



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LEON E. PANETTA  
MESSAGE TO PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS**

Seventy years ago on a December morning, our Nation sustained a cruel and destructive attack at Pearl Harbor. Our enemies thought that by this sudden and deliberate raid, they could weaken America. Instead, they only strengthened it. That day truly awoke a sleeping giant.

As we join you in remembering the events of December 7, 1941, we honor you and your fallen comrades for your indomitable will – and we remember the sacrifice and shared purpose of the American people, as well as the strength of our elected and military leaders during the war.

December 7, 1941, was indeed a day that will live in infamy. But in the memories of that day we continue to draw determination and conviction to protect our freedoms, to sacrifice for our fellow citizens, and to serve a purpose larger than self. You, the survivors of Pearl Harbor and of the war that followed, embody this conviction, this determination to raise high the torch of freedom and sacrifice. From your stories, posterity records for all subsequent generations the emotion, the heroism, and the tragedy of a harrowing attack and the titanic struggle that would later unfold.

As a young boy, I remember seeing troops move through Fort Ord during the war years in Monterey, California. My parents would invite soldiers into our home for Christmas dinner, and I remember seeing young men from all over the country about to go to war. And I remember thinking in that uncertain time: “This is going to be the last opportunity these young men have to enjoy the comforts of home for a long time.”

You are the veterans of that greatest generation. You have lived full lives and witnessed years of great prosperity because of the freedom you helped to secure for America and her allies. I know you take great pride, as I do, that your legacy lives on in today’s men and women in uniform, who have borne the burden of a decade of war, and who are truly this Nation’s next greatest generation. The 9/11 generation, like you, has stepped forward in your image of service and sacrifice, volunteering for military duty after another sudden and terrible attack on our shores.

We treasure you. You have brought everlasting credit to your fallen comrades. The men and women in today’s military stand on the shoulders of your individual and combined sacrifice and service to our Nation. Your example inspires those in uniform today, strengthens our Nation’s moral fiber, and proves that with united resolve our country can surmount any challenge. Thank you for your service, for your sacrifice, and for your endless zeal to see to it that our children and grandchildren can pass along a better life to the next generation. This has always been the American dream, a dream we can realize because of the determination of our citizens to defend it.

God bless you, God bless our troops, and God bless the United States of America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leon E. Panetta", is located at the bottom right of the page.