

A Day of Infamy

It was to be a knock-out blow. Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, wanted to avoid a protracted war given what he knew about the industrial might the United States would bring to bear. The objective of the attack on Pearl Harbor was “to decide the fate of the war on the very first day,” according to naval historian Ian Toll, who wrote that Yamamoto gambled the attack would force a war to a quick conclusion.

Led by six Japanese aircraft carriers with more than 400 planes, and accompanied by battleships, destroyers, cruisers and submarines, the Pearl Harbor attack force struck in two waves on Dec. 7, 1941, the first strike consisting of more than 180 planes, the second consisting of more than 170 planes.

Caught unaware, despite various warnings,

the U.S. Pacific Fleet was devastated.

On that day, more than 2,300 American service members were killed, nearly half — 1,177 — on the USS Arizona. The second largest loss of life was on the USS Oklahoma, with 429 men killed. Dozens of civilians also were killed that day, including members of the Honolulu Fire Department responding to fires caused by the attack.

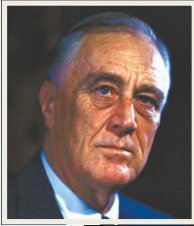
Despite the damage to the American fleet at Pearl, Japan got the prolonged war Yamamoto feared and knew at the outset Japan could not win. The gamble had failed.

— Sources: Pearl Harbor National Memorial, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, National Archives, “The Conquering Tide,” by Ian Toll.

The following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his most memorable speech to Congress:

“Yesterday, December 7th, 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 attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. ... 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 the 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, Dec. 7, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.”

The vote in the U.S. Senate was 82–0, the vote in the U.S. House of Representatives was 388–1.



Battered but not beaten •

Not only were many of the United States' ships at Pearl Harbor able to survive that fateful day, they played a large part in the Allied victory.

The fate of the fleet: U.S.

There were no American carriers at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, but present that morning were nine battleships and many other combat vessels. Two-thirds of the battleships that were hit — the exceptions being the the USS Arizona, USS Oklahoma and USS Utah — were refloated, repaired and joined in the many naval battles in the Pacific and European theaters after the attack.

USS NEVADA was the only battleship that got underway that morning, according to Pearl Harbor National Memorial, but was run aground to avoid blocking the channel. It was refloated and repaired, and later transferred to the Atlantic, where it served as the flagship for the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944. “The USS Nevada was the only ship present at both Pearl Harbor and D-Day,” according to the Memorial.

USS ARIZONA was hit multiple times in the first wave, and exploded when a Japanese bomb reached its ammunition magazines, killing 1,177 of the men on board. The battleship today rests on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, beneath the USS Arizona Memorial.

USS TENNESSEE was damaged during the attack, but was repaired, modernized and participated in many of the naval campaigns of the Pacific.

USS WEST VIRGINIA was sunk by torpedoes and bombs that morning that killed 106 sailors. It also was refloated, repaired and participated in many of the naval campaigns and battles in the Pacific. It was present in Tokyo Bay for the formal Japanese surrender on Sept. 2, 1945.

USS MARYLAND, next to the USS Oklahoma, sustained only light damage and in June 1942 “became the first ship damaged at Pearl Harbor to return to duty,” the Memorial reported.

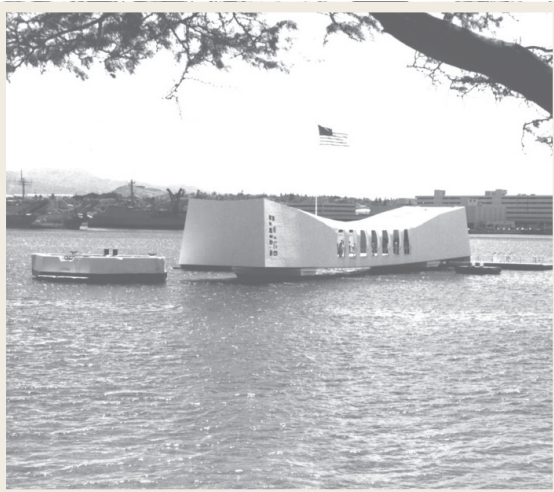
USS OKLAHOMA was struck by multiple torpedoes and rolled over, trapping sailors inside. In all, 429 men died; only 32 trapped men were rescued. It was too badly damaged to return to action.

USS CALIFORNIA, a former flagship of the Pacific Fleet, slowly sank after the attack that killed 105 sailors. It also was salvaged, rebuilt and served in the Pacific for the remainder of World War II.

USS PENNSYLVANIA was in drydock and not part of Battleship Row. It was bombed and strafed that day, with 31 sailors killed. It was repaired and participated in many of the naval battles later in the war.

USS UTAH, moored on the other side of Ford Island, was hit by torpedoes, rolled over and sank, killing 58 crew members. It was never salvaged and is today still visible in Pearl Harbor, where it is also memorialized.

— Source: Pearl Harbor National Memorial



USS Arizona Memorial



USS Nevada

The fate of the fleet: Japan

Led by six carriers, the Japanese fleet also included battleships, cruisers and destroyers, as well as submarines. Unlike the U.S. fleet, Japan did not lose any ships during the attack on Pearl Harbor. However, by the end of the war all but one of the surface fleet that participated in the attack on Dec. 7, 1941, had been sunk.

CARRIER AKAGI was torpedoed and scuttled during Battle of Midway, June 4-7, 1942.

CARRIER KAGA was set on fire and then scuttled during Battle of Midway.

CARRIER HIRYU was torpedoed and scuttled during Battle of Midway.

CARRIER SORYU was blown up and sunk during Battle of Midway.

CARRIER SHOKAKU was sunk by torpedoes in 1944 during the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

CARRIER ZUIKAKU was torpedoed, bombed and sunk in 1944 during the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

BATTLESHIP HIEI was struck and sunk during the naval Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942.

BATTLESHIP KIRISHIMA was bombed and sunk during the Second Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942.

Three cruisers and 10 destroyers that acted as escorts to the Pearl Harbor attack fleet were either bombed or torpedoed and were sunk during the war, between 1942 and 1945. The destroyer Ushio was the only Japanese ship of the 22 that were part of the Pearl Harbor attack force that was not sunk during the war. It was surrendered to the United States and was scrapped after the war.

— Source: Navy Source Navy History, <http://www.navy.mil/navsource.org/Naval/japan.htm>