

# The Truth About Pearl Harbor

by

John T. Flynn

On December 7, 1941, Japan struck our base and fleet in Pearl Harbor. Her planes knocked the American Pacific Fleet, for all practical purposes, out of the war. Within 24 hours the Japanese struck at the Philippines, Wake, Midway, Guam and Malay. Having knocked us out of the war in the Pacific for the time being in a single day, the way was open to the Japanese to push their victories across the whole Southwest Pacific until within six months they had conquered the Dutch and British East Indies, Indo-China and Malay—perhaps the richest empire of resources in the world. Without any single exception in our history, Pearl Harbor was the most disastrous defeat ever suffered by American arms. Practically all that has happened in the last two years in the Pacific, the great loss of life, the immense destruction of material, the grievous blow to our prestige in the Orient and the costly exertions which lie before us, are traceable to that humiliating defeat in Pearl Harbor.

Who was responsible for it? Someone in high authority, holding the commission of the American people in a critical hour, mishandled that trust upon a scale never before matched in all our 165 years of national life.

The President of the United States has caused a finger to be pointed at two men as the culprits—Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, and General Walter C. Short, commanding the Army in Hawaii. They were relieved of their commands and ordered to remain silent pending court martial. Then Washington proceeded to create the impression that it would be harmful to the national safety to even discuss the subject during the war. Behind this artfully created silence, the American people have been deprived of the opportunity to determine the real responsibility for the crime—for crime it was that was committed against the nation in that fateful episode.

For a long time the actual damage done to our naval and military equipment in Pearl Harbor was hidden from the people on the pretense that we could not afford to inform the enemy of the damage done. Under the pressure of public opinion that concealment was broken down and the full story of the losses was made known. Now the war in Europe draws to a close. Public opinion once again presses for the facts about the official chiefly responsible for Pearl Harbor and the Philippine disasters. The people are entitled to know the name of the culprit whose appalling negligence, ineptitude and ignorance has been hidden these last two years. Here I propose to examine this question.

Before Pearl Harbor the country was divided on the issue of entering the war. I do not intend to revive that discussion now, for it is irrelevant. Once this country declared war there was but one objective held essential by all Americans—to win it.

In examining this subject, therefore, I propose to proceed upon the assumption that those who urged all-out aid to our European allies and to China were right. I do not intend to question the propriety of giving

destroyers, of lend-lease, convoying arms or repealing the Neutrality Act. I shall, rather, assuming all these steps were proper, look into the conduct of the war in the Pacific to determine only one question: Who was responsible for the humiliating defeat at Pearl Harbor and the long, agonizing destruction of our Army in the Philippines and the immense exertions and losses required to recover the vast empire of Pacific islands which fell to the Japanese as a result?

The President has managed to plant in the public mind the following propositions:

1. *That on December 7, the United States, being at peace, the Japanese made a sneak attack—stabbing us in the back.*
2. *That at that very moment the United States was earnestly striving for peace.*
3. *That in ample time, when peace hopes faded, the State Department warned the War and Navy Departments and these in turn warned the Commanders in Pearl Harbor that the Japanese might attack that base.*
4. *That these commanders ignored the warnings, failed to take the proper measures of alert or defense and thus exposed the Pacific Fleet to destruction.*

Based on these propositions, a Commission headed by Justice Owen J. Roberts, after a brief investigation at Pearl Harbor, held Admiral Kimmel and General Short responsible for the defeat. But the War and Navy Departments have since refused resolutely to bring these two men to trial. Why? Danger of revealing important defense information to the enemy cannot be claimed now. Is it not rather for the purpose of withholding from the American people information essential to the defense of the men who are the real culprits? Let us examine all the facts to determine where the guilt lies.

## I

### When Did America Go to War?

The first proposition is that on December 7, 1941, *this country was at peace*. Being at peace our guard was down. Out of a clear sky Japan, without warning, struck us at Pearl Harbor—stabbed us in the back.

Before Pearl Harbor there had been much debate about whether we were at war and whether or not we should go to war. But surely no man, now looking honestly at the picture of those days, will say we were at peace. We had of course declared war on no one and no one had declared war on us. But the day of declared war is somewhat in the past. But let us see what we were actually doing in the two years preceding Pearl Harbor.

