

The Attack on Pearl Harbor



View of the attack on Pearl Harbor from a Japanese aircraft. The row of ships in the bottom center was called "Battleship Row." In this picture, some of the ships have already been hit by torpedoes and are beginning to sink. The lines in the water show the torpedo's path. The smoke in the background is from another ship that has been hit.

A Japanese bomber as it arrives at Pearl Harbor



The USS West Virginia (left) as it sinks after being bombed. The USS Tennessee burns behind it.

In 1941, many countries of the world were at war. In Europe, Germany and Italy were fighting together to expand their territories. Germany had already taken over many countries, including the Netherlands, Poland, Denmark and France. Germany had also been bombing Great Britain. The war in Europe had spilled into Africa, with German and Italian troops fighting British troops in North Africa.

Japan joined an alliance with Germany and Italy. This alliance was called the Axis. Japan wanted to take control of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

The U.S. had not joined the fighting, although it had loaned ships and supplies to Great Britain. Many Americans wanted to join the war to stop the Axis from taking over Europe and Asia. Other Americans were against joining in a far away war that did not concern the U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to discourage Japan from invading countries in Asia. In early 1941, he moved the U.S. warships in the Pacific from San Diego, California to Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Japan needed oil. The Dutch East Indies, which is now Indonesia, had a large supply of oil. The Japanese government decided to invade the Dutch East Indies in order to have an oil supply. They also developed a plan to keep the U.S. from interfering with the invasion.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, over 350 Japanese war planes from six aircraft carriers began bombing the U.S. ships at Pearl Harbor. The surprise attack began at 7:48 a.m. The attack was over in 90 minutes. Eight U.S. battleships had been damaged. Four of the battleships had been sunk. Eleven other ships, including cruisers and destroyers had been sunk or damaged, and 300 U.S. planes had been destroyed or damaged. Over 2,400 U.S. military personnel had been killed, mostly on the *USS Arizona*, and 1,282 had been injured.

Congress declared war on Japan on December 8 and on Germany and Italy on December 11. The U.S. had entered World War II. In 1945, the U.S., Great Britain and their allies won the war against Japan, Germany and Italy.

What Do You Think?

Americans were very angry when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. How do you think the attack changed the minds of those who had not wanted to go to war?

