

Forty-two years ago, a surprise Japanese attack on the US forces on the island of Oahu propelled this nation headlong into World War II. That particular incident has been examined in numerous attempts to determine how such a disaster could have been allowed to happen. The formal investigations conducted during and after the war all attributed some degree of responsibility to both the Navy and Army commanders on the scene.

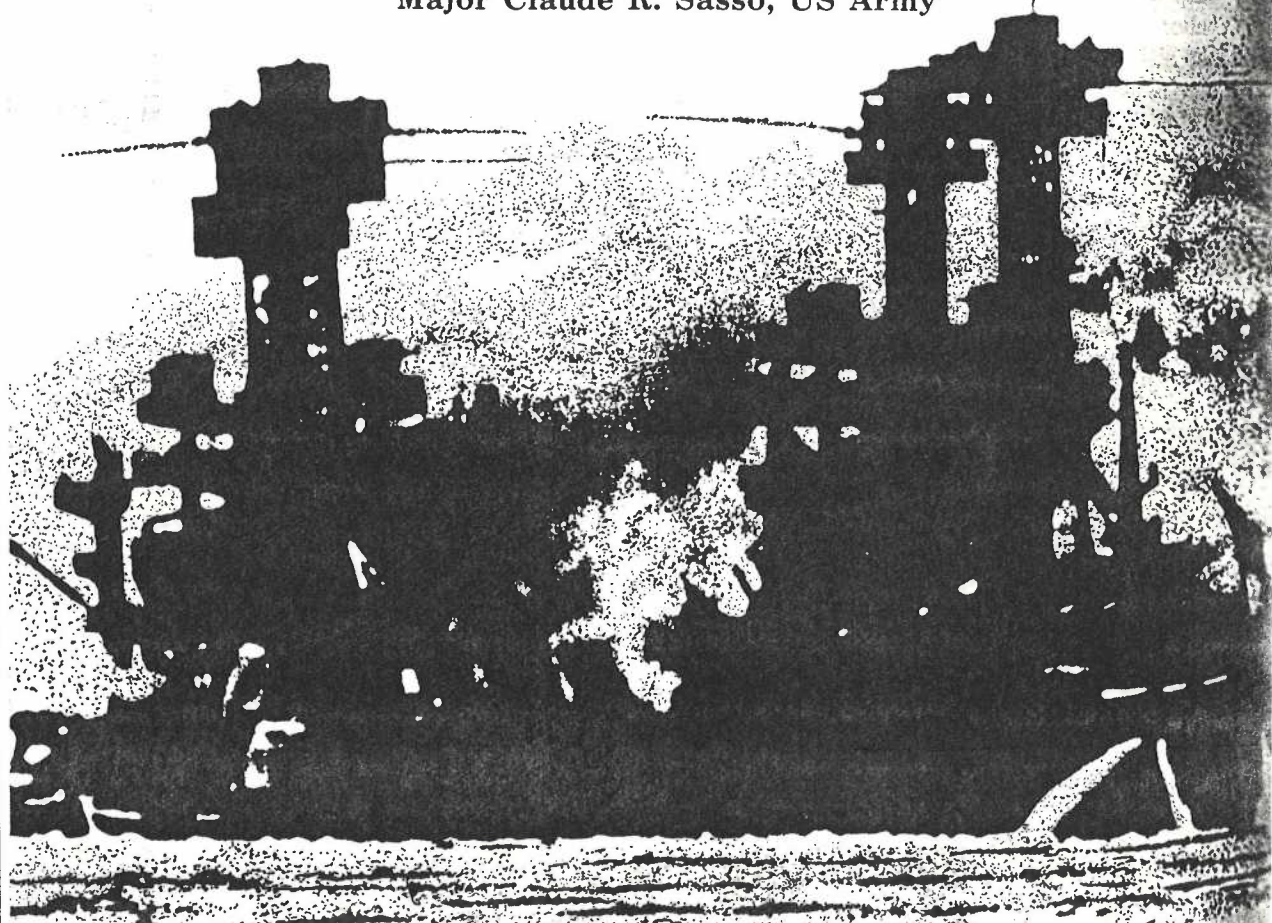
See pp. 44-46

SASSO

This article won the 1982 Arter-Darby Military History Writing Award for excellence in professional scholarship at the US Army Command and General Staff College (USACGSC). Competition for this annual award is open to all members of each USACGSC regular class.

# Scapegoats or Culprits: Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor

Major Claude R. Sasso, US Army





Admiral Husband E. Kimmel



Lieutenant General Walter C. Short

## MILITARY REVIEW

*By a long, complicated collocation of accident, custom, mischance, misunderstanding, overconfidence, and want of imagination, our great Pacific fortress and the fleet which was the key to Pacific mastery had been brought to a condition in which both were about as completely exposed to the impending attack as would have been possible short of actual treason.<sup>1</sup>*

**T**HIS assessment by historian Walter Millis appeared in his 1947 study of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, *This Is Pearl!* Those who have studied in great detail the web of events leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack know that these words have the ring of truth. The circumstances surrounding this act are, nonetheless, filled with ironies, miscalculations and psychological imponderables. Despite the work of several different investigating committees and individual investigators, which together fills hundreds of volumes, these factors have made it difficult for historians to affix responsibility for the greatest naval disaster in US history.

There is no doubt, however, about what happened on the island of Oahu on 7 December 1941 (see Figure 1). Some 360 Japanese carrier-based bombers and fighters suddenly appeared over the island. They struck in two waves beginning at 0750 and 0855 respectively in a surprise attack on US Army and Navy installations on the island. The strike was directed against three of the four Army Air Force fields—Wheeler, Hickam and Bellows—the Navy Patrol Plane Station at Kaneohe, the Naval Air Station at Ford Island, the Marine Corps Air Station at Ewa and, of course, the main target, the fleet in Pearl Harbor which consisted of 70 combat ships and 24 auxiliaries. The small Army airfield at Haleiwa on the island's north coast was the only place the Japanese failed to attack.

The air strikes were executed according

to plan and succeeded in damaging or destroying a major portion of the Pacific Fleet, including eight battleships and a significant number of Army, Navy and Marine aircraft on Oahu (see Figure 2). The cost to Vice Admiral Tadaichi Nagumo's 1st Air Fleet was minimal—29 aircraft, five midget submarines and one fleet submarine. All of this was accomplished in 1 hour and 45 minutes—before most of the Army's antiaircraft installations, about a dozen of which were located in and around the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, even opened fire on the attackers. US military and civilian casualties approached 3,600.<sup>2</sup>

Despite obvious signs of an approaching war in the Pacific, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, commanding general of the Hawaiian Department, US Army, had maintained the normal weekend schedules of their commands. The entire fleet, except for task forces on the way to Wake and Midway Islands, was moored in Pearl Harbor in neat rows without the protection of torpedo baffles.

