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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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Thursday, 12 December 2013

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Volume 27 Number 5

Published by WW II History Round Table

Edited by Dr. Connie Harris

[www.mn-ww2roundtable.org](http://www.mn-ww2roundtable.org)

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## **Welcome to the December session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.**

Tonight's speakers are CPT (R) Thomas Kimmel, USN, grandson of Admiral Husband Kimmel, naval commander at Pearl Harbor, and John Lambert, author of *Defenseless*; they are joined by Jim Johns and veterans of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, 7 December 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy ended the uneasy peace the United States had enjoyed behind its Pacific and Atlantic moats. Crossed the northern Pacific unobserved, IJN naval aviators pounced on the American battle fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor and the US Army Air Corps aircraft parked wing tip to wing tip at Hickam Field. Two waves of Japanese aircraft executed Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku's daring plan. Although a tactical success for the Japanese, the attack was a strategic and operational failure. Strategically, it unified the America populace behind war. More importantly, at the operational level the attackers failed to destroy the fleet repair facilities and the fuel reserves that supported Pacific Fleet operations for the next year.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, speculation arose over how much the US government knew about Japanese intentions. During and immediately after the war, there were nine investigations into possible "conspiracies" behind the Pearl Harbor attack, and a tenth one in 1995. In additions, numerous books have been written about possible conspiracies that run the gamut from the respected to pure fantasy. All of these inquiries have found that there was incompetence, miscommunications between service branches, little concern over Japanese intentions, and too few resources devoted to intelligence, but none have ever proven or a conspiracy – with or without Presidential involvement.

Underlying all the notions of a conspiracy is whether President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew of the attack and did nothing in order to have a reason to get into the war in Europe. An attack by Japan only guaranteed war with Japan. Adolf Hitler had carefully avoided giving FDR any pretext until after the Japanese attacked without informing their "ally." Without treaty obligation, he needlessly declared war on the United States

and brought the US into the European war. Hitler's reasoning had nothing to do with the Japanese; he was upset at US support of the British, particularly naval actions in the Atlantic. His contempt for the United States and its "mongrel" (racially mixed) population made war an easy choice once his honorary Aryan ally acted.

At the November session, David Kahn pointed out we had broken the Japanese Foreign Office's Purple and other codes. These gave us very little information about an impending attack because the Japanese military did not trust the civilians and did not inform the Foreign Office about operational matters.

The US Army's Signals Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence cryptographic group (OP-20-G), each understaffed and poorly funded, competed against one another and did not share information. We had few analysts and most did not know the broader cultural context necessary to interpret messages. Recipients were not allowed to retain the actual messages or to take notes on them for security reasons, hampering them in putting pieces together. The great breakthroughs in signals intelligence and code breaking were still in the future, as were adequate analysis and use in joint planning.

During November, both the Navy and the Army sent explicit war warnings to their Pacific stations about Japan. However, ADM Kimmel and Lt. General Walter C. Short, the Navy and Army commanders at Pearl Harbor, did not receive specific intelligence; British East Asia and the Philippines were regarded as the likeliest targets. Kimmel and Short were friendly, but neither shared his information or concerns with the other, and no efforts were made to plan a joint or coordinated defense of the Islands and their various commands. (Each service was wholly independent and reported to its Secretary; local commanders could cooperate or not as it suited them.) Short was more concerned about sabotage, which was why the Army Air Corps planes were parked for easier guarding.

Several of the conspiracy theories focus on the absence of the carriers. In 1941, aircraft carriers were considered fleet scouting vessels rather than capital ships. The IJN in particular, despite its lead in carrier aviation and operational theory, and the USN both considered battleships the main combatants (RADM Alfred T. Mahan's theory), and planned for a decisive meeting engagement in the western Pacific that would settle things. FDR, a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy,

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understood Mahan's theory and would not have left his battleships in harbor if he a) knew an attack might/would happen and b) wanted a war. One carrier was in a west coast port for repairs, and the other two were delivering aircraft to Midway and Guam. After 7 December, when only carriers were available, the Navy finally began to treat them as main combatants.

Even with all the signals intelligence intercepts and any other possible, misplaced, pieces of information, nothing was going to overcome the racially laced American hubris towards the Japanese. US officials would not/could not believe that these "little yellow men" would ever dare to attack

**Further Readings:**

Reviewed (favorably) in the *Journal of Military History* or *Military Affairs*:

Gordon Prange, *At Dawn We Slept* (McGraw-Hill, 1981).

Gordon Prange, *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History* (Penguin, 1096).

