

"A Date Which Will Live in Infamy": FDR Asks for a Declaration of War

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, stunned virtually everyone in the United States military. Japan's carrier-launched bombers found Pearl Harbor totally unprepared. President Franklin Roosevelt quickly addressed Congress to ask for a declaration of war as illustrated in this audio excerpt. Although he never mentioned Europe or the fact that Germany had not yet declared war on the United States, the Pearl Harbor attack allowed him to begin the larger intervention in the European war he had long wanted.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt: Yesterday, December 7, 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 United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our secretary of state a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

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. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Wake Island.

And this morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As commander in chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense. But always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us. . .

Source: Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

See Also: [The "Man in the Street" Reacts to Pearl Harbor](#)

["This Is No Joke: This Is War": A Live Radio Broadcast of the Attack on Pearl Harbor](#)