Barrage balloons were not in use, and systematic long-range air reconnaissance patrols were not being conducted. Army radars were being used only for training. Planes on the Army, Navy and Marine airfields were huddled wing tip to wing tip to prevent sabotage attempts, and Army antiaircraft guns, mainly 3-inch, were situated in gun parks. Ammunition was stored in magazines. From 1 to 4 hours

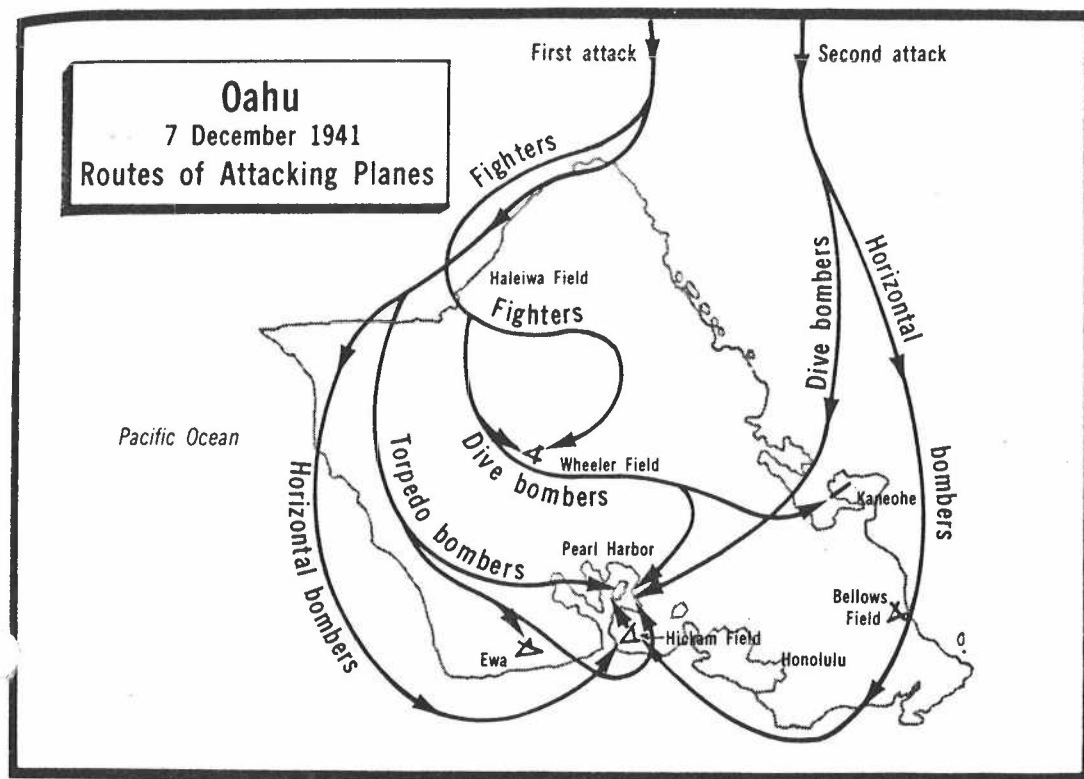


Figure 1

were required for the guns and their ammunition to be moved to firing positions.<sup>3</sup>

The total surprise and devastation of the Japanese attack immediately raised questions about the competency of Kimmel and Short. The answers to those questions are still in dispute today. Both men were relieved of their commands shortly after the attack, tainted by the subsequent Roberts Commission investigation and more or less forced into retirement, with possible courts-martial hanging over their heads for several years. Despite long years of honorable service, they found themselves under a cloud which could not even begin to be cleared away until after the war.

The reliefs of Kimmel and Short were expected and were, in fact, traditional in

military commands suffering great losses.<sup>4</sup> Before their departures from Hawaii, both men were called to testify before the Roberts Commission which had been created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 18 December 1941 to investigate the catastrophe. The commission, headed by Associate Justice Owen J. Roberts of the US Supreme Court, had started its work in Washington, D.C., taking statements from top officers at the War and Navy Departments. The commission's work was completed in a little more than a month, and its findings were presented to Roosevelt on 23 January 1942.

The report branded the Pearl Harbor commanders' actions as "dereliction of duty" since neither had shown a full ap-

*Roberts Commission*

*23 Jan 1942*

## MILITARY REVIEW

preciation of the responsibilities of their positions. Additionally, they had failed to properly assess "the seriousness of the situation" in view of the war warnings that had been received. Since Kimmel and Short were considered to have taken inadequate precautions and had failed to confer sufficiently on matters of mutual interest, they were judged culpable for "errors of judgment" which had served as the "effective causes" for the Japanese success.<sup>5</sup>

Some two and one-half years later, in July 1944, at the direction of Congress, the secretaries of the Army and Navy appointed separate boards to further study the facts surrounding Pearl Harbor. The Army board examined 151 witnesses and gathered 41 volumes of testimony. After the investigation, the secretary of war announced that there was no evidence to warrant a court-martial of Short. The secretary of the Navy went further and completely exonerated Kimmel after the Navy board found "that no offenses had been committed nor serious blame incurred on the part of any person in the naval service."<sup>6</sup>

The testimony recorded by the investigating boards was even more startling. For the first time, it appeared that Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold R. Stark and Chief of Staff of the Army General George C. Marshall, and some of their subordinates in Washington had not relayed all of the available intelligence to the commanders in Hawaii. Thus, the boards helped stir the cauldron that was beginning to heat up regarding the more basic issue of how the United States entered the war.<sup>7</sup>

Neither Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson nor Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal was satisfied that the investigations had uncovered all possible evidence. In November 1944, Stimson

directed Major Henry C. Clausen of the Judge Advocate General's Corps to conduct a one-man investigation in which he covered 55,000 air miles and interviewed 92 people. At its conclusion, Stimson did not revise a statement he made on 1 December 1944 about Short's removal for "errors of judgment of such a nature as to demand his relief from a command status." However, he did state his belief that any criticism of Marshall was "unjustified."<sup>8</sup>

Forrestal's inquiry, which was carried out by Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, began in May 1945. Hewitt's findings faulted Kimmel's performance but also criticized Stark for failing "to demonstrate the superior judgment necessary for exercising command commensurate with their rank and assigned duties."<sup>9</sup> As a result, Forrestal issued orders preventing either officer from holding any position in the Navy which required the exercise of "superior judgment."

In an effort to clear away the contradictory and confusing information surrounding Pearl Harbor, a special joint congressional committee was established under the chairmanship of Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky. The committee was unable to interview all of the principals in the case since Roosevelt and Frank Knox, Forrestal's predecessor as secretary of the Navy, had died. It attempted to gather the available evidence in its sessions which took place from 15 November 1945 to 31 May 1946.

The committee's 39-volume record of hearings not only failed to clear Kimmel and Short but also provided more grist for those who believed the blame belonged in Washington.<sup>10</sup> A school of "revisionist" historians, led by the eminent Charles A. Beard, charged Roosevelt with leading the country into war while professing a policy of peace and offered as evidence of

