Dec 3, 1961

The Day the World Changed Forever

The attack on Pearl Harbor twenty years ago marked the birth of the age of total peril.

By A. M. ROSENTHAL

PEARL HARBOR.

THE moment at which the world changed forever is recorded as 7:55 A. M. on the Sunday of Dec. 7, 1941. Actually, it may have been a few seconds earlier or later; nobody can be quite positive. Men were fighting and dying at that moment and 7:55 A. M. is as close as historical precision can come.

The first bomb cluster that fell wobbling from the first Japanese plane attacking Pearl Harbor exploded the United States into a world war. It took varying degrees of time for men to absorb this fact into their consciousness and some men died on ships in Pearl Harbor or at airfields nearby before they knew. In Honolulu, there were people rising for breakfast or dressing for church who saw the smoke and heard the noise and decided it was a m[illegible] realistic drill and went about their affairs.

But, in a matter of moments or hours, depending on what they were doing that day, everybody in the United States knew that war had come. The fact that the world itself had changed forever — this nobody could know on Dec. 7, 1941, or for a long time after, and it may quite well be that there are many who do not know it yet.

The world did not change because one nation went to war and was defeated, and because another nation was attacked and in the end was victorious. That had happened before.

The world changed because, with the lockstep of history, the first Japanese bomb became the Hiroshima bomb, the death of the battleship age led to the birth of the nuclear age, the thrust of Asian imperialism destroyed Western empires, and most of all because a world in which a nation might be defeated and survive became inexorably a world in which a nation might conquer and die. For all men, the sweet boon of aloofness was taken away, never to be returned.

These changes could not be known that day at Pearl Harbor.

* * *

THERE emerges from the stories of survivors, and the records of the investigations and the intimately dissecting, minute-by-minute studies that have been published, an image of a world that the passage of a mere twenty years has made archaic. The way men fought then was different, and so was the way they thought.

That morning, the weather at Pearl Harbor was a bit cloudy and the Navy recorded a north wind of ten knots. This is rather normal for the Hawaiian

dance at the Officers' Club and some private military dinner parties. Civilians were dancing in the carefully preserved stuffiness of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. There were not many tourists around in those days. People knew each other, and at cocktails or at dinner they talked about the danger of war.

12/3/61, p. 32

MOST people in Honolulu knew full well that war might come at any moment, but somehow the military and the civilians could not quite believe the attack would come here. Looking down from an admiral's window or a hill above Pearl Harbor, one could see the great armada drawn up in neat rows, huge, menacingly gray, bristling with gun-power, the essence of strength.

Academically, a man might know that ships could be destroyed by aerial bombardment, but who could really believe that this sight of glory could be smashed in minutes? Until 7:55 A. M., men still inwardly relied on an image of power that, unknown to them, had become a mockery.

Then power crumbled, and the unassailable was destroyed. Waters calm and smooth turned in an instant into waters boiling with bombs and torpedoes. Everywhere the stench of fire and explosives. A dozen ships burning and foundering, and on deck men with blackened faces and burnt hands yelling and weeping and fighting, firing every gun they could shoot, and below men drowning or choking or burning to death.

The Maryland lay burning, and the West Virginia; the Nevada and the Tennessee. Five torpedoes turned the Oklahoma into a tortured nightmare.

And then the Arizona blew up. One bomb, through the forecastle, into the forward magazine — and a sickening crunch came through the madness of all the other noises, a concussion that blew men off the ships nearby. A few minutes of fire and smoke and burning oil and the Arizona was finished. With her, 1,102 men went down.

All told, eighteen ships were sunk or damaged, 347 American planes destroyed or put out of action—and 2,403 men killed.

* * *

THE time of twentieth anniversary is approaching. Anniversaries do not create real emotions. They merely italicize them. On any day of the year a visitor to Pearl Harbor can feel sorrow and regret at death and defeat, and pride at men's bravery and a nation's recovery, or hate and bitterness

(Continued from Page 32)

rates into its parts, of dramatizing the difference between how it was then and how it is now.

On board the passenger plane coming into Honolulu from Tokyo there had been five soldiers, all of them sergeants and all of them in their early twenties. They were on their way to a United States Army radar school in Alabama, and they said they thought it would be pretty good duty.

AT the Honolulu airport, waiting for the plane to take off again for San Francisco, they bought a few magazines and drank some Cokes. It was night when they walked back to the ramp, but the airport lights picked out the word embroidered in silver thread on each of their shoulders — "Japan" — and shone on the red sunball of the flag on the jet's tail.

On the flight from Tokyo, nobody seemed to have thought it strange to be flying over Pearl Harbor, twenty years later, on a Japanese airliner and with Japanese soldiers bound for training in Alabama. At the airport, nobody paid any attention.

There is a Navy launch that takes visitors about Pearl Harbor. On board is a sailor, who was 2 years old at the time of the attack, and he smoothly recites the story.

After a bit the visitor half closes his mind to the sailor and his spiel and stares fixedly at a framed map on board. It is all laid out there as it was then.

Here is where the ships lay all neatly together. Here is where the planes were on Ford Island, off to the port side of the launch there, and here are the planes at Hickam Airfield all correctly lined up and waiting for death.

The cruise lasts for about an hour and at first there is nothing much to see but blue water and mottled green shore and the hypnotizing map.

