

30 Pearl Harbor



German tanks enter Czechoslovakia. Having to salute the invader was only the start of a conquered people's humiliation.

It is Sunday, December 7, 1941, and the sun is shining in Washington, D.C. To the morning churchgoers it seems just another bright winter day. At the White House, 31 guests are expected for lunch. There will be guests for dinner, too. None of that is unusual. The White House has become an informal, busy place since the Roosevelts moved in. That was more than eight years ago. FDR was reelected in 1936 and again in 1940. No other president has served more than two terms.

The American people (or most of them, anyway) have great faith in their president. These are dangerous times, and alarming things are happening all around the world. It is important to have a leader who can be trusted.

Hitler has steamrolled his way to some astounding victories. He has taken Austria, and Czechoslovakia, and Poland, and Denmark, and Norway, and Holland, and Belgium. One by one he picked off all those countries. The democracies let him do it. The democratic nations are so sick of war that they are willing to do anything to try to avoid it. What they have actually done is to make the war much worse than it would have been if they had stopped Hitler earlier.

It was when the Nazis marched into Poland that Britain and France finally responded. (Both nations had pledged their help to Poland if it was attacked.) Britain and France went to war.



German troops arrive in Prague, March 15, 1939, the day Hitler announced, "Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist."



The Polish army was hopelessly under-equipped and outdated; what could cavalry with lances do against a tank?



The Germans swept into Belgium and Holland at the same time. The Dutch city of Rotterdam resisted so strongly that Hitler bombed it to pieces out of spite. Below: a Belgian family stumbles through air-raid rubble. Above: the incredible sea rescue on the beaches of Dunkirk.



What they faced was something called *blitzkrieg*. That was the German word for “lightning war,” which was a good description. The Germans sped their troops, tanks, and artillery across nations, obliterating them almost before they knew what was happening.

When superbly trained, well-equipped German forces raced into France, the country was overwhelmed. A large British-French army was trapped at Dunkirk, on the English Channel. It looked as if the soldiers were doomed. Then the British government sent out an appeal for boats. Soon fishermen, dentists, grocers, tugboat captains—anyone with a boat that could make it across the Channel—were sailing, back and forth, back and forth, ferrying soldiers to England. They saved an army, but they couldn’t save France. On June 14, 1940, German tanks rolled into Paris.

Now almost the only European democracy left is Britain. And Britain is under attack. German bombers are pounding that small island. It looks as if it will go next. Everyone knows that the Nazis plan to invade England. Hitler’s goal is world conquest. Americans have plenty of reason to worry.

In Asia, Japan has earlier occupied Manchuria (in 1931) and other parts of China (in 1937), and has just invaded French Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea) in July 1941. Japan is also threatening Thailand, the Philippines, and other Pacific nations. The United States sends letters to Japan objecting to this aggressive behavior, and finally imposes a total trade embargo and freezes Japanese funds in U.S. banks. Inside Japan there is a power struggle between civilian and military lead-

ers. In the summer, Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoe offers to meet with Roosevelt. The president doesn't understand the importance of the request. He refuses the meeting. Konoe resigns, and is replaced by army minister General Hideki Tojo. In Japan, the military is now supreme.

This very day, December 7, Secretary of State Cordell Hull receives a call from two Japanese diplomats. They ask for an emergency meeting. Hull expects to be given the Japanese government's answer to an American peace letter. At the White House, after lunch, the president works on his stamp collection (he began collecting stamps as a boy). His good friend Harry Hopkins is with him; so is his Scottie dog, Fala. They are relaxing. The phone rings. It is close to 2 P.M., Eastern time.

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox is on the line. His voice is quivering. A message has just been received from Hawaii. This is what it says: AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR—THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

Pearl Harbor, in the Hawaiian Islands, is where the Pacific Fleet is headquartered! On Sunday morning ships were lined up in the harbor; their crews were having breakfast, or relaxing, or sleeping. At 7:02 A.M. Hawaiian time, a radar operator saw some blips on his screen. The operator didn't pay attention to them. He thought they were bombers he was expecting from the West Coast.

