

Secretary Knox and Pearl Harbor:

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This statement by Admiral Frank Beatty, never before published, is a historical document of prime importance in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. There is probably no one else alive who can give so revealing an account of what Pearl Harbor looked like immediately after the attack, and of the effect of the unexpected attack on the participants and surviving victims of Roosevelt's need for a dramatic surprise to unite the nation behind him in war.

In addition to solid historical information, the article has many special points of interest. It indicates how top officials in Washington—aside from Roosevelt and Marshall—had been so hypnotized by the parading of Japanese forces down the coast of Southeast Asia that they concluded that the Japanese would launch their first attack in the Far East. It validates the effectiveness of the Roosevelt-Marshall suppression of details having to do with warnings to Pearl Harbor after December 4. A leading aim of Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox in going to Pearl Harbor was to try to discover how Admiral Kimmel could have been so completely surprised considering that Knox had ordered a warning message sent to Kimmel at Pearl Harbor and to Hart at Manila on the night of December 6, after he learned of the arrival of the Japanese reply to Hull's ultimatum. The Japanese rebuff had for days been regarded by Washington as marking the time when war would be right at hand. No record could be found that this warning message had ever been sent from Washington or received at Pearl Harbor. Not even the Secretary of the Navy was above the effective ban on warnings to Pearl Harbor.

Some points were amplified during a pleasant interview I had with Admiral Beatty in San Francisco. Secretary Knox's report to Roosevelt completely absolved General Short and Admiral Kimmel of any and all dereliction of duty with respect to the surprise attack. But this was not in accord with Roosevelt's need to make them the scapegoats and saddle them with the responsibility for being surprised, an operation which

was almost immediately launched in the commissioning of the notorious Roberts Commission. Hence, Knox's report was immediately suppressed by Roosevelt and was brought to light only during the Joint Congressional Committee Investigation of Pearl Harbor in 1945-1946, after the war was over, by lucky accident growing out of the initiative of Senator Homer Ferguson of the Committee minority. Even then, little or no publicity was given to this important aspect of the suppressed report. Probably not one American in a million knows anything about it to this day. I am personally inclined to think that Admiral Beatty is a little overkind to Roosevelt in stressing the fact that the Knox report had to be suppressed to keep the Japanese from knowing about the damage inflicted at Pearl Harbor. They could have learned plenty about this from the newspapers by the time Knox had returned to Washington.

Furthermore, the publicity given to Knox's visit well illustrated the cleverness of Secretary of War Stimson in shifting his own guilt to the shoulders of others, a technique for which he became notorious in the post-Pearl Harbor investigations of the surprise attack. Roosevelt had ordered Knox and Stimson to prepare separate statements concerning the responsibility for the surprise and the devastation. They were intended to indicate that the Army and the Navy shared the responsibility equally. Knox issued his statement as to Navy responsibility first, and it naturally received great publicity in large headlines all over the country. Stimson adroitly delayed his statement until it had lost much of its interest as hot news. Hence it got few headlines and most of the statement appeared on the inside pages of the newspapers. The result was that the great majority of the public felt that the main responsibility for the Pearl Harbor disaster fell on the Navy and that Knox had admitted this to be the case.

Finally, as absorbing reading, Admiral Beatty's article, with its account of the intrepid air trip, so different from those of today in our fast and comfortable superjets, the spectacle of the devastated Pearl Harbor area, and Knox's intense interest in gathering the facts, is a documentary gem for those interested in recording crucial and dramatic occurrences in our past. The editors are fortunate in being able to reproduce it here.

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