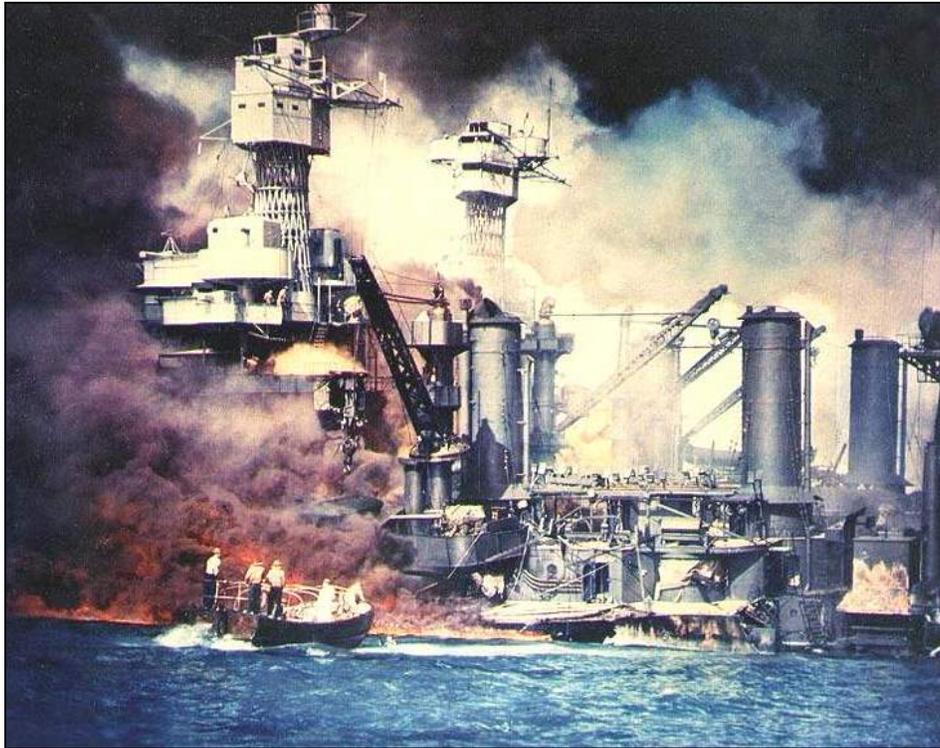


# EAST MEETS WEST AT THE PEARL HARBOR 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM: WHAT WE LEARNED

*J. David Rogers*



*Battleship Row burning at Pearl Harbor on Sunday December 7, 1941.*

The passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 1980 enabled researchers to begin unraveling the kaleidoscope of events leading up to the disastrous attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The release of this data was timely, insofar that it allowed interviews with many of the surviving witnesses of the events that shaped history. These individuals had remained silent to honor security-imposed guidelines during the previous four decades. Foremost among those most familiar with the Pearl Harbor attack was Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton, Chief of Intelligence for the Pacific Fleet before the attack and the duration of the Pacific War. As a flag rank officer, Layton was able to research the events surrounding sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, sifting through myriads of classified documents. His memoirs, published in 1984, represented the most significant contribution to the understanding of the Pacific War up to that time, shortly before his death in 1986.

Since the release of Layton's book, a number of significant contributions been released, principally, by Layton's co-authors, Roger Pineau and John Costello; but, also by others, such as Fred Parker, former director of the National Security Agency. These efforts focused on interviews with surviving Japanese diplomats

and naval planners, yielding fascinating new insight as to how the Japanese viewed American efforts at “negotiation” in the later half of 1941.

By the late summer of 1941 American strategy in the Pacific took a sudden and dramatic shift, departing the long-assumed gun-to-gun naval engagement in the western Pacific (known as Battle Plan Orange) to interdiction by long-range aerial bombardment. The Army Air Corps' new long range 4-engine bombers (B-17s and B-24s) were touted as being capable of interdicting Japanese armadas hundreds of miles from their objectives, thereby eclipsing their projection of sea power. This dramatic doctrinal shift was based on several recent events: 1) the British raid on the Italian fleet at Taranto by carrier-based aircraft in November 1940; 2) Hitler's employment of the Luftwaffe in overrunning of Europe in the spring of 1940 (which was in stark contrast to the ground campaign of the First World War); 3) Army Air Corps intercepts of ships far at sea, off the eastern seaboard (the interception of the Italian Liner Rex in 1938, among others); and 4) the secret development of the Norden bombsight.

