

"LET'S LICK HELL OUT OF THEM"



For many Americans, it began as a typical Sunday. Church in the morning, followed by a big Sunday dinner at midday. Then maybe a nap, reading the paper, taking a leisurely drive, or listening to the weekly CBS broadcast of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Like other New Yorkers on December 7, 1941, Aubrey and Con Morgan, along with their houseguest, John Wheeler-Bennett, tuned in to the popular Philharmonic broadcast at 3:00 P.M. to hear Brahms's Second Piano Concerto, performed by Arthur Rubinstein. In Boston, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a graduate fellow at Harvard, did the same. During the intermission, the Philharmonic radio audience heard CBS announcer John Charles Daly break in with a stunning news bulletin—the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. At that moment, Schlesinger later wrote, "an era came to an end."

It was also the end of the debate over America's involvement in the war. And, as it happened, the Pearl Harbor attack gave the lie to the arguments of many who had taken part in that discussion. As the columnist Marquis Childs put it, "the boldest interventionists had pitifully underestimated Japan's striking power. Isolationists had their chief argument—that no foreign power wanted to assail us in our own sphere—completely knocked out from under them."

President Roosevelt, in the midst of a conversation with Harry Hopkins at the White House, was given the news by Frank Knox over the phone. "No!" FDR exclaimed. He sat still, staring straight ahead,

for several minutes. Finally, he then dictated the first news bulletin for the afternoon and evening, then continued updating the losses at Pearl Harbor and assaults in Asia and the Pacific.

Struggling to come to grips with the "very strained and tired," Roosevelt remained calm. His reaction to any news was something that was not surprising, and there was never the slightest doubt. Others, however, had slighted him. His secretary, Grace Tully, was cited, while Attorney General Cummings was "deeply shaken, graver than usual."

Early in the evening, he called on several national leaders to the White House. The pre-Pearl Harbor debate was over. Fish, the ranking Republican, was invited to take part. Another Republican, Johnson, was included on the list for the meeting. Jumping to his feet, he was the new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he was table with his fist and expletives. He was pants down, Mr. President. I don't know, Tom. I just do.

Henry Stimson posed a question, "who had been war?" He had been taken so completely by surprise that he had no explanations and excuses. He had at hand was to draft a declaration. The president summoned Grenville Clark, who was working for him as a lawyer. He was work drawing up the declaration.

The White House guard was quickly installed to cover the White House. The craft guns were set up on the roof of the building next door. Most of the soldiers spotted soldiers guarding

for several minutes. Finally rousing himself, he called Cordell Hull, then dictated the first news bulletin about the attack. Throughout the afternoon and evening, the president received a flood of new dispatches updating the losses at Pearl Harbor and detailing other Japanese assaults in Asia and the Pacific.

Struggling to come to grips with the disaster, Roosevelt looked "very strained and tired," his wife later wrote. "But he was completely calm. His reaction to any great event was always to be calm. If it was something that was bad, he just became almost like an iceberg, and there was never the slightest emotion that was allowed to show." Others, however, had slightly different memories of FDR that day. His secretary, Grace Tully, remembered him as angry, tense, and excited, while Attorney General Francis Biddle described Roosevelt as "deeply shaken, graver than I had ever seen him."

Early in the evening, he summoned cabinet members and congressional leaders to the White House. In a reflection of the bitterness of the pre-Pearl Harbor debate, FDR refused to allow Rep. Hamilton Fish, the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, to take part. Another congressional isolationist, Senator Hiram Johnson, was included only at the last minute. Tempers ran high at the meeting. Jumping to his feet, a red-faced Senator Tom Connally, the new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, banged a table with his fist and exclaimed: "How did they catch us with our pants down, Mr. President?" His head bowed, Roosevelt said softly, "I don't know, Tom. I just don't know."

Henry Stimson posed the same question: How could the U.S. military, "who had been warned long ago and were standing on the alert, have been taken so completely by surprise?" But the postmortems, the explanations and excuses, would have to wait for later. The task now at hand was to draft a declaration of war against Japan. For that, Stimson summoned Grenville Clark, the architect of conscription, who was working for him as an unpaid adviser. Clark immediately set to work drawing up the document.

The White House guard was doubled, blackout curtains were hastily installed to cover the Executive Mansion's windows, and anti-aircraft guns were set up on the roof of the old State, War, and Navy building next door. Motorists returning from their Sunday drives spotted soldiers guarding Washington bridges. Those who were espe-

cially sharp-eyed might have noticed that one of the famed Japanese cherry trees surrounding the Tidal Basin was lying on the ground, apparently chopped down by an angry citizen.

