

The Truth of Pearl Harbor

(An Editorial)

By BASIL BREWER, Publisher, The New Bedford (Mass.) Standard-Times

Pearl Harbor is the saddest chapter in the history of America. Here, in one hour, was destroyed the Pacific battle fleet, chief weapon to restrain Japan from war—chief weapon with which to win, if war came.

Here were wiped out 4,000 officers and men of the American Army and Navy.

Innocent of responsibility, they died in a classic funeral pyre, built for them by the criminal negligence of others.

Pearl Harbor, which, as the Japanese planned, made impossible relief of the Philippines, may have been responsible for that other great tragedy—Bataan and Corregidor.

Pearl Harbor marked the beginning of war with Japan.

It may well have finished any hope of an early successful ending of the Japanese war.

Certainly the victims there, those who paid the "last full measure of devotion" were not to blame for the disaster.

Who were to blame for Pearl Harbor?

Surely here, if ever, there was guilt and there were guilty. Who were the guilty and why have they not been apprehended, tried, convicted and punished?

WHY?

The president had said Jan. 7, 1941, 11 months before Pearl Harbor:

"When the dictators are ready to make war upon us, they will not wait for an act of war on our part. They, not we, will choose the time, the method and the place of their attack."

Why, then, were we "surprised" at Pearl Harbor?

Why was the battle fleet there, each in its place, names and exact locations map-marked by the Japanese flyers to receive the torpedoes, made especially for this attack?

Why was the air arm of the Army there, herded together, unarmed, for the kill?

Should the Pacific battle fleet have been at Pearl Harbor on December 7?

And, if it should not, why was it there, and by whose orders?

INVESTIGATIONS

Four different "investigations" of Pearl Harbor have been conducted—all secret.

Only one "report" has been made, the report of the Roberts Commission, released a few weeks after Pearl Harbor.

Of the 127 witnesses who testified in the Roberts investigation, the testimony of none has been made public.

Of the hundreds of documents studied and put in the record in the Roberts investigation, none has been made public.

Why have not these documents been made public?

The Roberts report blamed General Short, commanding general of the Army, and Admiral Kimmel, commander-in-chief of the fleet at Pearl Harbor, for the disaster.

As a result of the findings of the Roberts Commission, both have been ordered tried by court-martial.

Kimmel and Short, members of Congress and many others repeatedly have demanded the trials be held.

Today, more than 2½ years after the report of the Roberts Commission, neither Short nor Kimmel has been brought to trial.

It was urged, shortly after Pearl Harbor, that trials would interfere with the war.

Certainly now, almost three years after the disaster, no such claim validly can be made.

More than a year ago the late Secretary of the Navy Knox wrote a letter saying public trials of Kimmel and Short could not affect the progress of the war.

Very recently a subcommittee of the House Military Affairs Committee stated public trials would not interfere with the war.

Why, in justice, have not these trials been publicly held, that those charged may be punished, if guilty, and, if innocent, freed?

Why have not the American people been told the truth about Pearl Harbor?

Truth, which they need in order properly to appraise their military and political leaders—and their policies.

Truth, which they need to appraise their own share, if any, in the guilt.

Truth, which they need to better guide themselves, as citizens—in the interest of the country in war.

The American people grew old overnight at Pearl Harbor.

Why are they being treated as children, who must not be told?

Pearl Harbor was the Gethsemane of the American people, as well as of the soldier dead.

Why not the truth, no matter how hard to take, to cleanse the soul—perhaps to bring temporal, as well as spiritual, salvation?

Not even the truth, as to the Pearl Harbor dead, was known, until long afterwards.

The facts as to the destruction of the battle fleet were withheld for a year—and then released with news of successful salvage operations.

WAR

For a year or more prior to Pearl Harbor, it had been clear to official Washington only a miracle or American surrender could keep the United States out of the European war and war with Japan.

Japan had signed the Tripartite pact with Hitler, binding her to war with the U. S., if war with Hitler came.

Japan had notified Ambassador Grew, in the Spring of 1941, the pact meant what it said.

Grew had advised Washington.

