

## Pearl Harbor

- Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath**, by John Toland, *Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1982. 366 pp. \$17.95.*
- At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor**, by Gordon W. Prange, in collaboration with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981. 873 pp. \$22.95.*

ALTHOUGH THE JAPANESE ATTACK ON Pearl Harbor occurred over four decades ago, interest in the circumstances surrounding the most embarrassing American military disaster in history remains high. The two most recent additions to the literature of December 7, 1941, Mr. John Toland's *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath* and Professor Gordon W. Prange's *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*, have been commercial successes, while Toland's volume has even become a minor cause célèbre because of its eccentric thesis.

Toland is best known for *The Rising Sun* (1970). This book on "the decline and fall of the Japanese empire" from 1936 through 1945 even won the Pulitzer Prize for History. *The Rising Sun* attributed Pearl Harbor to unimaginative military leadership that believed the Japanese were unable and reluctant to launch such an attack, and to "a national unwillingness to face the facts of a world torn from its stable course after World War I by economic and social revolution, fostered by nationalism and racism, and the inevitable realignment of power in both hemispheres." Now, a decade later, Toland is more specific in apportioning blame for the tragedy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he writes in *Infamy*, was the culprit. The Japanese success occurred because "Roosevelt and the inner circle had known about the attack" and withheld this information from the military chiefs in Hawaii.

*Infamy* is not, of course, the first attempt to prove Roosevelt culpable. The most famous was Charles A. Beard's *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the*

*War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (1948). Beard's book was a rejoinder to the underlying assumption of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East which had tried the Japanese "war criminals." The Tribunal claimed that, prior to December 1941, the United States had sought peace whereas Japan had engaged in a conspiracy to enlarge its sphere of influence. Beard believed Roosevelt bore a major share of responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities. He claimed that FDR, frustrated in his efforts to get the United States involved in the European war, saw a conflict with Japan as a "back door" for war with Germany. Beard's book, as well as a pro-Roosevelt volume such as Robert E. Sherwood's *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (1948), reflected the intense partisanship surrounding Roosevelt, the New Deal, and the American entry into World War II. Dogmatic and highly emotional, these books emphasized personalities rather than impersonal social, political, and economic factors. For Beard, Roosevelt was a devil. For Sherwood, he was an angel.

Beard did not claim, as has Toland, that Roosevelt knew a Japanese fleet was approaching Hawaii and refused to alert the proper authorities. There is little in *Infamy* to substantiate Toland's reckless accusation. Thus, for example, he charges that Americans had intercepted messages from the Japanese fleet that pinpointed its location. Actually, as students of Pearl Harbor have always known, Admiral Nagumo's ships were on strict radio silence. Toland's other claims are equally questionable. David Kahn, the foremost living authority on cryptography, has accused Toland of ignoring facts which contradicted his argument and of distorting what limited evidence he had to substantiate his thesis. There is "not one shred of evidence," Kahn wrote, to suggest that Japan was plotting to attack Pearl Harbor. In order to have anticipated the attack the United States would have needed spies in the highest levels of the Japanese government, aerial reconnaissance of the Imperial Japanese

Fleet, intercept units close enough to Japanese home waters to monitor Japanese naval messages, and a greatly expanded code-breaking operation capable of deciphering the Japanese naval code. None of these existed at the time of Pearl Harbor.

For Roosevelt and his entourage to have engaged in the type of plot suggested by Toland would have required the assistance of dozens of highly placed government officials, not one of whom revealed, either accidentally or purposely, and either before or after December 7, 1941, the Roosevelt conspiracy. The impossibility of covering up Watergate, which was a minor incident compared to what Toland claims took place in 1941, underlines the implausibility of his contention. Surely someone with a political ax to grind, or with a guilty conscience, or out of a sense of duty and honor, would have come forward to reveal the scheme. In the absence of this, then, Kahn is certainly correct in believing that "there was no plot, no cover-up. . . . At the heart of the Pearl Harbor tragedy lies not conspiracy, but fallibility." It is not difficult to understand the appeal of Toland's thesis. The Watergate affair and a growing suspicion of government have made a portion of the public vulnerable to the most extreme conspiratorial thinking.

*At Dawn We Slept*, on the other hand, is the finest study of the background to Pearl Harbor. Prange was well prepared to write this book. From 1945 through 1951 he had been Chief of the Historical Section of the Far East Command in Tokyo during the American military occupation of Japan. After 1951, and until his death in 1980, he was an historian at the University of Maryland. His fascination with Pearl Harbor bordered on an obsession, and he became its unquestioned authority. During the thirty-seven years he devoted to studying the attack, he examined literally tons of documents, interviewed countless Americans and Japanese, and composed a manuscript of some 3,500 pages. Two of Prange's former students reduced this unwieldy manuscript to a still hefty and extremely rewarding volume. Surprisingly, in

view of its subtitle, *At Dawn We Slept* adds little to the general outline of Pearl Harbor already familiar to specialists. The book's value lies rather in its immensity of detail, its sparkling historical vignettes, its incisive portraits of leading American and Japanese figures, its refusal to make easy and cheap accusations, and its understanding of bureaucratic conflict. It is as definitive a treatment of Pearl Harbor as is likely to appear in this generation.

