



## PEARL HARBOR HISTORY

**PEARL HARBOR, OAHU, HI** -- Just as the luster of a pearl seems to change with the shifting light of day, so has Pearl Harbor changed in the shifting light of history. This remarkable port, home to the great US Pacific Fleet, has been called “majestic,” one of the greatest harbors in the Pacific. In fact, it’s long been the envy of every nation that has tried to control it. The sheltered blue-green oasis glitters with scenic, historic and strategic importance; importance that predates the attack that drew the United States into World War II. Long before the morning of December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor had been captivating people with its dramatic beauty and provocative history.

The ancient Hawaiians called this area Wai Momi, or “Waters of Pearl,” for the wealth of pearl producing oysters that once rested on the bed of the peaceful bay. The sweeping shoreline that caressed the pristine bay also boasted the most fishponds of any area in the islands. This natural abundance made Wai Momi a prime location for fishing and diving. According to legend, a benevolent shark goddess who watched over this precious natural resource protected the area. And, just as the Hawaiian people treasured Wai Momi in the old days, the United States honors and values Pearl Harbor today.

Over the years, the face of Pearl Harbor has changed dramatically. When the first Westerner, British seafarer Captain James Cook came to the islands in 1778, a coral reef barred the entrance of the place known as Wai Momi, making it unsuitable as a port for deep draft shipping. At that time, nearby Honolulu Harbor was an infinitely more hospitable destination.

It wasn’t until 1826 that the US Navy had its first contact with the Hawaiian Islands, when the schooner USS Dolphin sailed in to port. After that, it took more than 13 years for the Navy to begin to recognize the potential of Pearl Harbor. During a routine survey of the area in 1840, an enterprising naval officer determined that the deep inner harbor could actually be accessed by completely removing the obstructing reef.

Despite gaining exclusive rights to Pearl Harbor in 1887, the United States did not make any attempt to take advantage of their claim on this strategic estuary until well after the turn of the century. It wasn’t until the capture of Manila during the Spanish-American War, when the United States needed to establish a permanent way station in the Pacific to maintain control of the Philippines. Then, for the first time, the American government began to understand the strategic importance of Oahu. Annexation soon followed, but even then little was done to fortify the area or capitalize on the vast potential of Pearl Harbor. Finally, beginning in 1902, the entry channel was dredged, deepened and widened to clear an opening at the entrance of the Harbor. Eventually, the 600-foot-wide, 35-foot-deep passage offered access to the Harbor for the full range of vessels in the fleet, including the massive nuclear aircraft carriers.

Despite the success of this massive undertaking, Congress did not officially create a naval base at Pearl Harbor until 1908. Even then, the first large ship did not enter the channel and anchor off the Pearl Harbor Naval Station until the armored cruiser USS *California* crossed the threshold in 1911.

From the early days of the 20th Century, it was clear that Japan was taking her place as a world power. This shift led the United States to move a significant portion of her naval forces to the Pacific. Pearl Harbor was a focal point of the transition; becoming homeport for much of the Pacific Fleet. And so the pieces of this historic puzzle came together. In a matter of time, the very action taken to protect America from this potential threat would be the thing that made her vulnerable to it.

Throughout its history, Pearl Harbor has been revered as a place of great value. In the beginning, it physically yielded sustenance for the Hawaiian people. Later, it empowered America to conquer her enemies. Today, Pearl Harbor embodies the lessons of our past and our vision of the future. Its legacy is the assurance we will never forget the sacrifice that drives our hope for the future.

The USS *Arizona* Memorial was dedicated on Memorial Day 1962 to commemorate the attack on Pearl Harbor and the men who died defending it. In 1989, the USS *Arizona* was designated a national historic landmark. Since 1980, the National Park Service has operated the Memorial and the Visitor Center to ensure the preservation and interpretation of the tangible historical resources associated with the attack – including the rich and vivid memories of its survivors. Veterans have always played a key part in maintaining this historic site. In fact, funding for the USS *Arizona* Memorial is provided in part by the Arizona Memorial Museum Association, a group of Pearl Harbor survivors and others interested in preserving this important legacy.

Each year, the USS *Arizona* Memorial welcomes more than 1.4 million visitors from around the world. To accommodate its international and out-of-state visitors, the Park has brochures written in 23 different languages including English, as well as an audio program which is currently offered in English, Chinese and Japanese.

The USS *Arizona* Memorial Visitor Center is located adjacent to Kamehameha Highway, near the Aloha Stadium, between Ford Island Bridge and Pearl Harbor's Makalapa Gate. To reach the USS Arizona Memorial from Waikiki, take the H-1 Freeway to the Airport Viaduct and follow the signs to the Arizona Memorial Exit 15A.

The Visitor Center is open 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving, December 25 and New Year's Day, with tours beginning every 15 minutes, and the last program starting at 3 p.m. Admission is free and tours are given on a first-come, first-serve basis. Reservations are not accepted. If you have questions, you can access recorded information at (808) 422-0561. To reach a National Park Service representative, call (808) 422-2771. To contact the Arizona Memorial Museum Association, call (808) 422-5664 or (808) 422-5905. The web site address for the USS Arizona Memorial is [www.nps.gov/usar](http://www.nps.gov/usar), while the address for the Arizona Memorial Museum Association is <http://arizonamemorial.org>

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