When Germany invaded Poland, and Britain and France declared war on Germany, our sympathy went out with equal fullness to Poland, France and Britain. We began by selling arms to Britain and France, which we had a right to do. We refused under our Neutrality Law, however, to deliver these arms to them. While we thus aided them greatly no one could call that war. Then came the fall of France in May, 1940. At this point the President made available to the British 500,000 Enfield rifles which were the property of the American Army, some planes and some 75's, together

with a great deal of ammunition. By this time the question of how far we should go to aid the allies became a national issue. The country approved aid and ever-increasing aid, but opposed a shooting war.

Late in 1940 the President proposed to give the British, hard-pressed in the Atlantic, fifty American destroyers. This was getting close to an act of war, though this construction on our act was denied.

In February, 1941, the President announced that Britain could no longer pay for all the arms she needed. He proposed that our government purchase guns and tanks and planes and munitions from American manufacturers, pay for them and lend them to Britain, China and other countries to use against the Germans. This was not a declaration of war. But to say it was not making war on Germany is to juggle words. It is possible to say that the country was doing the right thing in this action, but it is not possible to say it was not war.

The President next decided on a step which put us finally into actual war against Germany. Britain had occupied Iceland—a few hundred miles off the shores of England—in the summer of 1940. In July, 1941, the President *decided to join Britain in the occupation of Iceland*. Before this the President had established a naval patrol. That is, American destroyers and planes were sent out into the Atlantic into combat zones to hunt submarines and report the presence of these submarines to the British, who would then send destroyers or planes to drop depth bombs on them. To say we were not at war with Germany when our Navy was acting as a scout for the British Navy is to close our eyes to the truth. But when we reinforced the British army in Iceland and proceeded to use Iceland as a base for this naval patrol in the very heart of the European combat waters we were in the war beyond all dispute. Mr. Churchill hailed the occupation of Iceland as “a new cooperation *between the British and American armed forces*.” Cooperation in what? In the war against Germany. Charles Hurd, in the New York Times, wrote Nov. 9, 1941: “The establishment of a naval base in Iceland marked a change by which American international policy stepped from one of passive aid to Great Britain and her allies *into active participation* in the Battle of the Atlantic.” Against whom was the battle of the Atlantic being fought? Against Germany. If we were “actively participating” in that battle we were *actively participating in a war against Germany*. The New York Times, defending these acts, said: “The Nazis made war on us in the Atlantic. *We are making war on them in return.*”

I do not raise the question whether the President should or should not have done this. Certainly many of our very best citizens urged him to do it and approved what he did. I merely say that as we were making war on Germany, however justified, we are bound to recognize the fact and concede it as a fact.

The occupation of Iceland had immediate repercussions. The President decided to convoy British vessels sailing into Iceland. He knew this meant war. Secretary of the Navy Knox had said to a Senate Committee not long before that “convoys mean shooting and shooting means war.” Obviously if an American warship convoyed a British vessel carrying war material to England or Iceland and a German submarine came near, the American warship would shoot. That is precisely what it would be there for. A British warship would shoot and make no explanation of the act,

because Britain was openly and admittedly at war with Germany. But when an American warship shot at a German submarine that also was war. The President, however, couldn't admit it because Congress had not declared war and he naturally could not admit what he was doing or concede its significance. *In fact he denied it.* When a newspaper writer reported that the Navy was convoying British ships, the President publicly called him "a liar." When the President said that, he knew of course that the Navy was convoying ships and that the reporter was *telling the truth.* The truth came out later, only last year, when the Navy by Order No. 190, directed the issuing of awards of ribbons to men in the Navy, Marine and Coast Guard who had been in "actual combat" with German submarines "before December 7, 1941." Moreover on April 29, 1944, W. A. Crumley, famous naval reporter of the London Express, writing of the death of Secretary Frank Knox, said: "The full extent of our debt to Colonel Knox has not yet been disclosed but it can be said that American warships were assisting Atlantic convoys as early as March, 1941, eight months before Pearl Harbor."