Jonathan Parshall, "Reflecting on Fuchida, or 'a Tale of Three Whoppers,'" *Naval War College Review* 63:2 (Spring 2010): 127-138.

Fred Borch and Daniel Martinez, *Kimmel, Short, and Pearl Harbor: the Final Report Revealed* (Naval Institute Press, 2005).

Not reviewed in any professional history/military education journal so far as Dr. Fitzharris could determine:

John Toland, *Infamy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982).

John Costello, *Days of Infamy* (Packet Books, 1994).

Michael Gannon, *Pearl Harbor Betrayed* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

John Lambert, *Defenseless: Command Failure at Pearl Harbor* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2003)

Edward Beach, *Scapegoats: A Defense of Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

Allan Zimm, *Attack on Pearl Harbor* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishing, 2011).

**Announcements:**

**Twin Cities Civil War Round Table** - Dec. 17, 2013 – Higher Ed & Civil War - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - info@tccwrt.com

**St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table** - Jan. 27, 2014 – Grant Before Vicksburg, D. Page - 715-386-1268 – [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)

**Rochester WWII History Round Table** –507-280-9970; [www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org](http://www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org)

**Minnesota Military Museum**, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
**Air Show - Eden Prairie** - July 19-20, 2014; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100

**Honor Flight** - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717

**CAF - Commemorative Air Force** - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942

**Minnesota Air Guard Museum** -

See our programs on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrXVRHyalES1I7V9tu4gvlA>

[www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523

**Friends of Ft. Snelling**, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

**Fagen Fighters WWII Museum**, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644,

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

**Round Table Schedule 2014**

- 9 Jan. Eastern Front
- 13 Feb. Encounters with WW2 Leaders
- 13 Mar. Operation COBRA and Falaise
- 27 Mar. World War II in China
- 10 Apr. Rabaul and the SW Pacific
- 8 May Landing on Omaha Beach
- 10-27 May Tour of Normandy

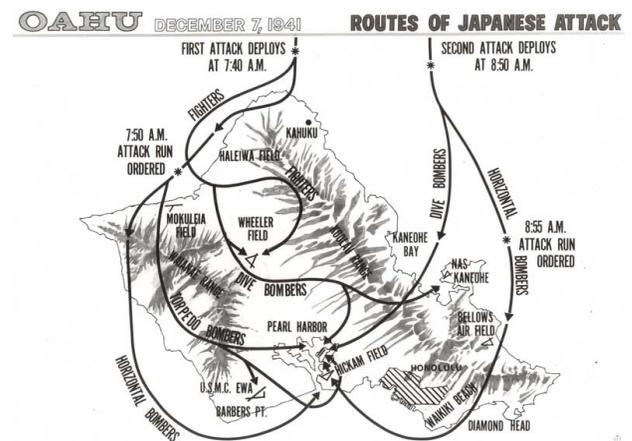
**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns** – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)



ADM Husband E. Kimmel, USN



LTG Walter C. Short, USA



from <http://www.pearlharbortour.com>

Analyzing Failure

Critical Task	Communication of Warning	Appropriate Level of Alert	Coordination
1. President/Service secretaries	1.1 Informed subordinates of breakdown in negotiations	1.2 Not applicable	1.3 Not applicable
2. Service chiefs (Stark and Marshall)	2.1 Failure: "war warning" confused Short by emphasizing sabotage; some intelligence withheld	2.2 Not applicable	2.3 Failure: attempted to improve local coordination but did not force the issue
3. CinC Pacific Fleet (Kimmel)	3.1 Failure: did not communicate understanding of danger to Short	3.2 Too low, but only somewhat	3.3 Critical failure: did not understand army alert; did not work out unified defense plan
4. COM 14 (Bloch) Commanding General Hawaiian Dept. (Short)	4.1 Warning sent out to component units	4.2 Critical failure: level of alert much too low (army)	4.3 Critical failure: precautions overlooked (e.g., barrage balloons); no adequate provision for cooperation of lower-level commands
5. Component commands (e.g., Hawaiian Air Force, Commander Naval Base Defense Air Force)	5.1 No reconnaissance per Kimmel's orders	5.2 Alert level determined by higher levels; some slackness	5.3 Critical failure: no integration for defense of Hawaiian airspace
6. Operating units (e.g., USS <i>Oklahoma</i> )	6.1 Not applicable	6.2 Failure: ranging from virtually no alert to inadequate	6.3 Not applicable

Arrows indicate causal links. Solid lines indicate primary pathways; dashed lines, secondary pathways.

FIGURE 3-1. Matrix of Failure from Cohen & Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*