

World War II (1939-1945)

The U.S. Entry into the Second World War

Wars

*In the old wars drum of hoofs and the beat of shod feet.
In the new wars hum of motors and the tread of rubber tires.
In the wars to come silent wheels and whirr of rods not yet dreamed out in the heads of men.*

In the old wars clutches of short swords and jabs into faces with spears.

*In the new wars long range guns and smashed walls,
guns running a spit of metal and men falling in tens and twenties.*

In the wars to come new silent deaths, new silent hurlers not yet dreamed out in the heads of men. In the old wars kings quarreling and thousands of men following.

In the new wars kings quarreling and millions of men following.

In the wars to come kings kicked under the dust and millions of men following great causes not yet dreamed out in the heads of men.

from **War Poems**

by **Carl Sandburg**

American poet, 1878-1967



Axis Powers Invade Europe

September 1, 1939 – World War II begins when Germany, without a declaration of war, invades Poland. Britain and France declare war on Germany on September 3, 1939. All the members of the Commonwealth of Nations, except Ireland, follow suit.

Spring, 1940 – Germany invades Denmark and Norway. German troops overrun Luxembourg, invade the Netherlands and Belgium and drive their armored columns to the English Channel. Great Britain resists the German attempt to bomb it into submission, but it is the only Allied power remaining.

June 22, 1941 – Germany invades the Soviet Union and destroys much of European Russia. However, the harsh winter curtails the German sweep to Moscow. Great Britain and the Soviet Union become allies.

The U.S. Entry into the Second World War

Initially, the United States' biggest concern is to protect commercial ships from attacks by German submarines.

The United States formally protests the aggressive acts of Japan in China, Indochina, and Thailand.

Despite attempts to maintain its neutrality, the United States enters the world conflict.

December 7, 1941 – Without warning, Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.



The twisted remains of the destroyer USS Shaw burning in floating dry dock at Pearl Harbor after the "sneak Japanese attack" on Dec. 7, 1941. –NARA photo

Early in the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, carrier-based planes of the Japanese Imperial Navy conduct a surprise attack on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. Approximately 100 ships – battleships, destroyers, cruisers, and support ships – are in the harbor that morning. The rest of the Pacific fleet is out to sea. Nearby Hickam Air Field is also attacked by the Japanese planes.

In the raid eight American battleships and 13 other naval vessels are sunk or badly damaged. The *USS Arizona* is completely destroyed and the *USS Oklahoma* capsized. More than 180 aircraft are destroyed.

Approximately 2,400 military personnel are killed.

A hurried dispatch from the ranking United States naval officer in Pearl Harbor provides the first official word of the attack: "Air Raid on Pearl Harbor. This is not a drill."

On December 8, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses the Congress of the United States. In this brief six-minute speech President Roosevelt delivers what some have regarded as the most famous phrase uttered by an American President: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the

United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."

Maine ties to Pearl Harbor bring the war home:

I am voting in honor of my brother, Sumner A. Sessions, who served 32 years in the Air Force. He was a Pearl Harbor survivor, having been at Hickam Air Field on December 7. His military career included service in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam.

Robert E. Sessions, Norway

Served in WWII, Battle of the Bulge

I want to pay tribute to my husband, Louis R. Mathieson, who joined the Navy in May 1940. He was on the *USS Oklahoma* at Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack. He has been a good husband for 56 years and is the father of 5, grandfather of 10, and great-grandfather of 5.

Vera Payson Mathieson, Owl's Head



I am voting in honor of my grandfather, John Chase. He was too old for the draft but after hearing the radio announcement about Pearl Harbor, he immediately signed up. He served in the Army and went into Japan after the nuclear devastation.

Andrew Roth-Wells, Georgetown

Louis R. Mathieson

Joseph E. Cyr, my husband, was a Pearl Harbor survivor. He served in the military for 5 years. He died November 20, 1999 at the age of 80. We had been married 52 years and 3 months and we have 2 daughters.

Theresa L. Cyr, Saco



Patrick W. Murphy

I am voting in honor of my husband Patrick W. Murphy, who served 21 years in the Navy, retiring as a Chief Petty Officer. He was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, on the *USS Vestal* at anchor by the *USS Arizona*.

*Carmen F. Murphy, Sanford
Served in WWII and Korea*

The entire text of **President Roosevelt's speech** follows:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with the government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleagues delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

This morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As commander in chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us. No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.

I believe I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces – with unbounding determination of our people – we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt
Pearl Harbor Speech to Congress
December 8, 1941