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was an
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territory of



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When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America was at last forced to officially enter World War II. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt officially declared war on the Japanese and in his famous radio address to the American people, he professed that December 7 was a day that would live in infamy. Americans and Japanese alike, still remember Pearl Harbor Day, but how many remember the gallant, fighting Marines who served on a tiny atoll in the Pacific by the name of Wake Island? Prior to the war, Wake Island, located 2300 miles west of Honolulu, was an unincorporated territory of the United States, which was placed under the jurisdiction of the Navy in 1934. It was also a Clipper stop on Pan American Airlines famed Trans-Pacific run, and in 1939, the U.

S. Navy began construction of an air and submarine base, which was half completed at the time of the attack. Because of the construction of the base, approximately 1200 civilians were on the island, working for the American construction firm, Morrison-Knudsen, in addition to the Navy personnel and Marines who had been sent to defend the island. The first attack came at noon on December 7, 1941, when 36 Japanese bombers initiated the first bombing of the island. The bombings by the Japanese continued until December 23, when under continuous shelling, the Americans, under U. S. Navy Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham, were finally forced to surrender. Although the Japanese finally took the island, they incurred heavy losses. Three cruisers and one transport sustained heavy damage, two destroyers and one patrol boat were sunk, while 820 Japanese soldiers were killed, with another 333 wounded. In contrast, American military casualties included 120 killed, 49 wounded, with two missing in action.

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Initially, Japanese strategists assumed that the tiny island would be overwhelmed in a matter of hours. However, they underestimated the fighting spirit of the military personnel and civilians stationed on the island. For sixteen days these brave men fought against overwhelming odds, but demonstrated both to the Japanese and to their fellow Americans back at home that the Americans could and would put up a courageous fight. During the first air raid, Pan Americans facilities were destroyed, and ten civilian employees of the airline were killed. When the assault on the island was first launched, the Americans had twelve aircraft. By December 21, they were down to two planes and by the 22nd of December, none was left in the fleet.

In addition, the Japanese used the technique of pattern bombing which caused heavy damage to practically every installation on the island. On the final day of the siege, over 1000 Japanese went on shore and the fighting that ensued continued for six hours. The Marines struggle to hold on to Wake Island came at a time when American installations in the Pacific were being both attacked and captured and the heroics of the fighting Marines on Wake did much to lift the spirit of the American people. Even when it looked as though Americas chances of winning the battle for Wake were few, it has been said that when asked by radio if there was anything they wanted, the Marines replied: Yes, send us some more Japs. This became a popular slogan during the war, much like Remember the Alamo.

After the surrender, the Japanese rounded up all of the civilians and enlisted men and forced them to march to the airfield. There they were stripped and bound with wire and made to stand in the hot sun for two days with no food and very little water. Back on the homefront, besides worrying about the <https://assignbuster.com/when-of-honolulu-was-an-unincorporated-territory-of/>

safety of their loved ones, the families of the civilians were left without the regular financial support that the construction crew had been sending prior to their unintended involvement in the war. Twenty-six civilians died during the sixteen-day siege of Wake. On January 12, 1942, approximately 1200 American prisoners of war were loaded on board the Japanese passenger ship, the Nitta Maru, for the twelve-day voyage to China.

Twenty of the wounded passengers were dropped off in Japan while five of the Americans were beheaded while aboard ship. The prisoners arrived at Shanghai on January