

FEATURE

I Remember Pearl Harbor

The first man in Chungking gets the startling news of the Pearl Harbor attack

By Mike Peng

A declaration of war was sparked by the most unforgettable telephone call I have ever made. Friends have importuned me to recall this happening of forty years ago. As a link in a chain of circumstances, it is related to any in-depth account of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and its repercussions in China.

Hollington K. Tong, China's vice-minister of information at that time, writes in his book on China and the World Press: "Mike Peng, in charge of our radio programs, was the first man in Chungking to get the startling news of the Pearl Harbor attack. He heard the report over the air at one A. M. on December 8. There is, of course, a sixteen-hour difference between Far Eastern and San Francisco time which accounts for the discrepancy in dates. Fearing that he might have been deceived by his own ears or by a false report, Mike listened until 3:30 before reporting to me. By then, he was satisfied that the report was true. He telephoned to me and I telephoned to the generalissimo."

Continuing, Dr. Tong said: "the generalissimo immediately called an emergency meeting of the national military council, and of the Central Kuomintang Standing Committee. The meetings and consultations on December 8 resulted in China's declaration of war on the Axis powers and in the generalissimo's messages to President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill."

So the generalissimo started his longest day in Chungking. Dr. Tong made the predawn wakeup call after checking with my report. Then he instructed me to keep on the news watch and broadcast the breaking story. Moments later, Wu



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Incoming signals on my receiver from KGEI, San Francisco and BBC, London were boosted by our remoting monitoring system, with fading and noises reduced to a minimum.

First to report to me was Ma Ping-ho, the black-gowned, Scotland-born, naturalized Chinese citizen, with a Cambridge degree. An excellent news writer, Ma got ready in a hurry to do our regular European transmission at 4: 30 A.M. My only trouble with him that time was in reading his penciled copy on junk paper of all sizes.

At five o'clock, Prof. Fung switched our transmitting antenna from UNI to OMNI angles to cover East Asia only. Thus, we begin joint operations with XGOA, our key station for domestic service. All writers, translators and announcers hustled with great enthusiasm. Together we produced a Pearl Harbor half-hour before daybreak, broadcast in major Chinese dialects and foreign languages.

At six A.M. sharp, Radio Tokyo came up with its first official announcement of the Pearl Harbor attack by Japanese forces. At 6:30 A.M., Radio New Delhi gave its first echo to the Japanese report. It became apparent at that early hour that all other East Asia signals, except Hanoi and Saigon, had been silenced by Japanese guns, from Hong Kong and Philippines down to Indonesia and Singapore.

I returned to Dr. Tong's house at 6:35 A.M. in response to his call. His top aide, H.P. Tseng and Jimmy Wei, joined us as I began to update my listening report. Later his adviser on Japanese affair rang the bell, with a fresh transcription of the first Domei bulletin on the Pearl Harbor attack his staff has intercepted. It drew no comment, but all had a sardonic laugh when I told a KGEI story about Upton Close, well-known American commentator, theorizing on the air in California that the Pearl Harbor attack was an act of mutineers, not of the Japanese government.

Back in my office again, I was glad to see Wang Shan-Wei, our executive engineer, waiting for me. I had been keeping in close touch with him since midnight. Wang was on the road all the time, covering the 4 corners of the XGOY complex: the underground transmitter at

Shapingpa which the enemy had tried to bomb out of existence: the riverfront power plant at Tuwan; the hilltop listening post at Hsiehtaitzu; and the main studio in the city. It was indeed his magic expertise that held such fragile components together for service to a suddenly darkened continent so well on that historic night.

In describing the aftermath, Dr. Tong remarked, "We began to feel a frightening sense of isolation. Cable services were disrupted. Oversea mail was neither going out nor coming in. Goods could not be transported. Our only connection with the outside world was by airplane over the dangerous hump route to India and by the tenuous thread of a weak radio transmitter."

Dr. Tong moved quickly to strengthen the radio arm. Dr. C. L. Hsia at New York was asked to take over the publishing of the weekly "China at War" when Hong Kong was threatened. XGOY was obliged to transmit articles to it for the duration of the war. It also served American and other foreign journalists in China. The roster includes Lowell Thomas, NBC, Eric Sevareid, CBS, Bob Brumby, MBS, Frederick B. Opper, ABC, Tillman Durdin, N. Y. Times, Theodore White, Time, and Ernest Hauser, Reader's Digest. Correspondents' mailer stories were transmitted in its "Feature service" and personnel measure sent in a "weekly mailbag".

XGOY transmissions were picked up, recorded, transcribed and airmailed in the United States by an unheralded hero — the Dr. Charles E. Stuart, who made possible the relay of Chungking, Mexico and Canada. A log of Dr. Stuart's efforts would reveal 10,000 words a day, seven days a week. How he also handled his dental patients is a mystery.

Dr. Stuart frequently complained about poor reception and that he could hear dogs barking and ducks quacking on our news programs. There were indeed dogs and ducks — Mrs. Tong's pets cavorting around the studio where I worked. Inadvertently, the Japanese did

me a favor one day when they bombed out the dingy place I never liked.

So that's the way it was, with so many Chinese hands and their foreign friends who worked "gung ho" in China's war effort forty years ago. WE salute them.