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Stanley Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas: A World at War, December 1941*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2011. Pp. 216. ISBN 978-0-306-82061-8.

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December 1941 was the most defining month in America's history, a time that both inspired and disheartened its citizens. Neither before nor since has the country been so unified: virtually no Americans opposed their nation's entering the Second World War after Imperial Japan's attack on the US Pacific fleet. Winston Churchill made a zigzagging journey across the ocean on a battleship with hatches battened down against the cold North Atlantic waters and radio silence maintained for fear of U-boat attacks. In meetings with a discouraged Franklin D. Roosevelt, he helped formulate a grand strategy that changed international as well as national history.

Historian Stanley Weintraub (Penn State) devotes *Pearl Harbor Christmas* to recounting the dramatic events of the most remarkable holiday season in the twentieth century. He vividly documents the days (from 22 Dec to 1 Jan) of discussions between the President and the Prime Minister. The hard realities that Washington and war-torn Europe faced at the hands of Hitler's *Wehrmacht* also feature, albeit fleetingly.

No military historian has written as often as Weintraub on the American holiday season—no less than five books.<sup>1</sup> But *Pearl Harbor Christmas* differs from its predecessors in providing a day-by-day narrative with chapters on each of the last ten days of 1941 plus New Year's Day 1942.<sup>2</sup> Structuring his account this way makes for easy reading while strongly evoking the atmosphere of a nation on the brink of war. Those with a keen interest in the human—as opposed to political-military—side of war will be particularly pleased.

Christmas in 1941 was bittersweet for Americans: rationing had not yet been implemented and citizens did not have to observe blackout instructions very strictly—unlike their transatlantic cousins. Though homes remained warm and cities bright, the nation knew things would be very different come Christmas 1942.

The welcome offer to Churchill included dinner on the evening he reached dry land. It would be a somewhat different White House than George VI and Queen Elizabeth had visited in the sunny summer of 1939, just before the European war had broken out. Preparatory blackout curtains hung at each window; exterior lighting was dimmed and directed away from the walls. Sentry boxes were set up at driveway entrances and along the perimeter fences. Police patrolled where onlookers once strolled. Yet a stately Christmas tree was being erected on the White House lawn. (19)<sup>3</sup>

Weintraub firmly believes the events of 7 December 1941 changed America at home and abroad, in both the security measures it adopted and the strategic thinking it espoused. He endeavors to illuminate those shifts with some success. On the domestic front, it is well known that the Treasury Department impounded Al Capone's limousine, but not that the commander in chief was himself assigned an armored car only *after* Pearl Harbor (3). And, too, we are treated to colorful anecdotes about the Secret Service proposing to erect the national Christmas tree in Lafayette Park, the potential number of unidentifiable persons attracted to

1. Besides the present volume, *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce* (NY: Free Press, 2001); *General Washington's Christmas Farewell: A Mount Vernon Homecoming, 1783* (NY: Free Press, 2003); *Eleven Days in December: Christmas at the Bulge, 1944* (NY: Free Press, 2006); and *General Sherman's Christmas: Savannah, 1864* (NY: HarperCollins, 2009).

2. The book is enhanced by twenty-three illustrations and seven pages of documentation.

3. Cf. David McCullough, *In the Dark Streets Shineth: A 1941 Christmas Eve Story* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2010) on the United States in a festive but unsettled holiday mood; also, *Washington Goes to War* (NY: Knopf, 1988), by David Brinkley, who was a radio reporter in the city at the time.

the lighting event, and access to participants on the South Portico (ordinary citizens could previously walk onto the White House grounds).

But it is in explaining the changes in US strategic thinking and the influence of British ministers that Weintraub truly excels. His coverage of Lord Beaverbrook is especially original. Beaverbrook was part of Churchill's entourage that descended on Washington to raise the morale of Americans, who had little clue what was going on in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, and to advise them how best to retaliate. Ever the realist, the Minister of Supply acted as a catalyst in the explosion of American industrial output and, after 1941, helped realize Roosevelt's metaphor of America as "arsenal of democracy": in the next three and a half years, manufacturers produced approximately 300,000 planes and shipyards launched almost a freighter a day—nearly a thousand Liberty Ships in all.