1944  
Inquiry -  
Army &  
Navy

Stark &  
Marshall

✱

St  
Cong  
James  
1945-  
1946

Beard

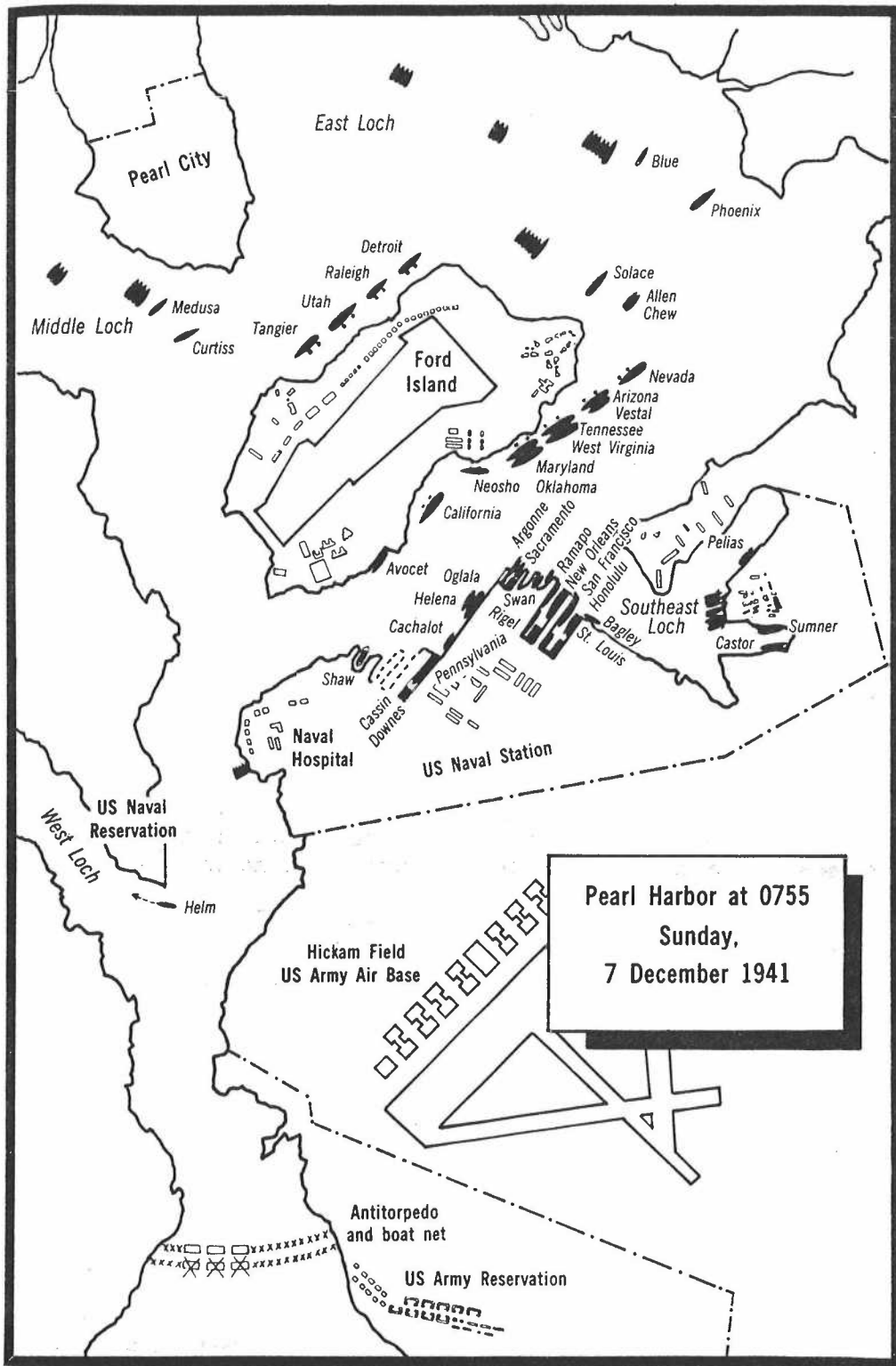


Figure 2

## MILITARY REVIEW



Naval Historical Center

Chief of Naval Operations  
Admiral Harold R. Stark

administration guilt the treatment of Kimmel and Short, implying strongly that they served as convenient scapegoats.<sup>11</sup>

*Ferrell*  
A decade later, after almost all US government records of the disaster had been released and the animosities engendered by the war years had cooled, more balanced evaluations such as Robert H. Ferrell's *American Diplomacy: A History* began to appear. While noting that Roosevelt's detractors could only produce circumstantial evidence, Ferrell concluded that no "proof of a presidential plot has yet appeared." Nonetheless, he felt that Kimmel and Short were "most unfairly cashiered after the Japanese attack."<sup>12</sup>

*H*  
Thus, the question of whether Kimmel and Short were culprits or scapegoats or whether the truth lies somewhere in between remains open to debate and perhaps will never be answered completely. An attempt will be made here to determine the degree of their culpability, if any, in light of the latest historical evidence.

The Pacific Fleet, while conducting

maneuvers off Hawaii in May 1940, was ordered to remain in that area after Germany had attacked France. Admiral James O. Richardson, Kimmel's predecessor, resisted this action from the beginning because he felt that deficiencies in ships, facilities and training made the fleet's new deterrent role impractical. An outspoken officer who seldom failed to be candid, Richardson was said to have called Pearl Harbor a "God-damn mouse-trap." As commander in chief of the fleet, his forthright approach was useful in pushing Stark toward a reassessment of US naval strategy which recognized that the main emphasis would be in the European theater, while the Pacific Fleet's role would be defensive.<sup>13</sup>

Realizing that, despite his opposition, the fleet would remain at Pearl Harbor to deter further Japanese aggression, Richardson pushed hard for more men and better equipment. During a visit to Washington, in October 1940, Richardson was upset by Roosevelt's refusal to push for an increase in enlisted personnel strength and to meet other requests Richardson deemed urgent. He told Roosevelt that:

... the senior officers of the Navy do not have the trust and confidence in the civilian leadership of this country that is essential for the successful prosecution of the war in the Pacific.<sup>14</sup>

Richardson's pushing so hard probably resulted in his being relieved of command in late January 1941. Richardson was succeeded by Kimmel, a tall, blonde Kentuckian who had graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1900. He inherited a Pacific Fleet which, including the US Asiatic Fleet, had only 102 effective vessels or about half the number of ships in the modern Japanese fleet. Richardson described Kimmel as an officer noted for his "conscientious performance of

duty."<sup>15</sup> His dedication extended to living without his family in Hawaii so that, as he explained to his friends, he could devote himself more fully to his job. This was at a time when most officers had their families with them.<sup>16</sup>

Short, his Army counterpart, was a meticulous blonde Midwesterner. A 1901 graduate of the University of Illinois, he was noted for his "super conscientious" performance of duty. Arriving in Hawaii in February 1941, Short took over a command which consisted of two infantry divisions, supporting ground troops, coast artillery and air units with responsibility for protecting the fleet and its ground installations.<sup>17</sup>

Each commander's responsibilities for defending the fleet and the islands were specified in two joint defense plans worked out shortly after they assumed command. The first was the Joint Air Agreement prepared by Major General Frederick L. Martin, commander of the Hawaiian Army Air Corps, and Rear Admiral Patrick Bellinger, commander of the Hawaiian Navy patrol aircraft. Martin and Bellinger's estimate of the situation for 31 March 1941 accurately described the Japanese aircraft carrier threat and concluded that long-distance reconnaissance flights should extend out 800 miles in every direction from the Hawaiian Islands. They estimated that an additional 180 B17s were needed to perform the reconnaissance. The aircraft had been requested, but that many were not available in the entire United States.

The Navy, which had assumed responsibility for long-range air reconnaissance, could not effectively patrol more than one-fourth of the designated area with its patrol planes. Kimmel and Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, Bellinger's immediate superior and commandant of the 14th Naval District, recognized this and con-

curred in Bellinger's decision to concentrate, instead, on the training of flight crews that would return to the United States and form the nucleus of newly commissioned air squadrons.

Although Navy patrols did fly in the fleet's operating areas around the islands, the flights were irregular and were designed largely for training. Most patrol bomber aircraft were reserved for action against the Japanese Mandates if war with Japan should break out.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Kimmel felt that the kind of detailed search that was needed could be undertaken only if a "carrier strike against the islands was probable within narrow time limits." The flights would deplete his limited supplies of aircraft fuel, wear out already aging aircraft for which there were no spare parts and seriously disrupt the aircrew training program. All of these factors would be vital to US capabilities when war came, as the military commanders believed it inevitably would.<sup>19</sup>

The second agreement was a more basic Joint Coastal Frontier Defense Plan, signed by Bloch and Short on 11 April 1941, which specified coordination through "mutual cooperation." The Army was to hold Oahu "against attacks by sea, land, and air forces, and against hostile sympathizers (for example, fifth columnists); to support the naval forces." The Navy was "to patrol the Coastal Zone and to control and protect shipping therein; to support the Army forces."<sup>20</sup>

More specifically, the Army was required to establish an Aircraft Warning Service (AWS) for the Hawaiian Islands. Its radars would be able to detect enemy aircraft at distances out to 130 miles when fully operational. Until the AWS began providing early warning information to the Navy, the Navy was to provide "such warning of hostile attack as may be practical" through use of ship-



## MILITARY REVIEW



Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson

National Archives

board radar, long-distance seaplane reconnaissance or the radio intercept system. The intercept system involved analysis of Japanese shipboard radio messages to determine the location of Japanese ships. This system was no more capable than the others, but it was far more secretive, and Short was the only Army officer aware of its existence.<sup>21</sup>

The defensive plans for the fleet and the islands were ultimately dependent upon the adequacy of mutual cooperation, without which both services would be severely impaired, and, of course, upon the material and intelligence support received from Washington. They were, obviously, also dependent upon the extent of the preparations made by Short, Kimmel and their respective commands.