Concurrently, Japan's course of conquest clearly pointed to the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Burma, possibly India, if not the Philippines.

That Britain could successfully meet this attack, without help, was dubious indeed.

Lend-lease convoyed supplies, loaned destroyers, etc., would not suffice if Japan attacked Britain.

Therefore, the President faced, early in '41 the two horns of dilemma.

He must decide whether to join Britain in stopping Japan—which meant war.

Or he must take the chance, which seemed a certainty, that without the U. S. actively fighting, the Tripartite powers would defeat Britain, force Russia to peace—and attack the U. S.

That the President had determined on war seems indisputable.

On Jan. 21, 1941, he wrote Ambassador Grew in Tokyo that the maintenance of British supply lines from the Far East was vital.

On Feb. 14, 1941, Dooman, Counselor of the American Embassy in Tokyo, told the Japanese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Okashi that, if the Japanese attacked Singapore, "the logic of the situation would inevitably raise the question" that this would mean war also with the U. S.

On Feb. 26, 1941, Ambassador Grew reported Dooman's conference to Washington, saying,

"I propose to say to Mr. Matsuoka (Japanese foreign minister), with whom I have an appointment this morning that the statements made by Mr. Dooman to Mr. Okashi were made with my prior knowledge and have my full approval."

Washington did not disapprove nor disavow Dooman's and Grew's statements.

In April 1941, Naval authorities in Washington had written the commanders of the Asiatic and Pacific fleets that the question of U. S. entry into the war seemed a matter of—"not whether—but when."

By the time of the Atlantic Charter meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt, early in August '41, events in Asia were moving with tremendous and ominous speed.

Churchill, the Australians and the Dutch urged an immediate ultimatum—war—if Japan pursued her expected course.

Responding to the argument for an immediate ultimatum, the President only asked if "we would not be better off in three months?"

And then said, "Leave it to me. I think I can baby them (the Japs) along FOR THREE MONTHS."

There was no disagreement between the President and Churchill as to Japanese plans—nor that Japan must be stopped.

Probably there was no disagreement that an ultimatum meant war.

It now is clear the President only was playing for time—time to be better prepared—

And—time for the American people to "catch up," mentally and morally, with commitments, made and to be made.

The Atlantic Conference between Churchill and Roosevelt settled the policy of a united front between the U. S. and England toward Japan.

That this was true seems implicit in the following from Churchill's address to Parliament on Jan. 26, 1942, about seven weeks after Pearl Harbor:

"It has been the policy of the Cabinet at almost all costs to avoid embroilment with Japan until we were sure that the United States would also be engaged"

"On the other hand, the probability since the Atlantic Conference, at which I discussed these matters with President Roosevelt, that the United States, even if not herself attacked, would come into the war in the Far East and thus make the final victory assured, seemed to allay some of these anxieties, and that expectation has not been falsified by the events."

July 24, the United States had "frozen" Japanese funds. Immediately after the Atlantic Conference, commercial embargoes, against oil, steel and gasoline were ordered which only could result in war.

This writer believes the President, in all these matters, made the correct decision—in the country's interests—that history shall so record.

With equal impartiality, history shall record that the President, out of his political genius, made one, perhaps two fatal errors, which may have brought on the Pearl Harbor disaster.

Certainly these contributed greatly to the disastrous success of the attack.

POLITICS

The working agreement with Churchill being what it was, the danger to the country being apprehended—the President failed to take the people into confidence.

This was the President's political bent. A statesman long ago would have told the people the facts—and risen or fallen with the consequences.

Democracy rises or falls, lives or dies, based on how well this thesis is understood and followed.

But the President was not of that talent nor taste. Far more than he trusted the people, he trusted his own facility of expression, his ability, not necessarily by the use of facts, to get the people to think as he wanted them to think.

Concurrently, this formula had seemed to the President not to have worked badly in eight years of the Presidency and three elections for President.

It was true, also, this was the only method the President knew. Secretary Hull had said, when questioned about apparent inaction in Washington, "governments which get too far ahead of the people are apt to fall."

The President, in the grave war situation in the Fall of '41, had gotten far ahead of the people—far too far for the people ever to catch up by anything which he, by that time, could say.

