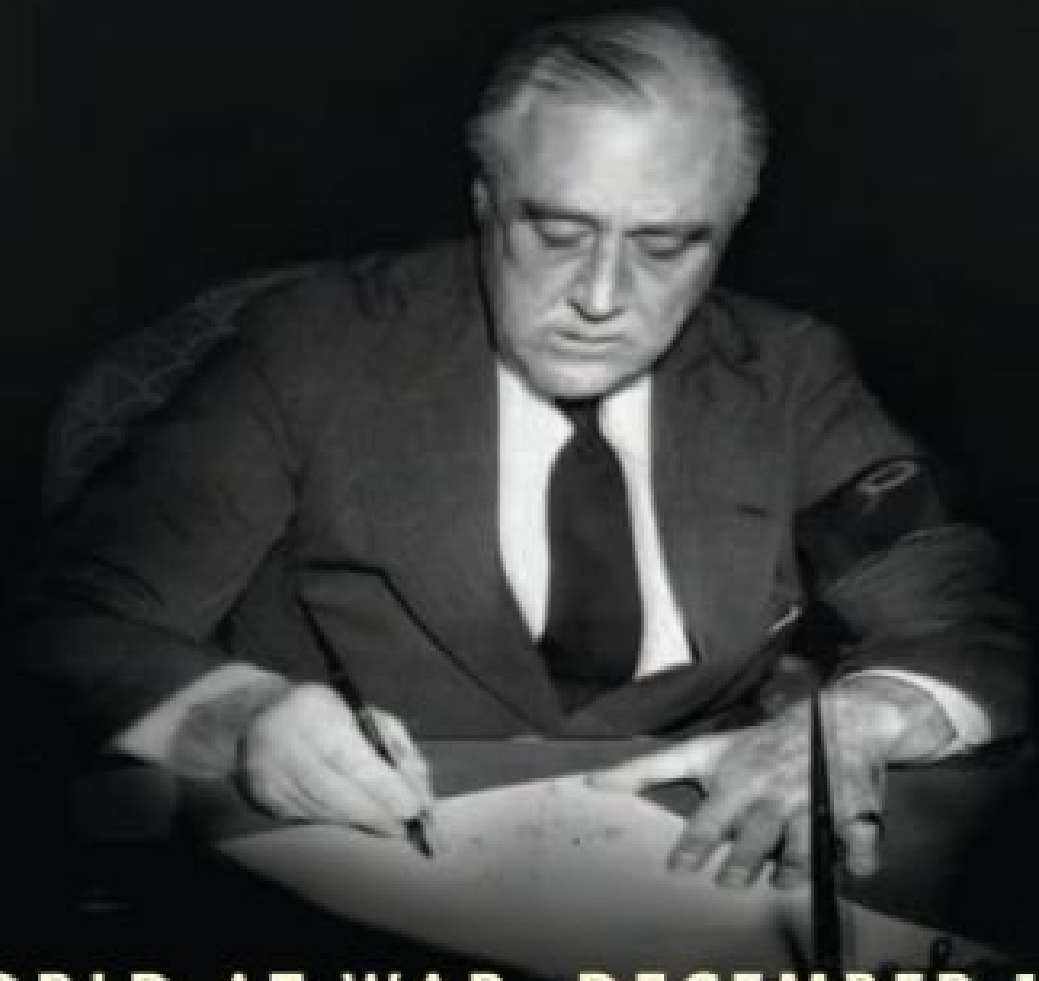


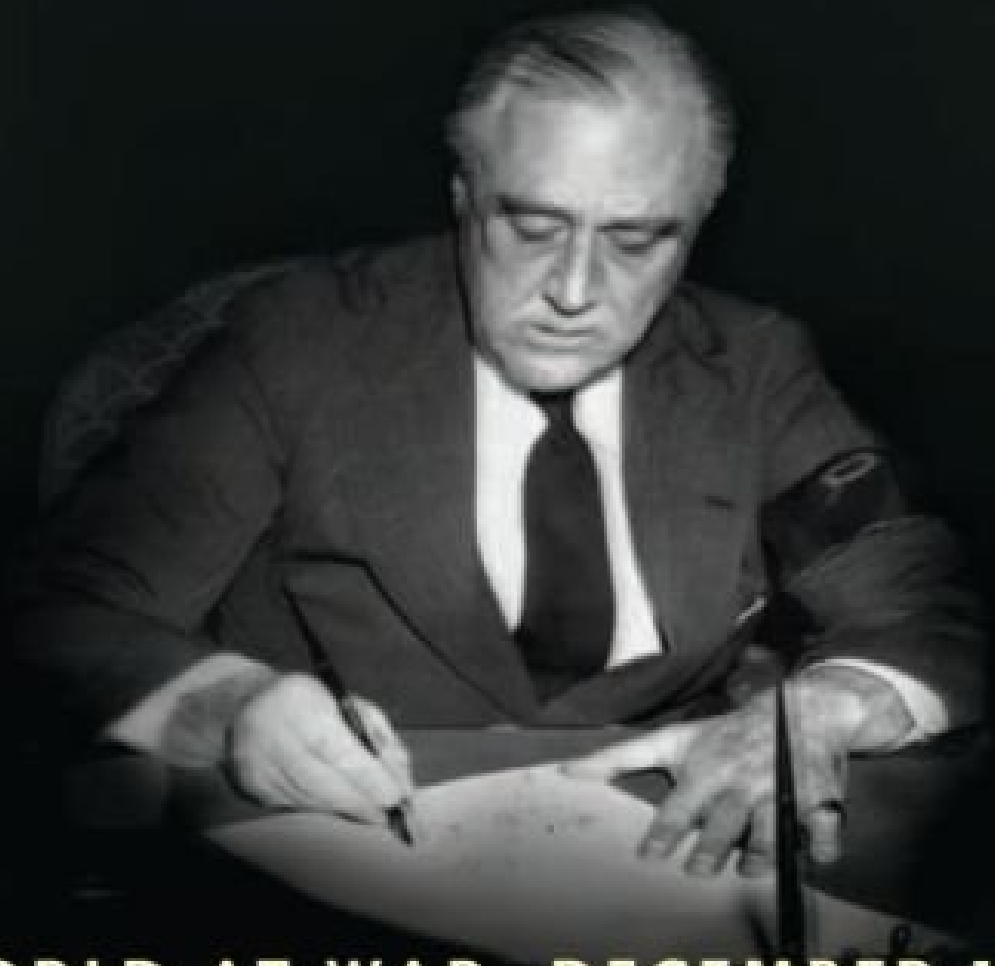
# PEARL HARBOR



A WORLD AT WAR, DECEMBER 1941



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A WORLD AT WAR, DECEMBER 1941





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# PEARL HARBOR CHRISTMAS

A World at War,  
December 1941



*Stanley Weintraub*



Da Capo Press

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**FOR RODELLE**

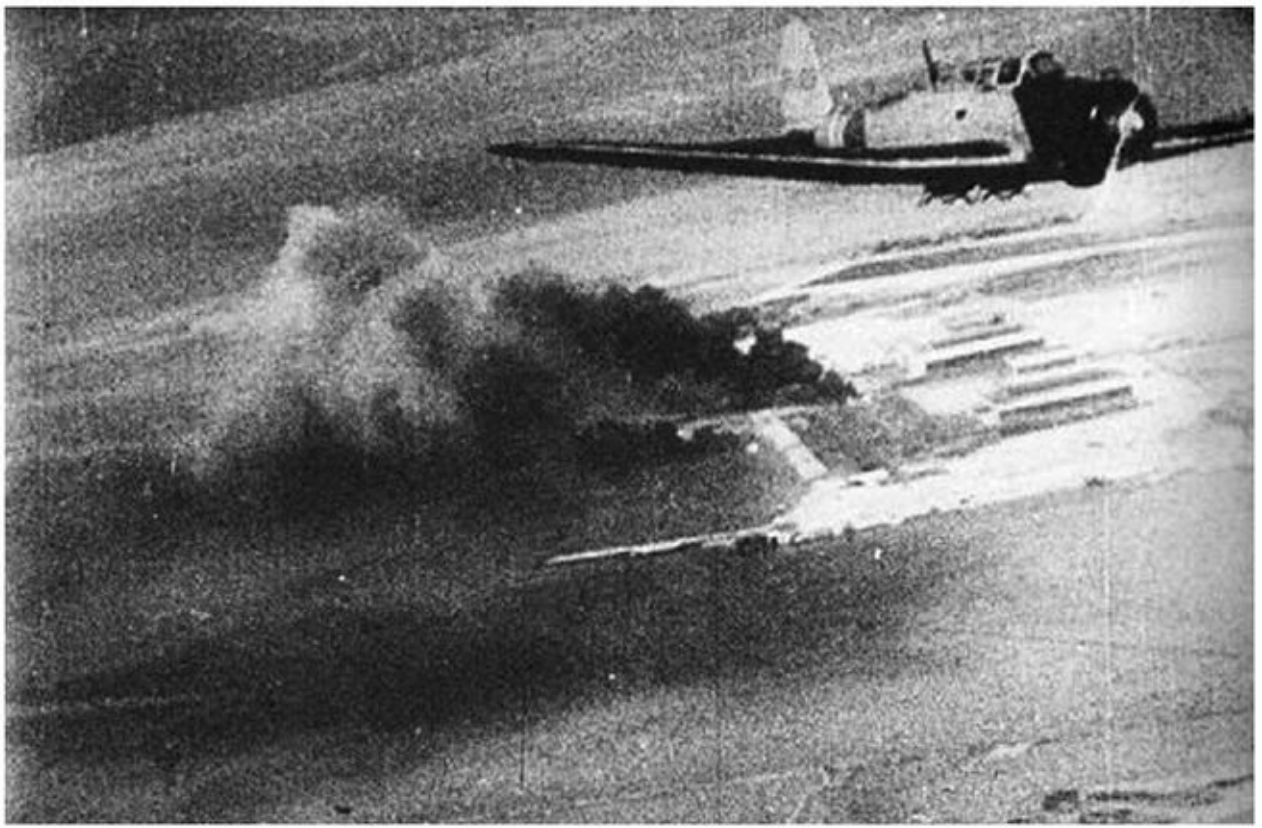
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# Prelude

IN TOKYO ON THE MORNING of December 21, 1941, the Asahi Shimbun published on its front page the first photo received of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It had been flown in by a dive bomber from the strike force returning to the Home Islands. Approaching Hawaii on its last leg from Washington was an investigating commission appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and chaired by Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts. It would be the first of many hearings on the worst military catastrophe in American history. As its plane approached Oahu, smoke, although no longer in billowing black clouds, rose from the wreckage in the harbor area. At aircraft height the upturned hulls of the capsized Oklahoma and Utah resembled beached whales.

