

## WHY WAS THE USA SO UNPREPARED FOR THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR IN 1941?

Extract from an interview with journalist and author Robert B Stinnett, 2002

By courtesy of The [Independent Institute](#)

The screenshot shows the website for The Independent Institute, with a navigation menu including Home, About Us, Blog, Issues, Newsroom, Events, Publications, Centers, For Students, Store, and Membership. The main content area displays an article titled "Do Freedom of Information Act Files Prove FDR Had Foreknowledge of Pearl Harbor?" dated March 11, 2002, by Robert B. Stinnett and Douglas Cirigliano. The article is an interview with Robert B. Stinnett by Douglas Cirigliano. The text of the article begins: "On November 25, 1941 Japan's Admiral Yamamoto sent a radio message to the group of Japanese warships that would attack Pearl Harbor on December 7. Newly released naval records prove that from November 17 to 25 the United States Navy intercepted eighty-three messages that Yamamoto sent to his carriers. Part of the November 25 message read: '...the task force, keeping its movements strictly secret and maintaining close guard against submarines and aircraft, shall advance into Hawaiian waters, and upon the very opening of hostilities shall attack the main force of the United States fleet in Hawaii and deal it a mortal blow...'"

### What is this source?

This extract comes from an interview given by the US author Robert B Stinnett in 2002.

Stinnett was being interviewed about a book he wrote called Day of Deceit.

### What's the background to this source?

When war broke out in Europe US President Roosevelt feared that a Nazi victory would threaten the USA. He tried to get the US people to accept the idea of joining the war but they were heavily opposed. In his book, Stinnett's main argument was the US President Franklin D Roosevelt knew the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbor. However, he did nothing because he wanted the

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USA to join the war and that the attack would make the American people support him.

Stinnett's book was based on documents he got from the US Navy intelligence service from the time. These showed that the US Navy was intercepting all Japanese transmissions and had cracked their codes. He claimed to have proof that signals about the attack on Pearl Harbor had been intercepted and sent to Washington.

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**It's worth knowing that...**

Stinnett's view is very controversial and is certainly not accepted by all historians. However, his work was based on documents from the US Navy intelligence service that he obtained under the US Freedom of Information Laws. At the time his book was written not all historians had seen these documents.

A great place to study this controversy is on the Internet. However, be careful to read critically what you see. Many of the comments on this subject are highly emotional and some are very biased indeed.

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**How will you use this source?**

1. Why has the author received a lot of criticism?
2. Is this criticism relevant?
3. Does the author himself seem to be a critic of Roosevelt?
4. Does this source support or contradict any other sources in this investigation?
5. Could any parts of this source be used as evidence in your report on the key question?

Use this table to help plan your report.