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“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 notion, 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.
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