The Attack on Pearl Harbor

In 1941, many countries of the world were at war. In Europe, Germany, and Italy were fighting together to expand their territories. Germany had already taken over many countries, including the Netherlands, Poland, Denmark, and France. Germany had also been bombing Great Britain. The war in Europe had spilled into Africa, with German and Italian troops fighting the British troops in North Africa.

Japan joined an alliance with Germany and Italy. This alliance was called the Axis. Japan wanted to take control of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

The U.S. had not joined the fighting, although it had loaned ships and supplies to Great Britain. Many Americans wanted to join the war to stop the Axis from taking over Europe and Asia. Other Americans were against joining in a far away war that did not concern the U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to discourage Japan from invading countries in Asia. In early 1941, he moved the U.S. warships in the Pacific from San Diego, California to Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Prior to the attack, the U.S. had placed sanctions on any type of war material going to and from Japan. Therefore, Japan needed oil, desperately. The Dutch East Indies, which is now Indonesia, had a large supply of oil. The Japanese government decided to invade the Dutch East Indies in order to have an oil supply. They also developed a plan to keep the U.S. from interfering with the invasion.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, over 350 Japanese war planes from six aircraft carriers began bombing the U.S. ships at Pearl Harbor. The surprise attack began at 7:48am. The attack was over in 90 minutes. Eight U.S. battleships had been sunk. Eleven other ships, including cruisers and destroyers had been sunk or damaged, and 300 U.S. planes had been destroyed or damaged. Over 2,400 U.S. military personnel had been killed, mostly on the USS Arizona.

On the day following the attack, President Roosevelt gave a heartfelt speech to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Japan. Congress agreed and declared war on the Japanese on December 8, 1941 and on Germany and Italy on December 11. With this act, the U.S. had officially entered World War II.

1. Why did the Japanese decide to attack the United States at Pearl Harbor?
2. Describe the damage done to the American fleet at Pearl Harbor.
3. Americans were very angry when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. How do you think the attack changed the minds of isolationists prior to the attack?

Pearl Harbor – 7th December 1941

**Japanese View**

As we closed in, enemy antiaircraft fire began to concentrate on us. Dark gray puffs burst all around. Most of them came from ships' batteries, but land batteries were also active. Suddenly my plane bounced as if struck by a club. When I looked back to see what had happened, the radioman said: 'The fuselage is holed and the rudder wire damaged.' We were fortunate that the plane was still under control, for it was imperative to fly a steady course as we approached the target. Now it was nearly time for 'Ready to release,' and I concentrated my attention on the lead plane to note the instant his bomb was dropped. Suddenly a cloud came between the bombsight and the target, and just as I was thinking that we had already overshot, the lead plane banked slightly and turned right toward Honolulu. We had missed the release point because of the cloud and would have to try again.

* Commander Mitsuo Fuchida

**US View**

The railings, as we ascended, were very hot and as we reached the boat deck I noted that it was torn up and burned. The bodies of the dead were thick, and badly burned men were heading for the quarterdeck, only to fall apparently dead or badly wounded. The Major and I went between No. 3 and No. 4 turret to the starboard side and found Lieutenant Commander Fuqua ordering the men over the side and assisting the wounded. He seemed exceptionally calm and the Major stopped and they talked for a moment. Charred bodies were everywhere.

I made my way to the quay and started to remove my shoes when I suddenly found myself in the water. I think the concussion of a bomb threw me in. I started swimming for the pipe line which was about one hundred and fifty feet away. I was about half way when my strength gave out entirely. My clothes and shocked condition sapped my strength, and I was about to go under when Major Shapley started to swim by, and seeing my distress, grasped my shirt and told me to hang to his shoulders while he swam in.

**Activities:**

1. Describe what the attack on Pearl Harbor was like for:

a. US sailors

b. Japanese pilots.

2. Why is it useful to view primary sources when explaining what the attack on Pearl Harbor was like for US sailors and Japanese pilots?