The inevitable result of this, of course, was that several American ships, including naval vessels, were torpedoed or sunk. One of these was the *Greer*. On September 11, 1941, the President announced:

"The U. S. Destroyer *Greer*, proceeding in full daylight toward Iceland had reached a point southeast of Greenland. She was carrying American mail to Iceland. She was flying the American flag. Her identity as an American ship was unmistakable. She was then and there attacked by a submarine. Germany admits it was a submarine."

Now the public assumed from this statement that this destroyer was proceeding on a peaceful mission, bringing mail to American soldiers in Iceland when she was deliberately attacked by a submarine. The truth came out a little later in a letter from the Navy to the Senate Naval Affairs Committee. The *Greer* was going to Iceland to American soldiers billeted there with the British army. A British patrol plane found a submarine ten miles from the *Greer*. The *Greer* put on speed and *pursued the sub.* The submarine fled. The *Greer* crowded it, broadcasting its position to the British Navy. A British plane appeared and dropped four depth bombs on the sub, while the *Greer* continued to crowd it for three hours and 28 minutes, before the submarine turned and fired at the *Greer*. The *Greer* then attacked with its guns. This was war. Charles Hurd, Times correspondent, called attention to the fact on November 9 that the *Greer* was not the only such incident. There was also the case of the *Kearny* and the *Reuben James*. He wrote that information had come belatedly that "in all three cases, the destroyers were hunting the submarines—the *Greer* to report where one lay and the other destroyers in an actual effort to destroy them." W. Averill Harriman, the President's personal agent in London, said November 23: "The U. S. Navy is shooting Germans—German submarines and aircraft at sea."

The President's difficulty arose from the fact that he was waging a foreign war while at the same time assuring the people that he was not, and would not take them into war. But men like Herbert Agar, editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, an ardent New Dealer and a leader in one of the war committees, caustically reproached the President for making these

pretenses when in fact the Lend-Lease Bill was an act "to enable him to conduct an undeclared war on Germany."

It must be conceded that the President dared not admit that he was making war because the country was still registering its opposition to war in all the polls. Yet we were in fact at war and it was not until long after Pearl Harbor that the people began to hear and realize the truth. We had been at war—shooting war—for many months before Pearl Harbor. Mr. Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of the New York Times, devoted to the President's war policy, said in a speech last year: "I am not one of those who believed that we entered the war because we were attacked at Pearl Harbor, but that we were attacked at Pearl Harbor because we were already in the war." Indeed in Washington today the man who would say in informed circles that we did not enter the war until Pearl Harbor would be roundly laughed at.

The assumption, therefore, that on December 7 this country was in a state of peace and was therefore in a condition where it could plead surprise at an attack is utterly without foundation.

## II

### The Managed Crisis

But what of Japan? The President, addressing the Congress the day after Pearl Harbor, said, referring to Japan: "The United States was at peace with that nation, and at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific." The veil has not yet been wholly lifted from the diplomatic and military prologue to the Japanese-American war. But enough is now known to make the picture reasonably clear.

Japan attacked China July 7, 1937. Up to January, 1940, this government refrained from any hostile intrusion into that war. The State Department had properly protested against Japan's aggression. But it did nothing to aid China. On the contrary it pursued a policy of aid to Japan. Under our Neutrality Law, when war began between Japan and China, it became the duty of the President to proclaim a state of war and stop all shipments of munitions to either country. The President, however, refused to do this. He was gravely criticized for violating the law. He has suggested that he did not proclaim our neutrality because it would then have been impossible for us to send any aid to China. Actually we were giving far more aid to Japan than to China. In 1939 we sent China goods to the value of \$55,600,000 while we exported to Japan goods valued at \$232,000,000. We did practically the same in 1940. We sold Japan the immense quantities of iron and scrap and oil and other materials with which she carried on the war in China and prepared herself for war with us. The government sent its sympathy to China and its scrap-iron to Japan. It was not until China and Japan became inextricably entangled in the European war that our government manifested its dynamic interest in China's "democracy."

In 1940, after the fall of France, the United States began to move ever more deeply into the European war. The interests of Britain in Asia brought China and Japan within the orbit of the Anglo-German struggle. Japan saw the United States looming as an immediate enemy through her