Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

Eighty-four years have passed since the fateful morning of December 7, 1941. Yet, the sound of those explosions, the cries of the wounded and the sight of smoke darkening the Pearl Harbor sky remain etched forever in our nation's memory.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously referred to Japan's surprise attack as a date that would "live in infamy." That phrase is often quoted, but sometimes, the true meaning of that infamy and what it cost and what it forged is lost to the passing of time.

To the VFW, the infamy of that day was more than just tragedy. It was a betrayal of peace, shattered by a sudden and deliberate ambush that cost of the lives of 2,403 Americans – all servicemen, women and civilians. Those lost were killed while just going about their routine day, not even knowing what was heading their way. We remember the names of the ships - the Arizona, the Oklahoma, the Utah - which were turned into metal coffins and memorials in minutes.

This National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, we do not just recount history; we honor a debt. We pause to remember every soldier, sailor, airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman who was serving our country on that beautiful, deadly Sunday morning. Their sacrifice was the price of our awakening and their names are the foundation upon which the greatest American military victory was built.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was a colossal tragedy, but it was also the moment the sleeping giant awoke, and a nation arose with unified fury. The response from the American people was immediate, total and profound. A generation of young men and women … from farmers and factory workers to clerks, teachers and students … put their civilian lives on pause and traded their futures for a uniform. They did not debate the cause, they simply answered the call.

Forever known as the Greatest Generation, this group faced the grim odds of a two-front war against ruthless Axis powers with an indomitable, unbeatable spirit. They were tested on the beaches of Normandy, in the jungles of the Guadalcanal, in the skies over Germany and across the vast, unforgiving Pacific.

However, these men and women didn't seek glory. They simply believed in the necessity of securing absolute victory to protect our nation against fascism and safeguard the freedoms we often take for granted.

The five years that followed the Pearl Harbor attack saw the largest mobilization of American spirit and industry the world has ever known, driven by the memory of the blood spilled in the waters off that coast in Hawaii.

Their dedication and patriotism ensured that democracy would prevail over tyranny and they returned home not as conquering heroes, but as humble veterans who simply wanted to get back to work, raise their families and build the modern American prosperity.

Their service and sacrifice helped cement the VFW's dedication to ensuring the rights and benefits earned by all generations of veterans, and to pass on the essential lessons taught by the sacrifices made on December 7, 1941.

As the decades pass, the number of Pearl Harbor survivors still with us dwindle. This places the mantel of remembrance squarely on our shoulders … on the shoulders of organizations like the VFW and on every American citizen.

Today, let us recommit ourselves to honoring the Greatest Generation's service by telling their story of diligence and perseverance and ensuring that their legacy of sacrifice is never lessened to a mere footnote in history.

Their contributions, their sacrifice, their steadfast devotion to duty, God, country and to their families, provide us with the example we need to emulate every day of our lives. We must remain dedicated to honoring their service, and through telling their story of diligence and perseverance, inspiring others to take up the mantel. Today, we are strengthened by the memory of their actions, so let us leave here equally resolved in our determination to serve our nation as selflessly as they did.

-VFW-