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HVL LESSON TITLE:

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

GUIDING QUESTION:

Should military leaders at Pearl Harbor been held accountable for the attack on Pearl Harbor?

OVERVIEW:

December 7, 1941 was as President Franklin Roosevelt described in his well-known speech as “A day which will live in infamy.” This lesson will introduce students to Admiral Husband Kimmel and Lt. Gen. Walter Short, the top two commanders at Pearl Harbor. Students will utilize research, as well as knowledge of the U.S. trial protocols, to determine whether or not these two men should have been held accountable for the



SUBJECT(S):
Social Studies/Government



WWII VETERAN(S):
Sherwin Callander



DURATION:
90 minutes

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“I had never seen such a mess in my life. I had to pull bodies out of the water. One that gets me so bad that I will never forget. I grabbed him by the hair and I reached over to grab his arm and meat came right off the bone. I’ll never forget that.”

WWII Veteran Sherwin Callander

OVERVIEW:

December 7, 1941 was as President Franklin Roosevelt described in his well-known speech as “A day which will live in infamy.” This lesson will introduce students Admiral Husband Kimmel and Lt. Gen. Walter Short, the top two commanders at Pearl Harbor. Students will utilize research, as well as knowledge of the U.S. trial protocols, to determine whether or not these two men should have been held accountable for the attack on Pearl Harbor.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short were the two top military commanders at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked. Following the attack, both were relieved of their commands, demoted, and retired, largely due to the perceived failures in preparedness that allowed the devastating surprise attack to occur. They were held accountable for errors in judgment and dereliction of duty.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Understand the timeline of the attack on Pearl Harbor.
- Utilize research skills to present historical information.

STANDARDS:

AL: 11: 6

Trace the progression of events and policies leading to World War II and the United States’ entry into the war.

AL: 11: 7

Analyze how United States military involvement shaped major events of World War II.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Memoirs of WWII-Sherwin Callander video](#)

Kimmel and Short Reading (Doc A)

Kimmel and Short Timeline (Doc B)

Trial Notes (Doc C)

Official's Trial Notes (Doc D)

At Fault Handout (Doc E)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Show the [Memoirs of WWII-Sherwin Callander Video](#).
- Instruct students to listen carefully to Mr. Callander's account of his experience at Pearl Harbor and to make note of some of the words he used to describe that day.
- After the video, discuss the words students wrote down during the video.
- Inform students that after the attack, two of the military's leading commanders were relieved of their duties.

ACTIVITY 02

- Distribute the Kimmel and Short Reading (Doc A). Students may read silently or this may be read as a class.
- NOTE: Teacher can use Doc A as background research and present it in a different way.
- After reading/notes on material, distribute the Kimmel/Short Timeline (Doc B). Divide students into two groups: Prosecution and Defense. Students will read and make notes on their assigned segments. (defense of Kimmel and Short or in charging Kimmel and Short).

ACTIVITY 03

- After students have read and made notes, have each group (Prosecution or Defense) elect a trial lawyer. This student will be responsible for presenting the case against Kimmel and Short or defending Kimmel and Short. The teacher should elect a judge that will oversee the trial. The remainder of the class will serve as the jury.
- Distribute the Trial Notes (Doc C) to the jury. The students named to serve as representatives for the defense, prosecution, and judge will receive the Official's Trial Notes (Doc D).
- Hold the mock trial. Give the prosecution 10 minutes to present their case. Then give the defense 10 minutes to present their case. The judge will allow the jury to ask for clarification if needed. The jury will give their votes to the judge on a secret ballot. The judge will end the trial with the ruling.
- Inform students that Kimmel and Short did get court martialed in 1941, therefore they were not given a trial. Both were relieved of their duties in the military.
- Distribute the At Fault Handout (Doc E). Discuss with students to sum up the lesson.

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

KIMMEL AND SHORT READING



Precisely at 7:55 A.M. on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a devastating Japanese aerial attack struck the island of Oahu, Territory of Hawaii. When it was over, the battleships of our Pacific Fleet, moored by pairs in their Pearl Harbor base, had received a mortal blow. Our army air strength in Hawaii—the Japanese found its planes ranged neatly wing to wing on airfield ramps—was a tangled mass of smoking wreckage.

The worst disaster in the military annals of the United States had ushered us into World War II. As in most wars, the political and diplomatic background was so complex and confused as to defy definitive analysis—though this has not prevented historians and others from making the attempt. But as to the disaster itself, the military record is clear.

