

**Suggested Remarks for
National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
For DAV (Disabled American Veterans) Representatives**

(Acknowledgment of introduction, distinguished guests, as well as others in the audience.)

Thank you, [**name**], for that warm introduction, and good [**morning, afternoon, evening**] everyone.

I want to thank you for inviting me here today. And I want to recognize some very special people in the audience:

Gentlemen and ladies, let's begin by showing our thanks to these men for their courage and determination to deal with those who believed they could attack us on Dec. 7, 1941. Let's give these veterans a big round of applause.

(APPLAUSE)

It's difficult to believe there are so few Americans alive who remember the attack seven decades ago, and the course it set for our nation. The story of Pearl Harbor is more about the courage of men and women under fire than it is about bombs and battleships.

The air attack on Pearl Harbor began at 7:48 a.m. Hawaiian Time. In the first wave of the attack, a total of 353 planes were launched from five aircraft carriers toward Oahu. Torpedo bombers led the first wave against the most important ships anchored at Pearl Harbor -- the battleships. Dive bombers attacked U.S. air bases across Oahu -- starting with Hickam Field, the largest, and Wheeler Field, the main U.S. Army Air Force fighter base.

Our only aerial opposition came from a handful of pilots flying Army fighters and Navy dive bombers from the carrier *Enterprise*.

Our men aboard U.S. ships awoke to the sounds of alarms, bombs exploding, and gunfire. Bleary-eyed, they ran to their General Quarters stations. The famous

message, "Air raid Pearl Harbor. This is not drill!" was flashed around the world.

We were woefully unprepared. Ammunition lockers were locked, aircraft were parked wingtip to wingtip in the open, and the anti-aircraft guns were unmanned.

But American servicemen and women responded effectively during the battle. Ensign Joe Taussig, Jr., the only commissioned officer aboard the USS *Nevada*, got the battleship underway during the attack. As planes attacked her, she was badly damaged and Ensign Taussig lost a leg during the battle. The ship was beached in the harbor after being bombed and torpedoed. But it was within easy reach for repair crews.

The destroyer, USS *Aylwin*, got underway with only four officers aboard, all ensigns, none with more than a year's sea duty. The ship operated at sea for 36 hours after the attack before her commanding officer managed to get back aboard.

Captain Mervyn Bennion, commanding the USS *West Virginia*, led his men until he was cut down by fragments from a bomb which hit the USS *Tennessee*, moored alongside.

A second wave of 171 planes targeted our aircraft carriers, which were at sea, cruisers and the several airbases surrounding the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor.

After 90 minutes of infamy, the attack was over. The toll was heartbreaking. An estimated 2,386 Americans were dead, including 55 civilians. An additional 1,139 were wounded. Of our Pacific Fleet, 18 ships were sunk or run aground, including five battleships.

Nearly half of the deaths came aboard the USS *Arizona*, where 1,177 were killed when the ship exploded after a bomb hit its forward ammunition magazine five minutes into the attack.

There were 82 Army and 42 Navy nurses present during the attack at Pearl Harbor. All of them survived, but caring for the tremendous number of casualties in such a short time made them heroes to the men who were wounded.

It is an often forgotten footnote that nearly all the ships sunk and damaged at Pearl Harbor were repaired and returned to fight during World War II. The shattered *Arizona* and the target ship *Utah* did not, and they remain at Pearl Harbor today. The USS *Oklahoma*, which capsized, was also never returned to the fleet.

The battleships that returned were the *Pennsylvania*, *Maryland*, *Tennessee*, *California*, *West Virginia* and *Nevada*. These vessels fought in the last great battleship action in history in the Surigao Strait off the Philippine Islands in 1944.

The cost of war is always high. More than 16 million men and women went to war during World War II. About 400 thousand died and 671 thousand were wounded.

When the veterans came home they began to rebuild our nation. They used the GI Bill to get education and training. They created new, innovative industries. They picked up a tired and worn nation and moved it into an economic boom.

Just think of what the Greatest Generation built. Computers, rockets to land men on the moon, modern jet transportation, cell phones, color television and microwaves. It's hard to touch a device today that wasn't envisioned by a veteran of World War II.

And they never forgot their fellow veterans, just as DAV remembers the veterans of all wars. They joined veterans groups. DAV membership today is 1.2 million. In 1941, we had 42,000 members – all World War I veterans. By 1946, DAV had grown to 105,000 members, and we continue to grow.

The Greatest Generation returned home also to make the VA and DAV the truly service-oriented organizations they are today. At the VA, they built the foundations that ensure high quality care and a life of promise for the men and women who have served after them. Generations of our veterans have the World War II veterans to thank for the quality and skill of care.

On this day, we honor the wartime legacy of the World War II veterans, and both you and I, DAV and the VA, care for them today, and honor their value and commitment to our nation. They are the heroes who had heroes follow in their footsteps.

We must not forget what they did and what they endured – both on Dec. 7, 1941, and all the days of battle that followed. We owe a great tribute for what they did to bring our nation together.

Pearl Harbor veterans were the first to serve and sacrifice for our nation during World War II. They answered the call to duty. Now veterans have the privilege to enjoy the foundation they built so that all may have the liberty they courageously defended.

Each of you knows DAV has been there to support you – veterans helping veterans. DAV has been investing in the hopes, dreams and accomplishment of injured and ill veterans for nearly a century. During that time, our organization has grown and evolved into the nation's premiere veterans service organization.

And all of our achievements stem from men and women like you – veterans wounded and sickened by war who are determined to grab as much of life as they can to overcome what was lost on the battlefield.

We at DAV do our utmost to reflect your dedication and leadership. Each of us shares a common experience. And each of us has faced recovery, rehabilitation and the strong drive to succeed. And to each of you, I thank you for your service to our nation.

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To those who invited me today, I want to thank you, sincerely, for all that you do. To those veterans here, I am in awe of being in your presence.

May God bless you. May God bless our nation,
especially those who have been placed in harm's way.
May He guard and protect those still on the field of battle,
and bless the lives of all who have returned.

Thank you. I've really enjoyed being here.

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