

Q106 – Why did the United States enter World War II?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

The United States entered World War II because Japan attacked our naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

More than 2,000 Americans died that fateful day: December 7th, 1941. (FDR clip: "... and dastardly attacked by Japan on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a state of war.")

Four days later, Nazi Germany declared war on the U.S. (Hitler speaking German) America joined the Allied powers: Britain, France, and Russia – fighting the Axis powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan. It was the worst war in history: a global war in which Americans fought on five continents.

More than 12 million men and women served in the armed forces: nearly one American in ten. More than 400,000 of them never came home.

After Allied troops invaded Italy in the summer of 1943, the fascist regime fell and a new Italian government signed an armistice. But German troops ousted the new government and fought on till the end of the war.

On D-Day, June 6th, 1944, Allied soldiers fought their way into occupied France, through the monumental Battle of the Bulge, and on to Germany and victory.

In the Pacific, the U.S. Navy stopped Japan's advance with a stunning victory at Midway in 1942, just six months after Pearl Harbor. Then began the long campaign to oust the Japanese from one island after another. Japan braced for a suicidal stand in its home islands until the atomic bomb drove the emperor to overrule his generals and surrender.

World War II left the United States as the worlds' superpower.