

# "A Day Which Will Live in Infamy"

Grace Tully



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## OVERVIEW

On December 7, 1941, without warning the Japanese bombed the United States naval base and airfield at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The fleet and the air force there were virtually destroyed. News of the attack reached Washington immediately, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt called together his cabinet and congressional leaders and prepared his declaration of war. One of the president's private secretaries recorded events as they occurred, and excerpts from her 1949 book, *F.D.R. My Boss*, follow.

**GUIDED READING** As you read, consider the following questions:

- How would you describe the mood of the country at this time?
  - How did Tully seem to view the president?
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On Sunday afternoon I was resting, trying to relax from the grind of the past weeks and to free my mind from the concern caused by the very grave tones in which the President dictated that Saturday night message. I was rather abstractedly looking at a Sunday paper when the telephone rang and Louise Hackmeister said sharply:

"The President wants you right away. There's a car on the way to pick you up. The Japs just bombed Pearl Harbor!"

With no more words and without time for me to make a single remark, she cut off the connection. She had a long list of people to notify. In twenty minutes I was drawing into the White House driveway, already swarming with extra police and an added detail of Secret Service men, with news and radio reporters beginning to stream into the Executive Office wing. . . .

Most of the news on the Jap attack was then coming to the White House by telephone from Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, at the Navy Department. It was my job to take these fragmentary and shocking reports from him by shorthand, type them up and relay them to the Boss. . . .

. . . The news was shattering. I hope I shall never again experience the anguish and near hysteria of that afternoon.

Coding and decoding operations in Hawaii and in Washington slowed up the transmission. But the news continued to come in, each report more terrible than the last, and I could hear the shocked unbelief in Admiral Stark's voice as he talked to me. At first the men around the President were incredulous; that changed to angry acceptance as new messages supported and amplified the previous ones. The Boss maintained greater outward calm than

anybody else but there was rage in his very calmness. With each new message he shook his head grimly and tightened the expression of his mouth.

Within the first thirty or forty minutes a telephone circuit was opened from the White House to Governor Joseph B. Poindexter in Honolulu. The Governor confirmed the disastrous news insofar as he had learned it. In the middle of the conversation he almost shrieked into the phone and the President turned to the group around him to bark grimly:

"My God, there's another wave of Jap planes over Hawaii right this minute." . . .

Within the first hour it was evident that the Navy was dangerously crippled, that the Army and Air Force were not fully prepared to guarantee safety from further shattering setbacks in the Pacific. It was easy to speculate that a Jap invasion force might be following their air strike at Hawaii—or that the West Coast itself might be marked for similar assault.

Orders were sent to the full Cabinet to assemble at the White House at 8:30 that evening and for Congressional leaders of both parties to be on hand by 9:00 for a joint conference with the Executive group.

Shortly before 5 o'clock the Boss called me to his study. He was alone, seated before his desk on which were two or three neat piles of notes containing the information of the past two hours. . . .

"Sit down, Grace. I'm going before Congress tomorrow. I'd like to dictate my message. It will be short."

I sat down without a word; it was no time for words other than those to become part of the war effort. . . .

"Yesterday comma December 7 comma 1941 dash a day which will live in infamy dash the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan period paragraph."

The entire message ran under 500 words, a cold-blooded indictment of Japanese treachery and aggression, delivered to me without hesitation, interruption or second thoughts.

"I ask," he concluded, "that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday comma December 7 comma a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire period end."

As soon as I transcribed it, the President called [Secretary of State Cordell] Hull back to the White House and went over the draft. . . . Hardly a word of his . . . historic declaration was altered. Harry Hopkins [Roosevelt's closest adviser] added the next to the last sentence: "With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounded determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God."

**Source:** Tully, Grace. *F.D.R. My Boss*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.