THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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Suggested Speech
Pearl Harbor Attack
Eighty-five Years Later

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FDR immediately understood the magnitude. Less than 24 hours after he received news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt addressed a joint session of 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," our nation's commander in chief stated. Equal part outrage and equal part determination, Roosevelt's six-and-a-half-minute address foreshadowed the tough road ahead.

"No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory," he said before requesting – and receiving – a declaration of war from the United States Congress.

It was indeed a rallying call for the American people. More than 81 percent of adults in the United States tuned in for the radio broadcast of his remarks. Lines of people extended for blocks outside of recruiting offices which expanded to 24-hour operations. In just a few short months, more than 1.5 million military enlistments and inductions would occur.

Famous aviator and ardent isolationist Charles Lindbergh pledged his support for the effort, stating - quote- “Our country had been attacked by force of arms, and by force of arms we must retaliate. We must now turn every effort to building the greatest and most efficient Army, Navy and Air Force in the world.”-unquote.

Fifteen Navy sailors would be awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions at Pearl Harbor, with a sixteenth being posthumously awarded to Marine First Lieutenant George Cannon for his valor at Sand Island.

Though the number of Pearl Harbor survivors is now down to single digits, the stories of that day's heroes will live on.

One such hero was Ensign Herbert C. Jones. As he was about to relieve the officer-of-the-deck aboard the *USS California,* the ship was struck by a bomb and a torpedo during the first wave of the attack. After diving into a smoke-filled hatchway, the 23-year-old officer crawled across the oil-covered decks to rescue an injured sailor.

He immediately followed the rescue by assuming command of an anti-aircraft battery, firing guns until the ammunition ran out. From there, he led a party to gather more shells when fire surrounded him. Two men attempted to rescue Ensign Jones. His last words were reportedly, "Leave me alone. I am done for. Get out of here before the magazines go off!" – unquote.

Eight U.S. battleships were severely damaged during the surprise attack. 188 aircraft destroyed. 2,403 Americans died.

For the United States, Pearl Harbor marked the beginning of a war. For the Empire of Japan and Germany's Third Reich, it would mean the beginning of the end.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill would later write in his memoirs that after hearing of the Pearl Harbor attack, he "slept the sleep of the saved and thankful," because he knew that with the entry of the United States, the war would be won.

In the January 1942 issue of The American Legion Magazine, National Commander Lynn Stambaugh said, quote: "Every Legionnaire and his family is at the service of the United States Government for the No. 1 job of winning this war. I have told that to President Roosevelt.

I know that every Legionnaire wanted me to say it."- unquote.

The American servicemembers in Hawaii on that Sunday morning were officially noncombatants since the nation was not yet in a state of war.

It did not matter to men like Dorie Miller, a cook and the first Black American to be awarded the Navy Cross.

While gathering laundry aboard the *USS West Virginia,* he was alerted by the "Battle Station" alarm and reported himself available for other duties during the attack. A former fullback for his high school football team, the muscular Texan carried his mortally wounded ship's captain to shelter and later fired a .50 caliber anti-aircraft gun, bringing down at least two Japanese planes despite having no training with the weapon.

Miller's actions were so inspiring that he was soon assigned to embark on a war bond and recruiting tour. In 1943 he made the Supreme Sacrifice, while serving on the escort carrier *Liscome* Bay. The vessel would be sunk by a Japanese submarine during the Battle of Makin.

Navy Captain Cassin Young had a much different background than Dorie Miller. Born in Washington, D.C., he graduated from the Naval Academy in 1916. He served as an officer through World War I and was later assigned as commander of the repair ship *USS Vestal* when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. After his ship was badly damaged, he took charge of an anti-aircraft gun. A blast from the nearby *Arizona* blew Young overboard. He managed to swim through burning oil and re-board his ship, where he navigated it to a safer distance from the explosions.

Like Miller, Captain Young would survive Pearl Harbor but not the war. He was killed on November 13, 1942, by an enemy shell as he was performing another act of heroism aboard the *USS San Francisco*.

In addition to the actions that led to the Medal of Honor, 51 Navy Crosses would be awarded from Pearl Harbor. Fifty-three Silver Stars. Thousands more would receive Purple Hearts, though the nation itself felt the pain of a gaping wound inflicted that day.

While that wound has healed, a scar remains. And so do the tears, both symbolic and real. In fact, since December 7th, 1941, an estimated 65,000 gallons of oil have leaked into Pearl Harbor Bay from the tanks of the *USS Arizona*. Those dark tears are still visible to visitors of that ship's hallowed memorial, in the harbor where she rests.

In 2023, the last chapter of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association disbanded. Fortunately, the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors continue to tell their story through their own organization.

In The American Legion, we make a promise to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars.

We in The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of The American Legion understand that our freedom is a gift. A gift that was bestowed upon us by the defenders of our nation dating back to the American Revolution.

It is a legacy that was also preserved at a great price and with great valor, on what began as a quiet morning on December 7th, 1941.

Eighty-five years later, we shall never forget them.

God Bless America and God Bless the Heroes of Pearl Harbor.