

NEVER A DULL MOMENT

Robert L. Clifford

Editor: Bob Clifford, U. S. Army Col. Ret., has seen more of the world and of this country's role in it than most. He seems to have a knack for being in places where history is being made. During our week in Antigua in March, I persuaded him to put some of his experiences down in writing so we could have a glimpse of history as he watched it being made. -



With gun (from Admiral Nelson's warship) and camera in Antigua - March 1994

Day of Infamy: December 7, 1941 was the most important day in my life. I was on duty in the General Staff Military Intelligence Division G-2 as a section chief in the Latin American branch, and I can never forget witnessing the unfolding of those incredible events. It was a damp and gray Sunday. I had dinner at my parent's house in Georgetown and had just sat down to read a book when the phone rang. A cousin said that the radio had just announced, "The Japanese are raiding Pearl Harbor."

Within ten minutes, I was at the War Department, then headquartered in the Munitions Building on Constitution Avenue. I was the fourth officer on duty at the G-2 Situation Room. The news tape machines in the hall brought us Associated Press and United Press news.

Someone had a radio. For the first two hours after the first Japanese strike, there was no effort to censor news of the damage done to our ships in Pearl Harbor or aircraft at Hickam Field. There were no official messages coming into the War Room, so I was directed to reconnoiter other divisions in the Munitions Building to ascertain what news they had. In rapid order I checked the Far Eastern Branch G-2, the front office of Brig. General Sherman Miles, assistant chief of staff G-2, and the War Plans Division. No office had any information. Let there be no doubt: the Japanese attack had been a complete surprise.

Around the War Room a question was asked as to the whereabouts of Col. Rufus Bratton, chief of the Far Eastern branch G-2. I was sent to the parking lot behind the Munitions Building to await his arrival. I accompanied him up the steps. He was perspiring freely. He kept mumbling "I thought those two Jap convoys in the China Sea were heading for Siam." I guess the colonel sweated off about 10 pounds that day.

Then I was sent to the Navy Department next door to see what the Navy knew. My first stop was Office of Naval Intelligence. I was told that the office had no news, that the Navy generally transmitted intelligence information through operational channels. I made my way to Op 38, the Navy War Room. It had charts on the wall indicating the known location of Japanese and Allied ships prior to the Jap attack. There was no indication of a Japanese task force in the North Pacific. I headed to the front of the building, to the office of Adm. Harold Stark, chief of Naval Operations. Sixteen admirals were sitting in his outer office, no one saying a word - a real wake. I will never forget that sight.

Back at the G-2 War Room I was told that Chief of Staff Gen. George Marshall wanted a set of maps showing where the Japanese had struck at other spots across the Pacific. Marshall was to take them to an 8 P. M. meeting at the White House. I sped to the G-2 Map and Photo branch, broke the locks to map cases and obtained maps of Malaya, the Phillipines, Guam, Wake, Midway and the Hawaiian Islands. On each I indicated with red arrows where the Japanese had attacked that day. By 7:30 P. M. I had the maps at the general's office. Col. Walter Bedell Smith, his executive officer, was awaiting me. He rapidly checked my work and said, "Okay, Captain," and took the maps in to Marshall's office.

Then the most surprising event of this confusing day occurred. On leaving Gen. Marshall's office, I stopped at the head of the stairs to see his departure. The general soon appeared at the hall door, putting on his overcoat, tugging to straighten his belt, and talking over his shoulder to Col. Smith.

The general was smiling broadly, almost happily. I asked myself, "Doesn't the general know that there's a war on?"

Only years later did I read about Marshall's difficulty in convincing President Roosevelt and presidential "military advisor" Harry Hopkins that the United States must accelerate its preparations for war and that the President must bear down on Congress to appropriate funds. That evening Marshall was smiling, realizing that at long last he would no longer have to wage the uphill fight at the White House.

My earliest memories living in Washington include World War I Preparedness Parades up Pennsylvania Avenue, the Armistice and troops returning from France. Dad and other relatives in uniform made sure we children knew and saw what was going on: Allied pilots stunting over Potomac Park; new tanks being tested in Rock Creek Park; suffragettes demonstrating for the vote in Lafayette Square opposite the White House alongside rallies to sell War Savings stamps and Liberty Bonds - an exciting environment.

Occasionally President Wilson drove by our Connecticut Avenue house on the way to Chevy Chase to play golf. Mrs. Wilson would have him gussied up in golfing tweeds but he never looked very happy about it.

We moved back to Illinois after the war, but returned from Evanston to Washington when President Harding appointed Dad to the Treasury. The United States had become a world power and many foreign delegations came to Washington. At the Willard Hotel we would watch international dignitaries

pass through Peacock Alley. The Prince of Wales, Marshal Foch, General Jacques of Belgium plus some ladies of more local repute. Congressman "Uncle Joe" Cannon took me to my first baseball game, the Senators beating the White Sox behind Walter Johnson's pitching. I watched Inaugural Parades, attended welcome ceremonies for Captain Lindbergh, Admiral Byrd, the dirigible LOS ANGELES, the launching of the battleship WEST VIRGINIA - but not the inauguration of F.D. Roosevelt.