Short brought a reputation of extreme conscientiousness to his new job. In

World War I, he had received the Distinguished Service Medal for diligence and competence in training "machinegun outfits" for action in the St.-Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. After the war, he had served three years in the Far Eastern section of the Military Intelligence Division in Washington, D.C., although his only tour in the Far East itself was a short, four-month stay in the Philippines in 1907.

Less than a month after assuming command of the Army's Hawaiian Department, Short was well aware of the deficiencies of his defenses. Consequently, he informed Marshall of his extreme concern about the status of the planned AWS which could only detect approaching aircraft at a distance of 5 miles or less. He considered this matter important enough "to be brought to the attention of the secretary of war."<sup>22</sup>

The situation improved in July and August 1941 with the arrival of mobile radar sets which allowed an early warning information center to be set up. Short also complained to Marshall of a lack of planes and antiaircraft guns, but Marshall's reply indicated that the "deficiencies" could not be remedied immediately. Short's preparation of the land defenses was thorough. Skillfully scrounging materials from salvage where necessary, he constructed obstacles, dugouts and emplacements on beaches considered to be potential landing sites and built other defense installations with newly procured equipment. He also reorganized his divisions to increase their firepower.<sup>23</sup>

Kimmel's task was even more challenging than Short's since he had offensive as well as defensive missions to perform in wartime. With a fleet only half as large as Japan's modern fleet, Kimmel displayed more tact than his predecessor Richardson had shown but was no less concerned

or diligent. In informing Bloch of his decision to not commit additional aircraft to the distant reconnaissance missions, Kimmel stressed the age of the planes, their need of maintenance and the requirement for their use in training.

US war plan "Rainbow 3," later revised as "Rainbow 5," called for immediate offensive operations against Japan through the Japanese Mandates if war should break out. In a letter dated 3 April 1941, Stark, who had been known since his days at Annapolis by the nickname "Betty," put it this way to his new Pacific Fleet commander:

*I advise that you devote as much time as may be available to training your forces in the particular duties which the various units may be called upon to perform under your operating instructions.*<sup>24</sup>

When Bloch subsequently complained of the need for new ships and patrol planes, Kimmel strongly endorsed his request for more and forwarded it to Washington. Stark did not have any planes to send, but he offered to make a few submarine chasers and possibly some privately owned ships available as auxiliaries.<sup>25</sup>

Any assessment of Short's and Kimmel's actions must take into account the intelligence received from Washington and their responses to it. For more than a year before the Pearl Harbor disaster, the United States had been intercepting and decoding the top-priority Japanese diplomatic cipher or "Purple" and had even manufactured a machine to perform this task. The information obtained through this means was known as "Magic." It provided valuable knowledge about Japanese intentions but did not furnish specific warnings of the attack on Pearl Harbor, an act about which even the Japanese diplomats in Washington knew nothing. Purple should not be confused

with the Japanese military codes which had not yet been broken.<sup>26</sup>

Although one Purple machine was located at Cavite in the Philippines, none was available to either military command in Hawaii. This fact undoubtedly reflects the "military preoccupation" with the Philippines caused by their relative weakness and strategic location in the path of the southward Japanese expansion. In fact, the existence and contents of Magic were so important that only a few key individuals were permitted to see it.

This was, of course, necessary to preserve the value of the intelligence breakthrough, but it also produced some unfortunate confusion. For example, Stark mistakenly thought that Kimmel



National Archives

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox

## MILITARY REVIEW

had access to all of the Purple intercepts, when, in fact, the Pacific Fleet had been removed from the list of recipients of Magic information six months before the Japanese attack. This had been done in the interest of greater security.<sup>27</sup> Stark's misunderstanding was particularly unfortunate in view of the fact that one of Kimmel's first actions upon arriving at Pearl Harbor was to inform Betty of his desire to be "rung in." Writing about what apparently was a dispute over whether the Office of Naval Intelligence or Operations was to keep him informed of secret intelligence data, Kimmel said:

*I do not know if we have missed anything, but if there is any doubt as to whose responsibility it is to keep the Commander in Chief (of the Pacific Fleet) fully informed with pertinent reports on subjects that should be of interest to the Fleet, will you kindly fix that responsibility so that there will be no misunderstanding?<sup>28</sup>*

The whole matter of the intelligence received by the two commanders in Hawaii is fascinating. Although Kimmel and, to a larger extent, Short had not received all of the intelligence available in Washington on 7 December 1941, a series of alerts and warnings stretching back to before they assumed command had been received. In June 1940, the War Department had placed both the Hawaiian and Panama Commands on alert in response to the fall of France, to signs of possible German aggression in South America and to the bombing of Chungking by Japan.

In February 1941, when they assumed command, Short and Kimmel were advised of the possibility of an air attack on Pearl Harbor, probably as a result of a report a month earlier from US Ambassador Joseph C. Grew in Tokyo. Grew had heard a seemingly fantastic rumor from a source in the Peruvian Embassy in

Japan who stated that the Japanese were preparing for a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Everyone, including Grew, however, considered this possibility improbable and unlikely since it was in direct contradiction with Japanese naval tactical doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

In his memoirs, Richardson maintains that Kimmel was handicapped by omissions in the "Rainbow 3" and "Rainbow 5" war plans which did not specifically associate Pearl Harbor with possible "raids or stronger attacks on Wake, Midway, and other outlying U.S. positions," as was done in the earlier Plan Orange, which had been in effect from 1923 to 1940.<sup>30</sup> It is perhaps more important to note that the prevailing view in Washington, from the president and the war council down through the Army and Navy leadership, was that the Japanese would be more likely to strike British and Dutch possessions in expansion thrusts before striking a US possession. A Japanese attack on the Soviet Union also seemed imminent in late 1941.

If the Japanese did strike, Guam, Midway, Wake Island and the Philippines were considered the likely targets, not Pearl Harbor. This view was generally shared by the Army and Navy commands in Hawaii who, along with authorities in Washington, did not fully appreciate the effect of US economic sanctions against Japan, Japan's immense stake in China, the determination and influence of its military leadership and the true capabilities and strength of its naval forces.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, it is important to realize that the Far Eastern crisis, while of extreme concern to US diplomatic and military leaders, nonetheless took a back seat to events in the European theater. Although she may be taking advantage of hindsight, at least one Pearl Harbor historian,

*Wohlstetter*

Roberta Wohlstetter, argues convincingly that Washington had sufficient intelligence to anticipate the Pearl Harbor attack. However, she feels that it was obscured by a mass of irrelevant information, particularly from the European theater. As Wohlstetter noted:

*For every signal that came into the information net in 1941 there were usually several plausible alternative explanations, and it is not surprising that our observers and analysts were inclined to select the explanations that fitted our popular hypotheses.*<sup>32</sup>

In October 1941, the Cabinet of Premier Fumimaro Konoye was replaced by that of General Hideki Tojo. As with other events which increased diplomatic tension, this situation prompted a Navy Department dispatch to all US Pacific commands on 16 October. It spoke of the decreasing chances of rapprochement between the United States and Japan and of the strong possibility of hostilities between Japan and the Soviet Union. It concluded:

*Since the U.S. and Britain are held responsible by Japan for her present desperate situation there is also a possibility that Japan may attack these two powers. In view of these possibilities you will take due precautions including such preparatory deployments as will not disclose strategic intention nor constitute provocative actions against Japan.*<sup>33</sup>

Kimmel received the dispatch and immediately forwarded it to Short. Since Kimmel received a second dispatch the same day ordering him to "take all practical precautions for the safety of the airfields at Wake and Midway," he concentrated on increasing the security and alert status of those more probable targets. Wake Island and Midway were important "stepping stones" in the high-priority task of sending bombers across the

Pacific to reinforce the Philippines.<sup>34</sup> Although the dispatch mentioned the possibility of Japanese attacks on US possessions, a letter from Stark to Kimmel the following day seemed to weaken the original alert. In the letter, he expressed his view that a Japanese attack was not probable.<sup>35</sup>