Fortunately we can now depend on two of the President's friends and biographers for the facts at this stage of the crisis.

Forrest Davis and Ernest K. Lindley, friends of the President, had access, through the President, to confidential information, from which they produced early in 1942, "How War Came."

This is from page 305 under the title, "The Sands Run Out—Pearl Harbor":

"Few, if any, high officials believed, however, that the United States would, or could, stand aside for long if the Japanese struck at the East Indies or Malaya, or even thrust into Siam. For at stake were not only immediate interests vital to us, but resources and strategic positions affecting our long-term security as a nation."

"THE QUESTION PERPLEXING MANY HIGH OFFICIALS WAS HOW, IN THE ABSENCE OF A DIRECT JAPANESE ATTACK ON THE AMERICAN FLAG, TO SUMMON THE NATION, DIVIDED AS IT THEN WAS ON QUESTIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY, TO THE STRONG ACTION WHICH THEY BELIEVED ESSENTIAL."

"THERE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE METHODS It was commonly supposed that the Japanese were too smart to solve this problem for the President by a direct assault on the American flag—especially at Hawaii, which even the extreme isolationists recognized as a bastion of our security."

Surely this is plain enough.

"As the Sands Ran Out at Pearl Harbor," the Japanese "solved the problem for the President by a direct assault on the American flag."

The President, in the last weeks before Pearl Harbor, required an "incident" that would enable the people to catch up with him.

Pearl Harbor gave the President far more of an incident than he needed, expected—or wanted.

Born optimist, the incident the President expected was to be a glancing blow—but the blow came full head-on at the whole body of the country.

Moreover, it was not THE KIND of an incident he had in mind, as shall be disclosed.

THE FLEET

Naval strategy opposed having the Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor.

Three or more high admirals had opposed it, including Kimmel, Admiral Richardson, immediate predecessor of Kimmel, was removed from command by the President because, among other things, he opposed basing the fleet at Pearl Harbor.

The fleet was at Pearl Harbor by orders of the President, though of course he ordered no such concentration as existed there on Dec. 7.

Reasons of diplomacy, and war strategy, as judged by the President, required a powerful fleet based at Hawaii, a threat and a warning to Japan, the only kind the Japanese could understand.

In no other way, the President judged, could the U. S. hope to keep open the British, and our own supply lines from the Far East.

These supply lines, the President had told Grew, were vital.

These were the supply lines the President and Churchill had agreed to defend together at the Atlantic Conference.

The admirals were opposed to basing the main fleet at Hawaii, because they believed the fleet there was too confined, too exposed to possible attack.

Knowing the power of the Japanese fleet, high officers of the Navy had for years questioned its ability to meet the Japanese successfully in Far Eastern waters.

Defending the Philippines always had been considered difficult. Certainly this thesis had not been changed by large increases in the Japanese Navy and by the fact that the U. S. fleet in '41 was divided between the Pacific and the Atlantic.

Additionally, the admirals opposed using the fleet at Hawaii as a threat to Japan.

Such an approach, they considered, was apt to result in "backing into the war," instead of the more forthright and direct method, which they favored.

What the admirals didn't know was, we were, to all practical purposes, already in the war.

We were watchfully waiting for the "incident" which would make the war, already a foregone conclusion, "politically possible."

A plan of cooperation with the British Far Eastern fleet had been arranged, which required the U. S. fleet to be as near as practical to the Philippines.

The Japanese knew the full meaning of the U. S. fleet at Pearl Harbor.

Every war plan of the Japanese, including the latest by Kuroki Matsuo, "The Three Power Alliance," published in 1940, plainly stated in war with U. S., Japan would be defeated—if the U. S. Pacific fleet were permitted to get to the Philippines.

We were, at the time of Pearl Harbor, waiting for an "incident" which would start war.

The Japanese, having in mind basic Japanese strategy, that the battle fleet of the U. S. must not get to Manila—for a long time had been PREPARING THE "INCIDENT."

SABOTAGE

Having overruled his admirals in basing the Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, it would be expected that the President, of all persons, would make most certain no disaster came from the fleet's being there.