Justice Roberts would convene his inquiry the next day, as across the nation the President expected Prime Minister Winston Churchill for dinner at the White House. Pearl Harbor had made them open wartime allies. One small logistical problem intervened, however. Late that morning the Prime Minister was still at sea. The battleship Duke of York was plowing through winter winds and heavy swells as it approached Chesapeake Bay. By radio, assuming a calmer Atlantic, Churchill had accepted Roosevelt's invitation. On docking in the upper Chesapeake, it would be only a 120-mile drive to Washington. Yet, increasingly anxious at the warship's slow progress, the PM was, as his personal physician, Sir Charles Wilson,<sup>1</sup> recalled, "like a child in his impatience to meet the President. He spoke as if every minute counted. It was absurd to waste time. He must fly."

Front page of the December 21, 1941, morning edition of Asahi Shimbun with the first picture of the Pearl Harbor attack, showing bombed Hickam Field by Japanese planes. Courtesy Asahi Shimbun



U.S. battleships under air attack at Pearl Harbor, as photographed by a Japanese pilot. U.S. Navy



Radioing his ambassador, the Earl of Halifax, the PM requested help

“Impossible to reach Mouth Potomac before 6:30 P.M. which would be too late... should like to come by airplane to [a] Washington airfield reaching you in time for dinner.” Halifax telephoned the White House, which ordered a squat twin-engine Lockheed Lodestar to Hampton Roads, where the battleship would dock. Churchill, his close adviser Lord Beaverbrook (proprietor of the Evening Standard and Minister of Supply), and several aides boarded the aircraft for the forty-five minute flight up the Potomac. The others awaited a special train to Washington sent by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, which would bring them to the capital by midnight.

Early winter darkness had fallen. Emerging from years of blackouts—ships also traveled without running lights to evade German submarines—the party aboard the transport plane was amazed to see the spectacle below. Few Americans anywhere had yet to follow recent blackout instructions. It was Christmas.

The Anacostia Flats Naval Air Station was across the Potomac from the new National Airport. Awaiting at the tarmac was a long, black limousine that the Treasury Department had confiscated from Al Capone. The Chicago gangster was now in prison. Roosevelt had been sitting in the car, waiting. “Please on no account come out to meet me,” Churchill had radioed. As the aircraft taxied to stop and Churchill emerged, gripping a walking stick to which what the English called an electric torch was attached, for use in navigating blackouts, the President was lifted out and was standing, leaning against the limo, propped by his locked leg braces and a cane. “I grasped his strong hand with comfort and pleasure,” Churchill recalled.



WHEN RADIO REPORTS that Hawaii had been attacked reached England, Churchill was at his official residence, Chequers, at dinner with Lend-Lease administrator W. Averell Harriman and Ambassador John G. Winant. “I do not pretend to have measured accurately the martial might of Japan,” the PM wrote in his memoirs, “but at this very moment I knew the United States was in the war up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all!” Curiously, Adolf Hitler was equally delighted about his prospects once Pearl Harbor had given him Japan as a partner. “We can’t lose the war at all,” he thought. “We now have an ally which has never been conquered in 3,000 years.”

After the news of Pearl Harbor, Churchill claimed to have “slept the sleep of the saved and thankful.” Actually, he stayed up until three talking with Winant about what to do next, and he determined to go to Washington. Seven months earlier, on May 3, feeling increasingly isolated and with German submarines strangling British lifelines worldwide, he had desperately cabled Roosevelt pleading for immediate American entry into the war—a plea he had made even earlier, in June 1940, as France surrendered to Hitler. In neither case could the President intervene overtly. Americans were unready, and Congress would have resisted

Roosevelt had to inch his way toward rescue, as he did symbolically when Britain's new envoy arrived in January 1941.

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GREETING CHURCHILL PERSONALLY remained an unusual honor for a head of government, especially when proffered by a long-incapacitated president, who had done so only once before—and then, too, to emphasize his solidarity with Britain. Ambassador Halifax, once of the influential appeasement fraternity in England, had crossed the Atlantic on the battleship *George V* and was greeted in Chesapeake Bay, six miles from Annapolis, by the presidential yacht *Potomac*, with Roosevelt aboard. Viscount Halifax then traveled into Washington with FDR. It was a precedent-shattering gesture, and Halifax was ever afterward “Edward” to Roosevelt.

What the public did not know was that the pair, however effective their relationship would be, was a brotherhood of the disabled. Roosevelt had lost the use of his legs to polio in 1921, and the tall, lean Edward Wood, then heir to his father's title, had been born with a withered left arm without a hand.

“Now that we are as you say ‘in the same boat’ wouldn't it be wise for us?” Churchill had cabled on December 9, “to have another conference?” They had met at sea, on Placentia Bay off Newfoundland in early August, initiating what would become after Pearl Harbor a formal military alliance. “We could review, Churchill now suggested, “the whole war plan in the light of reality and new facts as well as production and distribution. I feel that all these matters . . . can best be settled on the highest executive level.” He could leave “in a day or two” by warship and bring with him “necessary staffs.” In a draft of his war memoirs the PM wrote, then expunged, “I thought of staying in the British Embassy, as I did not know how stiff our discussions might be.”