A well-planned and brilliantly executed surprise attack by Japanese carrier-based aircraft was launched against the major American bastion in the Pacific. The United States government, its senior military leaders, and its commanders in Hawaii had had sufficient information to be adequately warned that an attack was possible, and had had time to be prepared to thwart or to blunt the blow. The information was largely ignored; the preparations were utterly inadequate. Someone had blundered. Who? And how?

At the moment of the attack four professional military men filled posts of vital importance. In Washington, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, was responsible for the entire United States Army and all of its installations. In a nearby office sat his Navy counterpart, Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations. On the Hawaiian island of Oahu, Lieutenant General Walter C. Short commanded the Hawaiian Department, the Army's most vital overseas outpost. Commanding the United States Pacific Fleet was Rear Admiral Husband E. Kimmel; his headquarters was also on Oahu, overlooking the great Navy base at Pearl Harbor.

Marshall, a product of the Virginia Military Institute, had a well-deserved reputation for brilliant staff work under Pershing in France in World War I. Later he had taken a prominent part in developing the Army's Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Short, a graduate of the University of Illinois, had entered the Army from civilian life in 1901. Early in 1941 he had been chosen by Marshall to command the Hawaiian Department.

Both Stark and Kimmel had graduated from the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis—Stark in 1903, Kimmel a year later. Both had risen to their high positions in the Navy following exemplary command and staff service at sea and on shore. Close personal friends, both were highly respected by their naval colleagues.

The thinking and attitudes of these four men were shaped by two decades of unanimous opinion among American soldiers and sailors that someday Japan would clash with the United States in a struggle for pre-dominance in the vast Pacific Ocean. All accepted without question the basic elements of U.S. doctrine for the defense of the Pacific in such a war.

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

KIMMEL AND SHORT READING

The doctrine was that the United States Navy—and in particular its Pacific Fleet—was the essential element to American success in a Pacific war. Immobilization or destruction of that fleet would be the greatest damage Japan could inflict on the United States. Upon the Army lay the responsibility for furthering the offensive powers of the fleet by protecting its great Pearl Harbor base; by safeguarding the Panama Canal, the Navy's life line from the Atlantic to the Pacific; and by defending the advanced Philippine delaying position, which in military opinion was likely to be Japan's initial target.

Since 1939 the top military authorities of the nation, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, had understood the almost inexorable logic of events that pointed to our eventual involvement either in the conflict which Hitler had begun in Europe or that in Asia between Japan and China—or both. And under Roosevelt's skillful guidance the nation, albeit grudgingly, was very slowly building up its military strength.

As 1941 rolled along, it became apparent, even to the man in the street, that the most pressing danger lay in the Far East. Our diplomatic relations with Japan were worsening; by November they appeared to be almost at the breaking point. The long-continued diplomatic bickering between the two nations on a variety of subjects had resulted in the arrival in Washington of a special envoy, Saburo Kurusu, who—with Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura—had on November 20 presented the State Department with a document that was practically an ultimatum. Japan would acquiesce to our government's demands that she withdraw from Indochina only upon "establishment of an equitable peace in the Pacific area" and, further, upon "supply to Japan [by the U.S.] a required quantity of oil."

In 1940, our cipher experts had cracked the Japanese secret codes—a cryptoanalytical procedure known in the War Department as "Magic." Hence our government knew that the envoys had received instructions to press for American acceptance of this "final proposal" by November 25. The ambassadors had been warned that for reasons "beyond your ability to guess" this was essential, but that if the "signing can be completed by the 29th" the Imperial Japanese government would wait. "After that things are automatically going to happen." It was also known through Magic radio intercepts that a large proportion of Japanese military strength—land, sea, and air—was concentrating in the Indochina and South China Sea areas. No evidence of aircraft carriers had been found, however, either in those areas or in the Japanese mandated islands. Intelligence agencies, monitoring Japanese radio traffic, considered it probable that the carriers were still in their home waters, but they were not certain. On this basis Marshall, Stark, and their respective staffs concluded that the Japanese were preparing to strike in Southeast Asia; this threat, of course, included the Philippine Commonwealth. Accordingly our Army and Navy commanders in the Philippines and at Guam had been specifically warned. The commanders in Hawaii, Panama, Alaska, and on the West Coast were kept informed of important developments.

