

THE MAKING OF A NATION - US Goes to War After Pearl Harbor, but Japan Is Not the First Target

By David Jarmul

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VOICE ONE:

THE MAKING OF A NATION -- a program in Special English by the Voice of America.

(MUSIC)

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December nineteen forty-one was one of the most successful surprise attacks in the history of modern warfare. Japanese warships, including several aircraft carriers, crossed the western Pacific to Hawaii without being seen. They launched their warplanes on Sunday morning to attack the huge American naval and air base.

Many of the American sailors were asleep or at church. They were completely surprised. In fact, some Americans outside the base thought the Japanese planes must be American airmen making training flights in new airplanes. The sounds of guns and bombs soon showed how wrong they were.



Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941

VOICE TWO:

The Japanese planes sank or seriously damaged six powerful American battleships in just a few minutes. They killed more than three thousand sailors. They destroyed or damaged half the American airplanes in Hawaii.

American forces were so surprised that they were unable to offer much of a fight. Japanese losses were very light.

Japan's destruction at Pearl Harbor was so complete that officials in Washington did not tell the full details immediately to the American people. They were afraid the nation might panic if it learned the truth about the loss of so much American military power.

VOICE ONE:

The following day, President Roosevelt went to the Capitol building to



**Roosevelt signs
declaration of war
against Japan**

ask Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. The Senate approved his request without opposition. In the House of Representatives, only one congressman objected.

Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. Congress reacted by declaring war on those two countries.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor ended the long American debate about whether to become involved in the Second World War. American politicians and citizens had argued for years about whether to remain neutral or fight to help Britain and France and other friends.

Japan's aggressive attack at Pearl Harbor united Americans in a common desire for military victory. It made Americans willing to do whatever was necessary to win the war. And it pushed America into a kind of world leadership that its people had never known before.

VOICE TWO:

President Franklin Roosevelt and his advisers had to make an important decision about how to fight the war. Would the United States fight Japan first, or Germany, or both enemies at the same time?

Japan's attack had brought America into the war. And it had severely damaged American military power. But Roosevelt decided not to strike back at Japan immediately. He would use most of his forces to fight Germany.

There were several reasons for Roosevelt's decision. First, Germany already controlled much of Europe, as well as much of the Atlantic Ocean. Roosevelt considered this a direct threat. And he worried about possible German intervention in Latin America.

Second, Germany was an advanced industrial nation. It had many scientists and engineers. Its factories were modern. Roosevelt was concerned that Germany might be able to develop deadly new weapons, such as an atomic bomb, if it was not stopped quickly.

Third, Britain historically was one of America's closest allies. And the British people were united and fighting for their lives against Germany. This was not true in Asia. Japan's most important opponent was China. But China's fighting forces were weak and divided, and could not offer strong opposition to the Japanese.

VOICE ONE:

Hitler's decision to break his treaty with Josef Stalin and attack the Soviet Union made Roosevelt's choice final. The American leader recognized that the Germans would have to fight on two fronts: in the west against Britain and in the east against Russia.

He decided it was best to attack Germany while its forces were divided. So Washington sent most of its troops and supplies to Britain to join the fight against Germany.

American military leaders hoped to attack Germany quickly by launching an attack across the English Channel. Stalin also supported this plan. Soviet forces were suffering terrible losses from the Nazi attack and

wanted the British and Americans to fight the Germans on the west.

However, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and other leaders opposed launching an invasion across the English channel too quickly. They worried that such an invasion might fail, while the Germans were still so strong. And they knew this would mean disaster.

VOICE TWO:

For this reason, British and American forces decided instead to attack the Italian and German occupation troops in north Africa.

British forces had been fighting the Italians and Germans in north Africa since late in nineteen forty. They fought the Italians first in Egypt and Libya. British forces had successfully pushed the Italians across Libya. They killed more than ten thousand Italian troops and captured more than one hundred thirty thousand prisoners.



Winston Churchill



Erwin Rommel

But the British success did not last long. Hitler sent one of his best commanders, General Erwin Rommel, to take command of the Italians. Rommel was brave and smart. He pushed the British back from Libya to the border with Egypt. And in a giant battle at Tobruk, he destroyed or captured more than eight hundred of Britains's nine hundred tanks.

VOICE ONE:

Rommel's progress threatened Egypt and the Suez Canal. So Britain and the United States moved quickly to send more troops and supplies to stop him.

Slowly, British forces led by General Bernard Montgomery pushed Rommel and the Germans back to Tripoli in Libya.

In November, nineteen forty-two, American and British forces commanded by General Dwight Eisenhower landed in northwest Africa. They planned to attack rommel from the west, while Montgomery attacked him from the east.

But Rommel knew Eisenhower's troops had done little fighting before. So he attacked them quickly before they could launch their own attack.

VOICE TWO:

A terrible battle took place at kasserine in western Tunisia. Rommel's attack failed. The American troops held their ground. And three months later, they joined with montgomery's British troops to force the Germans in north Africa to surrender.

The battle of north Africa was over. The allied forces of Britain and the United States had regained control of the southern mediterranean sea. They could now attack Hitler's forces in Europe from the south.

VOICE ONE:

The Allies wasted no time. They landed on the Italian island of Sicily in July of nineteen forty-



**Dwight
Eisenhower**

three. German tanks fought back. But the British and American forces moved ahead. Soon they captured Sicily's capital, Palermo. And within weeks, they forced the German forces to leave Sicily for the Italian mainland.

In late July, Italy's dictator, Benito Mussolini, was overthrown and placed in prison. The Germans rescued him and helped him establish a new government, protected by German troops. But still the allies attacked.

They crossed to the Italian mainland. The Germans fought hard, returning bullet for bullet. And for some time, they prevented the allied troops from breaking out of the coastal areas.

VOICE TWO:

The fighting grew bloodier. A fierce battle took place at Monte Cassino. Thousands and thousands of soldiers lost their lives. But slowly the allies advanced north through Italy. They captured Rome in June of nineteen forty-four. And they forced the Germans back into the mountains of northern Italy.

The Allies would not gain complete control of Italy until the end of the war. But they had succeeded in increasing their control of the Mediterranean and pushing back the Germans.

One reason Hitler's forces were not stronger in Africa and Italy was because German armies also were fighting in Russia. That will be our story next week.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

You have been listening to THE MAKING OF A NATION, a program in Special English. Our program was narrated by Jack Weitzel and Rich Kleinfeldt. It was written by David Jarmul. The Voice of America invites you to listen again next week to THE MAKING OF A NATION.