

Sullivan Recalls

Pearl Harbor Day

By FRANK SULLIVAN

Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941, was, at least in this part of the country, a fine, sunny, early Winter day. You probably slept late as you usually did on Sunday, then came downstairs and breakfasted, or you went to church and breakfasted after you came home. Any kind of meat you liked, if you favored the hearty breakfast. Two, three cups of coffee, or as many as you wanted, and all the sugar you wanted. Maybe you left two or three spoonfuls undissolved in the bottom of the cup.

The house was warm. If it wasn't, all you had to do was turn a thermostat and up went the temperature. There was plenty of fuel oil in the cellar tank, and plenty more where that came from.

At breakfast or afterward you looked at the Sunday papers. The news was not reassuring. It was, of course, no placid, halcyon day; it only seems as though it was, now that we look back on it from a year's distance. The two Japs were still in Washington and the President had sent a last-minute note to the Mikado. You felt somehow that war with Japan was coming, all right. But we'd knock 'em out of the Pacific in six weeks.

The newspapers (all except PM) were bulky with Christmas advertising. Page after page, offering electric gadgets of all sorts—toasters, waffle irons, hair curlers, heaters, radios. All you had to have to get yourself a typewriter or a razor or a bicycle or a rubber girdle or an oil heater or a refrigerator was the price of same.

On Dec. 6, 1941, probably not one person out of ten not living on the Pacific Coast could have told you the name of our important naval base at Hawaii—and such an oddly gentle, peaceful name, too! The names of Gen. MacArthur, Gen. Marshall, and Adm. Leahy were familiar to newspaper readers, but very few people outside Washington or the services could have told you who Nimitz, or Halsey, or Eisenhower, or Mark Clark or Ernie King or Uncle Joe Stilwell was. And no one at all outside the circle of their friends could have told you who were Colin Kelly, Capt. Wheless, John Bulkley, Butch O'Hare, Dorie Miller, Ensign Gay, or Donald Mason, or Daniel Callaghan.

You probably would have had a foggy notion of the location of Sumatra and Singapore, but dollars to doughnuts you couldn't have told what or where were Bataan, Port Moresby, Darwin, Midway, Wake, the Coral Sea, Buna, Guadalcanal or the Solomon Islands—or for that matter, Casablanca, Oran, or Bizerte.

Perhaps in the early afternoon of that pleasant day papa and mama got dressed and went for an automobile ride. Papa's shirt had a lavishly abundant tail to it, his trousers had cuffs, and his suit was vested and double-breasted. Mama still had silk stockings, or nylon.

Papa got the car from the garage, stopped at Joe's, said "Fill 'er up, Joe" (Cries of "Stop, you're breaking my heart!") and mama and he bowled contentedly about the countryside for a few hours.

Then, as twilight deepened, they came home, turned on the radio, and heard the news.

PM

DECEMBER 6, 1942

OldMagazineArticles.com