

# San Francisco Chronicle Monday, 8 December 1941

The Second World War became truly global when Japanese war planes attacked the US naval base in Hawaii, at Pearl Harbour, the most important American base in the Pacific, on Sunday December 7, 1941. Many isolationist forces in the US had resisted entering what at that time was mostly a European war but now, more than two years after the conflict had begun in Europe, the enemy had struck at home.

Some chronicles still call the attack “a surprise”. It definitely was without warning or a formal declaration of war, but it hardly was a surprise nor was it unexpected. For months, Washington and other world capitals had been expecting an important Japanese attack somewhere in the Pacific. The question was where. The US knew that Hawaii was a target. It knew that an attack could be imminent.

Two days beforehand, highly suspicious secret Japanese communications between Tokyo and its consulate in

Hawaii had been intercepted. But when, on that fateful weekend, a military officer received a copy of them in Washington and read them, he complained about minor errors in translation and left its full assessment for the following Monday. By then it was too late.

Early on Sunday morning, 366 warplanes attacked the US naval base, one of the largest in the world. Four battleships were blown up, four more were damaged and a further eleven were sunk or crippled. 200 fighters and bombers were also destroyed. The death toll was so high, 2403, than for some time the figure was kept a secret. Most of the casualties were from the battleship Arizona. Its remains now still lie half sunken in Pearl Harbour, converted into a tragic memorial to that terrible day which was reflected with huge headlines in all the American newspapers like this one from San Francisco.

Not long afterwards, the US Congress declared war on Japan. A war that almost led to the total destruction of the Empire of the Rising Sun.

