

World War II Valor in the Pacific

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National Monument
Alaska, California, Hawaii

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



On war's eve, Waikiki, with its famed view of Diamond Head, was a favored attraction for tourists, soldiers, sailors, and residents of O'ahu.



Sailors at Ford Island's PBY seaplane ramp watch a fireball erupt from USS Shaw.



A clock from Arizona stopped when the battleship was attacked. Far right: The attack led to a national slogan and battle cry, which later inspired the popular wartime song.

Above: USS Yorktown, shown here crippled by dive-bombers during the Battle of Midway, 1942, was soon after torpedoed and sunk.



Above: Americans of Italian descent in New York's Little Italy celebrate V-J (Victory over Japan) Day, the day Japan's surrender was announced—August 14, 1945.



Above right: Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu signs the Japanese Instrument of Surrender aboard USS Missouri, September 2, 1945.



The Pacific War

The United States was pulled into the deadliest, most globally extensive war in history when Japan attacked the tropical island of O'ahu in 1941. O'ahu's central Pacific setting and its great natural harbor made it an excellent location for U.S. military installations. Most important was the naval station established at Pearl Harbor in 1899, the year after the United States annexed the Hawaiian Islands. By 1941 O'ahu was heavily fortified, with army bases, airfields, and gun emplacements around the island. After the attack O'ahu served as headquarters for U.S. Pacific operations and staging area for hundreds of thousands of military personnel en route to the Pacific theater.

The Opening Attacks

The December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor was part of Japan's bold opening move to achieve its territorial ambitions. The strategic intent was to cripple the U.S. Pacific Fleet long enough to allow Japan to occupy a broad swath of the Pacific and Southeast Asia. In support of the Pearl Harbor attack, concurrent strikes on the

Navy, Army, and Marine airfields around O'ahu destroyed hangars and aircraft. On the next day Japan attacked Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Malaya.

Battle for the Pacific

Japan had started a war that would encompass a third of the globe and affect millions of civilians and military personnel. The attack on O'ahu was for the most part successful, doing considerable damage to the virtually unprotected U.S. Pacific Fleet, especially



Crewmen aboard USS Cassin are shown in the ship's mess before the attack. The destroyer was in a Pearl Harbor dry dock when it was struck by a bomb.

battleships. As Pearl Harbor recovered, Japan won a string of victories in the war's opening months. Its forces occupied country after country, displacing European colonial powers and gaining access to the natural resources that would keep its war machine running. But the O'ahu attack bought Japan only a little time before Allied industrial might began to tilt the balance as ships, tanks, and aircraft emerged from U.S. shipyards and assembly lines. By late 1942 Japan was on the defensive, and for three grueling years Allied forces pushed across the Pacific towards the Japanese home islands. By the time of the Allied victory in Europe in May 1945, Japan's defeat was inevitable.

War's End

In September 1945 Japan signed the surrender document onboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. On the U.S. home front there were spontaneous celebrations over the defeat of Japan and a collective sigh of relief at the end of wartime losses and hardships. During the seven-year Allied occupation, the former Empire of Japan adopted a new constitution in 1947, stripping political power from the Emperor and democratizing Japanese institutions. The occupation came to an end when the San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allied powers went into effect in 1952. World War II was officially over.

The Attack of December 7, 1941

Just before 8 am that Sunday morning, many of the sailors aboard naval vessels moored in Pearl Harbor were getting ready for leave and preparing for church services. In a few minutes the colors would be raised on more than 185 naval vessels throughout the harbor. On Ford Island and around O'ahu, soldiers, Marines, and sailors at Army and Marine airfields and naval air stations were going through similar military routines.

The attack came with no warning as aircraft emblazoned with red disks bore down

on the moored ships from all directions. Torpedo planes struck first, flying low over the water and launching torpedoes toward Ford Island's Battleship Row, the primary target. They struck *West Virginia*, *Oklahoma*, *California*, and *Nevada*, along with vessels berthed in the navy yard. Dive-bombers destroyed hangars and other buildings and parked aircraft at Hickam Field and on Ford Island. Bombs dropped from aircraft high above the harbor tore through *Arizona* (right) and other battleships. Fighter planes wheeled and dived, strafing aircraft and military personnel.

They fought together as brothers in arms; they died together and now they sleep side by side . . .

