



Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

World War II was foreseen and predicted by Americans. Southern Baptists were at the forefront of concern as war clouds spread over Europe and the far east. It is of some interest to note the reaction of Florida Baptists as WWII appeared on the horizon. I chose 30 days of reaction as it appeared in the *Florida Baptist Witness* from November 27, 1941-December 25, 1941. E. D. Solomon was the editor of the witness at this time and David M. Gardner, C. Roy Angell, A. C. Abney, J. C. Boatwright and W. T. Halstead served as the "Witness Committee."

It is amazing to most researchers how little local history, historical events and personal feelings are expressed by Baptists through their writings, sermons, and proceedings. If you read the *Witness* there is no real emphasis on war being declared on December 7, 1941. The first real mention of World War II per se is when William Kerman in the Christmas issue of 1941 said "We are at war."

Normally you would have to go to personal diaries, family albums and correspondence to find out what Florida Baptists were really thinking in December, 1941. But there are some significant "war issues" that are addressed in the *Witness* that helps us see Florida Baptists were facing the shock of war in Europe.

The first issue after Pearl Harbor presents a Powhattan W. James resolution that had passed (May 16, 1941) at the previous Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Birmingham. The resolution is on page one and is entitled, "Worth Dying For." Editor Solomon had no editorial comments in this first edition after Pearl Harbor but the SBC resolution is front page, large print and in bold type. The resolution states that things worth dying for included liberty under law, home, wives and children, honor and freedom of worship. (December 11, 1941, p. 1). This call to service set the tone for the *Florida Baptist Witness* issues in December, 1941.



Hershel Ford

Hershel Ford, pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Jacksonville wrote a book entitled *God Bless America*. The book called for a return to spiritual values by the citizens of the country. This book got early credence in World War II as Florida Baptists realized we had spiritual responsibilities as well as patriotic demands (November 27, 1941, p. 7).

In early December, 1941, before the War began for the United States there were some imperative appeals made on the pages of the *Witness*. In the December 4, 1941, issue, Louis Newton made a request for 30,000 New Testaments to be distributed to Russian prisoners. It is interesting to note that Newton appealed for the Bible money to be given on Sunday, December 7.

In the same December 4, 1941, issue that Newton made his Bible appeal there was also an urgent call from Alfred Carpenter of the SBC Home Mission Board. Carpenter noted that there were only 25 Navy chaplains from the SBC and more were desperately needed. Carpenter noted that chaplains needed to be "fearless, faithful, fruitful preachers of the gospel, warm hearted soul winners, men willing to make any sacrifice necessary for the needs of their men."



E. D. Solomon

L. H. Lehman wrote an article in the December 4, 1941, *Witness* that called for Rome and the Vatican to be spared of bombing. St. Paul's Cathedral in London had been bombed by Germany and many were calling for St. Peter's not to be spared. Lehman said that he supported the decision by Churchill and Roosevelt not to bomb Rome. Lehman stated in "defense of decency" and for the sake of Christian ideals the Vatican should be spared.



Louie Newton

The Home Mission Board also made a quick appeal after Pearl Harbor. An appeal was made on December 11, 1941, that every American home should have at least one person in uniform over for Christmas dinner. Christian hospitality was encouraged and "Every Soldier and Sailor at a Christmas Dinner Table" became an urgent appeal to Florida Baptists. (December 11, 1941, p. 14).

Christmas Day, 1941, the *Florida Baptist Witness* published its last issue of the year and William C. Kernan wrote on "Christians and the War." Kernan noted: "America has been hit savagely and hard and we are at war. We have no other choice than to be at war unless we want to surrender to force and turn the world over to its merciless exactions for generations to come." Kernan made an appeal for Christian conduct and Christian principles as America fought for justice and humanity.

In World War II we learned. All paid some and some paid all. That's why we live as free Americans today.

Honoring those who honor Christ,



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