My own military involvement was in the Washington High School Cadet Corps and in the Princeton Field Artillery ROTC unit. The Class of 1933 provided the largest number of Field Artillery-Reserve officers commissioned in any inter-war Princeton class! My senior thesis was "The Military Policy of the United States" with history professor Robert Albion as my advisor.

In the 1932 presidential campaign several of us undergraduates were active in Mercer County: Oren Root, Axel Smith, Soapy Williams, myself and Tom Fairchild '35. Hoover carried the borough of Princeton 4-1 but lost the nation. [Ed Delaney was working for the Democrats - see pg. 21]

The 1940 election. Back in Chicago working for the Northern Trust Company in the late 1930s I became active in politics, climbing the local Republican organization ladder from precinct worker, precinct captain, President of Evanston Young Republican Club, to "ward boss" in 1940. I was given the challenging assignment of taking over the semi-dormant Republican organization in Chicago's 25th Ward on the Near West Side in the heart of the area controlled by the Capone Syndicate, a group of Italian-Americans offering protective services to local businessmen. Ward headquarters was in a saloon on Ogden Avenue. We gathered there every evening after doing our house-to-house canvassing. Generally I was the only one present who did not have a shoulder pistol, a cauliflower ear, a broken nose and/or a scarred face. The nightly ritual was generally the same: wash down a raw egg with a shot of whiskey and then upstairs to see the "girls."

One evening the Democrats intercepted one of our workers, Jay Berwanger, a former University of Chicago running back and first winner of the Heisman Trophy. He didn't try to fight back but did an end run to the nearest pay phone to report the attempted mugging to a radio station which immediately put the incident on the air.

That ended Democrat skullduggery for the moment but we feared for more rough stuff on Election Day. I knew that the Democrat-controlled police would be looking the other way when voting violations occurred. We hired about 20 special policemen who worked for LaSalle Street banks. But I was still worried. So we recruited a "flying squad" of former football players, some of whom had run interference for Illinois' Red Grange. On Election Day polls opened at 6 A.M.. By 7:15 there had been three attempts to steal ballots and the "Flying Squad" intervened each time. At 7:30 the Democratic Ward Committeeman called off the rough stuff. Pheww!

The Democrats carried the ward as usual but with a reduced margin. The voters, mainly Italian and Polish immigrants, were too accustomed to doing the bidding of their priests and neighborhood precinct captains. On Election Night in 1960, when it appeared that Richard Nixon might carry Illinois, rumor has it that Chicago Mayor Richard Daley "discovered" 15,000 votes for Kennedy, 6,000 of those votes reportedly coming from the 25th ward, thus ensuring Kennedy's election. (Source - classmate Ken Lingle).

The War Years. The Army called me to active duty in late 1940, not at Fort Sill as I requested, but in the War Department in Washington. So I had a front row seat for the slow government transition from peace to war.

In the course of 5 1/2 years of active duty I served in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the China-Burma-India theatres. High point was the landing of the 45th Infantry Division (Oklahoma National Guard) in Sicily. There was great debate beforehand on whether to fire a pre-landing bombardment on the enemy beaches. The Army generals (Bradley and Middleton) argued that this would lose the element of surprise. I counseled the task force commander Admiral Kirk that, based on my Chicago ward experience with Italians, this would provoke an early Italian surrender. In the event a 15 minute barrage of white phosphorous shells was fired and the Italians met us on the beach, arms raised high, shouting "camerada".

My last active duty assignment was in Washington at the Army and Navy Staff College whose Commandant was General John L. Dewitt '00. After VJ Day I was assigned the job of arranging for a team of 50 ground, sea and air officers from the various theatres to do a "lessons learned" exercise on joint operations during the war. Frank Hibben did the paper work. Although large scale demobilization was occurring, President Truman, the Congress and most people

(unlike 1919) realized that the United States had become the world's leading power - Selective Service was continued, our armed forces were deployed around the world and the U.S. played a leading role at the new United Nations.

The Foreign Service. As the war ended I decided that international affairs would be more to my liking than banking in Chicago. I applied to the Foreign Service and soon found myself before a Foreign Service Examination Board chaired by Joseph Green '08, a former Princeton Professor of History. I feared he might ask me whether I had taken his Freshman course "Historical Introduction", which I had carefully avoided at the recommendation of my brother Lambert '27, but it didn't come up and I slipped into the Foreign Service.

In 1947 the Department of State assigned me to our Embassy in **Belgrade, Yugoslavia**. There I had an unsurpassed opportunity to witness the workings (very tight) of a communist state. I developed the custom of Saturday motor trips around the country to see what was going on. Occasionally we would drive up to some isolated farm house, announce that we were Americans and be treated to 120-proof rakiya. Needless to say the motor trips annoyed Marshal Tito, the local dictator. His press denounced us Americans as "Monarcho-Facist beasts, lackeys of Wall Street. etc.", so he did not want his people to be corrupted by contact with us. Eventually he had his Presidium put restrictions on diplomat travel in his Balkan country.