—Adm. Chester W. Nimitz



In minutes the attackers had transformed quiet routine into a nightmare of massive explosions, black smoke, and men leaping from burning ships into oil-covered water. Pearl Harbor was not alone, as bases all over O'ahu were simultaneously attacked. The intent was to disable the planes on the ground, preventing airborne resistance to the main attack on the fleet at Pearl Harbor. In Honolulu civilians lost their lives when improperly fused antiaircraft shells landed in the city. Around the island soldiers and sailors fired back with whatever guns they could find, but with little effect.

The second wave arrived about a half-hour after the first. Dive-bombers concentrated on the southeast side of Ford Island and the dry docks, heavily damaging the battleship *Pennsylvania* and the two destroyers sharing its dock. *Nevada* got underway, but after the battleship was struck by at least six bombs, the captain intentionally beached the ship. Bombers again pummeled Hickam Field, while fighters and dive-bombers swept other O'ahu airfields and bases. In less than two hours the Japanese attackers had weakened—but not crippled—the U.S. Pacific Fleet.



Rescuers went to work as soon as the attack was over. They saved 32 seamen from inside the hull of the capsized *Oklahoma*. 429 crew members lost their lives.

Battlefield O'ahu



The Strike on O'ahu

After sailing undetected for 4,000 miles—including difficult at-sea refueling—the Japanese force of 31 ships took its position 230 miles north of O'ahu. The first wave of 183 planes, launched from six aircraft carriers, reached O'ahu at 7:50 am. The surprise was complete. "Val" (the American name) dive-bombers and Zero fighters bombed and strafed Wheeler Army Airfield. Kate torpedo bombers reached Pearl Harbor a few minutes later, followed by high-level bombers. Zeros raked rows of parked aircraft at 'Ewa and Bellows airfields and Kaneohe Naval Air Station.

While O'ahu bristled with coastal gun batteries to deter a traditional naval attack, it was ill-prepared for a naval air assault. The island had inadequate antiaircraft defenses. To foil sabotage, planes at military airfields were parked in close rows, making them easy targets for strafing fighters.

About 30 minutes after the first wave, a second wave of 167 dive-bombers, high-level bombers, and Zero fighters hit O'ahu. This time U.S. sailors, soldiers, and airmen were able to mount some kind of defense, launching a few fighters and filling the air above Pearl Harbor with flak clouds, bringing down some of the attackers.

The Toll
Japan's attack killed 2,390 people—1,999 sailors, 233 soldiers and airmen, 109 Marines, and 49 civilians. Military and civilian wounded totaled 1,178. Of the eight battleships in the harbor, five were sunk. In all, 21 vessels were sunk or heavily damaged. After the attack the Navy undertook a massive salvage operation, and all but three vessels—*Arizona*, *Oklahoma*, and *Utah*—were returned to service. The attackers destroyed 164 aircraft and damaged 159.

The Japanese Navy lost 55 airmen and 29 planes. Of the five two-man midget submarines launched, four were lost and one was captured. Nine submarine crew members were lost and one was captured—America's first prisoner of war.

Better News
While the destruction was massive, it could have been much worse. The attackers failed to damage the harbor's submarine base, huge stocks of oil, and naval piers and dry docks. More importantly, none of the Pacific Fleet's three aircraft carriers were in port that day, leaving the U.S. with its most potent weapon in the Pacific War.

Pearl Harbor



USS Utah

In 1931 the battleship *Utah* was converted to an auxiliary gunnery training ship. In the early moments of the attack it was struck by two torpedoes and one bomb. It quickly capsized, entombing 58 men.

Ford Island

In the opening moments of the attack on the Pacific Fleet, Japanese dive-bombers struck the seaplane ramp, damaging hangars and destroying PBY seaplanes.

From Engagement to Peace

Emerging Powers

The traditionally inward-looking but rapidly industrializing United States began to move onto the world stage in the 1890s. By the end of the century it was a colonial power, having annexed Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The nation warmed to its new role, shedding its neutrality in World War I by declaring war on Germany in 1917. The next year it sent a force of 1.75 million soldiers to aid the Allies. O'ahu was caught up in global geopolitics as the expanding Pearl Harbor Naval Station on the island became the emblem of a fledgling U.S. empire with growing interests in the Pacific.

Japan was also making its presence known in the Pacific. Since the 1860s it had been swiftly modernizing, transforming itself through industrialization and militarization from a dynastic feudal society to a regional power. By 1910 Japan had defeated China and Russia in armed conflicts, annexed Korea and Formosa, and occupied Manchuria. An ally of Britain, it took control of Germany's Pacific islands during World War I. Lacking natural resources to sustain its industry, Japan resolved to establish control over what it called the Southern Resource Area—Southeast Asian countries rich in oil, tin, iron, and rubber—putting it on a collision course with European colonial powers.

