

Community Comment – Dec. 7th, 2015

By Jon Sapper

Pearl Harbor

A friend said and I'm paraphrasing.... I think I'm going to go live on a tropical island with warm ocean breezes, where I can sit outside for breakfast without a coat, sipping my morning coffee while reading the newspaper and taking leisurely walks on the beach to forget all the worries and headaches that I see most others fretting about. Just running away from some of the stuff I constantly hear people complaining about will give me the peace of mind and relaxation that I want.

Looking a bit surprised, I replied, "I was just reading about someone who did that a while back for some of the same reasons." They talked about this one warm Sunday morning where they had just finished their early morning walk and decided to go to a nearby café for a cup of coffee and read the paper. Although they usually got up early for the walk, they always took their time, because what was the hurry? They did this every day. It was very predictable.

Not far away on this Sunday morning, a young man was looking at his radar screen and saw some airplanes heading toward them. He called his boss who said not to worry about it. What he didn't know was that the day before, his superiors had intercepted a message that inquired about ship movements. This wasn't taken too seriously either and they'd get to it on Monday. The battles that were going on in other parts of the world, were just that, a world away: geographically, mentally and emotionally. This was paradise and no one could change that. More recently declassified information from the Office of Naval Intelligence confirmed the warning signs..... that war was imminent, but they were also dismissed.

An hour and 15 minutes later, over two thousand four-hundred U.S. citizens and military personnel were dead with 19 destroyers and battleships destroyed or damaged. 74 years ago today, this country was thrown into World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The warning signs were not heeded. Paradise couldn't be shattered. The real problems were a long ways away and really didn't impact their lives. Most of them got up early, took walks on the beaches, had their morning coffee and read the paper as a routine matter.

US leadership did not take action on those warning signs to translate them into a specific prediction of the horror that lay ahead.

I don't think we are quite as naïve as we were back then, but there are a couple of problems. Too many of us still think the real problems are a long ways away, and secondly, we're way too comfortable with getting up early, taking walks on the beach, having our morning coffee and reading the paper.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.