Short's response was, like Kimmel's, fitted to the current intelligence estimates but was focused on the "strong possibility" of war between Japan and the Soviet Union which had also been mentioned in the only other message sent to him on 8 July, "predicting" specific combatants. He concluded that the chances of Japan attacking Great Britain or the United States in the near future were less probable and that his action to "tighten up all our guards against sabotage, and ... against subversive measures" in July, when the United States instituted economic sanctions against Japan, should be maintained.<sup>36</sup> On 24 November 1941, Kimmel received a Navy Department message which stated in part:

*Chances of favorable outcome of negotiations with Japan very doubtful. This situation coupled with statements of Japanese Government and movement of ... naval and military forces indicate in our opinion that a surprise aggressive movement in any direction including attack on Philippines or Guam is a possibility. Chief of Staff has seen this dispatch concurs requests action aedes [that is, addressees] to inform senior Army officers their areas. Utmost secrecy necessary in order not to complicate an already tense situation or precipitate Japanese action.*<sup>37</sup>

Finally, on 27 November 1941, the final and most direct warning from Washington was labeled a "war warning." It read in part:

*This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan toward*

*24 Nov 1941*

*27 Nov 1941*

## MILITARY REVIEW

*stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased and an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo. Execute an appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in WPL-46 [that is, Rainbow 5]. Inform district and Army authorities.*<sup>38</sup>

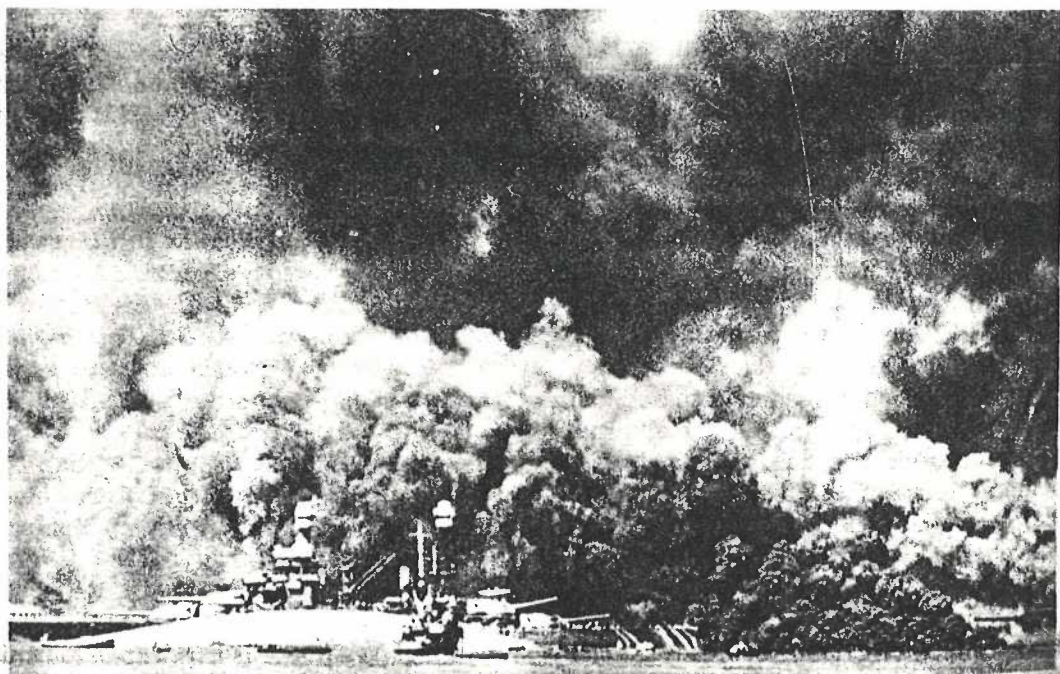
In addition to this dispatch, the War and Navy Departments suggested that Kimmel send 25 aircraft to Wake Island and 25 to Midway aboard an aircraft carrier if he agreed this was "feasible and desirable." Kimmel later said that, since this would have taken half of the Army's total pursuit planes and a carrier from Hawaii and, in view of previous communications, his thoughts about the im-

probability of an attack on Pearl Harbor were reinforced.<sup>39</sup> Short also received a communication from the War Department which, while not identified as a war warning, did state:

*Japanese future action unpredictable but hostile action possible at any moment. . . . Prior to hostile action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary but these measures should be carried out so as not, repeat not, to alarm civil population or disclose intent. Report measures taken.*<sup>40</sup>

Short was shown the original Navy war warning although he could not recall with certainty having seen it when questioned by the Roberts Commission. In a later investigation, he recalled the war warning message and stated that the Navy messages he had seen tended to be alarmist whereas the Army messages were of a

The *Maryland* can be seen beyond the hull of the capsized *Oklahoma*



National Archives

## KIMMEL AND SHORT

more restrained tone.<sup>41</sup> In any case, Short ordered an alert "number 1" which was the lowest of three levels of an alert system he had devised primarily to preclude sabotage. He informed the War Department of his action but heard nothing to indicate approval or disapproval. In fact, a message sent to the Hawaiian Department on 28 November listed detailed steps for preventing "sabotage, espionage and subversive activity."<sup>42</sup>

On the same day, Short changed the operating hours of the AWS radar center from the routine 6:00 to 11:30 a.m. plus several hours each afternoon to 4:00 to 7:00 a.m. He considered these "the most dangerous hours" for an air attack. Unfortunately, the reasons for changing the hours do not seem to have been communicated to those who were in charge of the system. The AWS continued on a training status under the "operational control" of the Signal Corps despite the opposition of the Air Corps. The Air Corps had been trying to have it begin operating on a regular 24-hour operational basis.<sup>43</sup>

Kimmel took vigorous action after he received the war warning of 27 November. He radioed his second in command, Admiral William S. Pye, who was at sea with some of the fleet's battleships and warned him to take all possible precautions because of the danger of war. In a meeting with Bloch and Captain Charles H. McMorris, his war plans officer, Kimmel agreed with their judgment that, if war came, the Japanese would strike the Philippines.<sup>44</sup>

This opinion was supported by the latest naval intelligence which indicated that 30,000 Japanese troops were aboard 70 transports headed south toward the Gulf of Siam and Malaya. Since the fleet was at "condition 3" readiness (one-

quarter of the anti-aircraft batteries were to be manned at all times with ammunition readily available for the remainder), Kimmel did not change patrol, reconnaissance or alert conditions.

He did, however, dispatch Admiral William F. Halsey with Task Force 8 to deliver 12 Marine fighters to Wake Island in the continuing effort to reinforce that island. Kimmel had briefed Halsey on the latest war warning and ordered him to "use his common sense" if he encountered Japanese forces. Halsey's force departed on 28 November and was prepared to fight on a moment's notice. Kimmel sent his submarines on "war patrol" to increase the readiness of fleet units and to reinforce the Marine garrisons on Wake, Palmyra and Johnson Islands. He also ordered the fleet to use depth charges on unidentified submarines found in Hawaiian waters.<sup>45</sup>

Kimmel failed, however, to notify several key officers of the contents of the 24 November and 27 November warnings. These included Bellinger, commander of the patrol planes and "the Navy's key man in the defense of the base," and Rear Admiral John H. Newton who departed with a task force on 5 December to deliver a squadron of planes to Midway.<sup>46</sup>

On 1 and 2 December, Kimmel met with the fleet intelligence officer, Lieutenant Commander Edwin T. Layton, who was responsible for keeping track of Japanese ship movements through radio traffic analysis. He learned that the locations of Japanese Carrier Divisions 1 and 2 were unknown. Although failure to locate the carriers with a reasonable degree of certainty was not unusual, the fact that the Japanese had changed radio call signs on 1 December, for the second time in 30 days, was "an additional progressive step in preparing for active operations on a large scale."

## MILITARY REVIEW

Kimmel asked Layton if the carriers could be rounding Diamond Head without his knowing it. Layton replied that he hoped they would have been sighted before then! In fact, the carriers were only five days away from Hawaiian waters even though Layton informed Kimmel that they were most likely in home waters.<sup>47</sup> Kimmel's half-serious query of Layton seems ironic.

