



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
72nd Anniversary of Pearl Harbor
Commemoration
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
07 December 2013
As prepared for delivery**

Thank you Rick for that introduction and for your leadership here at Navy Region Hawaii.

Senator and Secretary Cleland, Governor Abercrobie, Governor Brewer, Senator Hirono, Congresswoman Gabbard, Bishop Duprey, Admirals Hays and Mackey, fellow flag and general officers, veterans past and present, distinguished visitors, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking time for remembering this day in history.

This day has special meaning for me. My father, and four of his brothers, fought in World War II. In fact my father was here at Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. He was onboard the aircraft carrier USS Lexington, which had set sail westward just two days before the attack. So for me, it's a privilege to be here today...and I am deeply honored to be here as I look over these hallowed waters.

It's hard for me to imagine the events of that Sunday morning, 72 years ago. On an otherwise beautiful day in paradise, the horrific events that took place here caught America...her Navy...and the Territory of Hawaii by surprise...and it fell upon the shoulders of brave Americans, like these here in the front row, to respond to crisis.

They say that hindsight is 20/20. For history has shown us that the alarm bells had been sounding throughout the preceding decade. As America looked eastward, toward Europe, we watched as the military dictatorship in Germany began to grow in power...and fascist Italy allied with Nazi Germany...and much of the rest of Europe prepared for possible conflict. And we looked westward...where we saw the militaristic rise of Imperial Japan.

In fact, we relocated our Pacific Fleet from California to Hawaii in 1940, a move designed to give pause to a potential adversary.

Even so, on December 7th 1941, the United States was strategically surprised when carrier based aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy dealt an almost crippling blow to the Pacific Fleet. While our Nation was surprised that morning, our military here in the islands mustered an incredibly brave defense and engaged the enemy as best they could...with what they had. It was a day of gallantry and unquestionable heroism... even as it was a day of sacrifice and loss.

For those who gave the last full measure of devotion for their nation that day, we feel a deep sense of sorrow for the loss of such potential. Yet, we are also inspired by their great gift to the world...the gift of freedom itself. They did not go quietly into the night...and along with those who survived, a reluctant nation emerged to fight and ultimately win World War II. Those who survived Pearl Harbor also left us a warning. "Remember Pearl Harbor... Keep America alert...Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"... an imperative to never to be caught by surprise again.

But...Twelve years ago...we were again strategically surprised by a major attack on our soil. Not by a nation state but by terrorists. In the preceding decade, the alarm bells had been ringing, and we were again aware of danger. As we worked to get ahead of our enemies, few, if any, could have anticipated the methodology and comprehensiveness of those events in New York...Shanksville...and the Pentagon...on that fateful autumn morning.

Now, I don't claim to be an expert on the Good Book...but in Ezekiel...God was searching for a person who would "Build up a wall and stand in the gap" to defend a new nation...a warrior who would represent the honor and integrity of the people. Thankfully, our nation has always been blessed to have strong men and women with exceptional courage, who are willing and able to step forward to do whatever it takes to defend America, whenever our liberty is in jeopardy.

Just like the greatest generation...who answered the clarion call of duty to defend our nation after the attack on Pearl Harbor, after Korea, after Vietnam, after the Cold War and Gulf War...a new generation of men and women volunteered to stand in the gap for us after the 9/11 attack. Since then we have pursued and engaged our enemies, wherever they are found even to the ends of the Earth, and we are still at it today.

Now, as military efforts in Afghanistan draw down, our nation looks to the future, and we emphasize the tremendous importance of the Indo-Asia-Pacific. This dynamic region of the world already drives global economic prosperity, and will do so for the next century. Ours is a region of rapid growth...not only in population...not only in industry...but also in competition for scarce resources and in military growth and I say "ours" deliberately. The United States is...and will remain ...a Pacific power. But we also remember the warning from those who survived Pearl Harbor, and we are increasing our vigilance accordingly. Today, we are focused and listening for the first sound of the alarm.

The fact that we can sit here today, in peace, is just another example of the immeasurable debt we owe to all those who served in World War II, both at home and abroad. Whether stimulating the industrial might needed at home to support a war, or fighting on the front lines, everyone in the greatest generation played a part in underwriting the freedoms that we enjoy today. I offer my salute to those of you here today for your commitment to our nation, and for not failing when duty called.

As the Pacific Fleet commander, I want to assure you that this current generation of warriors has heeded your call. We remember Pearl Harbor, we are vigilant, and we are ready to fight tonight and win. Not only are we poised to respond to the first notes of the alarm bell, we are also doing everything possible to keep the alarm from sounding in the first place.

May God bless you and all of our Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, Merchant Marines and Coastguardsmen ... past and present...who have answered that clarion call to duty... and who have never failed us.

And God bless this land of liberty and freedom and is worth defending with our very lives.

Thank you very much.