

***December 7, 1941***

***By Mel Lavine***

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Seventy years ago on Sunday, December 7, 1941, I was attending a club meeting with a group of other young boys when an older brother burst into the room and announced, “The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor!”

We looked at each other questioningly. “Pearl Harbor?” we said. “Where’s that?”

Ever since I have asked contemporaries what they remember of that day. Where were they? How much of the news did they comprehend? I just asked a friend in my exercise class such

questions the other day.

He remembered he was at the movies in his hometown of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The feature was “All That Money Can Buy,” a film produced in 1941 based on the Stephen Vincent Benet classic, “The Devil and Daniel Webster.”

“They stopped the film,” he said. The manager came out and announced that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and we are now at war.” My friend can’t say if they continued with the movie, or whether people got up and left.

I wondered if he’d heard President Roosevelt’s speech the next day asking Congress for a declaration of war upon Japan. He has no recollection. But he thought his mother heard the speech on the radio.

She idolized him, he said. Remembering what a Roosevelt fan she was, he sang a few words of the lyrics of a popular song of that day: “I’m mad about new books, can’t get my fill, and Franklin Roosevelt’s looks give me a thrill...”

My Republican mother, I said, voted for him once.

The day after the attack, Mr. Taylor, our school principal, summoned all classes to the auditorium to hear the president. We kids and our teachers, too, were on pins and needles until Roosevelt spoke. His commanding voice assured us of victory.

The Lady Friend, who was eight, my junior by five years, was at home with her family in New Salem, North Dakota. She remembers her father, who was in France in the First World War, predicting, "This isn't going to be easy."

The attack on Pearl Harbor was the fifth and last time a president actually asked Congress for a declaration of war as prescribed in Article I section 8 of the Constitution.

Earlier proclamations were declared for the War of 1812 against the British; the Mexican-American War, 1846; the Spanish-American War, 1898; and the Declaration of War against Germany on April 6, 1917 during World War I.

Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, and lesser conflicts were, for the most part, legitimized by other acts of Congress, according to what I've read.

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