

## Surprise Attacks

### Pearl Harbor 1941



The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred on December 7, 1941. Japanese planes bombed the American fleet in its port at the naval base in Hawaii. This was a surprise attack by the Japanese because they wanted to remove the American Pacific Fleet from the region. The United States Navy was damaged severely by the

attack, as close to 2,400 men were killed, with half of that number being wounded. Many of the battleships and destroyers were severely damaged as well. Some of the ships sunk to the bottom of the harbor. The Japanese wanted to hurt the United States in order to strengthen the effort of their armies in moving into the Dutch East Indies and Malaysia. As a result of this attack, the United States declared war on Japan.

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### September 11 2001

The September 11 terrorist attacks were suicide attacks launched against the United States by the al-Qaeda terrorist network. Four commercial United States airliners were hijacked by teams of terrorists. Each of the teams of terrorists had a person who had been trained to fly a plane. Two of the planes slammed into the towers of the World Trade Center, resulting in the collapse of the Twin Towers. A third plane crashed into the side of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The fourth plane, intended to crash into a major landmark in Washington, D.C., was taken down in a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, where it is believed that the passengers of the plane were able to overcome the terrorists and bring it down. In the aftermath of the attacks, the United States launched a “War against Terrorism,” starting on October 7, 2001 with Operation Enduring Freedom.



### **Similarities**

There are many similarities between the attacks on Pearl Harbor during World War II and the September 11 terrorist attacks. Both attacks came as a surprise to the United States. It seemed that America was unaware that the Japanese and al-Qaeda were formulating plots to assault the United States. However, evidence has surfaced that the United States had prior knowledge that both attacks could be imminent. Seemingly, however, nothing was done about it. In both attacks, there was a tremendous loss of American life, as 2,388 Americans were killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor and 2,981 Americans were killed during the September 11 terrorist attacks. Both attacks came from the air; the Japanese utilized dive bombers in order to inflict casualties upon the Americans. On September 11, al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial American jets in order to use them as weapons against citizens of the United States. Both attacks caused the United States to engage in major military battles with their adversaries. The United States, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, declared war on Japan in the aftermath of December 7, 1941, a “date which will live in infamy.” In 2001, President George W. Bush launched a worldwide war on terrorism. He first focused on Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and then he issued the command to invade Iraq in 2003.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Discussion Questions:

1. How did the loss of life compare in the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the September 11 terrorist attacks?
2. How did the Japanese and the al-Qaeda terrorist network use planes against the United States?
3. What happened in the aftermath of both attacks on the United States?