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SETI Sneak Attack: Lessons Learned from the Pearl Harbor Hoax

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ABSTRACT

On December 7th, 2002 (a date that will live in infamy), the nonprofit SETI League received a terse email from a person not known to us, reporting the apparent detection at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii of a microwave signal of intelligent extraterrestrial origin. During the following twenty hours our members analyzed the claim, corresponded with the claimant, attempted (unsuccessfully) to independently verify the signal, and ultimately unmasked the claim as completely fraudulent. This episode gave the SETI community its first opportunity for real-time application of the Rio Scale, an analytical tool for quantifying the societal impact of a claimed SETI detection. The Pearl Harbor Hit started out at a one on the zero-to-ten ordinal Rio Scale, rose to a high of four, and then quickly fell to its ultimate value of zero, validating the utility of the Rio Scale.

The Rio Scale is more fully explained on the IAA SETI Permanent Study Group website, at <<http://iaaseti.org>>.