This was the situation as Marshall and Stark saw it early on November 25. From that time on events succeeded one another with increasing rapidity, both in Washington and in Hawaii. This is how they unfolded:

THE WARNINGS AT PEARL

KIMMEL/ SHORT TIMELINE

DOC B



Washington, Tuesday, November 25

Marshall and Stark attended a “War Council” meeting with the President, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Were the Japanese bluffing? Hull thought not; rejection of their terms would mean war. “These fellows mean to fight,” he told the group. “You [Marshall and Stark] will have to be prepared.”

It was evident to all concerned that other hostilities were almost certain to break out within a few days. The President, noting Japan’s proclivity for attacking without a declaration of war, impressed on all concerned that if war came, it must result from an initial blow by Japan. How, then, asked Roosevelt, could the United States permit this without too much danger to itself?* That evening Stark wrote a lengthy warning to Kimmel in Hawaii, informing him that neither the President nor the Secretary of State “would be surprised over a Japanese surprise attack,” adding that while “an attack upon the Philippines would be the most embarrassing thing that could happen to us...I still rather look for an advance into Thailand, Indochina, Burma Road areas as the most likely.” Marshall reviewed the incoming and outgoing messages to overseas commanders, and busied himself with the almost numberless duties of his most important task: preparing our Army for combat.

NOTES: _____

Honolulu, Tuesday, November 25

Kimmel and Short had more than a passing interest in the status of our negotiations with Japan. Admiral Kimmel had been kept informed of the increasingly strained relations by frequent frank and newsy letters from Admiral Stark. One of these, dated November 7, had said in part: “Things seem to be moving steadily towards a crisis in the Pacific....A month may see, literally, most anything...It doesn’t look good.”

Admiral Kimmel undoubtedly was thinking of that letter when he reread the official radio message which he had received the day before, November 24:

Chances of favorable outcomes of negotiations with Japan very doubtful...A surprise aggressive movement in any direction including attack on Philippines or Guam is a possibility. Chief of Staff has seen this dispatch, concurs and requests action addressees to inform senior Army officers their areas. Utmost secrecy necessary in order not to complicate an already tense situation or precipitate Japanese action.

Admiral Kimmel promptly sent a copy of the message to General Short. He had standing instructions to show such messages to the Army commander: the most critical messages from Washington were usually sent over Navy channels because the Army code was considered to be less secure. The Admiral saw no need for further action. After receiving a warning message on October 16 he had taken some measures for a partial alert and reported those promptly to Stark, who replied: “OK on the disposition which you made.”

Kimmel and Short had a cordial personal relationship, despite subsequent widespread but unfounded allegations to the contrary. They had frequently discussed, officially and personally, the possibility of a surprise Japanese attack and the measures to be taken to prepare for it and to thwart it if it should come. These plans had been approved in Washington. The Navy was responsible for long-range reconnaissance up to 700 miles, while the Army, with its land-based aircraft, was responsible for inshore reconnaissance for a distance up to twenty miles from shore. The Army's new radar would provide additional reconnaissance and air-warning service for a distance of up to 130 miles from Oahu. Periodically the commanders held joint maneuvers to test the plans and the readiness of their forces to carry them out.

Both Short and Kimmel were well aware of their responsibilities for assuring the security of the fleet and of the island of Oahu. Moreover, each commander assumed the other knew his business; each assumed the other's command was running on a full-time status. On the single island of Oahu were concentrated most of the 42,857 troops that comprised the units of General Short's department. Carrying out the intensive training schedule was the bulk of two infantry divisions, less one regiment scattered in detachments on the other islands of the group. Also on Oahu were most of the antiaircraft and coast defense units of the Coast Artillery Command, and more than 250 aircraft of the Army's Hawaiian air force. Some of these aircraft, aloft on routine training exercises, were being tracked by the inexperienced crews of six Army mobile radar units newly installed at different points on the island.

There was comparable activity at the great Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, on the southern coast of the island, close by the bustling metropolis of Honolulu. Quite a few vessels of the U.S. Pacific Fleet were in port. Here Kimmel, the fleet's commander in chief, had his headquarters, from which he and his staff closely supervised the intense training programs of their ships in Hawaiian waters. The Navy Yard itself was the principal installation of the Fourteenth Naval District; both base and the district were commanded by Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, who was a direct subordinate of Kimmel both as base commander and as a Pacific Fleet staff officer—a setup which bred no little confusion and which was not helped by the fact that Bloch was Kimmel's senior in the service, though not in command. Kimmel properly held Bloch responsible for the functioning and local security of all the land-based installations of the fleet in Hawaii, while he himself devoted his principal attention to the readiness of the fleet to function offensively at sea.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Wednesday, November 26

Before attending a meeting of the Army-Navy Joint Board, both General Marshall and Admiral Stark had learned that Secretary of State Hull, presented the Japanese with the following demands per President Roosevelt: withdrawal of Japanese military forces from China and Indochina, recognition of the territorial integrity of those countries, unqualified acceptance of the National Government of China, and, finally, negotiation of a liberal U.S.-Japanese trade treaty once the other conditions had been met.