From August 1941 onward, President Roosevelt's strategy with respect to the Japanese became one of stalling for time so 500 long-range bombers could be deployed to the Pacific bastions of Hawaii, Midway, Wake, Guam and the Philippines. American planners hoped to have those aircraft in place by June 1942. This deployment was on-schedule when the unexpected occurred in the early morning hours of Thursday November 27, 1941. At 3 AM that morning Franklin Roosevelt was awakened by a priority phone call from British prime Minister Winston Churchill to warn that the Japanese were going to attack the Americans and the British sometime within the next 10 days. The following morning Roosevelt convened a meeting of his innermost circle of advisors and instructed Secretary of State Cordell Hull that further negotiations with the Japanese were to be canceled. Hull was told to make no concessions of any kind to any Japanese demand or suggestion. The following day (Friday November 28<sup>th</sup>) the famous “war warning” was sent to the Pacific Commands (arriving on the 29<sup>th</sup> west of the International Dateline). This message warned Pacific commands that hostilities with the Japanese might be expected, to take precautionary measures against both seaward attack and sabotage, and under no terms to make the first move, but wait to be attacked.

In the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur took the latter admonition most seriously, losing his entire air force on the ground around noon on Monday December 8<sup>th</sup>, despite having been given 8 hours notice of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The greatest defeat in American military history then ensued, lasting just six months, with the United States losing its entire garrison of 90,000 regular soldiers and much of the Asiatic Fleet (another 10,000 sailors). The long-range strategic bombers stationed at Clarke Field played no significant role, other than that of scouting. When the war ended four years later, congressional hearings were convened and a number of congressional critics offered harsh criticism of the “war warnings” and why theater commanders had not been given

the latitude of taking “precautionary offensive action.”

Today, we know that Roosevelt and Churchill were strained in their efforts to find honorable and publicly-acceptable pretenses for America's entry into the global conflict. The “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor couldn't have been better scripted for their purposes, for in its aftermath occurred the most dramatic reversal and unification of American public opinion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This reversal was particularly dramatic with respect to American participation in a Pacific war, which was in direct contrast to what the Japanese supposed would occur, having meticulously monitored American protests and public opinion polls voicing their opposition to involvement in an Asian land war. The Japanese felt a sharp blow to the American fleet at Pearl Harbor would not only prevent American interference with their designs of conquest across the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, which envisioned Japan as the master race controlling the flow of raw materials and strategic dominance in East Asia, displacing the western European and American footholds. The Japanese closely monitored American opinion polls and newspaper reports, which applauded Franklin Roosevelt's anti foreign war involvement platform during the 1940 election. While Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term on an isolationist platform, he urged Congress to pass the two largest naval shipbuilding programs the world had ever seen (78% of the US capital ships utilized in World War II were ordered in June and September of 1940, a few months before the 1940 elections).

During the last half of 1941 American newspapers were filled with reports of anti-war protests, with entire classes of college graduates signing “I won't serve” petitions. But, there were harbingers of the coming conflict as well. In the summer of 1941, German U-boats even sank two U.S. destroyers providing “neutrality patrol” escort in the North Atlantic. On May 27, 1941 President Roosevelt addressed the nation in a radio broadcast, announcing the Proclamation of an Unlimited National Emergency titled “We Choose Human Freedom.” A national draft was instituted, reserve forces were recalled to active duty, and the National Guard was activated. But, many Americans remained steadfast in their isolationist, peace-at-all-cost political stance. To this segment of the populace, Roosevelt was perceived to “have been asking for it” when he stood up the “Neutrality Patrol”, a move seen by many as a less-than-neutral act from the German point-of-view. In the eyes of these people, it was the Brits who should be protecting such convoys, not the Americans.

