

## *Why Did the Japanese Attack Pearl Harbor?*

December 7, 1941



*U.S.S. Arizona*

Why did the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor?

There are two main reasons:

- More living space was needed. Japan is an island nation and in 1941 consisted of 4 main islands. Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu and the more remote island of Formosa. There were also 4,000 smaller, mostly uninhabited islands. The main islands covered approximately 145,000 square miles - about the size of Montana. The population at the time was about 69 million people. Since the islands are mountainous, nearly everyone lived on the coastal plains and in the valleys resulting in densely populated areas.
- A second, more pressing problem was the lack of natural resources. Japan imported oil and steel from the United States, rubber from Malaysia and the Dutch East Indies. Food supplies were mainly fish and rice.

The Japanese military had taken control of the government and set out to solve these problems by invading China and Manchuria. Long range plans were to take the Philippine Islands, Malaysia and the Dutch East Indies. Countries with interests in the area, England (Hong King and Singapore), France (French Indo China - now Vietnam), the Netherlands (Dutch East Indies) and the United States (Guam, Wake Island and the Philippines) demanded that Japan withdraw from China and Manchuria. Japan refused.

There followed a period of negotiations and upon failure, the United States stopped exports of oil and steel to Japan.

The Japanese High Command ordered the Commander in Chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, to come up with a plan to destroy the United States Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian islands. The U.S. Navy had 8 battleships, 3 aircraft carriers and numerous supporting vessels based there.

Admiral Yamamoto had been the Japanese Naval Attaché in Washington, D.C., had taken courses at Harvard University and had traveled extensively in the United States. He was aware of the immense industrial capacity of the U.S. and told the High Command that he was against such an attack. He told the High Command that he could raise havoc in the Pacific for 6 months or a year, but he could not guarantee success because he knew that America could out-produce Japan in every machine of war.

His orders stood, however, and he proceeded with a plan for a surprise attack. The Japanese armada sailed on November 26, 1941. Admiral Yamamoto chose a Sunday morning knowing that it was a day of rest for the Americans and vigilance would be lax. The code words "East Wind, Rain" were to be transmitted to the fleet to verify that the raid was on and the Commander of the Air Group was to transmit the code words "Tora, Tora, Tora" (Tiger, Tiger, Tiger) if the raid was a surprise.



*Nakajima B5N "Kate" Torpedo Bomber*

Just before 8:00 AM Hawaiian Time on December 7, 1941 the infamous words "Tora, Tora, Tora" were transmitted to the Japanese fleet.

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U.S.S. West Virginia

The attack was a devastating blow to the U.S. Navy. 8 battleships were sunk or damaged. The Arizona was sunk and is now a memorial. California, Maryland, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and West Virginia were damaged and 180 U.S. airplanes were destroyed. Many lesser ships were also damaged and over 2,300 Americans lost their lives that day. However, many ships were repaired and returned to service; Nevada later fought at D-Day.



Naval Air Station on Ford Island

As luck would have it, the three aircraft carriers, Lexington, Saratoga and Enterprise were at sea. They would form the nucleus for the rebirth of the U.S. Navy and a surprise United States victory at the Battle of Midway.

### Pearl Harbor Timeline

- 9/01/39 Germany attacks Poland (WWII begins)
- 12/7/41 Pearl Harbor is attacked
- 12/8/41 Philippines / Guam attacked
- 6/4-5/42 U.S. wins Battle of Midway
- 6/6/44 D-Day
- 5/07/45 Germany surrenders
- 8/6/45 A-Bomb dropped on Hiroshima
- 9/02/45 Japan surrenders; WWII ends

### The Dixie Wing of the Commemorative Air Force



Douglas SBD ("Slow But Deadly") Dauntless

The Dixie Wing CAF currently maintains and flies a Douglas SBD Dauntless, one of only three flying today. The Dauntless sank more shipping than any other allied aircraft in WWII and was instrumental in defeating the Japanese at The Battle of Midway, the turning point of World War II in the Pacific. [www.dixiewing.org](http://www.dixiewing.org)



The Commemorative Air Force is a 501(c)3 that has over 11,000 members in 27 states and four countries. The mission of the CAF is to 1) to restore, maintain, and fly World War II aircraft; 2) to maintain museum facilities for aircraft as a tribute to the thousands of men and women who built, serviced, and flew the planes; and 3) to perpetuate in the memory and hearts of all Americans, the spirit in which these great planes were flown in the defense of this nation. [www.commemorativeairforce.org](http://www.commemorativeairforce.org)