

Pearl Harbor

When World War II began, the United States tried to stay neutral. But when Japanese airplanes pulled off a surprise attack on the U.S. Navy in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii two years into the war, the United States had no choice but to defend itself. At that time, Hawaii was not a U.S. state, but U.S. territory.

When Japan attacked, the United States was taken completely by surprise. Hundreds of Japanese fighter planes targeted the U.S. fighter planes on the ground, in order to prevent them from taking off and fighting back. Japanese bombers dropped bombs and torpedoes on the U.S. war ships. The attack came in two waves, and many U.S. ships, fighter planes, and other aircraft were destroyed. However, most of the ships were recovered and put to use fighting the Axis Powers later in the war.

One of the ships that was sunk was called the USS Arizona. When the Arizona sank, the over 1,100 U.S. military personnel that were on board died. Another 1,200 or so Americans were also killed that day. Japan suffered relatively few casualties, though they did lose some aircraft and a few ships.

The reason behind the attack was preemptive. Japan feared that U.S. Navy ships so close to Asia would interfere with Japan's plans to take over other countries and add them to the Japanese empire. They feared that the U.S. would attack them, and hoped that by destroying the U.S. war ships, they could prevent any attack. Instead, the U.S. declared war on Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. Far from being crippled, the U.S. Navy recovered quickly. No aircraft carriers were destroyed in the attack, and aircraft carriers were soon playing a critical role in the war.