By 7:55 A.M. he knew better. That was when the first dive bombers—with the red Japanese sun painted on their sides—let their bombs

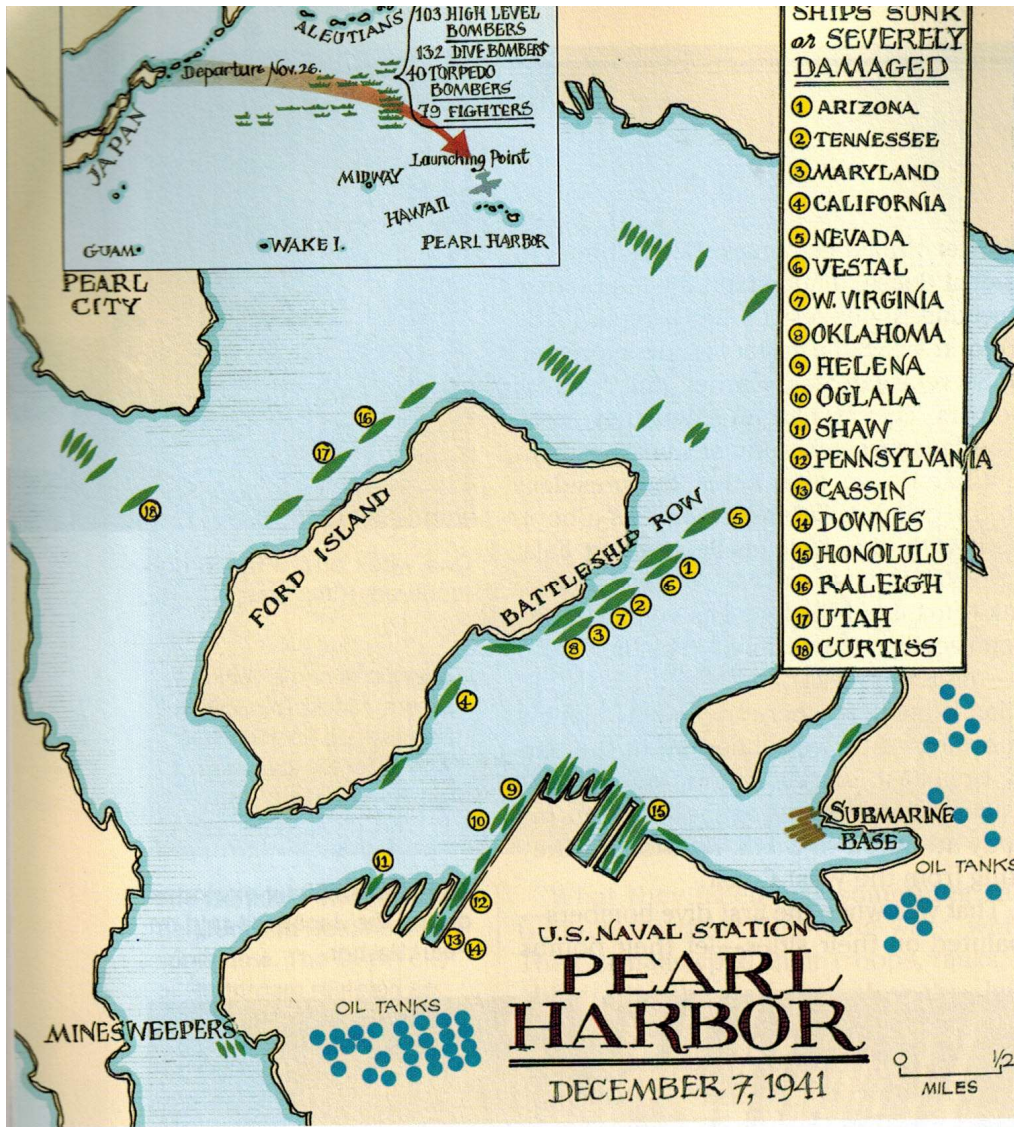


One week after France surrendered, Hitler was in Paris.