At 5 P.M. on November 26 Secretary Hull met with the two Japanese ambassadors and presented this reply to them. Special envoy Kurusu read the note, then commented that his government would “throw up its hands” and that the American position practically “put an end to the negotiations.” Marshall knew war was imminent and authorized the Chief of War Plans Division to send overseas commanders a warning of the possibility of a surprise Japanese attack.

Honolulu, Wednesday, November 26

Admiral Kimmel received a report from the radio intelligence unit in Hawaii of a strong concentration of Japanese submarines and carrier aircraft in the Marshall Islands. This implied, but did not definitely prove, that some Japanese carriers were there as well. This information was perhaps inconsistent with a somewhat more definite report from the Philippines saying that radio traffic indicated all known Japanese carriers to be in home waters. Neither Admiral Kimmel nor members of his staff saw any need to inform General Short of these reports.

Short, meanwhile, had received an official message directing him to send two long-range B-24 bombers—due from the mainland—to photograph and observe the Japanese bases of Truk in the Caroline Islands and Jaluit in the Marshalls, reporting the number and locations of all Japanese naval vessels. He was to make sure both planes were “fully equipped with gun ammunition.” But neither mission was ever flown: only one B-24 reached Short, and it was not properly equipped.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Thursday, November 27

Stimson added word of a telephone discussion with the President, who, agreeing that an alert order be sent out, desired all commanders to be cautioned that Japan must commit the first overt act of war. All four in Stimson’s office then prepared drafts of alert messages to be sent to General MacArthur and Admiral Hart in the Philippines and to Army and Navy commanders in Hawaii, Panama, and on the West Coast.

“Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated to all practicable purposes with only the barest possibilities that the Japanese Government might...offer to continue.”

The message then reiterated Mr. Roosevelt’s desire that Japan commit the first overt act. But this, it was pointed out, should not repeat not be construed as restricting you to a course...that might jeopardize your defense. Prior to hostile Japanese action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary [italics supplied], but these measures should be carried out so as not repeat not to alarm civil population or disclose intent. Report measures taken...

The message further directed that, should hostilities occur, commanders would undertake offensive tasks in accordance with existing war plans. It concluded with the caution that dissemination of “this highly secret information” should be limited to the essential minimum.

Stark’s message to Navy commanders was sent at the same time; it opened bluntly: “This dispatch is to be considered a war warning.” It related the end of negotiations and the expectation that “an aggressive move” might come within the next few days. Then, in contrast to the more general Army warning, it added the information that known military activities of the Japanese indicated they probably intended to launch “an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra peninsula or possibly Borneo.” If read together, these two messages definitely pointed a finger at Southeast Asia as the expected enemy target.

NOTES: _____

Honolulu, Thursday, November 27

The official warnings from Washington confirmed to Short and Kimmel the seriousness of the international situation. Short, who noted that he was expected to report the measures he was taking, sent the following reply: “Report Department alerted to prevent sabotage. Liaison with the Navy.”

The Hawaiian Department plans provided for three kinds of alert. Number 1, which was what Short had ordered, was to guard against sabotage and uprisings—long a preoccupation of all Hawaiian commanders because of the high proportion of Japanese in the Islands. Number 2 included security against possible isolated, external air or naval attacks. Number 3 was a full-scale deployment for maximum defense of the Islands, and particularly of Oahu—heart of the military organization. Only in the two higher stages of alert was ammunition to be distributed to the anti-aircraft batteries; in Alert No. 1 all ammunition was to be kept stored in the dumps. Under Alert No. 1, planes would be parked closely for easy guarding; under the others they would be dispersed. Short did, however, order his newly installed radar stations to operate daily from 4 A.M. to 7 A.M. ; these were the dawn hours when surprise attack was most likely. Further reconnaissance, he felt, was the Navy’s responsibility. Kimmel was not aware that Short’s radar was operating only on a curtailed basis.

