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Japan 1941: Countdown To Infamy



Synopsis

When Japan attacked the United States in 1941, argues Eri Hotta, its leaders, in large part, understood they were entering a conflict they were bound to lose. Availing herself of rarely consulted material, Hotta poses essential questions overlooked by historians in the seventy years since: Why did these men - military men, civilian politicians, diplomats, the emperor - put their country and its citizens in harm's way? Why did they make a decision that was doomed from the start? Introducing us to the doubters, bluffers, and schemers who led their nation into this conflagration, Hotta brilliantly shows us a Japan never before glimpsed - eager to avoid war but fraught with tensions with the West, blinded by traditional notions of pride and honor, nearly escaping disaster before it finally proved inevitable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Everyone knows that, on December 7th, 1941, the Japanese Navy attacked the American base at Pearl Harbor. Numerous ships were sunk or damaged, scores of planes destroyed, and over 2,000 people were killed. But what led Japan to take such a drastic step to start a war that they had no hope of winning? Eri Hotta attempts to answer this question in "Japan 1941". One could argue that World War II began when Japan invaded China in 1931. From that point forward, Japan was under scrutiny from the rest of the world, including the United States. By 1941, Japan was suffering from sanctions, including an embargo on oil and scrap metal from the United States. War with the United States was a distinct possibility. But what of the preparations for this war? Hotta argues, rightly so,

that the Japanese were unprepared to fight a successful war against the United States. The industrial might of the United States would overwhelm Japan. Japan, in the words of Winston Churchill, would be ground into dust. Despite the vast difference in industrial might, many Japanese felt that war was the only answer. Others believed that success could be achieved through negotiation. It was this constant bickering and interservice rivalry that ultimately doomed Japan. Hotta states that none of Japan's top leaders had sufficient will, desire, or courage to stop the momentum for war. The attack on Pearl Harbor can be viewed loosely as a tactical success for the Japanese. But the result was a strategic nightmare, for only 6 months later, the Japanese advance was stopped at Midway. I found this book to be an informative narrative about Japan's preparations for war in 1941.

This new look at the reasons why Japan took the path to war in 1941 offers new insights as well as previous treaded ground. The author was born in Tokyo and educated in Japan and researched Japanese archives to present a Japanese perspective on the events leading to war. The majority of the population were jubilant at the onset as the prevailing view was that America had been waging economic warfare against Japan for some time. Prince Konoe, prime minister from July 1940-October 1941, and Matsuoka Yosuke, foreign minister July 1940-July 1941 are portrayed as the ones most responsible for leading Japan onto the path of war. This alters previous readings of Konoe being a moderate influence in the imperial government. However, the author nearly exonerates Tojo Hideki as the former general had to make the best of an already complex situation and the military was set for war. The events of this time period is open for interpretations and there are numerous authors that can take widely different viewpoints. This author presents her findings and explains them in a good format. The Roosevelt administration was waging economic warfare against Japan. This fact has been written about before but this book actually details that it was waged in a manner that FDR knew could lead to retaliation. If a nation today tried to cut the US off from its oil supply or any other resource they would attack that country. Japan was mired in a conflict with China, taking over administration of Indochina from France, and was tied by treaty to countries that the west didn't like. The political method of the imperial government is explained and it really was a complex way of running a modern nation.

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