*At Dawn We Slept* is weakest when it leaves the military aspects of December 7, 1941 and speculates on the ultimate responsibility for the American-Japanese confrontation. Japan, Prange contends, had embarked upon a reckless policy of expansionism and militarism which threatened vital American national interests as well as the interests of America's allies, particularly England. Japanese ambitions were virtually limitless, seeking "all that the traffic would bear." This statement is surprising in view of Prange's admiration for the Japanese people and his unwillingness to demonize the Japanese military. In its justified effort to exonerate the Roosevelt administration from direct military culpability for Pearl Harbor, *At Dawn We Slept* overlooks its more serious responsibility for the deterioration of American-Japanese relations during 1940 and 1941.

Roosevelt and his advisors had, by 1940, concluded that Germany and not Japan was the greater threat to American security. The "Germany first" decision declared that, in the event of a two-ocean war, the United States would conduct a defensive strategy in the Pacific while most of its resources would be channeled into the European conflict. This most fundamental of all American decisions prior to entering the war, correct as it might have been at the time, was immediately endangered by hardline opponents of Japan. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson best exemplified this approach. "The only way to treat Japan," he declared in 1940, "is not to give her anything." Reluctance to compromise with the Japanese was encouraged by Japan's adherence, along with Germany and Italy, to the Tripartite Pact of

September 27, 1940, and by the hesitation, after Munich, to do anything which could be interpreted as "appeasement." America was hoping that somehow Asia could return to the situation existing prior to 1937, and this hope was bolstered by the widespread impression that threats of American military and economic sanctions would easily intimidate the Japanese. In reality, the administration's objectives in the Far East increasingly diverged from America's interests and military power in the region.

The Japanese interpreted American actions and rhetoric as threatening her national security. A more careful examination would have revealed that they were largely bluster. The United States was neither able nor eager to fight Japan. The military recognized that the navy was in no condition, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to challenge Japan in the western Pacific, and it constantly pleaded for more time to prepare for hostilities. Time, however, was the commodity in shortest supply due to the pressures being exerted on Japan. American embargoes on vital natural resources, particularly oil, had made the Japanese desperate. Japan could become self-sufficient in oil and rubber and could be able to continue her war in China indefinitely if she seized the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. The key question was what action would the Americans take if Japan moved southward. Tokyo had concluded that the United States, because of its close relationship with Great Britain and its economic interests in southeast Asia, would declare war immediately. This was, of course, precisely what the United States wanted Japan to presume, believing it would cause Japan to back down. From the Japanese perspective, it made sense to strike first at the Americans at Pearl Harbor and the Philippines in order to eliminate any threat to Japan's lines of communication to the East Indies.

Why had things come to this state? Was there no possibility for compromise? Could concessions to Japan have led to a split between Tokyo and Berlin? Couldn't a case be made for the legitimacy of Japanese ob-

jectives? Was there any American national interest worth fighting Japan for, particularly when Washington's priorities lay in Europe? Was it wise to court war in the Far East at a time when Germany's defeat was not yet on the horizon and the military was unprepared? An increasing number of historians are answering these questions in ways that do not cast a favorable light upon the Roosevelt administration.

F. C. Jones' *Japan's New Order in East Asia: Its Rise and Fall, 1937-1945* (1954) rejects the view that Japan was determined to conquer all of East Asia, while James B. Crowley's important *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930-1938* (1966) argues that Japanese leaders pursued traditional and limited goals of security and prosperity, and sympathizes with Japan's refusal to give up its imperial ambitions as long as the Western countries showed no inclination to relinquish control over their Asian colonies. Japan, Crowley maintains, did not engage in any imperialistic conspiracy. Rather, as a poor nation whose economic conditions had been exacerbated by the Great Depression, Japan saw no other alternative except geographical expansion and the acquisition of vital natural resources. A Japanese document of the time claimed that American policy aimed to "compel Japan, as in the past, to kowtow to the United States. With the sentinel of the Far East in economic chains, the Orient would once again become the playground of Western economic imperialists."

