

## PEARL HARBOR

Greater East Asia News #1 — Air Attacks Over Hawaii  
(*Daitōa Nyūsu* #1)

Japan *Production*: Nichiei, *Print*: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 4 min., 1941.

During the Pacific War, *Greater East Asia News* was produced as propaganda for the occupied territories by the Overseas Department of Nichiei, which engaged in newsreel production in accordance with national policy. There were various editions available in a variety of languages, including a Philippines version (in English and Tagalog), a Celebese version, a Malaya version, and a Burma version. This newsreel reports the air raid on Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Naval Air Force. Of course, it was produced in December 1941, and is the Philippines edition, judging from its English narration.

This is a precious film for its recording of the Japanese perspective on Pearl Harbor, from deployment of the ships to the attack itself. Jittery shots and the narrator's agitated voice vividly describe the actual conditions that day. It's also extremely interesting to note the use of "Nippon" as opposed to "Japan" to refer to Japan, or the use of "March of the Battleships" as theme music. In several parts of *Nihon News* #62 and #82 (which is entitled, "Great Air Raid on Hawaii"), we can see the same shots which were probably picked up from this film.

— Yamane Sadao

December 7th

U.S.A. *Direction*: John Ford and Gregg Toland, *2nd Unit Direction*: James C. Havens, *Photography*: Gregg Toland, *Editing*: Robert Parrich, *Music*: Alfred Newman, *Production*: U.S. Navy, *Print*: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 20 min. / 83 min., 1943.

Americans shot only a few minutes of film at Pearl Harbor, so when director Gregg Toland and John Ford set out to make a movie about the attack they built their film out of special effects and Hollywood intrigue. Besides commemorating the attack, the filmmakers intended to celebrate the impressive rebuilding of the Pacific fleet, destroy any vestiges of isolationism, and bring the loyalty of Japanese Americans into question. The resulting mess provides an example of how not to make a propaganda film. It was so unacceptable to so many people that its release was held up for a year and it was finally cut into several lengths, one of which won the Academy Award for best documentary short in 1942.

In 1940, John Ford created a "Field Photographic Unit" within the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS, what would be known later as the CIA). The idea was to create a film team that could go out and shoot the shooting, should the U.S. enter the war. When the head of the OSS, William Donovan, proposed a film about Pearl Harbor, Ford suggested Gregg Toland as director, the renown photographer for *Citizen Kane* and *Wuthering Heights*. Toland spent much of 1942 producing an 83-minute docu-drama on location in Hawaii and at the Hollywood lot of 20th Century Fox.

The unexpurgated version of *December 7th* is simply awful. Much of the running time is divided between a racist account of the imaginary Japanese American spy activities and a simplistic debate between Uncle Sam and Mr. C (his conscience). Uncle Sam (Walter Huston) is in Hawaii taking a break from the world's state of crisis. His conscience, Mr. C (Harry Davenport) won't leave him in peace. He chides Uncle Sam for his isolationist and relaxed attitudes; there are dangerous countries out there and their spies are paving the way for an attack. The film then shows Japanese American hairdressers, gardeners, and cabbies eavesdropping on white Americans, then reporting their findings to Japan by secret radios (a paranoia not unlike that in the Japanese film *Weapons of the Heart* (*Kokoro no busō*)). A subversive *Shintō* priest (played by a Korean American) exhorts Japanese Americans to pledge themselves to the emperor and the Japanese race. A token Nazi makes an appearance, but it's important to note he's an American of German ancestry.

After the spectacular battle scenes, the ghost of a victim of Pearl Harbor (Dana Andrews) meets a ghostly soldier from WWI in Arlington Cemetery. The latter predicts a third world war if American returns to isolationism, using a baseball metaphor straight from *Kill Or Be Killed*: "America decided they [sic] didn't want to play ball in the international league and left Wilson on third base." The Pearl Harbor ghost returns the metaphor, saying he's depending on the leaders of the free world to make the world safe:

"Safe, period. Safe for us to continue our democracy; safe for any other nation to live under any book of rules whatever its name so long as they call a fair ball fair and a foul ball foul [sic]. This time Uncle Sam's going to be in there pitching. When this ball game is over, a lot of guys are coming back to home plate and they're going to ask a lot of questions."