Japanese aggression was perceived as an almost imaginary threat when compared to the German conquests that had continued unabated since August 1939 across Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. The Americans had engaged in seemingly honorable negotiations with the Japanese ever since Washington imposed a trade embargo on the Japanese because of their aggression in mainland China. Although nothing of substance was traded in these negotiations, they played a cataclysmic role in bringing about a stinging reversal of public opinion that occurred the day after the Japanese attacked Pearl

Harbor, which was viewed as a dastardly act by a barbarian state. This indignation arose from the perception that peace-loving Americans had tried everything in their power to behave reasonably and negotiate their differences with the Japanese, and that the Japanese reaction was the most treacherous deed ever imparted on America. Such treachery and evil had to be avenged. The fact that neither side was actually seeking a compromise, but were jointly playing for more time to prepare for war, never occurred to most Americans.

The Pearl Harbor attack achieved for the Roosevelt what Hitler's abrogation of the Munich Pact had done for Churchill: it drowned the "anti-war" critics and vaulted each leader into positions of unprecedented public support. At no other time in the 20th Century has American public opinion been so unflinchingly aligned on one issue: 99% of Americans polled felt we were obliged to declare war on Japan. Hitler played into Churchill's hand by promptly honoring his Sino-Nazi pact, declaring war on the United States on Monday December 8<sup>th</sup>, the same day Roosevelt delivered his "Day of Infamy" speech to a joint session of Congress. Roosevelt's two and a half year dilemma on contriving an honorable entry into the European war was thereby solved, and his critics silenced by the tempest of public emotion that the sneak attack provoked.

60+ years later it would seem that little has changed on the American political scene, insofar that public opinion can shift markedly when catastrophic events occur. Presidents remain prisoners of public opinion, which is influenced by media coverage of world and domestic events. Americans still require the employment of reasonable political negotiations before initiating hostilities. Surprise attacks by our "enemies" remains one of the surest "trip wires" for initiating retaliatory action: for example, the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, the Libyan bombing of a Berlin discotheque in 1986, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

Japanese logic in devising their war plans were well researched by their observers of the U.S. media and weekly public opinion polls. Their error in judgment accrued from their failing to appreciate the tentative and reactionary nature of American political opinion. Americans love to blame someone, and they tend to vote more AGAINST one candidate than FOR another. In 1941, the Japanese system of government remained semi-feudal, honoring the spiritual deity of the Emperor. No two political systems could have been more dissimilar, thereby setting the stage for each side to make erroneous conclusions about the supposed reactions of the other to various extraneous stimuli.

In formulating their final war plans, each country made fantastic errors of judgment. The Japanese errors lay in their assumption that their communications security was uncompromised, despite two earlier breaches that had necessitated changes. For the Americans, their almost blind faith in high altitude strategic bombing proved a total failure in the first year and a half of hostilities.

Submarines would end up sinking as much tonnage as strategic bombers, something no pre-war planner had perceived.