Gerald K. Haines' incisive essay "American Myopia and the Japanese Monroe Doctrine, 1931-1941," which appeared in *Prologue* (Summer 1981), draws attention to the seemingly hypocritical American policy of strongly upholding the sanctity of the Monroe Doctrine, and even broadening its scope, while just as vigorously refusing to accept a Japanese Monroe Doctrine for East Asia. Tokyo had proclaimed such a doctrine in the early 1930s, using the original Monroe Doctrine as a model. Haines believes Japan had sufficient legitimate interests in the region to justify such a doctrine, despite the objec-

tions of Secretary of State Cordell Hull and others who were unable to see any resemblance between the American and the Japanese versions. The Japanese, Haines contended, would have agreed to a *modus vivendi* with the Americans based on a mutual recognition of each other's Monroe Doctrine. "By refusing to recognize Japan's regional claims," he wrote, "the Roosevelt administration helped harden positions on both sides."

Norman A. Graebner, one of America's leading diplomatic historians, has severely criticized the Roosevelt-Hull Pacific policies.<sup>1</sup> He faulted the administration for failing to recognize that matters of national survival for the Japanese were of little importance for the United States. It was highly unlikely that the threat of economic and military sanctions could change Japan's course. The United States, Graebner insisted, had only two options, either to recognize Japan's hegemony in the western Pacific, because of the primacy of her interests and power, or to oppose Japan's objectives and run the risk of war. Unsympathetic towards Japan's economic plight, oblivious of the psychological and political factors influencing Japanese policies, and confident that Japan could be intimidated, Washington refused to compromise.

The United States did not seek war with Japan. Quite the contrary, American policies would, it was hoped, force Japan to come to her senses. This underlay the policy recommendations of Stimson, Harold Ickes, Frank Knox, and the other hardliners in the administration. American leadership, despite the warnings of Joseph Grew, our ambassador in Tokyo, failed to appreciate Japan's growing desperation. As late as November 27, 1941, Stanley K. Hornbeck, the chief of the Far Eastern desk in the State Department and a partisan of China, wrote that "he does not believe that this country [i.e., the United States] is now on the immediate verge of war in the Pacific." Graebner claimed that this American "diplomatic inflexibility" aimed at the "unraveling of the whole Japanese empire." For their part,

the Japanese found the American policy inexplicable except if it sought to cripple Japan. They could not understand America's commitments in the Far East in view of her limited interests there. The United States, as the Japanese once stated to Washington, "always holds fast to theories in disregard of realities."

Prange, echoing what other defenders of the Roosevelt administration have contended, writes that "no one who has examined the great mass of historical evidence on Pearl Harbor can doubt that the United States wanted to maintain peace with Japan as long as possible." This is undoubtedly correct but also irrelevant. The real issue does not involve American intentions but rather the impact of Washington's actions and words on Tokyo, whether, in fact, these facilitated or obstructed efforts to resolve the conflict short of war. It is impossible to believe, in the light of December 7, 1941, that American policies were not viewed by the Japanese as threatening. The exaggeration of America's ability to intimidate the Japanese, the inability to comprehend the sense of desperation permeating the Japanese government and military, and the desire to restore the political situation in the Far East to that which existed prior to 1937, and perhaps even 1931, indicate an unrealistic and dangerous mode of thought. Roosevelt's failure was not due to any diabolical desire to have the Japanese become the instrument whereby the United States could enter the European conflict. It stemmed from confusion regarding America's interests in the Far East. "Roosevelt," Graebner wrote, "was never able to establish goals in the Far East which reflected the nation's limited interests, its lack of available strength, and its desire to avoid war."

The "revisionist" critique of Roosevelt, as exemplified by *Infamy*, is wrong not because it is critical of him but rather

because it posits a conspiratorial theory of history and asks the wrong questions. Roosevelt, Stimson, Knox, Hornbeck, and the rest were men of peace and honor. What can be questioned is their judgment and imagination. The United States in December 1941 found itself involved in the wrong war, with the wrong enemy, at the wrong time, and in the wrong place. The right war was with Germany and not Japan, later and not sooner, and in Europe and not in the Pacific. Only great industrial might, plentiful natural resources, and a large population enabled the United States to prevail in a two-ocean war. The United States won despite and not because of Rooseveltian diplomacy.

The moral globalism exhibited in 1941 resurfaced exactly two decades later. In January 1961 a young president told the world that the United States "shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." Four years later we were deeply entangled in the Vietnam War. Neither in 1965 nor in 1941 was Washington able to answer satisfactorily the question whether the nation had any vital interests in the Far East worth a major war. Vietnam encouraged some historians to reevaluate America's stakes in the Far East and to take a hard look at the events leading up to Pearl Harbor. But Prange was not among these historians. He had, after all, first begun serious study in 1943 of the day of infamy.

Reviewed by EDWARD S. SHAPIRO

<sup>1</sup>Norman A. Graebner, "Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Japanese," in *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941*, ed. Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 45-52; Graebner, "Japan: Unanswered Challenge, 1931-1941," in *Essays on American Foreign Relations*, ed. Margaret F. Morris and Sandra L. Myers (Arlington, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 117-46.