Startled, Roosevelt would have opted for more time to see how war mobilization was going and the situation in the Pacific was “more clarified.” He planned to respond that way in a draft he never sent. In a second response, on December 10, also unsent, he wrote that a meeting would be “more useful a few weeks hence than immediately. However I will wholeheartedly and gladly accept your opinion on timing.” The President's advisers realized that the British would come with carefully drafted proposals and a substantial wish list of war materiel before the White House could scramble to create its own strategies and review its production goals. Also there was concern over the hazards to the top levels of the British government. The North Atlantic was a shooting gallery for German submarines and the Luftwaffe flew reconnaissance from French and Norwegian bases.

The third presidential reply, actually sent later that day, began, “Delighted to have you here at White House.... My one reservation is great person[al] risk to you—believe this should be given most careful consideration for the Empire needs you at the helm and we need you there too.” Having postponed sailing whi-

keeping a convoy at the ready, Churchill notified those who were to travel with him and packed his bags.

His formal invitation to stay at the White House came via Lord Halifax while Churchill was at sea. Although he had invited himself, a strong hint to do so had come from the President in a telegram announcing Congress's formal declaration of war on Japan on December 8. "Today," Roosevelt had written in the naval metaphors both leaders shared, "all of us are in the same boat with you and the people of the Empire and it is a ship which will not and cannot be sunk." The "same boat" image was echoed in Churchill's cable to Washington.

Ambassador Winant in London telegraphed Harry Hopkins at the White House via Secretary of State Cordell Hull (the proper protocol): "Our friend asked me the house was large enough to permit him to have with him a secretary and his valet." The PM (soon "the Prime" to the President's staff) had accepted while at sea, enlarging his personal entourage at the White House to his confidant "Max Beaverbrook, John Martin (Churchill's principal secretary), two security men, and the PM's valet. The rest of the party, including Averell Harriman, were to be housed nearby at the Mayflower Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue rather than at the more distant British Embassy.

"At first," Roy Jenkins, a later Cabinet minister, has written, "Churchill had intended to stay only about a week, but as his visit lengthened, he became near to a real-life version of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*." In the hit comedy of 1939-40 by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, the radio personality Sheridan White-side is mellifluous and charming at the microphone, having apparently broken his leg on departing the home of a socially prominent Washington couple, is rushed back indoors to heal in a wheelchair, becoming an insufferable long-term guest.

The worldwide disasters of the weekend of Pearl Harbor made it urgent for the Prime Minister as well as the President to pool global strategies. "As soon as I awoke" the morning after, Churchill claimed, "I decided to go over at once to see Roosevelt." He feared that the immediate impact of Pearl Harbor would be a retreat into an "America-comes-first" attitude in Washington, withholding aid to Britain and Russia while concentrating resources to strike back at Japan. In solidarity with Japan, Adolf Hitler would make that "Europe last" likelihood more likely by declaring war on the United States, but isolationists who had inveighed against involvement in European wars were still influential in Congress, and the attack on the United States had come in the Pacific. Roosevelt's cordial invitation to the White House put a new slant on everything.

Before the PM embarked on December 12, he engaged in strategy sessions with his advisers, who recommended continuing the careful language they had employed with America before the new dimension to the war. Sir Alan Brooke, the new chief of the imperial general staff, recalled that Churchill turned to one in the cautious circle "with a wicked leer in his eye" and said, "Oh! That is the way we talked to her while we were wooing her; now that she is in the harem we talk to her quite differently!"

That open cynicism would be dispensed with in Washington. The Japanese were winning everywhere on the Pacific Rim. Across the Atlantic, embattled Britain

supplied largely by sea, was losing as many freighters to U-boats as were being built to replace the sinkings. Malaya was being overrun, and its 220-square-mile island appendage, Singapore, was unlikely to hold out. Hong Kong had been invaded and had no hope of survival; Wake Island had been attacked and Guam quickly occupied; and in the Philippines the Japanese were already on Luzon and bombing Manila. Australia seemed threatened, and Hawaiians worried that, with the navy and air forces on Oahu decimated, the Japanese might return.

After much politics-as-usual debate about the appropriate age for draft registration, Congress on December 19 had timidly settled on twenty for induction and eighteen for registration. On both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts the services had hurriedly set anti-aircraft guns on the roofs of buildings and alongside docks. Some weapons were obsolete, others wooden fakes, there to instill spurious confidence. Sentries, often bearing 1918-vintage rifles, were posted at railway stations and armaments factories. Although the only interloper likely over the American skies at Christmas was likely to be Santa Claus with his sleigh and reindeer, a twenty-four-hour sky watch in the Northeast was ordered for the holidays by Brigadier General John C. MacDonnell, air-raid warning chief for 43,000 volunteer civilian observers. "Experience in war," he declared, "has taught that advantage is taken of relaxation in vigilance to strike when and where the blow is least expected." Lights remained on almost everywhere.

Anxiety on the Pacific coast about Japanese air raids, however absurd, had already panicked San Francisco, thanks to the paranoia of Fourth Army commander Lieutenant General John DeWitt at Fort Ord. Every Japanese fisherman and vegetable farmer along the coast was suspected of covertly warning nonexistent enemy aircraft, and the hysteria resulted in the relocation of the New Year's Day Rose Bowl extravaganza from California to somnolent Durham, North Carolina, where Duke University would play Oregon State.