During the 1930s Japan grew more nationalistic and militaristic. In 1940 it established the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a bloc of Asian nations freed of western influence, to gain access to their resources. It joined the Axis powers through the Tri-Partite Pact with Germany and Italy. In response the United States moved the Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor in 1941 and embargoed oil bound for Japan. Knowing the U.S. Navy was repositioning, Japan decided to strike early and secure new territories before the United States and its allies could respond.

The Asia-Pacific War

The U.S. Pacific Fleet was knocked back on its heels by the Pearl Harbor attack, while coordinated Japanese attacks overran South-east Asia and the southern Pacific. But the U.S. Navy quickly regrouped, and six months later would deliver an effective counterpunch. As the Pacific War heated up, Pearl Harbor became the center for U.S. operations in the Pacific, commanded by Adm. Chester Nimitz. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, headquartered in Australia, commanded U.S., British, Australian, and New Zealand forces in the southwest Pacific area. After Pearl Harbor, Germany declared war on the U.S. and America faced a two-ocean war. With the U.S. fleet divided, the Japanese had a decided advantage in



In its quest for resources and territorial expansion, Japan invaded China in 1937. The harsh occupation lasted until the end of the war.

Pacific warship numbers. U.S. industrial strength, however, allowed the military to rapidly expand its arsenal of ships, aircraft, and tanks, while Japan could not quickly enough replace its military hardware or skilled pilots lost in combat.

The damage to the U.S. Pacific Fleet battle line at Pearl Harbor hastened the end of the battleship era. The primary warship became the aircraft carrier, whose warplanes could support or thwart the amphibious landings so crucial in the Pacific theater. On this immense battlefield carriers fought out of sight of each other, as the "flat-tops" launched swarms of dive-bombers and torpedo

planes to seek out the opposing fleet. Battleships remained tactically valuable, defending carriers and shelling islands before amphibious landings, but strategically this was a carrier war.

Knowing Japan's only chance was to reduce U.S. carrier power, Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto planned to lure the U.S. fleet into battle off Midway in June 1942. U.S. intelligence broke the Japanese naval code, allowing the U.S. Navy to set a trap and ambush the Japanese carriers. Japan lost four of its six carriers at Midway and was forced onto the defensive. Allied offensive strategy then took three broad paths: the push across the central Pacific toward the Japanese homeland with a bloody "island-hopping" campaign by U.S. Navy, Marine, and Army forces; the Allied drive in the southwest Pacific toward the Philippines; and the engagement with our allies in the China, Burma, and India theater.

By 1944 the Japanese Navy was wearing down. U.S. submarines decimated Japan's shipping, especially oil tankers bearing the lifeblood of its war machine. It was only a matter of time before Japan surrendered or the Allies invaded its home islands. After U.S. atomic bombs devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan accepted terms of surrender. On September 2, 1945, aboard USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, the brutal Pacific war came to an end.



Left: Evening newspapers around the world carried headlines like this on December 7, 1941. For readers of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, it hit much closer to home.

Right: Marines and soldiers make amphibious landing on Tinian during Marianas campaign, 1944.



Left: Torpedo planes launch from USS *Monterey* during Battle of the Philippine Sea, 1944.

Right: After two years of war aboard destroyer escort USS *Wileman*, crewmen celebrate upon learning of Japan's surrender.



1941

After Pearl Harbor, Japan rapidly takes Thailand, Malay Peninsula, Manila, Hong Kong, Gilbert Islands, Wake, and Guam.

1942

Philippines, Burma, and Singapore fall. Japan invades New Guinea. Its victory in Battle of Java Sea effectively ends Allied resistance in Netherlands East Indies. Doolittle Raid demonstrates Japanese vulnerability. Japan occupies U.S. Aleutian islands Attu and Kiska. Months-long Guadalcanal Campaign begins.

1943

U.S. Marines occupy Guadalcanal. Solomon Islands Campaign protects supply line to Australia. Japanese are driven out of Aleutians. Allied campaign to retake New Guinea intensifies. Beginning of major offensives to take Marshall and Caroline islands and retake Gilberts.

1944

U.S. B-29 bombers make first attacks on Japanese homeland. U.S. takes Saipan and Marianas; retakes Guam and Philippines. Japan's invasion of India fails. Japan begins kamikazi attacks in Battle of Leyte Gulf.