Then suddenly there is a hulk and a flag and some masonry. The Arizona. Every day, the flag is raised and lowered over the hulk because on the roster of the United States

(Continued on Page 98)

(Continued from Page 96)

Navy the battleship Arizona is still in commission. The masonry is for a monument, still unfinished. On the shore nearby the land is still black from burning oil.

"Are they still down there?" Often, tourists on the Pearl Harbor cruise ask this of the guides, who nod. They are still down there, in thirty feet of water, with a flag flying over them, on the Arizona. Tourists wince at the thought and sometimes weep. A feeling of suffocation comes with the thought of men trapped, burned and dead on a ship, and still down there.

"It's corny, I know," a Navy officer says as the launch pulls away from the Arizona. "But Pearl Harbor isn't a place; it's an emotion.

"Once, after the cruise, a man stepped up to me and gave me $350 for the Arizona Memorial, and right afterward, the same cruise, another man gave me a twenty-minute tongue-lashing about how it was all Roosevelt's fault. You can't always tell what emotions people will bring with them."

AT a Pearl Harbor naval office, an officer is rushing off to a lunch for the Arizona Memorial. He puts on a fresh shirt, knots his tie and slips on a gold tieclip. The clip is a silhouette of a destroyer, a Japanese destroyer, given to him by a Japanese officer visiting Pearl Harbor not long ago on a training mission.

In downtown Honolulu, over a neat corner building a Japanese flag flies. Twenty years ago, on the same site, a young Japanese naval officer kept Tokyo informed about weather and ships in port. Today, a pleasant Japanese consular officer discusses trade between Japan and Hawaii. Hawaii is a better customer of Japan than ever.

On Ford Island, where the planes burned, an American admiral talks earnestly and with admiration of the part Japanese destroyers and planes are doing now in joint submarine detection work with the United States.

"No hard feelings left?" a visitor asks of people who were here then, and almost always the answer is: "Well, some people, maybe. But not many. After all, the whole picture has changed."

* * *

HISTORICALLY, the picture of the relations between Japan and the United States has changed so much as to be unrecognizable. In 1941 the Japanese were not simply trying to destroy an enemy fleet but, in calculation, taking another stitch in a design to rule all Asia, a design almost successfully completed. Now the two countries are allies.

Here at Pearl Harbor, where the symbols of enmity and alliance about-facing stand out so vividly, only a fool would attempt to predict the political line-up twenty years from now. There is room to wonder whether the deep anti-militarism burned into the Japanese national consciousness will ever allow Japan to be an emotional as well as a technical ally. What one knows with certainty is that the Japanese accomplished their own permanent removal as a military power—and the removal of all but a few nations—by starting the chain that led from Pearl Harbor to Los Alamos to Hiroshima to the Siberian testing grounds.

There were other consequences of Pearl Harbor, more important ones, that can be seen now but could not be seen then, least of all by the men who planned the attack in Tokyo.

The Japanese empire started on Dec. 7, 1941, a process that was to lead to the death of the kind of imperialism the world had known until then. When the Western imperial powers returned after Japan's defeat they came back to empires in ferment, to peoples who had seen them humbled and would not forget, to colonies that had been thrust from the political backwater to the crest of the historical wave and would never be the same.

But beyond the affairs of empires, and even beyond the fact that the war sped the confrontation between the West and the Communist powers, the world changed more deeply and more frighteningly as a result of Pearl Harbor. It changed for all nations, but most of all for the United States.

(Continued on Page 100)

Until that moment when men at Pearl Harbor looked up at the sky in dazed wonderment, the relation of the United States to the rest of the world had been a little like the relation of a naturalist to ants in a box. For all the awakening realization of the intertwining of national fates the United States somehow stood psychologically aloof.

THE process of transformation that began at 7:55 A. M. and the nuclear age that followed so inexorably from that moment changed all that beyond dreams of recall. The United States was exploded into world war, and into the world, every corner of the world.

History is a sequence of ironies and of these one of the greatest is that a nation that did not want world power, that did not understand and perhaps still does not understand world power, was thrust into world power by the very nations—the Germans in Europe and the Japanese in Asia—for whom it was their sustaining dream.

The historical movement from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima and beyond utterly changed the concept of power and of balance of power, of time and space and of national and personal safety. The Pearl Harbor attack did not create in itself the confrontation between East and West. But it changed the timing of its coming, and it changed the methods and the boundaries of the struggle that was to take place.

Until that morning there were degrees of peril in the world. It was safer to be in Oregon than in London. That morning twenty years ago removed all comforting classifications of peril.

Pearl Harbor is now the headquarters of all United States military power in the Pacific and, although the fleets are always dispersed, it remains one of the spots that military men casually call "first-strike targets." Yet there is no particular feeling of special danger experienced here by a visitor.

IT is not that the winds are too balmy in Hawaii and the air too sweet to sustain fear. It is simply that everybody who visits here knows that if "it happens again" at Pearl Harbor, why, it will happen everywhere. It will happen to the visitor, whoever he may be.

This is how the world changed at 7:55 A. M. on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941: the first Japanese bomb led to Hiroshima and the creation of the totality of peril, the global target, the nameless burning city.

There are still red ants and white ants, peaceful ants and killer ants. But Pearl Harbor created for them all the universal ant box.