Large crowds milled outside the White House until late that night. Many bystanders huddled together in Lafayette Park across the street while others pressed against the tall iron fence in front. Throughout the misty evening, the silence was broken periodically by the spontaneous singing of patriotic songs, with "God Bless America" a particular favorite.

Near midnight, FDR invited the CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow, who was on home leave from London, to join him in his office. Also there was William Donovan, the head of the U.S. government's new intelligence agency. Over beer and sandwiches, Roosevelt told his visitors of the staggering losses at Pearl Harbor—the eight battleships sunk or badly damaged, the hundreds of planes destroyed, the thousands of men dead, wounded, and missing. The president kept his rage under control until he started talking about the aircraft. "Destroyed on the ground, by God!" he shouted, pounding his fist on his desk. "On the ground!" As Murrow later recalled, "the idea seemed to hurt him."

At one point, the president asked Murrow and Donovan what both considered a rather curious question. Did they believe that, given the Japanese attack on U.S. soil, the American people would now support a declaration of war? The two men were firm in their assurances that their countrymen would indeed rally around the president.

CHARLES AND ANNE LINDBERGH were on Martha's Vineyard, spending a quiet day with their children, when they heard the news. Since Lindbergh's notorious Des Moines address, he had not done much public speaking. In the few appearances he did make, he seemed unfazed by the almost universal denunciation of his remarks in Iowa. In an October speech in Fort Wayne, Indiana, for example, he again claimed that free speech was dead in America and suggested that Roosevelt might well call off the 1942 congressional elections.

None of that kind of talk was evident in the statement Lindbergh released shortly after learning of the Japanese attack. "We have been stepping closer to war for many months," he said. "Now it has come and we must meet it as united Americans, regardless of our attitude in

the past. . . . Whether or not I have been attacked by force of arms, I am not afraid." He went on: "We must meet the greatest and most efficient Army in the world."

With that, Lindbergh fell silent. He did not answer the ringing phone, reply to a deluge of letters, or give interviews. For years, the most famous isolationist in the public arena.

Other prominent isolationists were also silent. At lunch with, of all people, a British propaganda official, Roosevelt heard news of the attack. "I must do something that will rally the nation against the attack," he declared. "I must do something that will rally the nation against the attack." McCormick's front-page editorial, "The time has come, have only one task. To defend and preserve the American flag," and the editorial was a cartoon showing Lindbergh as they watched a monster being buried in a grave. "This time, John," U.S. Senator Wheeler declared.

Senator Burton Wheeler declared: "Let's lick hell out of the isolationists: 'The time has come. . . . There is only one way to win a war to victory.' America First asks its members to unite behind Roosevelt as commander in chief. Open doors for good. 'I just remember years later. 'Not only over the game was over.'"

Senator Gerald Nye was silent. His less response to Pearl Harbor was at an America First rally in news. Rather than seek a public address until a reporter walked

the past. . . . Whether or not that policy has been wise, our country has been attacked by force of arms, and by force of arms we must retaliate." He went on: "We must now turn every effort to building the greatest and most efficient Army, Navy and Air Force in the world."

With that, Lindbergh fell silent. He refused to answer his constantly ringing phone, reply to a deluge of telegrams from former supporters and detractors, or give interviews to reporters. After two tumultuous years, the most famous isolationist in America was suddenly gone from the public arena.

Other prominent isolationists echoed Lindbergh's call for national unity. At lunch with, of all people, a journalist from London and a British propaganda official, Robert McCormick excused himself when he heard news of the attack. "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor," he declared. "I must leave my guests and write an editorial that will rally the nation against aggression." In the next day's *Tribune*, McCormick's front-page editorial began: "All of us, from this day forth, have only one task. That is to strike with all our might to protect and preserve the American freedom that we all hold dear." Alongside the editorial was a cartoon showing Uncle Sam standing next to John Bull (the stocky, blimpish figure used by cartoonists to portray Britain) as they watched a monster labeled WORLD WAR II rising from its grave. "This time, John," Uncle Sam said, "we must bury the monster deeper!"

Senator Burton Wheeler's reaction to the attack was short and succinct: "Let's lick hell out of them." Rep. Hamilton Fish told his fellow isolationists: "The time for debate is past. The time for action has come. . . . There is only one answer to the treacherous attack by Japan—war to victory." America First, meanwhile, issued a statement urging its members to unite behind the war effort and pledging to support Roosevelt as commander in chief. The organization then closed its doors for good. "I just remember feeling sick," Robert Stuart said years later. "Not only over the loss of Pearl Harbor but what it meant. The game was over."