The US delegation may have been relatively inexperienced compared with their seasoned British counterparts, who had confronted and overcome earlier imperial transgressors, but they were not naïve about their guests' agenda: "The President's advisers realized that the British would come with carefully drafted proposals and a substantial wish list of war matériel before the White House could scramble to create its own strategies and review its production goals" (6). How was the anti-labor, pro-imperial, conservative Beaverbrook able to sway a liberal, Democratic administration? The answer lies in the man's powers of persuasion; further, his "tough-minded realism may have been more significant an influence on ... Arcadia [the code name for this second wartime meeting] ... and the outcome of the war than either Churchill or Roosevelt" (164).

As influential as "the Beaver" evidently was, his failure to form close bonds with any of his American counterparts has led some to concentrate too exclusively on the rapport between Churchill and Roosevelt. This unfortunately omits the military building blocks which fostered the "special relationship."<sup>4</sup>

A serious shortcoming of the book is that, apart from his Prelude (1–10), Weintraub does not provide any context within the wider war for his claims about, for instance, Beaverbrook's influence on the outcome of the war (164). This is regrettable, since Churchill's suggestion that Dill stay on in Washington after Arcadia was, as Andrew Roberts has observed, "effective in creating good relations between the American and British military staffs there."<sup>5</sup> Readers will not know just how "effective" that decision was, unless they refer to Roberts and read that only thirty years earlier, in World War I, America had refused to merge its war effort with Britain's, preferring instead to remain an "associate" power.

Conscious that poor coordination between its members had hindered the Triple Entente's efforts against the Central Powers in the First World War, the Allies now avoided the same mistake by instituting a unified command. This laid the military foundations for victory and foreshadowed such postwar institutions as the United Nations. These unprecedented events in the weeks after Pearl Harbor underscore the significance of December 1941 in global history. But those who wish to learn more about the peculiar circumstances of the genesis of the name "United Nations" (rather than "Associated Powers") should turn to the account by Dan Plesch, quoting FDR's companion, Daisy Suckley (and correctly assigning the relevant date as 29 December, not the twenty-sixth like Weintraub):

F.D.R. got into his bed, his mind working & working ... Suddenly, he got it—United Nations! The next morning, the minute he had finished his breakfast, he got onto his chair & was wheeled up the hall to W.S.C.'s room. He knocked on the door, no answer, so he opened the door & went in & sat on a chair, & the man went out & closed the door—He called to W.S.C. & in the door leading to the bathroom appeared W.S.C.: "a pink

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4. See David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Vintage Books, 1989) 231: "not merely was the example set by the close personal relationship between Roosevelt and Churchill at the summit, but it was followed by the establishment of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee for the joint prosecution of the war." Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West, 1941–1945* (NY: Harper, 2009) 76, notes that relations between Sir John Dill and George C. Marshall warmed to such an extent that the de facto British ambassador would relay to the Army Chief of Staff what the Commander in Chief had earlier telegraphed to the Prime Minister.

5. *Ibid.*

cherub” (FDR said) drying himself with a towel, & without a stitch on! F.D.R. pointed at him and exploded “The United Nations!” “Good!” said W.S.C.<sup>6</sup>

*Pearl Harbor Christmas* is purportedly the author’s final foray into the Christmas-at-war genre of military history—a good thing, given the lack of wider context that this installment suffers from.<sup>7</sup> I very much hope that Weintraub reverts to his earlier, useful explorations<sup>8</sup> of Anglo-American relations and produces a broader work on the “special relationship” that brought Great Britain to America’s side in an hour of dire peril.<sup>9</sup>

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6. *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged Peace* (NY: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 32.

7. Craig Shirley, in *December 1941: 31 Days That Changed America and Saved the World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), shows that it is possible to avoid this deficiency.

8. See *The London Yankees: Portraits of American Writers and Artists in England, 1894–1914* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) and *Victorian Yankees at Queen Victoria’s Court: American Encounters with Victoria and Albert* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011).

9. Esp. in light of revelations that British officers provided their Japanese counterparts with military secrets and the know-how to carry out the raid on Pearl Harbor: see the BBC Two documentary written and directed by Paul Elston, *The Fall of Singapore: The Great Betrayal*, originally aired on 21 and 23 May 2012 – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1205.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1205.htm); see also *Broadcast* (22 May 2012) – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1206.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1206.htm).