Kimmel and Short met daily between 1 and 3 December to discuss the Army's relief of the Marine garrisons on Wake Island and Midway, a topic on which they disagreed. Neither man suspected the imminent danger to their commands. Despite their discussions of the war warning messages, Short did not know that the Navy had not instituted long-range reconnaissance patrols. Additionally, Kimmel, in turn, thought the Army, including its radar stations, was on full alert.<sup>48</sup> This seemingly incredible failure to exchange vital information was explained later by Short. He said that he did not press Kimmel for details about naval preparations since he felt Kimmel would volunteer the necessary information.

Unfortunately, this did not always happen.<sup>49</sup> When Kimmel was notified on 3 December that the Japanese had destroyed most of their codes and ciphers in key diplomatic and consular posts in the Far East, Washington and London, he did not pass this information to Short. Based on the available intelligence information, it was not illogical to assume that the destruction of codes and ciphers was a precaution in the event Japanese Embassies were seized following an invasion of Thailand and Malaya.<sup>50</sup> In a letter written on 23 November and which reached Kimmel on 3 December, Stark stated his opinion that the possibility of an attack on the Philippines was somewhat doubtful despite the strong feeling of some au-

thorities in Washington.<sup>51</sup>

Short interpreted the intelligence that he received from his own intelligence section with a similar attitude. On the evening of 6 December, Short was delayed in his quarters before going out to dinner with Lieutenant Colonel Kendall J. Fielder, one of his two G2 officers, and their wives by a call from Lieutenant Colonel George W. Bicknell. Bicknell, who was Short's second G2 officer, delivered a manuscript of a recorded telephone conversation that he felt could not wait until the next day.

The conversation—between the wife of a Japanese dentist in Honolulu and a Tokyo newspaper office—contained a number of suspicious questions about the number and size of aircraft in the area, the size of the fleet and whether searchlights were being used at night for planes. Although the remainder of the conversation was just vague and general enough to disguise its intent, Bicknell seemed sure it was “very significant and an indication of something in the wind.” However, he could not say what. Short examined it carefully and conferred with Fielder but then went on to dinner unable to draw any immediate conclusions from the so-called Mori manuscript.<sup>52</sup>

Whether the Mori manuscript could be interpreted as a hint of imminent attack is open to question.<sup>53</sup> The War Department in Washington, however, intercepted several messages in the first week of December about which there is less question. They indicated Japanese interest in the mooring and berthing plan at Pearl Harbor, but, unfortunately, they were not decoded and sent to Hawaii until mid-December.<sup>54</sup> There seems little doubt that, if Kimmel had had this information, he would surely have increased his command's alert status.

This argument is more convincing since

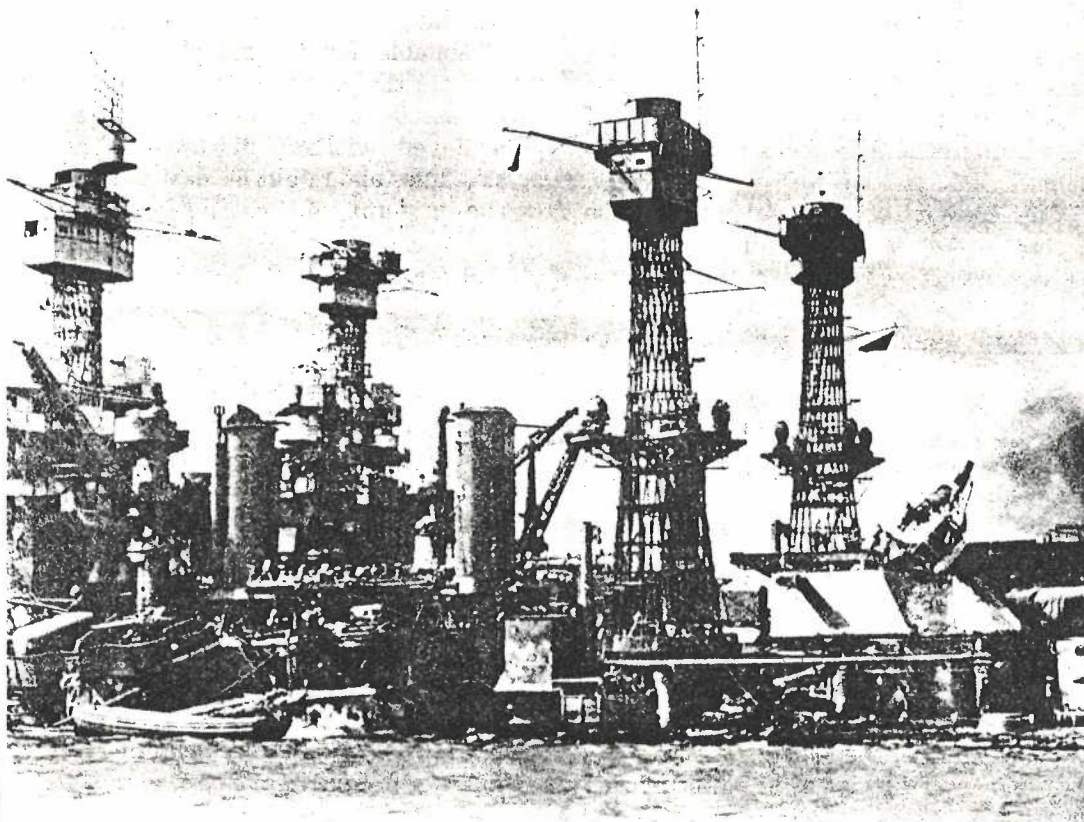
## KIMMEL AND SHORT

Kimmel had expressed some "misgivings" about the adequacy of the defenses at a meeting with his staff on 6 December. Unfortunately, he was dissuaded on this occasion by the confidence of his advisers that "the Japanese could not possibly be able to proceed in force against Pearl Harbor when they had so much strength concentrated in their Asiatic operations" and by the assurance that their own preparations were adequate.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, neither Kimmel nor Short was informed of the full course and status of the negotiations with Japan despite the availability of this information from the

Magic that was collated in Washington. It was not that they lacked warning of the impending outbreak of hostilities in the Pacific. Stark felt that "wolf" had been cried so often in that theater in 1941 that he did not at first believe that the news about Japan presenting the United States with "what amounts to an ultimatum" at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (7:00 a.m. Hawaii Time) was important enough to warrant still another warning on 7 December. After a few minutes' thought, however, he changed his mind and asked Marshall, who was sending the warnings to Army commands, to add the words "Inform the Navy." It was already too

Twisted metal and shattered OS2U floatplanes mark the remains of the *West Virginia*.  
Beyond is the *Tennessee*.





## MILITARY REVIEW

late, however, since the Japanese attack was under way when the message arrived.<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, although Nagumo's 1st Air Fleet had left Yokohama on 22 November, it was under orders to turn back if the negotiations were successful or if the force was discovered before 7 December. It is also ironic to note that, although Marshall's message was too late, the commands in Hawaii received two last-minute signals that could have limited US damage and increased that of the attackers if they had been acted upon immediately. The first signal came about 1 hour before the Japanese strike when the destroyer USS *Ward*, which was operating in the defensive sea area, reported observing and dropping depth charges on an unidentified submarine. This information was reported to Kimmel, but he took no action until it could be verified. He later justified this on the grounds that there had been three previous contacts of this kind in the five weeks before the attack.<sup>57</sup>

The second warning came when the Opana radar, which was scheduled to cease operation at 7:00 a.m. but had continued to operate, began to track the first wave of incoming Japanese aircraft while it was still 137 miles north of Oahu. Although this vital news was reported to the AWS information center, it was dismissed by an inexperienced Air Corps lieutenant who thought it was a report of a flight of US B17s scheduled to arrive from the mainland that morning. If the significance of the radar report had been realized, it would have provided up to 45 minutes' warning. The submarine report would have given 60 minutes' warning.<sup>58</sup>

In the final analysis, much of the reason for the extent of the Japanese success lies in the overconfidence of US military and civilian authorities in Washington and