Japan's prime minister, General Hideki Tojo, called the attack on Pearl Harbor "a blow for the liberation of Asia."

The U.S. *Shaw* explodes during the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor.





loose on Battleship Row. The battleship *Arizona* gave off a tremendous roar, split in two, and slipped to the bottom of the harbor. That was just the beginning. Almost all the American planes on the island were damaged or destroyed. Most of the warships were crippled or sunk. And more than 2,400 soldiers, sailors, and civilians were killed.

At 2:05 P.M. Washington time (which is 8:05 A.M. Hawaiian time), the Japanese envoys arrive at Secretary of State Cordell Hull's door. They are part of an elaborate Japanese plan of deception, but their timing is off. Before the secretary can see them, his phone rings. It is the president, with the awful news of the Japanese attack. Now, Hull is from Tenn-

essee, and he claims he has a Tennessee temper. The stories of what he says to those envoys will differ, but it is known that they leave quickly, with their heads down.

Hull is soon at the White House. So are many government and military officials. Newspaper reporters begin arriving. At 2:25 P.M. the story goes out on news wires to the American people. The reports from Pearl Harbor are humiliating, but that isn't the only bad news. This same day, the Japanese have attacked American and British bases at Midway, Wake Island, Guam, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Philippines.

It is an astonishing act of aggression. But this president is at his best in a crisis. His advisers are angry, fearful, and frustrated. The president remains calm. He came into office during the nation's worst economic crisis. This is worse: the free world is fighting for survival.

Nationalist China's old walled capital city, Nanking, was captured by the Japanese in December of 1937. What happened is told in a book by an American writer, Iris Chang, called *The Rape of Nanking*. It's a story of the unspeakable horrors of war and of heroism, too.

Pearl Harbor is a disaster, but it may also be a lucky break. It unites the nation. There are no more isolationists. Everyone joins the war effort. Pearl Harbor shows the damage that air power can do. It changes people's thinking on that subject.

The next day the president goes before Congress. The Japanese have launched an "unprovoked and dastardly attack," he says. December 7 is "a date which will live in infamy." He asks Congress to declare war on Japan. Three days later, Japan's allies—Germany and Italy—declare war on the United States. It is World War II. It will make the awful First World War seem like a fire drill. The United States will fight this war against the wolves, maintain its democracy (as it did during the terrible Depression), and remain, as Abraham Lincoln said, the last best hope of earth.

Infamy (IN-fuh-me): it means "evil reputation."

Secretary Hull with Japanese ambassador Nomura (left) and special envoy Kurusu on their way to the White House, three weeks before the bombs fall on Pearl Harbor.



Two Great Leaders Speak and Inspire

Winston Churchill was an orator who could, and did, inspire a nation. This is part of what he said to the British people on June 4, 1940:

"We shall go on to the end. . .we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. . . until in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

When it came to oratory, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a match for Churchill or anyone. He liked to talk to the American people—as if he were a friend sitting in their living rooms—in radio broadcasts called "fireside chats." Usually those chats were filled with humor, but on February 9, 1942 he didn't have anything funny to say:

"We are now in this war. We are all in it—all the way. Every single man, woman, and child is a partner in the most tremendous undertaking of our American history....On the road ahead there lies hard work—grueling work—day and night, every hour and every minute. I was about to add that ahead there lies sacrifice for all of us. But it is not correct to use that word. The United States does not consider it a sacrifice to do all one can, to give one's best to our nation, when the nation is fighting for its existence and its future life...."

"The true goal we seek is far above and beyond the ugly field of battle. When we resort to force, as now we must, we are determined that this force shall be directed toward the ultimate good as well as against immediate evil. We Americans are not destroyers; we are builders."

"We are now in the midst of a war, not for conquest, not for vengeance, but for a world in which this nation, and all that this nation represents, will be safe for our children....We are going to win the war and we are going to win the peace that follows."

"And in the dark hours of this day—and through dark days that may be yet to come—we will know that the vast majority of the members of the human race are on our side. Many of them are fighting with us. All of them are praying for us. For, in representing our case, we represent theirs as well—our hope and their hope for liberty under God."