Most of the scenes above were expurgated from the final film, leaving the battle and its aftermath. For filmmakers and military and civilian bureaucrats, the film's failure was not its attack on the Japanese American community. According to research by William Murphy and James Skinner, the reasons were multiple.<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Navy Frank Knox found the film too easy on Japanese Americans. Julian Johnson, Fox's head of production, liked the film but found the "graveyard stuff" anti-climactic. Harold Stark, commander of naval forces in the European theater, thought it portrayed the navy in a poor light:

"It is true that every caution was being maintained to prevent internal sabotage, but it is not true that U.S. Navy task forces were not at sea, as they were; also, Navy PBYS were out on patrol work...As I reported to the President that afternoon, our striking forces were not impaired despite the destruction we suffered. The picture leaves the

distinct impression that the Navy was not on the job, and this is not true. Also, a goodly part of the damage was done by Jap torpedo planes and not enough of these are shown. I am not concerned with minor inaccuracies but great harm will be done and sleeping dogs awakened if the picture is released as it now stands, leaving the impression that the Navy was asleep."<sup>2</sup>

Toland was crushed by the criticism, and beat a retreat to Rio with the Field Photographic Unit. Ford turned his attention to the work print upon his return from India, where he worked on *Victory in Burma*. He gutted *December 7th*, except for the battle, and won an Academy Award for the effort.

Americans shot only five or six minutes of documentary footage at Pearl Harbor — mostly burning ships and medics tending to the wounded. According to a biographer of John Ford, 100 feet of 16mm black and white was shot by C. Daugherty, and Lt. Cmd. Edward Young shot another 100 feet on 8mm Kodachrome. A few of Daugherty's shots may be seen in *December 7th*, but by and large the entire sequence is special effects. In the last 40 years, these reconstructions have been recycled as reality by countless, naive documentary filmmakers, blurring the line between fiction and documentary in ways Toland and Ford couldn't have predicted.

— Abé Mark Nornes

#### NOTES

1. Murphy, William T. "John Ford and the Wartime Documentary," *Film and History* IV/1 (February 1976), and Skinner, James. *December 7th: Filmic Myth Masquerading as Historical Fact*, (unpublished manuscript). This essay relies heavily on the latter for historical material.
2. Murphy, op cit., p. 7.

#### Momotarō's Sea Eagle (*Momotarō no umiwashi*)

*Japan Planning*: Navy Dept. of Information, *Photography*: Seo Mitsuyo, *Music*: Itō Noboru, *Engineering, Orchestration*: Mochinaga Tadahito, *Special Effects*: Kimura Hajime, *Script*: Kurihara Shigeru, *Assistance*: Tanabe Toshihiko, Hashimoto Tamako, Tsukamoto Shizuyo, *Production*: Geijutsu, *Executive Producer*: Ōmura Einosuke, *Print*: 35mm, sd., Japanese, b&w, 37 min. (the extant print is 33 min.), 1943.

*Story*: Here is a press release from the time of the film's release:

"Momotarō, the hero of children's stories, makes a leap up onto the stage of the Greater East-Asia War! As the commander of the Sea-Eagles, he takes to the field in the greatest bombing of the century. Displaying their skill honed through rigorous daily training, his pheasant, canine and simian troops cleverly spread out freely, in all directions, and using bombs and torpedoes destroy the enemy airfield on Onigashima Military Harbor (Demon Island — Hawaii's Pearl Harbor), filling the screen with countless thrilling, unparalleled scenes. The spectacular shape of the mother ship, riding the wind and waves of the Pacific, heads east! While the attack signal steadily grows in volume, the stern, manly Commander Momotarō gives an address of instructions and sends the air assault division on their bombing run. As a rabbit ground crew member encourages them on, the large force takes off towards the enemy army's port! To crush the enemy fleet! To the tune of Hawaiian music, they rush into the enemy