My next posting was to our new Embassy in **Rangoon**. Burma's recovery from the devastation of the war was just getting underway when Britain's Labor Government gave independence to this troublesome colony. The country lapsed into an all-out civil war with the hill tribes in the north rebelling against the down-country Burmese who controlled the Rangoon government. Nonetheless, as the Embassy's economic reporting officer, I travelled the country visiting the British mining and oil installations and checking on a dozen American missionary facilities. On up-country visits I always took along a case of Dewar's "White Label", so was assured a warm welcome by businessmen and missionaries alike.

By the time I left Burma late 1949 there were eight local groups fighting for control of the country and the economy slowed to a halt. This was a forewarning of troubles to come in third world countries as they received their independence.

My next post was **Beirut, Lebanon** then the jewel of the eastern Mediterranean "Riviera". It was replacing Cairo as the center of American business activity in the Near East. As

Legation Commercial Attache I was a busy man. However Saturday motor trips continued to see Crusader castles and other historic spots. I had the company of a Foreign Service colleague on these travels. The Arabs admired Americans albeit they increasingly feared (and rightly) the U.S. Government's favoritism for the new State of Israel. Eventually the tour ended, the colleague and I were married, and we returned to the United States, acquiring a house in Princeton on Patton Avenue, east of Harrison Street.

Life in Princeton. In the 1950s Princeton seemed little changed from our days. President Dodds and Dean of the Faculty Douglas Brown '19 were adhering to traditional values and student activism was still to come. In becoming acquainted with Dean Brown he accepted my suggestion, originally proposed as an undergraduate, that the Army ROTC curriculum be broadened to include courses in "Political Organization for National Defense", "Economic Mobilization for War", and to continue "Military History". He found faculty to teach each of these courses. The Department of the Army was delighted with this broadened curriculum and encouraged other colleges to adopt the "Princeton Plan".

Again with Dean Brown's encouragement, we on the Graduate Council started the Faculty-Alumni Seminars over Reunion weekend. In 1953, our 20th, Frank Pace and Soapy Williams participated in the first such seminar entitled "The Development of a Long Term Policy for the Military Training of our Youth" with Dean Brown as the moderator. It was successful and the practice continues to this day.

Pakistan. In 1956 I reentered the Foreign Service to serve in Karachi as the economist of the U.S economic aid program to Pakistan. Again, as in Burma and Lebanon, I found the host country lacking in sufficient trained manpower at professional, technical and skilled levels to undertake all the economic and social development programs required to move the country up the ladder of development. My wife Penny and I worked with Pakistani of all backgrounds to broaden their vision of modern society. Some lifelong friendships resulted and Pakistan has slowly developed a more viable economy.

United Nations. In 1962 I switched to the United Nations Technical Assistance Program. Over the following ten years I served as Economic Advisor in five newly independent countries: Niger Republic, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Sabah State of Malaysia (former North Borneo) and Western

Samoa. In some of them ethnic/tribal differences plus customary political maneuvering weakened the country's stability and retarded progress.

Nonetheless I think that one of the great dramas of our times has been the assistance tendered by the developed nations, led by the United States, to assist the over one hundred underdeveloped states around the world. This is a continuance of the 19th century spirit which sent American missionaries around the world. I was glad to be a part of this global undertaking.

Virginia Politics. In 1972 Penny and I abandoned Princeton (town and gown) for Williamsburg. From the 1960s on, the campus had been rent by debate and strife. Various ideologies were promoted by faculty and taken up by some students. Anti-Vietnam war protesters destroyed the atmosphere of our once small town college. Nassau Hall gave up its responsibility of being *parentis in loco* to students and student morals began to sink to national levels.

However some of us did succeed in 1972 in bringing back the Army ROTC after the Department of the Army had withdrawn it during the heat of the campus anti-Vietnam protests.

So the Cliffords moved to Williamsburg where we are delighted to find most people adhering to the standards and values handed down to us from the past. Politically the issues are generally debated intelligently, despite TV static, and my generation seeks candidates for office who share our values. I have had more time to devote to political activities: attendance at Republican meetings ranging from precinct level to National Conventions, candidate recruitment and coaching, traditional door-bell ringing (I may well be the last of the species), etc.

The future? Unfortunately in recent years citizen participation in the political process has declined. The neighborhood precinct captain is largely history and so are the heated barber shop debates. Most voters obtain their political information from TV evening news which is often lacking in breadth and depth. It is increasingly difficult to recruit broadly qualified individuals for public or party office. Too often the younger generation is not volunteering for political office and community leadership.

Candidates, once selected, campaign often in 15 second "sound bites". Pressure groups move in to fill the void and their Political Action Committees monitor office holders' thinking and action. The future of American society and U. S. world leadership are at risk (sadly) as I conclude this.