Though Kimmel was already alerted to some extent, he knew that for the moment he could do little in the way of “defensive deployment” in his war plan tasks—most specifically, raids into the Japanese mandated islands. Should he then prepare for an attack against Oahu? The Washington message implied that this was not a probability. He did order immediate attack on any and all unidentified submarines discovered in the vicinity of Oahu and other fleet operating zones. Neither then nor later, apparently, did he check on the local security measures undertaken by other commands, nor did he suggest any co-ordination between these commands and Short.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Friday, November 28

General Marshall, back from his North Carolina inspection, approved the warning message Gerow had sent to the overseas commanders. At noon he attended the President's "War Council" meeting at the White House. The implications of a large Japanese amphibious force, known to be sailing southward through the South China Sea, were discussed. British Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and the Philippines were potential targets, the invasion of which would immediately involve us in war. But unless Congress should previously declare war, the United States could not attack this force. Marshall thumbed through a sheaf of radio replies to the "war warning" message. Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, commanding on the Pacific Coast, reported instituting a harbor alert at San Francisco and similar precautions in Alaska in liaison with naval authorities. He requested permission to direct air as well as ground deployment of his far-flung command. It was a long message, contrasting sharply with Short's succinct report of sabotage defense measures in Hawaii. But the Chief of Staff didn't pay much attention; it would be someone else's job to handle any necessary responses. So Marshall initialed most of the messages and then forgot about them. Short's message, however, was not initialed by Marshall. He would later testify he had no recollection of ever having seen it, although it bore the routine rubber stamp, "Noted by Chief of Staff."

Admiral Stark, was pushing off a long message to Navy commanders on the West Coast, and to Admiral Kimmel, quoting the Army alert message of the twenty-seventh, including its admonition that Japan must commit the first "overt act."

NOTES:

Honolulu, Friday, November 28

Kimmel read Stark's long quote of the Army's alert message. He was particularly interested in its stress that "if hostilities cannot...be avoided the United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act." This appeared to confirm his decision of the previous day: limiting defensive deployment to one patrol squadron.

Kimmel received several other interesting reports. The U.S.S. Helena reported contact with an unidentified submarine. An intelligence estimate based on radio intercepts indicated Japanese carriers were still in their own home waters. Another report on intercepted Japanese messages established a "winds code," by means of which Japan would notify its diplomatic and consular representatives abroad of a decision to go to war: "east wind rain" meant war with the United States; "north wind cloudy," war with Russia; "west wind clear," war with England and invasion of Thailand, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies.

Kimmel never thought of mentioning any of these reports during his conference with General Short that day. Neither thought of asking the other what action he had taken on the November 27 warnings, nor did either volunteer any information on matters he considered to be of interest to his own individual service only.

NOTES:

Washington, Saturday, November 29

Both General Marshall and Admiral Stark received Magic copies of more intercepted Japanese messages. One of these from Premier Tojo in Tokyo to the ambassadors in Washington was quite ominous:

The United States'...humiliating proposal...was quite unexpected and extremely regrettable. The Imperial Government can by no means use it as a basis for negotiations. Therefore...in two or three days the negotiations will be de facto ruptured....However, I did not wish you to give the impression that the negotiations are broken off. Merely say to them that you are awaiting instructions....From now on, do the best you can. To Marshall and Stark this was clear evidence indeed that the Japanese were stalling for time only long enough to get their forces ready to attack in the Indonesia-Southeast Asia area.

Late in the afternoon both read with considerable interest reports of a warlike speech which Premier Tojo had delivered that day (November 30, Tokyo time). The twenty-ninth had been the deadline established in the messages from Tokyo to the ambassadors. The speech, while violently warlike in tone, failed to give any indication of Japanese intentions.

NOTES:

Honolulu, Saturday, November 29

Things were generally quiet on Oahu and in the outlying waters, as the Army and Navy both began a weekend of relaxation after five days of strenuous training. There was considerable bustle, however, at the Army's headquarters at Fort Shatter, as well as at Navy headquarters at nearby Pearl Harbor. General Short approved a message in reply to the latest sabotage warning from Washington, outlining in detail the security measures which had been taken. Admiral Kimmel received another message from Washington reminding him once more that he was to be prepared to carry out existing war plans in the event of hostilities with Japan. Thus, once again, the two commanders were reminded of the alert messages they had received on the twenty-seventh, and once again they found themselves satisfied with the actions they had then taken.

