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Stanley Weintraub. *Pearl Harbor Christmas: A World at War, December 1941.* Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011. vii + 201 pp. $24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-306-82061-8.

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Plotting a Course through the Storm, Christmas, 1941

Stanley Weintraub's *Pearl Harbor Christmas* delivers an intimate look at the leadership dynamics of World War II, using the final days of 1941 as a focus. Although most of the book relates to the American and British perspective, Weintraub incorporates the situation in Europe and Asia, and takes into account many of the key players, including the Germans, the Japanese, and the Russians. While he tells most of the story from the standpoint of each nation's leadership, Weintraub also examines the views of individuals from the lower echelons of command as well as civilian observers.

One could call this book a story because of its sweeping scope and the narrative tone taken by its author. Reader get a sense that they are sitting in on the recounted events. The book opens with Winston Churchill's transatlantic voyage to meet with Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) shortly after the American declaration of war in December of 1941. Weintraub captures the urgency with which the British prime minister sought to meet with FDR and to cement their fledgling alliance and their priorities for the war. Along with Churchill's efforts to win FDR over to his outlook on how to fight the war, the book details the chaos and lack of preparedness on the part of the British, the United States, and their allies regarding the Pacific theater and the Japanese entry into the war. Added to this was the dire state of affairs facing Britain and the Soviet Union in Europe, together with the question of how the United States would factor into the European theater of the war.

At times the book has a frenetic pace, showing how the Allied powers were reeling from Japanese attacks in the Pacific. The author reserves harsh judgment for many of the senior commanders and officials making the decisions concerning damage control in the Pacific. The general tenor of these decisions was one of ineptitude and Weintraub is quick to call out Churchill for squandering resources on prideful but inadequate defenses of places like Singapore, which were ultimately doomed. The sting of Weintraub's critique is reserved not only for the British but also for the Americans and the Germans. He takes Douglas MacArthur to task for his deceptive claims of a hard-fighting resistance to the Japanese advance in the Philippines, and he criticizes Adolf Hitler's refusal to let his troops retreat despite setbacks on the eastern front fighting the Russians.

Weintraub goes into great detail describing the interactions between Churchill and FDR in the White House while the prime minister stayed there as a guest in order to formulate war plans and policy. This included Churchill's much-desired pledge that the Allies would focus on winning the war in Europe first. The reader is treated to vignettes regarding Churchill and FDR's participation in some Christmas festivities, including the lightning of the White House Christmas tree. These forays into the personal side of the lives of these leaders illuminate the humanity of these individuals who were making decisions of such tremendous consequence for the world.

However, the author also looks at the warriors and civilians fighting to survive on the front lines of the conflict and trying to make sense of a world gone mad. For example, Weintraub tells the tragic story of the ill-fated naval destroyer *Peary*, and recounts an instance of a female shopkeeper's defiance of Nazi soldiers' demands for a rare book from her bookstore in France. Some of the most interesting experiences of lesser players are related from the perspective of Dr. Charles Wilson, later Lord Moran, who was Churchill's personal physician, and Alonzo Fields who served as a butler in the White House. Through their eyes we are treated to the story of FDR's surprise encounter with Churchill while the latter was naked in his room, as well as FDR's fondness for mixing and serving cocktails, along with Churchill's penchant for drinking them.

The book concludes with the impression that the war was in a tenuous state for all sides involved. The Japanese, despite their supreme early confidence, wondered how long their victories would last. This concern was underscored by their failure to achieve all of their objectives when they attacked Pearl Harbor, most notably, the destruction of American aircraft carriers. In Europe, the Germans were slowly being beaten back by the Soviets while Hitler ignored the advice of his generals regarding withdrawal. The Soviet Union, although on the counteroffensive, clamored for American and British material aid and for the opening of a second front to draw off Nazi strength in the East. For their part, the Allies had to find some way to recover from their early losses and put together an effective strategy based on their shaky position. At home in the United States, Americans did not fully feel the effects of the war, but Weintraub paints a picture of a nation gearing up for battle, although nowhere near full wartime footing.

Weintraub makes no attempt to hide his dislike for Churchill and MacArthur; both are repeated targets of his ire. He portrays Churchill as a meddler with a habit of interfering in military affairs beyond his comprehension. Additionally, Weintraub frames him as a man with tremendous ego who was unwilling to accept or even face his mistakes. He takes Churchill to task in the book's notes by stating that the prime minister, when writing his voluminous memoirs, falsified or omitted mistakes he had made during the war. MacArthur is shown as a shameful opportunist, who was more concerned with preserving his personal reputation than with mounting an effective defense of the Philippines. To reinforce this point, Weintraub describes how MacArthur continuously fabricated reports of vigorous resistance on the part of his troops during their retreat to Corregidor. Additionally, the author highlights the fact that MacArthur took the time to use funds promised to him by the Filipinos to purchase Lepanto gold mining stocks while the Japanese were busy taking over the Philippines.

While this book was immensely entertaining to read, it lacked in-depth analysis. To be sure, Weintraub consulted a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, in writing this book. He makes especially great use of memoirs and firsthand accounts, which add a vivid and human character to the narrative. Still, the book does not set down any analytical goals, explicit arguments, or references to historiography. One could also pick at some very minor factual errors in the book, such as the labeling of the Japanese aircraft carrier *Akagi* as *Agaki*. Also, the title is a bit misleading as Pearl Harbor itself does not feature prominently in the book. On the whole, none of these points diminishes the rich and vital story Weintraub seeks to tell here. Taken as such, this book provides a magnificent look at the drama and tumult surrounding some of the key players in the time following the United States' entry into the Second World War.

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