

Patriotic Holidays *of the United States*

An Introduction to the History, Symbols,
and Traditions Behind the Major Holidays
and Days of Observance



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A black and white photograph of the USS Arizona (BB-39) in a tropical harbor. The ship's name and hull number are painted in large, bold letters on the white hull. The background features a lush, forested hillside with several palm trees and a pier extending into the water. The foreground shows the dark water of the harbor, with a large number of white birds, likely terns, flying and landing on the ship's hull and in the water.

USS ARIZONA BB-39

National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

***Date Established as a Patriotic and National Observance:
August 23, 1994***

Date Observed: December 7

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, shocking Americans and marking the entrance of the United States into World War II. In 1994 Congress passed a bill designating December 7 as National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. It is not a federal holiday, but every year the president issues a proclamation calling for appropriate ceremonies and for flags to fly at half-staff.

Attack on Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor began on Sunday at 7:55 A.M., Hawaiian time. Within minutes the Navy's commanding officer at the base sent an urgent radiogram to all ships around Hawaii: "AIRRAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NO DRILL."

The Japanese air raids devastated the American naval base on Oahu. Nearly all the ships of the U.S. Pacific fleet were anchored off the shore, and most were damaged or destroyed. In addition, more than 150 planes were destroyed. The battleship USS *Arizona* sank, entombing 1,777 sailors and Marines on board. In sum, the attack claimed more than 3,000 casualties — 2,403 killed and 1,178 injured. American civilian deaths numbered 68.

The next day President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. His opening words are part of the

*Visitors drop
orchid petals into
the water over the
sunken USS
Arizona in tribute
to the fallen crew
members who
rest below.*



This marble memorial was built over the sunken USS Arizona and dedicated in 1962.

American memory: “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.” (See Appendix for text of entire speech.) Congress immediately declared war.

In response, Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy, declared war on the United States.

On the home front, preparation for war began. Men and women joined the armed services, and President Roosevelt ordered an investigative commission to determine how the U.S. military was taken unawares and what, if any, responsibility rested with commanders. As a result of the inquiry, the Army and Navy commanders in charge in Hawaii were relieved of their positions.

World War II

Between 1939 and 1945, World War II was fought in Europe, north Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and many Pacific islands. The conflict pitted the Allies—led by Britain and the United States—against the Axis, led by

Germany, Italy, and Japan. A combination of events during the 1930s led to the war, including the rise of militaristic dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Japan; unresolved problems stemming from World War I; and the spread of the Great Depression. In 1933 Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party came to power in Germany, which had been defeated in World War I. Hitler advocated an aggressive, racist program to restore Germany as a major world power and solve its economic problems. He encouraged Germans to view themselves as a superior race and began creating concentration camps in 1933 for the ultimate purpose of exterminating European Jews and others whom he hated.

In May 1939 Hitler entered an alliance with Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy, who also sought to take control of countries in eastern Europe and north Africa. This agreement led to the formation of what became known as the Axis powers.

World War II started when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. By 1940 Germany had invaded Austria, part of Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France. Later that year Germany began an air attack against Britain to prepare for an invasion.

In September 1940, Japan joined the Axis alliance. Japan was ruled by military leaders who sought to dominate east Asia and the Pacific. The United States opposed these plans, and Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Malaya, and the Philippines. As a result of the attack, the United States entered World War II. Though the U.S. government had been assisting Britain and France by providing arms and financial help, most Americans were opposed to direct involvement in the war. Pearl Harbor changed all that, and Americans enlisted by the thousands.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Stalin joined the Allies. On January 1, 1942, the Allies — France, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union — signed a formal pact called the United Nations Declaration, which later lent its name to the international organization founded after the war. With this they pledged their commitment to defeat the Axis together.

Allied forces fought many battles in the Pacific, the Soviet Union, Europe, north Africa, and Sicily. The Allies next determined to liberate Europe and began an air campaign in preparation for an invasion of Normandy, France.



Top right: Sailors aboard the USS Okane render honors while passing the USS Arizona Memorial during the 62nd Pearl Harbor Day observance.

Above: Pearl Harbor survivors participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the National Park Service's annual Pearl Harbor Day commemoration.



The invasion, known as D-Day, took place on June 6, 1944. Allied troops fought major battles which led to the defeat of the German army in France, Belgium, and, finally, Germany.

The war ended in Europe on May 7, 1945, when Germany surrendered. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, after the United States dropped the devastating atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is estimated that 17-25 million troops on both sides were killed. About 400,000 were Americans. There is no certain count of how many civilians died, but estimates indicated that more than 30 million civilian lives were lost; in addition, some 6 million Jews perished in the Nazi concentration camps.

Observances

Each year on December 7 ceremonies around the nation commemorate the lives lost at Pearl Harbor. At the USS Arizona Memorial the annual program features a moment of silence, veteran and survivor speakers, a wreath laying, patriotic music, a 21-gun salute, and a naval parade. In 1991 a 50th anniversary commemoration took place over four days at Pearl Harbor.