Doubtless, the President thought he had so arranged. It is a fact, however, the President, by his own acts, unwittingly of course, contrived to bring about the success of the Japanese attack.

This was not in the manner that he has been commonly accused, running all the way from plotting the attack, to ordering the fleet unprotected to oppose the Japanese—all of which are false.

The President's responsibility is nevertheless direct and definite.

Early in January, Secretary of Navy Knox had sent a warning to both Army and Navy chiefs at Pearl Harbor suggesting the danger of a surprise bombing attack by air against the fleet at Pearl Harbor.

It had been a foregone conclusion, if war with Japan came, it would begin by surprise attack, the Japanese way as the President himself had said Jan. 6, 1941.

But, as the months went by between the first of the year and Dec. 7, 1941, as the plans of the Japanese to attack became matured, for some strange reason there was less and less emphasis on surprise attack on the fleet at Pearl Harbor by air, and more and more on sabotage.

Of several warning messages from Washington to Short and Kimmel, recorded in the Roberts report, in addition to the one in January from Secretary Knox, four referred to sabotage.

None, after the Knox warning, referred to the possibility of surprise attack by air on the fleet.

Twice, in acknowledging warnings and instructions from Washington, General Short reported to Washington he had taken all precautions AGAINST SABOTAGE.

On Nov. 27, 10 days before Pearl Harbor, General Short advised Washington he had ordered Hawaii "alert No. 1" against sabotage, and gave details of what measures he had taken.

Washington knew of and did not disapprove these "defense steps" solely against sabotage.

Sabotage, third in the list of attacks most expected by Knox in January, had become No. 1 of those expected in Washington and Pearl Harbor as Dec. 7 approached.

It is not sabotage which competent military leaders, in Washington or Pearl Harbor, would normally most fear, as war with Japan approached.

As Dec. 7 approached, the "incident," which would bring war with Japan, was daily, almost hourly, expected in Washington.

Historically, the sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana harbor on Feb. 15, 1898—an act of sabotage, had brought war with Spain.

By some strange twist, the President, and to some extent the military leaders in Washington, were in a "Battleship Maine" state of mind, when the attack occurred, or at least were up to the last hours before the attack.

This explains why the battle fleet was docked, each ship at its station, awnings up—why the planes were grounded wing to wing, unarmed, ammunition for guns and planes locked in magazines, when Japan struck Dec. 7.

The Army at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, interpreting its instructions from Washington, was "alerted" for sabotage only.

Had Hawaii "alert No. 3" been ordered, by General Short, the Japs might never have struck, certainly the damage would have been far less.

In far-away Aleutian islands at Dutch Harbor, where military orders only had to be followed, U. S. bombers were cruising with live bombs in racks, U. S. fighters, with live ammunition in guns, when the attack came to Pearl Harbor Dec. 7.

DISASTER

But it is not alone the "sabotage psychology" at Pearl Harbor for which the President must accept his share of responsibility.

There were blunders there, both of omission and commission, which he must shoulder.

The Commanders at Pearl Harbor had warnings of danger.

But with every warning, save one, came a "precaution," which led their hands psychologically, if not actually.

As the danger became greater and Pearl Harbor closer, the "precautions" became more definite, more insistent, more urgent.

These precautions came direct from the White House.

The only warning message that Kimmel and Short received, which did not contain definite precautionary orders, was the one from Secretary of the Navy Knox in January '41.

This was 11 months before Pearl Harbor and long before the expected "incident," which would kick off hostilities, was expected.

Here are the precautions, which accompanied each "warning," as told in the Roberts report.

Oct. 16, as Kimmel and Short were warned of danger by Washington, they were ordered to do nothing which would "CONSTITUTE PROVOCATION AS AGAINST JAPAN."

Nov. 24, 13 days before Pearl Harbor, Kimmel was enjoined to strictest secrecy, in any defense moves he made "to PREVENT COMPLICATION OF TENSE EXISTING SITUATION."

Nov. 27, came the most serious warning yet, from the Chief of Staff to Short, but with it an order that under no circumstances was he to take any steps or make any moves that would make it appear the U. S. had committed "THE FIRST OVERT ACT."

