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Our Good Luck at PEARL HARBOR

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A surprising revelation by the man who took command of our Pacific fleet after the great disaster

SAD THOUGH THE LOSS of life was at Pearl Harbor—17 years ago today—and terrible though the destruction, the consequences of the Japanese attack could very easily have been devastatingly greater.

Had our commands received timely warnings of the approach of the enemy, there is no doubt in my mind whatever that our fleet would have been at sea maneuvering to intercept the attacking force and striving to bring about a fleet action.

In such a case, our battle line—slower by at least two knots—could never have closed to ranges where we might have exploited our skill in gunnery. Our one old carrier probably would have been hopelessly overwhelmed by the six Japanese carriers that accompanied the attacking force. Our battleships and cruisers would have come under heavy air attack by greatly superior forces and might have been sunk in deep water with 100 per cent loss of life. Our destroyers would have made heroic efforts to torpedo the enemy carriers but, with inadequate air cover, would have suffered great losses.

Such an action probably would have occupied most of the day of December 7, 1941.

Our forces ashore would have had ample information of the course of the battle at sea and could have taken steps to prepare for the blows to be expected the following day. Some of the Army Air Corps planes might even have joined the sea battle if the Japanese commander had chosen to accept battle within the range of Oahu's shore-based planes. Despite this, the greatly superior Japanese fleet could have returned on December 8 to complete the destruction of all American air

strength and then, methodically and leisurely, proceeded to destroy the repair facilities of the naval base and to burn—with explosive machine-gun fire—4,500,000 barrels of fuel oil stored in a completely exposed tank farm.

What a shocking loss that would have been! The destruction of the repair facilities would have forced our Navy all the way back to the West Coast of the United States.

The loss of that great fuel supply would have been well-nigh irreparable. The campaigns against the Japanese would have been so much delayed that they might have established themselves so strongly in the Western Pacific that years of effort would be needed for their expulsion.

We might be fighting out there to this day!

What happened instead was perhaps the greatest boon and good luck to our Navy to come out of our misfortune at Pearl Harbor. Because we were caught by surprise, our fleet was in a relatively shallow port. This fact enabled us to salvage most of our outdated ships and greatly reduce the loss of our trained officers and men.

Fortunately, too, for the Allied cause, a great underground bomb-proof fuel storage was nearing completion in the hills behind Pearl Harbor. Into this vast storage, rushed to completion in 1942, was dumped our precious reserve of fuel. This important storage—to this day, and for the predictable future—is perhaps our greatest strength factor in the Eastern Pacific. Atomic power may replace in a small way our dependence on petroleum fuels, but such will not be the case for many decades.

Another such underground bomb-proof fuel storage in the Western Pacific—in Guam, which we

control—would so strengthen American control of the Pacific for years to come that it is surprising that such is not now under construction.

The object of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was to inflict sufficient damage to our naval strength to give their navy a free hand to expand and consolidate its holdings. For this purpose, they could have chosen better targets at Pearl Harbor—the destruction of our fuel!

The Japanese attack left our submarine base at Pearl Harbor virtually untouched. Its destruction by bombs would have been easy and it would have greatly hampered our most effective—and only—available weapon, our submarine force, which, incidentally, was the only force we had which could operate unsupported in Japanese waters from the earliest days of the war. The effectiveness of those submarines, in cutting down Japanese naval strength and their merchant marine, is too well known to require retelling.

Just why the Japanese Navy failed to complete the havoc and destruction at Pearl Harbor, which was easily in their power, must be left to another story.

But the attack shocked our country out of its apathy about the World War already under way in Europe. All the arguments for and against entering the conflict ended and America, as one man, joined the fight against aggression.

Can anyone doubt that, during those momentous years of World War II, an all-seeing Divine Providence was guiding and protecting our nation as, indeed, it had from the days of our Revolution? ●