1945

Allies retake Philippines, Burma; take Japanese home islands Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Chinese offensives retake important cities in southern China. Firebombings devastate Tokyo and other cities. Atomic bombings, Soviet invasion of Manchuria lead to Japan's surrender, August 14.

1945-1960

Allied troops occupy Japan after surrender. Japan adopts a new constitution in 1947, democratizing the country. The 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allied Powers brings an end to the occupation and officially ends the war with Japan. With the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan in 1960, the two countries become allies.



Japanese A6M2 Mitsubishi "Zero" fighter



A World Changed by War

The human toll of the war was unprecedented. The U.S. military lost over 106,000 in the Pacific; 2.1 million Japanese sailors, soldiers, and airmen died. From 1937, when Japan occupied China, to 1945 over 20 million civilians in the Pacific and Southeast Asian theaters died from military attacks, massacres, disease, and starvation.

The carnage shocked the world into action. Less than two months after Japan's surrender the United Nations was born in San Francisco. While its peacekeeping missions have not always kept the peace, the UN has been a key international forum and a crucial source of humanitarian aid.

The war also ended the old order in the Pacific region. Sea lanes would now be protected by the U.S. Pacific Fleet. In Southeast Asia and the Pacific Island groups the war hastened the demise of the centuries-old western colonial system. Movements for independence began soon after war's end, and within 10 years most Southeast Asian colonies of Great Britain, the United States, the Netherlands, and France had gained some degree of independence.

Overshadowing all: with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons had been unleashed on the world. The nuclear arms race was underway, and nations now lived with the unthinkable possibility of nuclear warfare. The first of hundreds of post-war nuclear tests by the U.S., Soviet Union, and other nations was the U.S. "Operation Crossroads" (below) off Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands (see map). Bikini's inhabitants were relocated before the tests, and the island remains contaminated and uninhabitable.

The U.S. conducted six other tests in the Marshall Islands until 1958. Marshall Islanders suffered directly from testing, but the threat of nuclear weapons affected life worldwide, from Cold War tensions to cultural expressions of anxiety over the nuclear peril.



Nuclear test off Bikini Atoll, July 25, 1946.

Memorialization



Central to the park's mission is memorializing those who fell during the attack on O'ahu. The USS Arizona Memorial (above), built over the sunken hull, honors the 1,177 crewmen who died. Designed by architect Alfred Preiss, it was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1962. The hull is both a tomb for over 900 sailors who remain within and a living reef providing habitat for marine life.

The USS Oklahoma Memorial honors 429 sailors who died when the ship capsized. The visible hull at the USS Utah Memorial commemorates its 58 dead.

About Your Visit

The park sites are adjacent to the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. A good place to start is in the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center. It is open daily from 7 am to 5 pm. The last program begins at 3 pm. The visitor center and USS Arizona Memorial are closed Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. The park is just off State Highway 99 (Kamehameha Highway), about a 45-minute drive west of Waikiki.

In the visitor center's Aloha Court you can pick up free tickets for the USS Arizona Memorial interpretive program (first-come, first-served). You can also purchase tickets for related Pearl Harbor Historic Sites.

The interpretive program includes a brief talk by a National Park Service ranger followed by a 23-minute film on the Pearl Harbor attack. Immediately after the film visitors board a U.S. Navy shuttle boat to the memorial. All visitors disembark on the memorial and return with their shuttle boat. While waiting to take the memorial shuttle, you can visit the visitor center's museum exhibits, bookstore, and snack bar and the nearby shoreline exhibits. Headsets can be rented for an audio tour.

Other area park sites are the Mooring Quays along Battleship Row, and on Ford Island the USS Utah Memorial, Chief Petty Officer Bungalows, and USS Oklahoma Memorial (take the Ford Island Shuttle to this site). Pearl Harbor Historic Sites include the USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park, the Battleship Missouri Memorial, and the Pacific Aviation Museum. Take the Ford Island Shuttle to the last two.

Regulations • Bags or articles that allow concealment are prohibited in the park. Nearby storage lockers are available for a small fee. Visitors may bring a camera and camcorder. • Follow state regulations regarding firearms.

Accessibility The visitor center and its restrooms, movie theater, exhibit area, bookstore, information desk, and drinking fountain are wheelchair-accessible. The U.S. Navy shuttle boats and memorial are also wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome. Call the park number for accessibility information on other sites.

World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

More Information World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument 1 Arizona Memorial Place Honolulu, Hawaii 96818 808-422-3300 www.nps.gov/valr