In the same message "recommutation" was ordered but only "IN SUCH A WAY AS NOT TO ALARM THE CIVIL POPULATION OR DISCLOSE INTENT."

Here a military authority must have thought of the possibility such an order might tie the hands of the commander, for there was inserted:

"He (General Short) was not to be restricted to any course, which would jeopardize his defense."

Nov. 28, nine days before Pearl Harbor, Short was cautioned again that any protective measures he took, "MUST BE CONFINED TO THOSE ESSENTIAL TO SECURITY" and HE MUST AVOID "UNNECESSARY PUBLICITY AND ALARM."

It was the next day, Nov. 29, Secretary Hull stated, "The diplomatic part of our relations with Japan is virtually over and the matter will now go to the officials of the Army and Navy."

Nov. 29, eight days before Pearl Harbor, Kimmel was ordered to "TAKE NO OFFENSIVE ACTION UNTIL JAPAN HAD COMMITTED THE FIRST OVERT ACT."

Nov. 30, seven days before Pearl Harbor, Kimmel received the last warning message to reach Pearl Harbor before the attack.

It was a copy of a dispatch sent to Admiral Hart at Manila, ordering certain scouting, but again with the admonition, to "AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF ATTACKING."

None of these precautionary orders came from military authorities in Washington, though all came through military channels.

None of these precautionary orders at Pearl Harbor ever was withdrawn. One of the last warning messages sent to Pearl Harbor was changed by the President, personally, to insert the usual precaution.

The official explanation, of course, is that, if war came, the President wanted the record to show he had done all he could to prevent it.

But on Nov. 29, eight days before Pearl Harbor, as stated, the Secretary of State had said "the matter will now go to the officials of the Army and Navy."

The Roberts report, in No. 15 of its conclusions, quotes one of the many precautionary orders from Washington as a cause of the success of the Pearl Harbor attack, though the report does not fix the responsibility.

The last full talk week before Dec. 7, 1941 the Roberts report does not show a single message from Washington to Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor.

It now is known Washington had, during this week, information of greatest importance, which Short and Kimmel didn't receive until AFTER the attack.

This is the real story of Pearl Harbor, seven warnings of danger to the commanders there, SIX CONFUSING AND CONTRADICTIONARY "precautions," which tied their hands.

Word available the last fatal week—word most needed at Pearl Harbor—never was sent.

Obviously the President, "as the sands ran out" at Pearl Harbor, was definitely expecting a Japanese attack.

But the nearer it was expected, the more careful he became that when the attack, should come, it should be such as the isolationists could not tie onto himself.

The attack, which came at Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, was one which the "isolationists" could not tie onto the President.

But the success of the attack can, in part, in all fairness, and in such measure as each citizen shall judge, be placed at the door of the Commander in Chief as commander and personally.

The President, and others, in Washington, first had lulled the commanders at Pearl Harbor into expecting only—sabotage.

The President then had given them such restraining precautions and orders they did not know what they could or dare do—in measures of protection and defense.

The Japanese, as Davis and Lindley had said, solved the problem of how to summon the nation against isolationism for the President at Pearl Harbor.

But, in trying to keep "the record clear," the President unknowingly and unintentionally had contributed to the destruction of the Pacific battle fleet, had helped to bring about Bataan and Corregidor, had lengthened immeasurably the Japanese war.

"WHY?"

This of course explains many things.

It explains the long delay of the court-martial of General Short and Admiral Kimmel.

It explains why the President, through members of Senate and House, stopped Congress from passing resolutions calling for trials.

It explains why the President still prevents the records of the Roberts Commission and the testimony of its 127 witnesses being made public.

It explains the Presidential order which forbade Admiral Hooper a year ago to testify about Pearl Harbor to a committee of Congress.

It explains why the information has been given out as to the investigation by Admiral Hart, at the suggestion of Secretary Knox.

It explains investigation number 4, now being held behind closed doors. While House pressure succeeded in substituting secret hearing number 4, for a proposed resolution of Congress calling for immediate court-martial.

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