NAVAL RESILIENCE
THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR, 7 December 1941

RESILIENCE LESSONS FROM THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

Japanese naval aviation conducted a devastating attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Sunday 7 December 1941, causing significant destruction to the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The measures taken by the Americans following the attack, however, converted this defeat into a remarkable case of resilience. This transformation can be analyzed through the resilience model developed by Maritime Strategy Research.

NH 50930 Pearl Harbor Attack. Naval History and Heritage Command.

BACKGROUND

The attack on Pearl Harbor came as a surprise for the American Navy and was a resounding tactical success for the Japanese. At the time of the strike, the United States and Japan were not at war and the naval base at Pearl Harbor was not prepared to counter this air attack.

As a consequence of this audacious attack the Americans suffered significant losses, including 2,403 death, 18 ships sunk or damaged, and 159 planes destroyed.

THE RESILIENCE MODEL

RISKS

1	Risk assessments
2	Risk appetite

PREVENTION

3	Culture	Leadership
4	Training	Simulations
5	Protocols	Guard rails
6	Inspections	Indicators

DISRUPTION

7	Early warning signals
8	Emergency reaction
9	Crisis management

RECOVERY

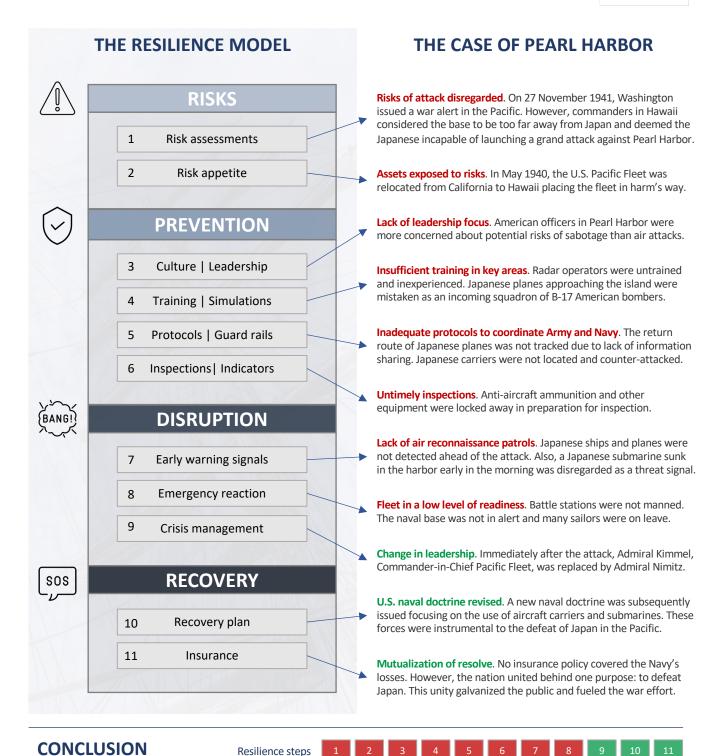| 10	Recovery plan
11	Insurance

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

André Fournier is a naval historian and risk management practitioner with more than 25 years of experience. He is also a risk researcher and believes that naval history provides lessons of risk management that are replicable to modern-day business situations.

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THE CASE OF PEARL HARBOR

Risks of attack disregarded. On 27 November 1941, Washington issued a war alert in the Pacific. However, commanders in Hawaii considered the base to be too far away from Japan and deemed the Japanese incapable of launching a grand attack against Pearl Harbor.

Assets exposed to risks. In May 1940, the U.S. Pacific Fleet was relocated from California to Hawaii placing the fleet in harm's way.

Lack of leadership focus. American officers in Pearl Harbor were more concerned about potential risks of sabotage than air attacks.

Insufficient training in key areas. Radar operators were untrained and inexperienced. Japanese planes approaching the island were mistaken as an incoming squadron of B-17 American bombers.

Inadequate protocols to coordinate Army and Navy. The return route of Japanese planes was not tracked due to lack of information sharing. Japanese carriers were not located and counter-attacked.

Untimely inspections. Anti-aircraft ammunition and other equipment were locked away in preparation for inspection.

Lack of air reconnaissance patrols. Japanese ships and planes were not detected ahead of the attack. Also, a Japanese submarine sunk in the harbor early in the morning was disregarded as a threat signal.

Fleet in a low level of readiness. Battle stations were not manned. The naval base was not in alert and many sailors were on leave.

Change in leadership. Immediately after the attack, Admiral Kimmel, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet, was replaced by Admiral Nimitz.

U.S. naval doctrine revised. A new naval doctrine was subsequently issued focusing on the use of aircraft carriers and submarines. These forces were instrumental to the defeat of Japan in the Pacific.

Mutualization of resolve. No insurance policy covered the Navy's losses. However, the nation united behind one purpose: to defeat Japan. This unity galvanized the public and fueled the war effort.

CONCLUSION

Resilience steps | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |

The American losses suffered at Pearl Harbor are largely explained by **failures encountered in the initial 8 steps of the resilience model**. However, in the aftermath of the attack, the Americans took decisive actions that **addressed the final 3 steps of the model** to reverse the situation and ultimately won the war against Japan. Pearl Harbor well demonstrates that **long-term resilience is achievable** through taking appropriate necessary resilience measures, despite initial aggregation of missteps and failures.