On war maps in the press, limited to much less than the actual facts, a dismal Christmas loomed, but it did not appear that way in shop windows across America. Enhanced by holiday lights, the street lamps and store fronts glittered and a plethora of merchandise long vanished from high streets in Britain awaited shoppers now benefiting from jobs created by proliferating war contracts and a burgeoning army and navy. Christmas trees were plentiful, seldom priced at more than a dollar or two, and in the traditional holiday spectacle at Radio City Music Hall in New York, the star-spangled Rockettes, in mechanical unison, high-stepped away any war gloom. In newspapers across the nation the Japanese were thwarted in the Terry and the Pirates comic strip, and in film Gary Cooper as Sergeant York was defeating the Germans single-handedly in the earlier world war.

The hit book for Christmas giving, at a hefty \$2.50, was Edna Ferber's Reconstruction-era romance *Saratoga Trunk*. For the same price, war turned up distantly yet bombastically in a two-disc set of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture performed by Artur Rodzinski and the Cleveland Orchestra. In New York gift crates of oranges and grapefruit from Florida were \$2.79 at Bloomingdale's. A new Ford or Chevrolet, both soon to be unobtainable, cost \$900. Hatt



Carnegie's designer dresses began at \$15. The upscale Rogers Peet menswear store offered suits and topcoats from a steep \$38. (At recruiting stations nationwide, the army was offering smart khaki garb at no cost whatever to enlistees.) Henri Bendel featured silk stockings at \$1.25 a pair; stockings in the current wonder weave, nylon, sold for \$1.65. By the following Christmas nylon would be almost unobtainable. The fabric would be the stuff of parachutes.

Among the long-prepared Christmas toy glut, shops across America advertised a remote-control bombing plane at \$1.98, which ran along a suspended wire to attack a battleship. The Japanese high seas Kido Butai had not needed suspended wires at Pearl Harbor, nor in the Philippines, Malaya, or Hong Kong. The Royal Navy's principal warships on the Pacific Rim were at the bottom of the Gulf of Siam, and the depleted Pacific Fleet, with seven battleships sunk or disabled at their anchorages, had only two destroyers available to patrol the long coastlines between Vancouver and San Diego. As Churchill would put it, "Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere [were] weak and naked."

On the other side of the continent, thoroughly open to attacks if there were to be any, the Prime Minister, having embarked from the River Clyde in Scotland on December 14, was already in the mid-Atlantic on the new battleship Duke of York amid violent, frigid gales. Aware from his office of her husband's falling behind schedule, Clementine Churchill cabled him from London on December 19: "You have been gone a week & all the news of you is of heavy seas delaying your progress—plans to change into planes at Bermuda, so as to arrive in time, & the those plans cancelled.... May God keep you and inspire you to make good plans with the President. It is a horrible World at present. Europe overrun by the Nazis, hogs, & the Far East by yellow Japanese lice. I am spending Christmas here . . . going to Chequers on Saturday the 27th."

In Washington the American brass worried even before Churchill departed about having the PM at Roosevelt's elbow, where, despite Britain's weak hands getting even weaker, he could employ his glib persuasiveness and imperial visions.

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## En Route

CHURCHILL AND HIS STAFF had taken the overnight train from London to Greenock on the Clyde. They reached the Duke of York on the morning of December 13, three days after its sister ship, Prince of Wales, and heavy cruiser Repulse, had been sunk by Japanese torpedo bombers off Malaya. Vice Admiral Sir Tom Phillips had rushed both warships north toward the enemy invasion fleet without any air cover. The shock and humiliation were great, and the strategic loss was irreversible. Still, the Prime Minister could claim confidence that American involvement—and American industrial potential—would inevitably reverse the Axis tide.

By radio aboard—and twenty-seven code clerks working round the clock—the PM kept in touch with events. The Germans were deep into Russia but slowed almost to stalemate by stiff resistance and heavy snow. Blaming faltering commanders for the crisis, Berlin radio reported, Adolf Hitler had assumed supreme command of the Wehrmacht. The Japanese were already exceeding their own expectations in Malaya and the Philippines and intent on driving the Dutch from the oil fields of Borneo. Hong Kong's invaders, ordered to take mainland Kowloon and the island in ten days, were experiencing unexpected resistance, but there were no escape routes. While the sandbagged and surrounded Repulse Bay Hotel on the beautiful eastern shore, packed with frightened guests and refugees and defended by grimy, nearly sleepless, soldiers, was being shelled, an English lady who had paid a steep £10 a day for her stay complained loudly, "What are all those Chinese people doing here?"

From the start the Duke of York and its passengers and crew endured a rough crossing. Swept by gales and high seas, the splashed decks were off limits for the first three days. Over the protestations of Dr. Wilson, Churchill dosed himself below with Mothersills Seasick Remedy ("Stops travel nausea on your vacation trips," the label advertised), and he began offering seasick stories to his queasy companions. At the dining table, when the PM chatted gaily about the special purpose buckets he had once seen on the bridge of a destroyer, Sir John Dill made a queasy exit. There was no stopping the former First Lord of the Admiralty, who told about the desperate passenger on an ocean liner who was rushing to the nearest rail when a steward warned, "But sir, you can't be sick here!"

"Oh, can't I?" said the passenger as he kept going.

