

WWII Part Two: The U.S. Enters the War

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Word Count **900**

Level **1040L**



Cabinet members watch with mixed emotions as President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wearing a black armband, signs the United States' declaration of war against Japan at 4:10 p.m. Washington time on December 8, 1941. On December 7, Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in a surprise attack that destroyed a large portion of the fleet there, prompting the war declaration. Bettmann/Getty Images

The second in a four-part series.

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt followed the news of fighting in Europe with obvious concern. He knew Americans did not want to be involved.

But, he also knew that if Germany ever controlled all of Europe, its power would be colossal. So, Roosevelt moved his nation to greater preparedness, increasing the size of the U.S. Navy and Army. Roosevelt wanted America to be ready.

Japanese ambitions

Who Fought in World War II?

ALLIED POWERS



United Kingdom

France

Soviet Union

United States

AXIS POWERS



Nazi Germany

Japan

Italy

Many other countries were involved, but these were the major ones on each side.

At that time, the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands controlled most of the natural resources, especially oil, to the south of Japan. And, these countries said they would not sell resources to Japan if it did not remove its troops from China. But, the proud Japanese wanted their own empire. Japan wanted to be one of the great nations of the world.

For Japan, this meant war with the West. As such, Japan made a direct strike against the United States, which was the one country that could crush Japan. This required a bold attack on the United States Pacific Fleet. Such an assault would require careful planning, intense training, absolute secrecy and complete surprise. Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's plan was to first cripple the American fleet and then to force a gigantic naval battle in the Pacific. If Japan won, America would be forced to meet its demands.

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

On the early morning of December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu. Japan's early-morning attack was a military success. Its aircraft carriers crossed the Pacific without being spotted and surprised the sleeping American fleet. All eight American battleships and dozens of smaller ships were hit. More than 2,000 sailors died that day. The Japanese lost only a few pilots and planes, and no ships. Still, Admiral Yamamoto had concerns. Three large American aircraft carriers of the fleet were not in Pearl Harbor that day and the Japanese aviators could not find them. Also, Yamamoto had not thought to order his pilots to blow up the giant oil tanks and fuel storage centers around Pearl Harbor.

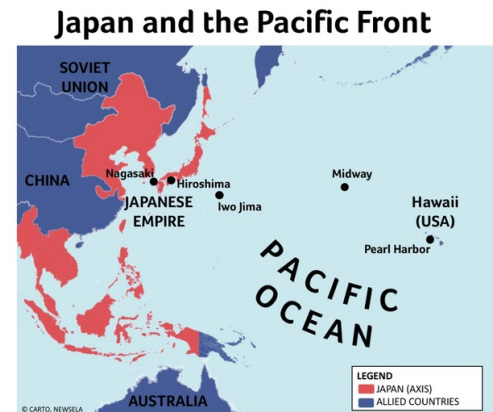
More so, Yamamoto knew the Japanese had awakened a sleeping giant. He expected the United States to gather its enormous human and material resources against Japan. Yamamoto knew his country's cause was almost hopeless.

The great national debate about whether the United States should get involved in World War II ended when the first bombs fell on the Hawaiian Islands. The next day, Roosevelt spoke before a joint session of Congress and asked for a Declaration of War against Japan. It was approved without debate and almost without objection. Surprisingly, on December 10, Germany declared war on the United States even though Germany's alliance with Japan did not require this.

President Roosevelt was happy that the United States was in the war, and in fact, he had manipulated the Japanese into firing the first shot. But he had expected the initial Japanese attack to be against the Philippines and was shocked by what happened at Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt knew how to funnel national anger at Japan into a much more critical war against Germany, which he knew was actually the greater threat.

U.S. industry gears up for war

In December of 1941, the nation launched the greatest industrial growth in history. Within months, new orders for weapons, uniforms and combat vehicles absorbed the remaining



unemployed workers from the Great Depression. Old factories were expanded and modernized as giant new ones sprang up.

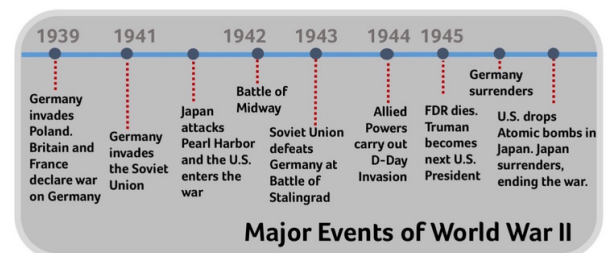
In the skies, American dominance was clear. Boeing built the great four-engine, strategic bomber fleets that destroyed entire cities. As early as 1942, American factories were already churning out 48,000 airplanes, which was more than Germany and Japan combined. Manufacturing for trucks, jeeps, landing ships, artillery pieces and self-propelled guns was high. By 1945, the United States Navy had grown larger and more powerful than the navies of all other countries put together.

Women crucial to preparation efforts, but racial prejudices persist

As millions of men joined the Army and as production soared, women became the obvious source of labor. The growth in female employment between 1942 and 1945 was staggering. At first, women took nondefense jobs as clerks, cabbies, truck drivers, waitresses, ambulance crews, streetcar conductors and filling-station attendants. Soon, jobs in shipyards and aircraft factories opened up since the majority of working-age males were serving overseas.

Japanese-Americans and African-Americans had a harder time proving their importance and finding full citizenship. The Pearl Harbor attack meant that Japanese-Americans, many of whom had been citizens of the United States since birth, were suddenly suspected of being enemy agents. They were rounded up and sent to temporary internment camps. Still, many served with courage and honor in the U.S. armed forces. Meanwhile, blacks were not allowed in the Marine Corps and were inducted as sailors only to serve as cooks, and in the Army, they served in segregated units under mostly white officers.

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Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph in the section "Japan attacks Pearl Harbor" BEST explains why it was risky for the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor?
- 2 Which sentence from the article describes Roosevelt's MAIN concern?
- (A) He knew Americans did not want to be involved.
 - (B) But, he also knew that if Germany ever controlled all of Europe, its power would be colossal.
 - (C) The next day, Roosevelt spoke before a joint session of Congress and asked for a Declaration of War against Japan.
 - (D) But he had expected the initial Japanese attack to be against the Philippines and was shocked by what happened at Pearl Harbor.
- 3 Based on the article, which of the following MOST influenced Japan's decision to attack the United States?
- (A) a drive for power
 - (B) a plot for revenge
 - (C) a desire for wealth
 - (D) a need for resources
- 4 According to the article, how did the American people's thoughts change after the Pearl Harbor attack?
- (A) Prior to the attack, Americans resisted U.S. involvement in the war; after the attack, outraged Americans supported joining the war.
 - (B) Prior to the attack, Americans believed Japan was not a threat to the U.S.; after the attack, Americans feared Japan more than Germany.
 - (C) Prior to the attack, Americans thought the U.S. would never enter the war; after the attack, Americans wished the U.S. had become involved sooner.
 - (D) Prior to the attack, Americans had been skeptical of the Germans; after the attack, distrusting Americans shifted their skepticism to the Japanese.