Senator Gerald Nye was the only isolationist leader to offer a graceless response to Pearl Harbor. He was waiting offstage to make a speech at an America First rally in Pittsburgh when someone told him the news. Rather than seek confirmation, he went on with his antiwar address until a reporter walked onto the stage and handed him a note

saying that the Japanese had just declared war on the United States. Glancing at the paper, Nye announced to the audience "the worst news that I have had in twenty years to report," then, unbelievably, finished his speech as written, adding only the comment, "This was just what Great Britain planned for us. . . . We have been maneuvered into this by the President." As reporters crowded around him afterward, the senator grumbled, "It sounds terribly fishy to me."

THE BRITISH, MEANWHILE, WERE overjoyed. Marion de Chastelain, who worked for William Stephenson in New York, rushed from her apartment to the British Security Coordination office as soon as she heard the news. She arrived just as officials from the Japanese consulate in New York, whose office was in the same Rockefeller Center building as BSC's, were being escorted away by U.S. authorities. For the rest of the afternoon and into the evening, Chastelain and other BSC staffers toasted the new Anglo-American alliance with champagne.

In Britain, Winston Churchill learned of the attack while at dinner with U.S. ambassador John Gilbert Winant and Lend-Lease administrator Averell Harriman at Chequers, the prime minister's country house. Earlier in the day, Churchill, haunted by the fear of an imminent Japanese offensive, had asked Winant, "If they declare war on us, will you declare war on them?" The ambassador replied: "I can't answer that, Prime Minister. Only the Congress has the right to declare war under the United States Constitution." Churchill was silent for a moment, and Winant knew what he was thinking: a Japanese attack on British territory in Asia would force British forces into a two-front war, with the possibility of no lifeline from the United States.

That night, the prime minister—tired, moody, and obviously depressed—uncharacteristically had little to say to anyone. A little before nine o'clock, Churchill's valet brought a flip-top portable radio into the dining room so that the British leader and his guests could listen to the BBC news. It seemed a routine broadcast at first: war communiqués at the beginning, followed by a few tidbits of domestic news. Then, at the end, one brief, unemotional sentence: "The news has just been given that Japanese aircraft have raided Pearl Harbor, the American naval base in Hawaii."

With that, Churchill headed toward the door, exclaiming, "We

shall declare war on Japan. "Good God," he said, "you must be mad!" Churchill stopped for a moment. "What shall I do?" When asked what he should do, Churchill replied, "And I shall do it."

A few minutes later, Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Churchill, "What is this about Japan?" Churchill replied, "They have attacked us at Pearl Harbor last night, Churchill later wrote, "I was so shocked and so full of grief, quite convinced now that we were not alone in this live."

ACTUALLY, CHURCHILL, HAD gotten a little ahead of himself. He had not yet asked Congress for a declaration of war, mentioning Germany or Japan. He had not yet declared war against all the Axis powers. He had not yet told Germany that he had pushed Japan to the limit. He had not yet held out, detecting, the hidden motives of the public between the lines.

Early in the afternoon, a dark naval cape, was driven by a fleet of mines holding fixed bayonets. Steel cables, strung between the ships, held hundreds of people who were watching the historic event.

Braced on the arm of a chair, Roosevelt slowly mounted the steps of the White House cavernous room—filled with the President's Court, along with foreign ministers and administration officials—entered the room. Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt president to preside over the ceremony.

Roosevelt's call for a declaration of war, but it made an indelible impression in the chamber, as well as on the minds of those who heard their radios that afternoon.

shall declare war on Japan!" Winant jumped up and ran after him. "Good God," he said, "you can't declare war on a radio announcement!" Churchill stopped and, looking at him quizzically, asked, "What shall I do?" When Winant said he would call Roosevelt at once, Churchill replied, "And I shall talk to him too."

A few minutes later, FDR was on the phone. "Mr. President, what's this about Japan?" Churchill asked. Roosevelt replied: "They've attacked us at Pearl Harbor. We are all in the same boat now." That night, Churchill later wrote, he "slept the sleep of the saved and thankful," quite convinced now that "we had won the war. England would live."

ACTUALLY, CHURCHILL, IN HIS conviction that all would be well, had gotten a little ahead of himself. The following day, Roosevelt would ask Congress for a declaration of war against Japan alone, without even mentioning Germany or Italy. Most of his closest advisers had urged war against all the Axis powers, with Stimson arguing correctly that Germany had pushed Japan to attack the United States. But the president held out, detecting, he said, "a lingering distinction in some quarters of the public between war with Japan and war with Germany."