Reaching the Azores without incident, the Churchill party could transmute business there safely by radio. A hundred miles farther out, plowing ahead of buffeted light escort vessels, which were forced to turn back, the battleships maintained outgoing radio silence, but events did not make that easy for the Prime Minister. "Our very large deciphering staff," he recalled, "could of course receive by wireless [radio] a great deal of business. To a limited extent we could reply. When fresh escorts joined us from the Azores they could take in by daylight

Morse signals from us in code, and then, dropping off a hundred miles or so, could transmit them without revealing our position. Still, there was a sense of radical claustrophobia. . . .”



IN WASHINGTON radiograms brought in increasingly bad news. In the central Pacific a handful of marines and marine pilots had held off the Japanese at the isolated Wake Island after repelling a landing on the eleventh, but after another attempt, their overwhelmed remnants were buckling. The nation had been electrified by a brash radiogram from Wake, “Send us more Japs!”—but it was at best an imaginative misreading of a much more gloomy message. Although the isolated garrison was doomed, it had accomplished a feat never repeated during the war—fending off an amphibious force with coastal guns.

In the doomed Philippines on the twenty-second, General Douglas MacArthur, having boasted before Pearl Harbor that he was ready to meet any Japanese thrust, sat in his headquarters in an historic old fortress in Manila near his hotel penthouse flat as alarming reports came in about troop withdrawals. Forty-three thousand Japanese began swarming ashore at Lingayen Gulf in central Luzon, although MacArthur prepared defiant communiqués claiming otherwise.

Like the British in Malaya withdrawing southward on the four hundred-mile-long Kra Peninsula toward theoretically invulnerable Singapore, protected by the natural moat of the Strait of Johore, MacArthur’s ground forces were unprepared, under-equipped, and quickly shorn of air and naval support. American subs off the Philippines had attacked enemy transports, but their poorly designed torpedo fuses did not work. Much of the air force on Luzon had been destroyed on the ground, although MacArthur had received ample warning about likely attacks. But for sporadic air raids met with futile anti-aircraft weapons geared in altitude settings for an earlier war, Manila was quiet. Its population, with nowhere to go, was passive and anxious. Preparing to leave for the tadpole-shaped “rock” of Corregidor in Manila Bay, considered as impregnable as Singapore, the general drew up a proclamation, its release still withheld, declaring Manila an open city. By the laws of war ignored by the Japanese elsewhere, the declaration meant that by Christmas the city would be undefended and thus exempt—on paper—from bombardment.

MacArthur then sent for Lieutenant Colonel Sid Huff, a retired naval officer who had become a personal assistant commissioned on the general’s behalf. “Sid,” said MacArthur, “I’ve forgotten to buy Jean a Christmas present.” Whatever would be purchased would be less than useless on Corregidor, but Huff was to think of something for Mrs. MacArthur. Philippine money would also be useless, and the general had plenty of it to lavish on Manila shops. Loyally, Huff went off to place what he knew Jean patronized and would know her size (twelve), returning with boxes of dresses and lingerie bound with Christmas ribbons. MacArthur crossed the

street from venerable, walled Intramuros in Calle Victoria, took the elevator to his ~~Manila Hotel penthouse flat on the sixth floor—with seven bedrooms and a study, a dining room and a ten thousand-volume military history library built for him in 1935.~~ He advised Jean to open the gifts right away. Christmas Eve might be too late.

War tension was lost on little Arthur IV, who would celebrate his fourth birthday in a tunnel on Corregidor in February. He had a gaily decorated Christmas tree in the family penthouse, and his presents were in a closet, never to be stacked under the tree on Christmas Eve after his bedtime. That evening his parents announced it was the day before Christmas, which it wasn't, and extricated his presents for unwrapping. One was a tricycle, which he pedaled happily round the spacious flat and its balconies while his mother opened her own gifts with pretended joy. She examined each, holding the contents one at a time to admire. "Sir Boss, they are beautiful," she said as she began rewrapping them for departure. "Thank you so much." Mark Twain's fictional Connecticut Yankee who dominated King Arthur's court was addressed as "Sir Boss," and Jean had adopted it.



KEEPING BUSY AT SEA, Churchill dictated position papers on "The Atlantic Front" and "The Pacific Front" to offer the President, suggesting the dispatch of American troops to Northern Ireland and bomber squadrons to Scotland in order to relieve British forces for action. Overestimating the American pace of preparedness, he envisaged beginning the liberation of Europe little more than a year later—the subject of a third paper, "The Campaign of 1943." In the postwar publication of his papers, silently edited, he omitted the paper on the Pacific front, giving that title to a fourth, originally "Notes on the Pacific." He may have felt embarrassed about the hopes he had held for Singapore, expected to hold the Japanese back for six months until rescue. What he did print, however, was equally complacent, expecting that by May 1942, only five months distant, the Allies could mass a formidable battle fleet in the Pacific, bolstered by aircraft carriers yet to be built and "improvised carriers" converted from existing merchantmen and warships. The Royal Navy had begun employing "escort carriers" for convoy duty, and Roosevelt would initiate a program to refit freighters under construction as small carriers, then order escort carriers designed as such. (Of 151 American carriers constructed during the war, 12 would be escort size. Only 5 would be lost to enemy action.)

Ever the optimist, Churchill saw the military resources of Japan, dependent on what could be exploited from occupied territories that he expected the allies to retrieve, as a "wasting factor" leading to inevitable defeat. His two service chiefs, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, concurred. Abetted, apparently, by Portal, the PM promoted deploying air power that did not yet exist from locations that also did not exist for massive air assaults on Japan.

itself to retard further “overseas adventures” and bring the war directly to the Japanese islands. “The burning of Japanese cities by incendiary bombs,” he wrote in a paragraph he did not reprint postwar, “will bring home in a most effective manner to the people of Japan the dangers of the course to which they have committed themselves.” That would indeed happen, three years later, but not because American planners and aircraft engineers had read the PM’s papers.