A Sampling of Observances

- 1. Mount Diablo, California:** A ceremonial lighting of a beacon atop the mountain at dusk every December 7 remembers the fallen of Pearl Harbor. Contact Mount Diablo State Park, 96 Mitchell Canyon Rd., Clayton, CA 94517, 925-837-2525, http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=517
- 2. Pearl Harbor, Hawaii:** See description above. Contact USS Arizona Memorial, 1 Arizona Memorial Pl., Honolulu, HI 96818, 808-422-0561, fax: 808-483-8608, <http://www.nps.gov/usar/>
- 3. Fredericksburg, Texas:** The National Museum of the Pacific War at the Admiral Nimitz State Historic Site hosts an annual commemoration that includes guest speakers and special recognition of troops on active duty and their families. Contact National Museum of the Pacific War, 340 E. Main St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624, 830-997-4379; fax: 830-997-8220, <http://www.nimitz-museum.org/>
- 4. LaPorte, Texas:** Ceremony aboard the Battleship *Texas*. Contact Battleship Texas State Historic Site, 3523 Highway 134, LaPorte, TX 77571, 281-479-2431, <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/battleship/>
- 5. Chicago, Illinois:** Chicago remembers Pearl Harbor at Navy Pier with the reading of names of Chicago natives who died in the attack, tolling of bells, "Taps," a 21-gun salute, the tossing of a wreath into the lake, and the playing of the "Navy Hymn." Contact Mayor's Office of Special Events, 121 N. LaSalle St., Rm. 703, Chicago, IL 60602, 312-744-3315; fax: 312-744-8523; TTY: 312-744-2964, moseinquiry@cityofchicago.org, <http://egov.cityofchicago.org/> (click on "City Departments," then scroll to and click "Special Events")
- 6. Fall River, Massachusetts:** Ceremony aboard the Battleship *Massachusetts* that includes tossing a wreath into the sea. The *Massachusetts* houses an exhibit and memorials on Pearl Harbor. Contact Battleship Cove, Five Water St., P.O. Box 11, Fall River, MA 02722-0111, 508-678-1100; fax: 508-674-5596, battleship@battleshipcove.org, <http://www.battleshipcove.org>
- 7. Washington, D.C.:** Wreath laying at the Lone Sailor Statue at the U.S. Navy Memorial. Contact U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation & Naval Heritage Center, 701 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Ste. 123, Washington,



DC 20004-2608, 202-737-2300, ext. 768 (Events Hotline), <http://www.lonesailor.org/>

8. **Morgantown, West Virginia:** Since the 1970s VFW Post 548 and West Virginia University ROTCs have paraded to Ogleby Plaza, to the bell and mast from the USS *West Virginia*, a battleship that sank in the attack. The ceremony includes a 21-gun salute, the playing of "Taps," the dedication of a wreath, and guest speakers. Contact VFW Post #548, 494 Spruce St., Morgantown, WV 26505, 304-292-9352.



Web Sites

"After the Day of Infamy: 'Man on the Street' Interviews Following the Attack on Pearl Harbor," an online presentation of the American Folklife Cen-

ter, Library of Congress at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afcphtml/afcp/home.htm>

Arizona Memorial Museum Association at <http://arizonamemorial.org/>

Library of Congress online exhibit at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/dec07.html>

National D-Day Museum in New Orleans provides information about Pearl Harbor and World War II at <http://www.ddaymuseum.org>

National Japanese American Memorial Foundation at <http://www.njamf.com/>

Pearl Harbor Survivors Association at <http://www.pearlharborsurvivorsonline.org/>

U.S. Naval Historical Center offers information and images of the attack on Pearl Harbor at <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/pearlhbr/pearlhbr.htm>

USS Arizona Memorial at <http://www.nps.gov/usal/>

Sources for Further Reading

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Web Sites

This section includes all web sites listed in the entries in alphabetical order by the names of the sponsoring organizations.

Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission at <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov>

Air Force at <http://www.af.mil>

Air Force Association at <http://www.afa.org/>

Air Force Historical Research Agency at <http://afhra.maxwell.af.mil>

Air Force Sergeants Association at <http://www.afsahq.org/>

Air National Guard at <http://www.ang.af.mil/>

American Ex-Prisoners of War at <http://www.axpow.org/>

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

Labor Day at <http://laborday.aflcio.org/aboutunions/laborday/>

Workers Memorial Day at <http://www.aflcio.org/yourjobeconomy/safety/memorial/>

American Gold Star Mothers at <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/>

American Labor Museum at <http://www.geocities.com/labormuseum/>

American Legion at <http://www.legion.org/>

American Legion Auxiliary at <http://www.legion-aux.org/>

American Pyrotechnics Association at <http://www.americanpyro.com>

AMVETS at <http://www.amvets.org/>

Arizona Memorial Museum Association at <http://arizonamemorial.org/>

Arlington National Cemetery at <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org>

Army at <http://www.army.mil>

Army and Navy Union, USA at <http://www.armynavy.net/>

Army Institute of Heraldry at <http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/>

Army National Guard at <http://www.arng.army.mil/>

Bill of Rights Institute at <http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org/>

Blinded Veterans Association at <http://www.bva.org/>

Blue Star Mothers at <http://www.bluestarmoms.org/>

Civil Rights Movement Veterans at <http://www.crmvet.org/>

Coast Guard at <http://www.uscg.mil>

Commission on Presidential Debates at <http://www.debates.org/>

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