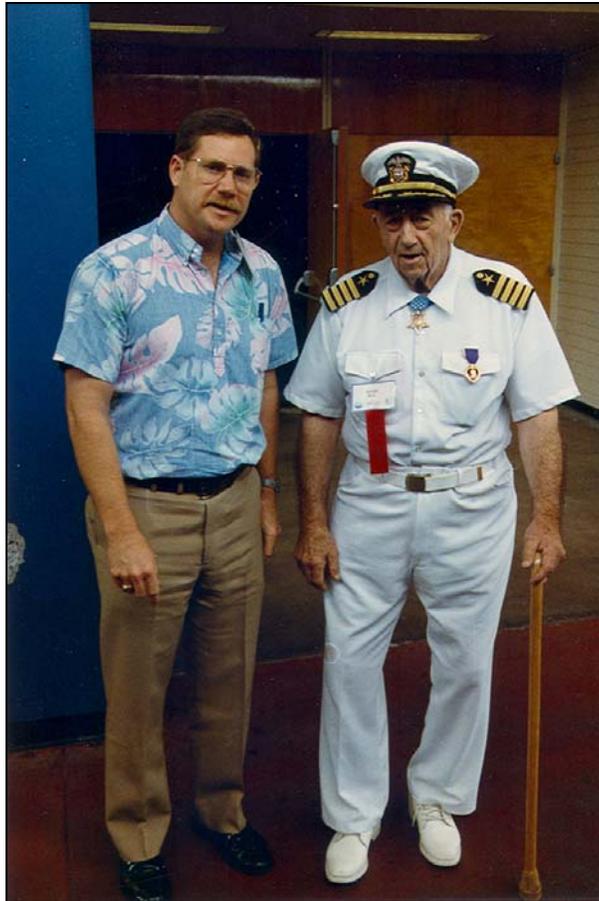
The Pearl Harbor attack stands out as the Japanese' greatest military achievement of the War. Planned in only three months, it incorporated incredible skill and ingenuity, now taken for granted in Japanese industry. To effect the attack, the Japanese developed the first use of beam-to-beam refueling of their fleet, developed the most reliable torpedo, and modified it to be dropped from as high as 18,000 feet with the addition of plywood fins. They practiced a six-carrier coordinated attack involving 400 aircraft, utilized scout aircraft attached to submarines, developed the war's largest mini-submarines, and transited over 3000 miles of open ocean without being detected. When examined carefully, it was a worthy undertaking, much more daring than subsequent naval operations we would witness during the balance of the war. Unfortunately for the Japanese, the attack's principal targets, the American aircraft carriers, were out of port; ferrying planes to Wake and Midway as part of the new Roosevelt "air envelope" strategy. In addition, the Japanese missed putting any bombs on the unprotected oil tank farms at Pearl, where a two and one-half year supply of fuel oil for the entire Pacific Fleet had been carefully stockpiled over the previous two years. Had these tanks been set afire, the naval campaign in the Pacific would have been seriously setback.

It didn't take long for the missing American carriers to be heard from. In mid-April, ENTERPRISE and HORNET sortied to within 800 miles of Japan, and HORNET launched the 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers in "Doolittle's Raid." Though it was of little military consequence, the attack brought swift repercussions at home. Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was held responsible for the American penetration of the Japanese homeland. He was compelled to finish the job that had not been accomplished at Pearl Harbor: lure the American carriers out to sea where they could be dispatched in a decisive battle. Six weeks after the Doolittle Raid the two carrier fleets met at the Battle of Midway. Though numerically inferior, the Americans possessed the element of surprise, having recently broke the Japanese JN-25 naval code. In one of the greatest upsets in naval history, the Americans emerged victorious. The Japanese never recovered from the crushing defeat at Midway, having lost 4 of their 6 combat-experienced fleet air groups. The remainder of the Pacific war was largely a bravely-fought retreat, staving off the inevitable consequence.

So, the study of America's entry into World War II provides a dramatic insight into the misunderstandings of dissimilar cultures; the intrigue of political decision making, and the withholding of information in Washington power circles. Then, as now, the inveterate power of American public opinion continues to guide the Country. In this power game it is the professional soldiers and sailors who must take the brunt of any offensive action, accept the public's blame for any defeat, and be expected to perform miracles with limited resources. If and when a war starts, the professionals must hold the line while the nation mobilizes and trains a

conscript force to fight the war. Although the days of global conflict appear to be over for the time being, future conflicts will continue to test the efficiency and integrity of our intelligence collection systems in seeking to understand and find our potential adversaries.

*J. David Rogers is CEO of Rogers/Pacific, Inc. in Pleasant Hill and a naval reserve officer. He participated in the recent activities commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack in Hawaii.*



*The author (at left) with retired Navy Captain Don Ross at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium on the Pearl Harbor Attack in Honolulu. Captain Ross was one of only two surviving Medal of Honor recipients from the attack. Ross changed the course of history by keeping the boilers lit on the battleship Nevada and getting her underway during the Second Wave of the Japanese attack. This movement undermined Japanese intentions to destroy the 2-1/2 year supply of fuel oil that the Japanese intended to destroy, which would have crippled American naval operations for several years thereafter.*