Field Marshal Sir John Dill, who had been replaced at the War Office by Brooke, was expected to remain in Washington as liaison. Although Churchill had sniffed about him as “DillyDally,” he had the backbone to disagree with the Prime Minister and took some risky decisions for which the PM would take postwar credit. Pushing Dill out of the way so that Churchill could run the war through personal surrogates proved inadvertently to be one of the Prime Minister’s best appointments. Remembered for his observation, “It takes a lot of moral courage not to be afraid of being thought afraid,” Dill became an intimate of American chief of staff General George Marshall, and he was so highly regarded throughout the war that on his death late in 1944 he was buried, with Congressional approval, at Arlington.

After FDR had sent Churchill a memorandum suggesting a “Joint Staff Conference” with their American counterparts “as to how we are going to fight the war together,” the PM convened his own military advisers aboard on December 18, along with the Minister of Supply, Lord Beaverbrook. Canadian-born William Maxwell Aitken, a controversial Hearst-like newspaper baron who owned the Daily and Sunday Express and the Evening Standard and promoted appeasement during the tawdry Thirties, had become a relentless foe of Hitlerism once war erupted. Having only produced newsprint, he had become the tireless and inventive war production czar in Churchill’s ministry.

Further staff meetings were called as the Duke of York struggled in turbulent waters. In his cabin on the bridge, Churchill sipped brandy, took naps, and read two books he had brought along—a novel about Napoleon and Josephine, and a World War I sea story by C. S. Forester, author of the Hornblower series the PM loved. He watched a movie every evening, with his favorite Blood and Sand, a bullfighting epic starring Rita Hayworth and Clark Gable—who, at forty-one, would soon be a gunner in action on a B-17. Churchill also enjoyed The Sea Hawk with Errol Flynn and Claude Rains, in which Queen Elizabeth (Flora Robson) desiring to spare the purses of her subjects, hesitates to fund ships to defend England against the Spanish Armada. “You see,” Churchill told Harriman as the film wound down, “The British have always been the biggest damn fools in the world. They are too easygoing and niggardly to prepare. Then at the last minute they hurry around and scrape together and fight like hell. Good luck has pulled them through. If the good Lord once forgets them, they will be finished.”

Reminding himself of one of the many troubles he had to face—the British did not have a single capital ship left in either the Pacific or the Indian Ocean—on the evening in the middle of a film he leaned over toward Harriman and, defending Admiral Phillips, who had gone down with his ship, remarked, “It is a sad business, the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. They could have harassed the

enemy, always playing the second role to your big fleet. We made great sacrifice to send them [to Singapore]. They came in time. It is a cruel thing. But I will never criticize a man who aims his arrow at the enemy. I will defend him." And in his memoirs he would also defend himself of charges of "civilian interference" in sending them uselessly.

The noise and vibration in Churchill's personal quarters aft rendered it all but unusable, and he worked where he could. In a long letter to be mailed to his wife on arrival, he wrote to Clementine on Sunday, December 21, "I had been hoping till an hour ago to dine with the President tomorrow, Monday night—and this is not yet impossible—but it is still blowing hard and from my porthole I can see every minute, tremendous seas pouring over the bow of the ship, while down below can be heard the crash of them striking the sides. We are running obliquely across the waves and sometimes the ship rolls very heavily. However, once you get used to the motion, you don't care a damn."

Three days earlier he had told Clementine in a letter to be posted on shore as diplomatic mail, "We left our destroyer escort behind as they could not keep up with us in the rough seas." If the weather improved, they expected to pick up an American destroyer escort north of Bermuda that would guide the Duke of York into the Chesapeake Bay then north toward Annapolis.

There would be no American destroyers. None could cope with the heavy weather, which had so retarded the battleship itself that Lord Beaverbrook quipped that they might as well have traveled by submarine. Yet despite the risk and the turbulence, Churchill was relieved, he wrote, that he did not attempt to fly. He had been offered encouragement that a flight over the Atlantic to Nova Scotia would take only twelve or fourteen hours, but in winter "sometimes you are kept waiting 6, 8 or 10 days for favorable weather, so that the tortoise may still beat the hare." As Americans were not yet on ration coupons for clothing, he intended to cable Clementine on arrival "to know the length of your stockings." He was, after all, arriving at "Christmastide."



THAT THE PM WOULD actually be staying at the White House was unanticipated in the first hectic days after Pearl Harbor. Lord Halifax had been to the White House to press for accepting Churchill in Washington even before Adolf Hitler had announced that the Third Reich was at war with the United States. Addressing the toothless Reichstag, convened only to listen to him, Hitler screamed at "the man who, while our soldiers are fighting in snow and ice . . . likes to make his chats from the fireside, the man who is the main culprit in this war." Churchill had been replaced in Berlin by a new target.

A visit by Churchill so soon after Pearl Harbor, Halifax had cabled Downing Street, might be "rather too strong medicine" for some American public opinion which the President "still feels he has to educate up to the complete conviction of

the oneness of the struggle against both Germany and Japan.... They are terribly shaken here, as you can well suppose, and fully realise that they have been caught napping."