Hawaii. Japanese capabilities were underestimated, and the complex and myriad strings of the web of intelligence were misinterpreted. This seems to have fostered in the Hawaiian commanders what Admiral Earnest J. King, Stark's successor as chief of naval operations, referred to as an "unwarranted feeling of immunity from attack" based on "shared beliefs" which permitted them to "rationalize their policy decisions."<sup>59</sup>

Although it must be noted that Washington repeatedly cautioned secrecy, minimum dispersion of intelligence and the avoidance of gestures which could be misinterpreted or viewed as warlike, Kimmel and Short, nonetheless, had sufficient information to warrant raising the state of alert. In his history of US naval operations in World War II, Samuel Eliot Morison observes that it was unreasonable for the naval command to rule out the possibility of air attack when increased surveillance could have been achieved without disrupting training schedules and might at least have limited the amount of destruction. He concluded: *S.E. Morison conclusion*

*After every allowance is made for the insistent training problem and the failure of Washington to let the Hawaiian commanders have all the intelligence in their possession, the fact remains that Pearl Harbor was the most important United States base in the Pacific and that war was imminent, as everyone who read the newspapers knew. It was an outpost, too, where military men are supposed to be alert at all times, like a sentry walking his post. Admiral Kimmel need not have had so rigid a schedule of arrivals and departures that the Japanese could count on the battleships being in port Sunday morning. Normal week-end leaves and liberties need not have been granted when war was likely to break out any day. Dis-*

## KIMMEL AND SHORT

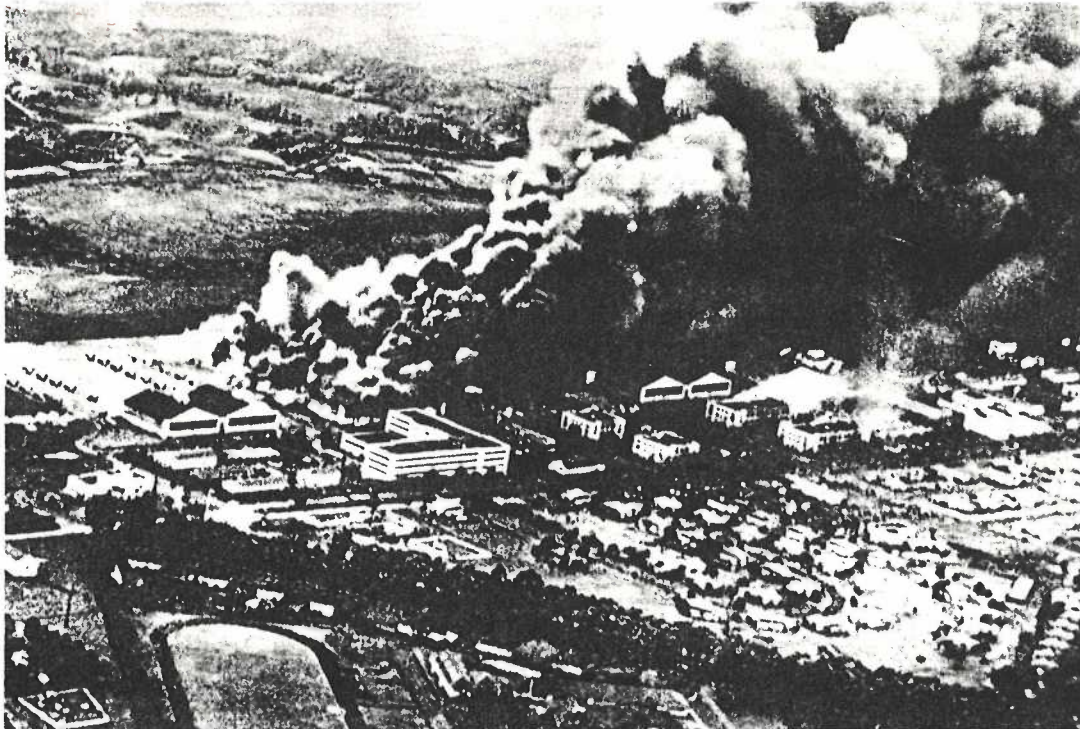
tant air reconnaissance might have been very much better, as it became immediately after the heavy losses on 7 December. More planes might have been patrolling if both services had not been so keen on their Sabbatical rest.<sup>60</sup>

The fleet had, after all, been stationed in Hawaii as a deterrent, and both commanders were diligently preparing for wartime missions. The ultimate responsibility of the commander for everything a unit does or fails to do, despite whatever handicaps may exist, was well understood by both Kimmel and Short and cannot be escaped. Kimmel, despite his proven competence, conscientiousness and dedication, tacitly stated as much when he told two members of his staff on the day after the attack that the proper thing would be for Washington to relieve him of his command.<sup>61</sup>

The awesome responsibility of a professional soldier or sailor serving in a command position is, if frequently interpreted unrealistically, nonetheless, a well-understood fact of life with which they must live. Bicknell, the intelligence officer who delivered the Mori manuscript to Short, put it this way after reflecting upon the events years later: **BICKNELL**

I have always had the opinion, and I might be wrong, that the commanding general of a situation such as we were facing in those days had the responsibility of making up his mind what should be done and not having to rely on what somebody back in Washington might have said. After all, he was put out there to command the Hawaiian Department, and under the war plan, to protect the naval base at Pearl Harbor. Therefore, if he decided that it was necessary to go into

Fighter planes were parked in rows at the Army Air Force's Wheeler Field



National Archives

## MILITARY REVIEW

a full alert, I see no reason why he should not have done so. . . I may be wrong in this but I still feel that it was his responsibility and that he should have taken whatever steps were necessary. . .<sup>62</sup>

NOTE!!

It seems apparent that both commands should have been at a higher state of alert on 7 December and that there should have been a more complete exchange of vital defense information. Short should have pushed the AWS into full operation sooner, and Kimmel should have reacted more seriously to the submarine contacts. Although both men were dedicated and extremely competent military professionals, they were at least partly responsible for the extent of the Japanese success at Pearl Harbor. Their forced retirements, however, while unquestionably designed to ease the resentment of US citizens and to produce a psychological effect, seem to have been unnecessary and unfortunate.

\*!

Even King, who recommended in his endorsement to the findings of the Naval

King - 1945?

Court of Inquiry that both Kimmel and Stark be relegated to positions "in which lack of superior judgment may not result in future errors," was among a long list of admirals who expressed their confidence in Kimmel.<sup>63</sup> A similar and more specific acknowledgement of Short's capacity and dedication was made by Fielder, Short's former intelligence officer, who attributed the 24th and 25th Divisions' success in the Pacific during World War II to the "high state of training" they attained under a general who stressed physical fitness and thorough familiarity with weapons and their use. He added:

*It was too bad he had to be made a scapegoat and never got to lead troops in combat. He would have been, in my opinion, one of the greatest of our World War II combat leaders.*<sup>64</sup>

Thus, although Kimmel and Short were "culprits" to a degree, they were also "scapegoats," and both should have been permitted to make contributions to the war effort.

## NOTES

1 Walter Millis, *This Is Pearl!*, William Morrow & Co., N.Y., 1947, p 333.

2 Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass., 1948, pp 98-125.

3 Millis, *op. cit.*, pp 333-34.

4 Homer N. Wallin, *Pearl Harbor: Why, How, Fleet Salvage and Final Appraisal*, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1968, p 117.

5 Percy L. Greaves Jr., "The Pearl Harbor Investigations," in *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: A Critical Examination of the Foreign Policy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Its Aftermath*, edited by Harry Elmer Barnes, Greenwood Press, N.Y., 1953, p 413. After the publication of the Roberts Report, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short were severely criticized. Representative Andrew J. May, chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, suggested in one speech that they be shot. See Husband E. Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story*, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, Ill., 1955, p 170.

6 Greaves, *op. cit.*, p 429.

7 Charles A. Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1948, p 308.

8 Greaves, *op. cit.*, pp 433-39.

9 *Ibid.*, p 443.

