

Pearl Harbor: Trauma anaesthesia circa 1941

President Franklin D Roosevelt proclaimed that December 7th 1941 is “a date which will live in infamy”. On this day the Japanese Navy conducted a surprise attack on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. 2,402 personnel were killed and 1,282 were wounded. While this event is considered pivotal in prompting the formal entry of the United States into World War II, it is also recorded as the time when the new induction agent thiopentone entered the anaesthesia ‘scene’. Urban myth contends that thopentone killed more servicemen than the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, but this is clearly not the case.

This presentation of a ‘virtual trauma anaesthetic’ will review the drugs, equipment, techniques, and concepts dominated this era. The contrast with contemporary notions of trauma care will be obvious.