The welcome offer to Churchill included dinner on the evening he reached the land. It would be a somewhat different White House than George VI and Queen Elizabeth had visited in the sunny summer of 1939, just before the European war had broken out. Preparatory blackout curtains hung at each window; exterior lighting was dimmed and directed away from the walls. Sentry boxes were set up at driveway entrances and along the perimeter fences. Police patrolled where onlookers once strolled. Yet a stately Christmas tree was being erected on the White House lawn.



SECRETARY OF WAR HENRY STIMSON was instructed to prepare an American agenda for the visit, to be ready by the weekend before the British party arrived. He called together Chief of Staff George C. Marshall; Army Air Forces chief Lieutenant General Henry H. ("Hap") Arnold; Chief of War Plans Leonard T. Gerow, a brigadier general; and his new deputy, Dwight D. Eisenhower, another one-star general assigned largely to Pacific operations, as he had served in the prewar Philippines and earlier in Washington under Douglas MacArthur. By December 20, a Saturday, a "Suggested Analysis of the Basic Topics and their Attendant Problems" was submitted to the White House. It largely reaffirmed Churchill's views that Germany was the prime enemy and that "a violent renewal of submarine activity" in the North Atlantic had to be anticipated. Stimson, however, realized that with Pearl Harbor the precipitant of American involvement, the public would want evidence of some action against the Japanese who were sweeping through Southeast Asia and were already in the Philippines.

A joint Anglo-American board in Washington since March 1941, with little but an advisory function, met on Sunday the 21st to evaluate what might be done with so little time and resources already diminished by attacks, invasions, material losses, and defeats across the globe. It could only recommend "hold[ing] when necessary while building up strength." Yet even holding was nearly impossible. That Sunday afternoon at a conference at the White House, with the Secretaries of War and Navy (Henry Stimson and Frank Knox) and their top brass, the President went over the memoranda item by item, reviewing how the recommendations fit the burgeoning bad news. The "big fleet" Churchill had referred to was no longer big. Dockside Pearl Harbor was a ruin, although repair facilities and fuel storage tanks had not been impacted, and two aircraft carriers normally moored there had been at sea and were happily unscathed. Despite nine hours' warning after Pearl Harbor, General MacArthur had more than half his air force destroyed on the ground. Tons of his unprotected supplies had burned on the docks at Cavite, near Manila. He had made little or no provision to protect

food, fuel, and munitions stocks for withdrawals, and the ongoing invasion of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf, first reported falsely as thwarted, was a reality. The pitiful Asian fleet based in Manila Bay was scattered or sunk. Guam was gone. The American presence in the Pacific barely existed.

Isolated Hong Kong had been penetrated from its Kowloon Peninsula and New Territories appendages on the mainland. Its fall was expected by Christmas. The outcome was never in doubt. At Sandy Ridge in Lo Wu in the New Territories, Lieutenant Colonel Robert A. MacPherson lay among twenty casualties. Sadism was far from uncommon among Japanese soldiery, especially when they tasted victory. The wounded were savagely beaten with rifle butts, roped together in threes, and bayoneted. Sergeant Major Matthew C. Hamlon, with three riflemen of the Royal Rifles of Canada were captured at Eucliff. Stripped of their weapons, their hands were bound behind their backs. Prodded forward with bayonets to the edge of a cliff, they were made to sit down, seeing below the bodies of previous dead, some beheaded. Colonel Roji Tanaka ordered a firing squad forward and all were shot, but Hamlon rolled down the cliff and survived to testify at the war crimes trial of the colonel years later.

Realizing only that the entire Hong Kong scene was an irreversible tragedy, Churchill wrote, "Although one knew it was a forlorn outpost, we expected that they would hold out on the fortified island for a good many weeks, possibly for several months." But "fortified" exaggerated the reality. For a token defense, British historian has written, absorbing as many casualties as would happen before surrender was absurd. "At the very most all that would be required was a[n infantry] company, bugler, flag corporal, and a suave governor with a knighthood, double-barrelled name, stiff upper lip—and a tie from one of the lesser public schools."

After landing in Malaya nearly unopposed, the Japanese were moving southward toward the Johore Strait and Singapore. The British had nearly no navy left in Singapore, and what remained of its pathetic air force was so obsolete that Lieutenant General Arthur E. Percival's forlorn attempt to hold the northern Kra airfields was senseless. The Japanese had, Churchill conceded, "an unlimited power of reinforcement." Their timetable specified crossing the broad Perak River on the 15th; the occupation of Kuala Lumpur, the major city in Malaya, a month later; arrival at Johore Baru across the strait from Singapore on January 31; and the taking of Singapore itself on February 11, the date chosen because it was the anniversary of the coronation of the mythical Emperor Jimmu in 660 BC. The schedule was only slightly more ambitious than the reality. By December 21 they had reached the Perak River. To the east, Burma had been penetrated, and Thailand quickly occupied with hardly a shot fired.

Escorted by the cruiser Pensacola, the American convoy of slow transports that had been lumbering southwest from Honolulu to reinforce the Philippines could no longer get there and had been rerouted toward Australia. (It reached Brisbane on the 22nd.) The western Pacific had become a Japanese pond. The five thousand troops, seventy planes, forty-eight 75-mm guns, 340 trucks, six hundred tons of bombs, nine thousand barrels of aviation fuel, and 3,500,000 rounds of



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