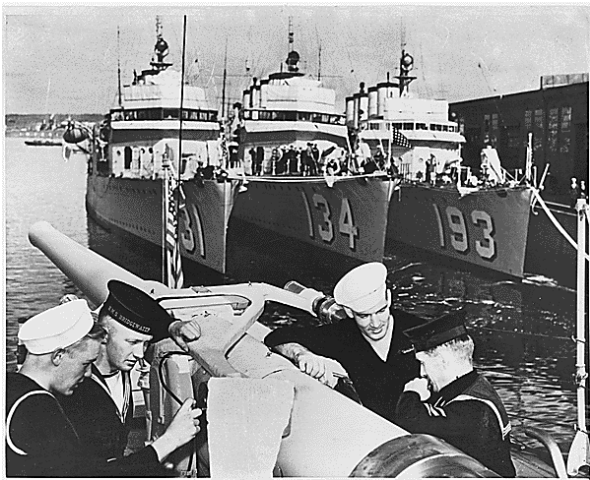
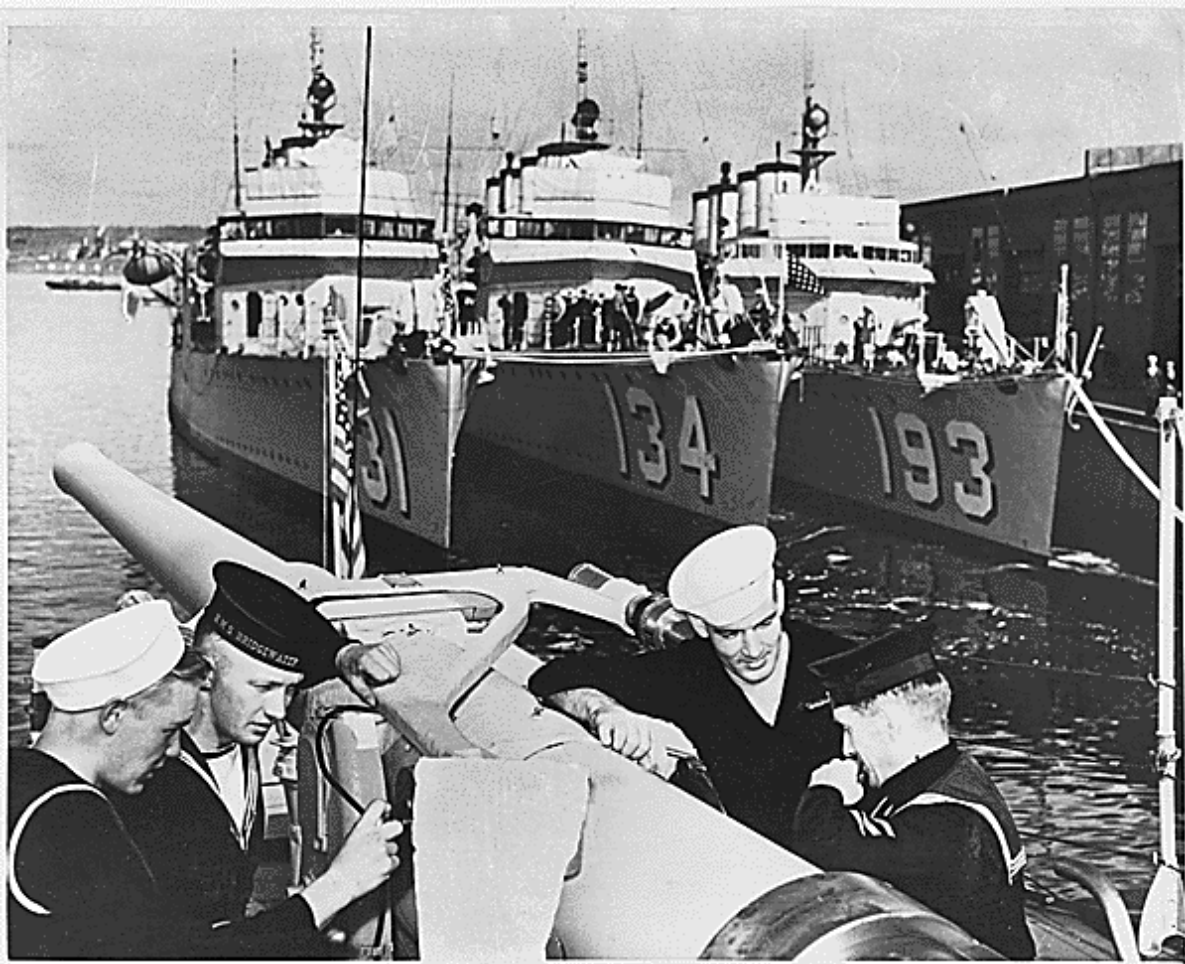


