboldened officers and much to their chagrin, he did not want to send planes back to Hawaii, for a third wave, to attack the repair facilities and the oil tanks at Pearl. His luck had been so enormous that he did not want to take more risks. And that, along with the sparing of its aircraft carriers, was America's only piece of good fortune on that day of devastation.

In the course of planning the operation, Admiral Yamamoto had observed that the great mistake made in Japan's surprise attack against the Russians at Port Arthur in 1904 was in not being "thoroughgoing" enough. The same mistake was made once again at Pearl Harbor. Oil had been central to Japan's decision to go to war. Yet the Japanese forgot about oil—at least in one crucial dimension—when it came to planning Operation Hawaii. Yamamoto and his colleagues, who had endlessly reviewed America's preponderant position in oil, all failed to grasp the significance of the supplies on the island of Oahu. An assault on those supplies was not included in their plans.

It was a strategic error with momentous reverberations. Every barrel of oil in Hawaii had been transported from the mainland. If the Japanese planes had knocked out the Pacific Fleet's fuel reserves and the tanks in which they were stored at Pearl Harbor, they would have immobilized every ship of the American Pacific Fleet, and not just those they actually destroyed. New petroleum supplies