10 The majority report found no evidence to support charges made against Franklin D. Roosevelt and other top administration officials. However, the minority report placed the blame for the defeat at Pearl Harbor on Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, General George C. Marshall, Admiral Harold R. Stark and General Leonard T. Gerow

(who served under Marshall as assistant chief of staff, War Plans Division). Both reports blamed Short and Kimmel. See Beard, *op. cit.*, pp 339-54.

11 *Ibid.*, *passim*.

12 Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy: A History*, W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., N.Y., 1959, pp 393-94.

13 Waldo H. Heinrichs Jr., "The Role of the United States Navy," in *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941*, edited by Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1973, pp 219-20.

14 James O. Richardson, *On the Treadmill to Pearl Harbor: The Memoirs of Admiral James O. Richardson*, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1973, p 435.

15 *Ibid.*, p 306.

16 Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass., 1972, p 82.

17 A. A. Hoehling, *The Week Before Pearl Harbor*, W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., N.Y., 1963, pp 47-48.

18 Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1962, pp 12-13. The term "mandates" refers to the Caroline, Mariana and Marshall Islands, all of which were mandated to the League of Nations after World War I and were administered by Japan.

19 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, p 15; and Janis, *op. cit.*, p 79.

20 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 19.

21 *Ibid.*, pp 21-23 and 31-32.

22 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, pp 47-48.

23 *Ibid.*, p 49; and *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, US Government Printing

Office. V  
24 Ki  
25 Ho  
26 W  
27 W  
28 H  
sionally  
of the ir  
p 450.  
29 V  
30 R  
would  
patrol t  
an orc  
Richar  
the air  
conten  
31 J  
32 V  
33 V  
34 V  
Pearl I  
tion or  
prepar  
the Pl  
Comm  
p 259.  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
tende  
were  
42  
sabo  
alert  
Japa  
of 16  
sabc  
tellic  
Jape  
217  
to ar  
migt  
had  
relai  
jeop  
Hoe  
"nu  
an e  
4  
also  
4  
was  
ear  
wa  
me

## KIMMEL AND SHORT

Office, Washington, D.C., Part 39, p 61.

24 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, pp 36-37.

25 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, pp 49-50.

26 Wallin, *op. cit.*, p 66.

27 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, pp 170-82 and p 394.

28 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 38. Richardson felt Stark was "professionally negligent" in not personally ensuring that Kimmel had all of the information available from "Magic." See Richardson, *op. cit.*, p 450.

29 Wallin, *op. cit.*, pp 75-76; and Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 386.

30 Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp 304-6. He goes on to say that Kimmel would have protected Pearl Harbor with "an adequate seaplane patrol to the full limit of the resources available" if he had received an order as definite as the warning specified in Plan Orange. Richardson himself had daily long-range reconnaissance flights in the air until 5 December 1940 which adds some credence to his contention. He blames Stark for the omissions.

31 Janis, *op. cit.*, pp 87-88 and 98.

32 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, pp 387 and 393.

33 Wallin, *op. cit.*, p 77.

34 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 140. Marshall later told the Army's Pearl Harbor Board that he felt Hawaii was the best prepared position on the Japanese front. He noted that "if the Hawaiian state of preparation in men and material was 100%, Panama was 25% and the Philippines about 10%..." See *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, *op. cit.*, p 259.

35 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, p 41.

36 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, pp 133-34.

37 Wallin, *op. cit.*, pp 77-78.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, p 48.

40 *Ibid.*, pp 48-49.

41 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 137. Although the Army's messages tended to be more restrained, the Navy Department's messages were usually more detailed and up-to-date.

42 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, p 49. Since Short was so concerned about sabotage after he had received the "war warning" and sabotage alert messages, it is perhaps important to note that 35,000 aliens of Japanese origin were in the islands along with a native population of 160,000 Americans of Japanese origin. Although no instances of sabotage had occurred while Short was in command, his own intelligence section told him, in the summer of 1941, that the Japanese Consulate had expanded its staff of assistant consuls to 217 when 12 would have sufficed. When the suggestion was made to arrest them as agents of a foreign power, he conceded that they might be agents, but that they should be arrested only after they had been warned and allowed to register. He felt that the friendly relations he had developed with the Japanese population would be jeopardized by such precipitous acts. Nothing was done. See Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 85. Short might have designated an alert "number 2" which was designed to protect against an air attack or an alert "number 3" which was a full alert. See Millis, *op. cit.*, p 264.

43 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, pp 9-10. Forces in the Philippines were also placed on full alert. See Millis, *op. cit.*, pp 262-63.

44 Captain Charles H. McMorris had given his opinion that there was no chance of an air attack on Pearl Harbor at a meeting held early on 27 November before the war warning was received. Short was present. None of the officers at the meeting voiced disagreement. See Millis, *op. cit.*, pp 263-64.

45 *Ibid.*, pp 267-69; and Hoehling, *op. cit.*, pp 86-88. Kimmel notified the Navy Department on two occasions of his order to use depth charges but received no comment from Stark on this order.

46 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 66; and Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 97. Hoehling states that Vice Admiral Wilson Brown departed for Johnson Island without being warned of these messages, but he was aware of them and should have informed Rear Admiral John H. Newton who was his subordinate. Newton's fleet was actually sighted as it passed one of the submarines of Vice Admiral Tadaichi Nagumo's fleet on its way to its station off Oahu. See Millis, *op. cit.*, pp 315-16.

47 *Ibid.*, pp 296-97. Kimmel points out in his book that, in the six months before Pearl Harbor, the location of Japanese carriers was "uncertain" during 134 days. See Kimmel, *op. cit.*, p 55.

48 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 95.

49 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 28. Navy communications usually were not sent to the Army unless it was specified in individual messages.

50 Millis, *op. cit.*, p 300; and Janis, *op. cit.*, p 80. There is some indication that Short's own intelligence section told him of the code destruction, but he denied it.

51 *Ibid.*, p 232. Stark had informed Kimmel that Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull believed the Japanese might launch a surprise attack on the Philippines.

52 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, pp 124-26 and 140. The manuscript's name came from that of the caller, Mrs. Motokazu Mori, who was on both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and G2 lists of "suspicious persons."

53 Millis, *op. cit.*, p 332; and Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p 54.

54 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 92.

55 Janis, *op. cit.*, pp 82-83. King also believed that if Kimmel had had more intelligence, his command would have been more prepared.

56 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, pp 174-75.

57 Kimmel, *op. cit.*, pp 76-77. Morison believes Kimmel's response to the early morning submarine contact was inadequate, and this seems to be a correct interpretation.

58 Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, pp 11-12 and 16-17.

59 Janis, *op. cit.*, p 87. The feeling of immunity from attack was based on several incorrect assumptions about Japanese capabilities. For example, warships anchored in Pearl Harbor were considered to be protected from torpedo bombs which had to be dropped in at least 60 feet of water to be successful. Since Pearl Harbor was only 30 to 40 feet deep, it seemed "safe," but, unbeknown to US intelligence, the Japanese had developed a torpedo bomb with this capability. Kimmel, however, had been warned in June 1941, by Admiral F. E. Ingersoll, assistant chief of naval operations, that shallow water attacks were a "possibility." Kimmel, however, seems to have acted upon probabilities while dismissing certain possibilities.

60 Morison, *op. cit.*, pp 135-37.

61 Janis, *op. cit.*, p 83.

62 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 207.

63 *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, *op. cit.*, p 354. Kimmel mentions receiving warm letters from Admirals Senn, Bowen, Nimitz, Taussig, Shafroth, Calhoun, Theobald and Richardson and quotes some of them. See Kimmel, *op. cit.*, pp 176-79 and *passim*.

64 Hoehling, *op. cit.*, p 208.



Major Claude R. Sasso is professor of military science at the University of California, Los Angeles. He received a B.S., an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Loyola University of Chicago and is a 1982 graduate of the USACGSC. He has served in Europe and Vietnam and as an assistant professor of military science at Loyola University of Chicago and as an operations and training staff officer with a headquarters at Fort Lewis, Washington.