

Tomorrow, a great many posts will be shared about the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor Attack. I think however, that some thought should be given to Dec 6, 1941. The Imperial Japanese fleet was beating a course toward a wholly unprepared U.S. Pacific fleet. Our Navy was bound by orthodox Mahanian doctrine, that a great fleet of battleships will draw the enemy fleet into a decisive battle that would determine the course of the war. Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote his classic Naval Treatise before the invention of the airplane and strict adherence to it resulted in the U.S. Navy being unprepared for what was about to be thrown at us. Japan also embraced Mahanian doctrine and built a great fleet late in the 19th century - a fleet that defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904. Some younger IJN officers however, began to realize that Mahanian doctrine would fail in the dawning Air Age.

Adm. Isoruko Yamamoto, architect of the Pearl Harbor strategy, knew that the airplane would be decisive in a future naval war and he made sure his pilots were the cream of the aviation world. Japanese industry produced the finest combat aircraft in existence in 1941. Yamamoto was confident that the Pacific Fleet would be expunged in his carefully-planned air attack. Having traveled extensively in America, he also knew, and forcefully told his superiors, that America would lift itself from the mud of the Pearl Harbor and would defeat Japan. Why then, were Japanese pilots warming up their engines for an attack that would ultimately result in their own destruction?

The Russo Japanese war ended with the Treaty of Portsmouth which granted Japan some of the territories won in the war, a reasonable diplomatic compromise by Western standards but a deep insult for the Japanese. Japanese politicians began to reject the Western influence they blamed for losing their war conquests and xenophobia and racial superiority became the overwhelming forces in Japanese politics. In a long and convoluted succession of events, Japan militarized and became convinced that it's inevitable destiny was to become a global empire. Yamamoto could be trusted to defeat the American fleet but his understanding of the American psyche was overruled. Japanese hubris convinced them that America had no will to fight and on Dec. 8, 1941, would accede to all of Japan's demands.

In 19th Century America, imperialism was burgeoning. We forced open trade with Japan and China. The Spanish-American war gave us control over Philippines - Japan's back yard. With new global responsibilities, we built global Navy. The "Great White Fleet" (not a racist term, the ships were painted white) projected American power and influence on world cruises. We were invincible! Back home, immigration was beginning to lose it's luster. "Yellow hordes" of "racially inferior Asians" were immigrating into the western states, and vicious racism was spewed by our newspapers. Americans of Japanese descent were barred from public schools and attended segregated schools in San Francisco. In 1906, after the devastating San Francisco Earthquake, Japanese immigrant children were forced to travel to a single Japanese school, traversing neighborhoods controlled by racist gangs and were savagely beaten. The American climate of racism and xenophobia was widely reported in the Japanese press which only solidified their hatred. Interestingly, Japan contributed a large sum of money for earthquake relief, the only foreign country to assist us.

In the U.S also, hubris reigned. The idea of Japan successfully attacking the U.S. fleet was laughable.

They still used swords because their Asian-eyes didn't allow them to shoot straight. Their airplanes couldn't compare to ours. Pearl Harbor was too shallow for air-launched torpedoes and aerial bombs couldn't penetrate battleship armor. And so our fleet sat proudly at their berths, largely devoid of anti-aircraft guns which were thought to be unnecessary on December 6, 1941, waiting to destroy Japan in a Mahanian battle that would never happen.

I do not hold the view that Japan was correct in attacking America and I do believe they brought the mushroom cloud upon themselves. I do hold however, that racism, xenophobia and hubris led America and Japan to the abyss of December 6, 1941. Tomorrow the bombs would fall on Hawaii and the world would change forever - or would it? On Dec 7, 2016, 75 years later, Racism, Xenophobia and Hubris are still political malignancies that exist in no small way here and abroad and if unchecked, will be the end of humankind. This is what we should talk about on Dec 7, 2016.