

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY



The attack on Pearl Harbor changed the course of history.

GENERAL

There are certain events that have shaped our country's history and left unforgettable impressions in people's minds. The first moon landing and the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks are two of those events. **Can you think of others?** Another happened on Dec. 7, 1941. This event sent the U.S. into World War Two. **Where did this event take place?** (*Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.*) **Does anyone know what happened on this date?** (*The Japanese attacked a U.S. naval base.*)

Pearl Harbor was located on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. **Why would Japan choose Pearl Harbor as a target for its attack?** (*Because it was much closer to Asia than the mainland United States was.*) Relations between the U.S. and Japan had been getting worse for several years. Japan was at war with China, and the U.S. thought that Japan was trying to take over the region. The United States stopped sending Japan oil, metal, and other supplies. On Dec. 6, 1941, Japan sent a message to the U.S. that said it was breaking off peace talks. The U.S. government thought this meant that an attack was likely and sent a warning to the military in Hawaii. But the message traveled slowly, and it didn't reach Army headquarters until four hours after the Pearl Harbor attack.

At 7:02 a.m. on Dec. 7, Hawaii time, two soldiers saw a fleet of about 50 planes on the radar. But an officer, thinking that they were U.S. planes coming from California, ignored the sighting. At 7:53 the first wave of Japanese planes began bombing Pearl Harbor. In all, the Japanese sent about 350 planes in to attack. Five U.S. battleships were destroyed, and three others were damaged. The Japanese also destroyed 188 airplanes. About 2,400 U.S. soldiers and civilians were killed in the attack. Almost half of the deaths were soldiers aboard the battleship *Arizona*.

Japan conducted the attack because they

thought the U.S. might try to stop it from

expanding its territory in Asia. But although they succeeded in slowing the U.S. down, the attack also had other effects. The day after Pearl Harbor was bombed, the president of the United States called December 7, 1941, "a date which will live in infamy." **Who was the U.S. president at that time?** (*Franklin D. Roosevelt.*) Congress voted almost unanimously to declare war on Japan. Japan had signed an agreement with Germany and Italy, and on December 11, Germany declared war on the U.S. **Who was the leader of Germany in 1941?** (*Adolf Hitler.*) Before December 7th, 1941, many people in the U.S. had felt that America should not get involved in the wars in Europe and Asia. But Pearl Harbor changed that overnight, and support for the war was overwhelming. **Do you think the United States would have become involved in World War Two if it had not been for Pearl Harbor? Why or why not?**

The attack on Pearl Harbor also fed mistrust and prejudice, with tragic results. In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which forced 120,000 Japanese Americans out of their homes and away from their businesses. They were placed in bleak "internment camps" for up to four years, although there was never any evidence that a Japanese American citizen was a spy against the U.S. government.

Many people have compared the attack on Pearl Harbor to another surprise attack on American soil: the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. **How are these attacks similar? How are they different? Do you think this is a good comparison? Why or why not?** END OF STORY