Roosevelt explains the need for 'Lend-Lease'

Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire. Now, what do I do? I don't say to him before that operation, "Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have to pay me \$15 for it." What is the transaction that goes on? I don't want \$15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over.





The United States had already agreed to supply Britain with 50 old destroyers in exchange for use of Naval bases in the Caribbean. Roosevelt's proposal now went a lot further.

Churchill had written to Roosevelt on the 8th December spelling out the difficulties that Britain faced. The time had come to come clean about Britain's financial ability to continue the war alone:

The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies. While we will do our utmost, and shrink from no proper sacrifice to make payments across the Exchange, I believe you will agree that it would be wrong in principle and mutually disadvantageous in effect, if at the height of this struggle, Great Britain were to be divested of all salable assets, so that after the victory was won with our blood, civilisation saved, and the time gained for the United States to be fully armed against all eventualities, we should stand stripped to the bone. Such a course would not be in the moral or the economic interests of either of our countries.

Roosevelt was personally sympathetic to Britain's cause and recognised that United States interests were very much at stake. However there was a strong body of opinion in America that was, if not isolationist, then non-interventionist. There were also legal difficulties, not least the Neutrality Act, that meant that direct aid to Britain, paid for by the United States, could never be a proposition. Roosevelt's solution was 'Lend-Lease', whereby Britain and other nations would be loaned war aid. It was a system that would still require legislation but it appeared a less radical step than direct aid. First he needed to persuade the American people, which was his purpose in his speech of 17th December:

In the present world situation of course there is absolutely no doubt in the mind of a very overwhelming number of Americans that the best immediate defense of the United States is the success of Great Britain in defending itself; and that, therefore, quite aside from our historic and current interest in the survival of democracy, in the world as a whole, it is equally important from a selfish point of view of American defense, that we should do everything to help the British Empire to defend itself.

Famously Roosevelt used the analogy of helping a neighbour whose house was on fire:

Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire. Now, what do I do? I don't say to him before that operation, "Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have to pay me \$15 for it." What is the transaction that goes on? I don't want \$15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over. All right. If it goes through the fire all right, intact, without any damage to it, he gives it back to me and thanks me very much for the use of it. But suppose it gets smashed up—holes in it—during the fire; we don't have to have too much formality about it, but I say to him, "I was glad to lend you that hose; I see I can't use it any more, it's all smashed up." He says, "How many feet of it were there?" I tell him, "There were 150 feet of it." He says, "All right, I will replace it." Now, if I get a nice garden hose back, I am in pretty good shape.

In other words, if you lend certain munitions and get the munitions back at the end of the war, if they are intact haven't been hurt—you are all right; if they have been damaged or have deteriorated or have been lost completely, it seems to me you come out pretty well if you have them replaced by the fellow to whom you have lent them.

The Lend Lease Act was not passed until March 1941 and Britain would not start to see the material benefits of it for many months after that. Nevertheless this was a very important signal that Britain would have the ability to keep fighting in the long term.

Read the whole speech at [The American Presidency Project](#).

Editor / December 17, / 1940

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