

The luckiest, unlucky thing that happened to Chester Nimitz - and the United States - occurred in January, 1941 when he was passed-over for Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet by Adm. Husband E. Kimmel. Kimmel, perhaps unfairly, was blamed for the Pearl Harbor disaster 10 months later and relieved of command. Ironically Nimitz was his replacement. Chester Nimitz understood the value of Naval Aviation, carrier warfare, signals intelligence and the emerging science of traffic analysis - and selected the finest subordinate commanders in the Navy to lead the few fighting groups left in the Pacific. All these strengths contributed to a resounding defeat of the Japanese Fleet at Midway, 75 years ago this date.

The Midway operation was designed to break the supply line to Australia, establishing Japanese control over the entire western Pacific. The Midway victory kept Australia out of Japanese hands and kept open this vital supply route to the United States which later facilitated the island by island advance placing our bombers in range of the Japanese homeland.

So in June, 1942, the US Navy eliminated 4 Japanese carriers and with them the majority of their best combat pilots and now had a supply line to the Southwest Pacific. What we didn't have was the supplies themselves, the merchant ships to carry them and the warships to protect them. Also lacking in 1942, were enough trained troops to take the offensive. This issue would come to light two months later in the Solomon Islands, mostly at an obscure island named Guadalcanal. More on that to come.

Note: This is a historical discussion of 1942, and is not intended as a comment today's politics.

The "America First" movement of the Post WWI era effectively prevented America from arming to meet the emerging Fascist threat to Europe as well as banning any military participation there or in Asia. With two vast oceans separating "us" from "them," the prevailing wisdom was that America was safe and had no business mixing in European or Asian affairs. Isolationism ended on Dec. 7, 1941 - quickly replaced by a total commitment at every strata of American society. Young people left school to join the armed forces, industrialists saw unlimited potential to make fortunes in war production and workers at every skill level saw the opportunity to lift themselves out of the lingering poverty of the depression. These opportunities eventually extended to women and minorities but sadly, only for the duration of the war.

The American homeland would be untouched by the war itself, thus becoming an unstoppable war-production engine that would support 17 million military personnel, on two fronts extending over the girth of the planet. Taxes alone could never pay for this commitment and so there arose the largest deficit-spending program in history - voluntarily born by nearly every American. A WWII private earned \$50 per month. \$6.25 was deducted from his check to purchase an \$18.75 War Bond every 3 months. (Between the bond, life insurance and family allotments, the average dog-face used to remark that they were both fighting the war and paying for it.) In the U.S. where an annual income of \$1400 could comfortably support a family of 4, Americans also bought bonds - 187 billion dollars worth, perhaps 3 voluntary dollars for every one confiscated as taxes. Post war, this investment and the wave of prosperity it created gave us Spam, open heart surgery, big cars, Levittown and Tranquility Base. It also gave us NATO, the Marshall Plan, Minute-man Silos and the Cold War. But 75 years ago, America was mobilized, motivated and "in it."

Some were "in it to win it," some were in it to get rich, some were in it because they were just plain angry at our enemies. Grandpa and grandma grew a "victory garden," Dad was called up, mom had a war plant job and youngsters collected scrap iron for the cause. Given the divided nature of our nation today, us 'boomers and succeeding generations tend to think America's commitment to "The War" was propaganda but the few GI Generation folks left testify that such singularity of purpose actually existed. Let it be remembered.