

Pearl Harbor

1921–7 December 1941

Pearl Harbor took 16 years to plan and it was either a masterstroke or a complete cock-up. Either way, all sides knew about it at the time. One method of drawing an ally into war is to give the mutual enemy (Japan) enough information to attack the ally (America) without retribution, thus giving the country attacked (America) a clear mandate to join the war. Pearl Harbor was just such a mission and it occurred with full British and American Chief of Staff knowledge.

Britain started planning its next war in 1919 in order to utilise its existing military and to prevent them from getting restless and turning in on themselves and the nation. Britain planned a war with America and it was due to start in 1927. The conflict was based around ‘naval tonnage’, but was eventually settled with diplomacy and the *Washington Treaty*.

However, a plan to attack Pearl Harbor was commissioned by the British Admiralty and awarded to the consultant Hector C. Bywater, who came up with the *Bywater Plan* which involved dropping torpedoes from planes into Pearl Harbor. It was believed at the time that the harbour was too shallow at 12 metres, but Bywater correctly forecast that adapted torpedoes could be dropped safely and efficiently into the shallow harbour.

Hector C. Bywater (21 October 1884–17 August 1940) was an English and American journalist, author and spy who could hold a packed pub room in rapt attention when he told anecdotes. He wrote *Sea Power in the Pacific* (1921) and *The Great Pacific War* (1925) and knew more about the navies of the world than a roomful of admirals. He published numerous articles on Pacific strategy as the European naval correspondent for the *New York Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *New York Times*.

When Bywater wrote *Sea Power in the Pacific: A Study of the American-Japanese Naval Problem* (1921), it was an immediate sell-out among Japanese and American Navy General Staff who studied it line by line. The US Naval Institute’s *Proceedings* magazine called it “the most important recent estimate of the situation . . . in the Pacific”.