Early in the afternoon of December 8, Roosevelt, enveloped in a dark naval cape, was driven to Capitol Hill. Guarded by dozens of Marines holding fixed bayonets, the Capitol looked like an armed camp. Steel cables, strung between posts outside the building, kept back the hundreds of people who had gathered in the chill air to be part of the historic event.

Braced on the arm of his son James, FDR, his face drawn and grim, slowly mounted the steps of the rostrum in the House chamber. The cavernous room—filled with members of Congress and the Supreme Court, along with foreign diplomats, the cabinet, and other key administration officials—erupted in applause and cheers. In the gallery, Eleanor Roosevelt and Edith Wilson, the widow of the only other president to preside over U.S. involvement in a world war, looked on.

Roosevelt's call for a declaration of war lasted barely six minutes, but it made an indelible impression on those listening in the House chamber, as well as on the millions of Americans gathered around their radios that afternoon. From his first sentence, describing Decem-

ber 7 as a "date which will live in infamy," the president, whose voice burned with barely restrained anger, underscored the outrage felt by himself and his countrymen at the "dastardly" attack, and he left no doubt about the nation's resolve to take vengeance. At the speech's conclusion, lawmakers of both parties jumped to their feet in a standing ovation.

Half an hour after Roosevelt spoke, the Senate voted unanimously for war against Japan. The scene in the House was somewhat more turbulent. One member—Jeannette Rankin, a Montana Republican and the first woman to serve in Congress—had made it clear to colleagues before the tally that she would vote no, just as she had in 1917, when America entered World War I. House Republicans tried to dissuade her, but the sixty-one-year-old Rankin, a lifelong pacifist who had spoken at several America First rallies, held firm. As House majority leader John McCormack read the war resolution, she rose from her seat and cried out, "Mr. Speaker, I object." Sam Rayburn icily cut her short. "There can be no objection," he declared, gesturing to McCormack to continue.

Cheering and stamping their feet, congressmen from both parties yelled, "Vote! Vote!" Banging his gavel, Rayburn called for order, and McCormack urged the House to cast a unanimous vote for the resolution. Rankin jumped to her feet again and sought recognition from Rayburn. "Sit down!" one congressman shouted, as Rankin declared, "I rise to a point of order." Rayburn ignored her, and the clerk, his voice booming out over repeated appeals by Rankin for recognition, called the roll. The final vote was 388-1.

Columnist Marquis Childs, watching the chaotic scene from the House press gallery, later wrote: "It seemed to me that those who tried to coerce [Rankin] into voting aye were foolish. A solitary no was a demonstration to the world that even in the critical moment of attack, we do not compel the false *Ja* vote of dictatorship."

The resolution was signed by Rayburn at 3:15 P.M.; by Vice President Henry Wallace, on behalf of the Senate, ten minutes later; and, at 4:10 P.M., by President Roosevelt. The United States was now officially at war.

The following night, the light atop the Capitol was extinguished. It would remain dark until the end of the conflict.

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FOR THREE LONG DAYS, Britain faced the horrifying prospect of war in both Europe and Asia with the United States committed only to the latter. Nothing was heard from Berlin. Hitler had gone out of his way for well over a year to avoid war with America. What if he continued to do so? Would the president finally seize the initiative? If not, how could the British possibly hold out?

According to the terms of the Tripartite Pact, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor did not obligate Germany and Italy to go to war against the United States: the treaty applied only to situations in which its signatories were victims of attack. Over the course of those days in early December, arguments raged in the highest ranks of the German government over whether to add America to Germany's list of enemies. A number of Hitler's advisers advised him not to do so. Ranged against them were Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and others, who pointed out that Germany had long sought Japan's involvement in the war by dangling the promise that if the Japanese engaged in war with the United States, "Germany, of course, would join the war immediately."

In the end, Hitler resolved the issue. For months, he had counseled patience, despite what he saw as repeated provocations by the United States. Inwardly, he seethed with anger and hatred toward Roosevelt and his country. The Japanese aggression at Pearl Harbor, which he hailed as "the turning point," freed him to do what he had wanted to do all along.

On December 11, Hitler appeared before the Reichstag to declare war against the United States. In response, Roosevelt sent a resolution to Congress calling for war against Germany and Italy. This time, Jeannette Rankin decided to abstain, and both chambers voted unanimously in favor.

FOR NEARLY A YEAR, many officials in the German government had been convinced that Roosevelt was poised to enter the war at any moment. Postponing a declaration of war against America at the time of Pearl Harbor, they felt, would simply be putting off the inevitable.