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Steven M. Gillon, *Pearl Harbor: FDR Leads the Nation into War*. New York: Basic Books, 2011. Pp. xvi, 224. ISBN 978-0-465-02139-0.

Review by Daniel Simonsen, Ruston, LA (simonsen@aviatorphoto.com).

Steven Gillon (Univ. of Oklahoma), in *Pearl Harbor: FDR Leads the Nation into War*, treats both the Pearl Harbor attack and the wartime presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. He analyzes FDR's actions in detail from the moment (1:47 p.m.) on 7 December 1941 when he learned of the Japanese attack to his speech to Congress the following day.

To accomplish this task, Gillon uses the diaries and notes of the principal actors, White House transcripts, and information from the commission that FDR appointed to investigate the attack. Recognizing the gravity of the day, the president broke from his standard practice and permitted stenographers to record the dialogue from his meetings immediately following the attack; consequently, 7 December 1941 is the best documented day of FDR's presidency.

President Roosevelt's untimely death while still serving in office prevented him from writing the memoirs that might have shed light on his decision-making processes. Many have attempted to fill that historical gap. Gillon, while not specifically an FDR historian, clarifies the context of Roosevelt's decisions by concentrating on his actions in the crucial hours following the attack.

Gillon begins with an exploration of FDR's personal character, beginning with his childhood, when his ever protective and caring mother, Sara Roosevelt, "smothered him with affection and insulated him from the struggles of ordinary life" (135). After Sara's sudden death exactly three months before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt, as the *New York Times* reported, "shut himself off from the world more completely than at any time since he assumed his present post" (23). Gillon highlights the depth of the bond between mother and son by pointing out that her passing "was the only time that anyone had ever seen FDR cry" (23).

FDR had learned how to control his emotions from his mother. Even when polio left him paralyzed from the waist down in 1921, he hid his disappointment at the effects of the crippling disease and his confinement to a wheelchair and their implications for his rising political career. The stoicism he learned to show in the face of his paralysis, Gillon writes, stood FDR in good stead in December 1941: "despite the enormity of the defeat at Pearl Harbor, and its potential consequences, Roosevelt remained steady and sure-minded. 'Through it all the President was calm and deliberate,' a cabinet member observed. 'I don't know anybody in the United States who can come close to measuring up to his foresight and acumen in this critical hour'" (xvi).

As a secondary theme, Gillon stresses FDR's proficiency in making critical decisions based on his instincts. Lacking the instantaneous communication resources of our internet era, he had to cope with a glaring lack of information, some of which was unreliable in any case. For example, early reports claimed that two of the enemy aircraft at Pearl Harbor had borne swastikas on their tails!

Gillon also draws a parallel between Roosevelt's skill in dissembling his paralysis in public settings and his enlistment of the national press in divulging (or not) and managing the information that flowed into the White House on 7 December:

FDR walked a delicate line in the hours after Pearl Harbor: He needed to use the attack to justify declaring war against Japan, but he wanted to avoid providing the public with the details of the devastation. Perhaps Roosevelt worried that the specifics would demoralize the nation, allowing his enemies to blame his administration for the glaring security lapse. It is also likely that FDR feared that arousing too much passion would undermine his larger strategic goals. He wanted to transform anger at Japan's actions in the Pacific into a mandate to enter the war against Germany in Europe. (126)

Gillon contends that, before the attack, FDR's primary focus was Europe, where he operated as his own de facto Secretary of State. The Pacific region, by contrast, he left to his actual Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. For the US failure to anticipate the growing potential for Japanese aggression in the Pacific, Gillon holds FDR at least partially responsible.

The book ends with an analysis of Roosevelt's speech on 8 December. His opening words, "December 7th, 1941—a date which will live in infamy" (175), are, of course, among the most iconic ever spoken in American history. Gillon offers a meticulous and intriguing discussion of Roosevelt's drafting of the speech he delivered to a joint session of Congress and the American people. His confidants wanted him to specify the nature and severity of the Japanese attack. But Roosevelt, anxious to preserve the nation's morale, kept his message brief, in line with his practice of shaping opinion partly by withholding specific details. Hence, Gillon points out, he made only a "vague reference to the damage at Pearl Harbor" (175), then moved on to mention other American interests that had been attacked. Whatever the degree of detail in the speech, FDR certainly motivated the largest radio audience in history to pursue an all-out victory. Congress, later that very day, complied with his call for a declaration of war.

Gillon vividly recreates the atmosphere of a nation abruptly thrown into war by quoting significant figures and ordinary people alike. Media excerpts illustrate FDR's masterful control of information. In addition, small sidebar discussions further evoke the mood of the period. For example, in the aftermath of the attack, Roosevelt was driven to his speech before Congress in Al Capone's confiscated armored car! (The US Government had been unable to purchase such a car for the president's security.)

Pearl Harbor: FDR Leads the Nation into War is an engrossing, well-written, and insightful study.¹ Its extensive documentation will reward other researchers seeking information about specific events in the days covered. The book belongs on the bookshelves of both students of World War II and anyone interested in Franklin Roosevelt's response to the crisis of America's day of infamy.

1. It also provided the basis for a History Channel program, "Pearl Harbor: 24 Hours After," aired on the seventieth anniversary of the attack. See Neil Genzlinger, "When the Country Was Attacked, and There Were No TV Updates," *NY Times* (6 Dec 2011) - www.miwsr.com/rd/1207.htm.