NOTES:

Washington, Sunday, November 30

General Marshall, returning from his usual Sunday morning horseback ride at Fort Myer, found another intercepted Japanese message awaiting him; the Foreign Ministry was cautioning its envoys in Washington to keep talking and "be careful that this does not lead to anything like a breaking-off of negotiations." He agreed with G-2's conclusion that the Japanese were stalling until their South China Sea assault was ready.

Honolulu, Sunday, November 30

General Short, in light of his instructions "not to alarm the civil population," must have been annoyed to read the Honolulu Advertiser headlines that morning: "Hawaii Troops Alerted." There wasn't anything he could do about it, however; even the limited nature of his Alert No. 1 would draw newspaper attention in a critical time such as this. He also read that "Leaders Call Troops Back in Singapore—Hope Wanes as Nations Fail at Parleys" and "Kurusu Bluntly Warned Nation Ready for Battle."

Kimmel ordered a squadron of patrol planes to Midway, to replace temporarily the squadron which he had ordered earlier to Wake. He was also interested in an information copy of a Navy Department message to Admiral Hart. Kimmel didn't think that war could be delayed much longer. He wrote on the top of a piece of paper the words—"Steps to be taken in case of American Japanese war within the next twenty-four hours," an aide-mémoire of the orders he must issue to his fleet.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Monday, December 1

A busy day. Stark learned from his intelligence staff that the Japanese Navy had changed service radio frequencies and call letters for all units afloat—a normal prewar step. He went to the White House with Secretary Hull and briefed the President. But most significant was an exchange between Japan's ambassador to Berlin and his foreign office. The ambassador reported that Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop had given him Hitler's unequivocal assurance that "should Japan become engaged in a war against the United States, Germany, of course, would join the war immediately." Tojo promptly told the ambassador to inform the German government that "war may suddenly break out between the Anglo-Saxon nations and Japan through some clash of arms... This war may come quicker than anyone dreams."

Honolulu, Monday, December 1

Kimmel and Short held another routine conference. But neither discussed local security precautions or a possible threat to Oahu. Politely but inconclusively they continued discussion of the divided responsibility at Wake and Midway. Kimmel never thought to mention to Short that he had received another Washington warning about the "winds code" and that he had also been informed of the change in Japanese military frequencies and call letters. It never occurred to Kimmel that Short might not have been told about either matter.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Tuesday, December 2

Additional Magic intercepts indicated further Japanese preparations for war, with the enemy's known offensive weight still massing in Southeast Asia.

Honolulu, Tuesday, December 2

Kimmel, discussing intelligence reports with his staff, noted the change in Japanese radio frequencies as related in the Navy Department's fortnightly intelligence summary, received late the previous day. He called for intelligence estimates on the location of Japanese aircraft carriers. Captain Edwin T. Layton, his intelligence officer, gave estimated locations for all except Divisions 1 and 2—four carriers.

"What!" exclaimed Kimmel, "you don't know where [they] are?"

"No, sir, I do not. I think they are in home waters, but—"

"Do you mean to say they could be rounding Diamond Head and you wouldn't know it?"

The conference ended after a discussion on the difficulty of locating a force operating under sealed orders while preserving radio silence.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Wednesday, December 3

Along with the other recipients of Magic information, General Marshall and Admiral Stark noted but attached no particular significance to a pair of intercepted messages made available to them that day. One, dated November 15, was already old; its translation had been deferred for several days in order to take care of messages considered more urgent. It referred to an earlier message directing the Japanese consulate at Honolulu to make periodic reports on the location of American warships in Pearl Harbor, and requested the Honolulu consulate to step up these reports to twice a week. This was nothing new.

The other message was a reply by Prime Minister Tojo to the suggestion of his ambassadors at Washington that peace could perhaps be preserved through a high-level conference—they had proposed former Premier Prince Konoye as the Japanese envoy and Vice President Henry Wallace or Presidential Assistant Harry Hopkins for the United States—at “some midway point, such as Honolulu.” Tojo’s response, that “it would be inappropriate for us to propose such a meeting,” seemed a less significant indication of Japan’s immediate intentions than the continuing reports of her movements in and near Indochina.

NOTES: _____

Honolulu, Wednesday, December 3

Admiral Kimmel noted the continuing and surprising lack of information on Japanese carriers contained in the latest daily radio intelligence summary, which stated that “carrier traffic is at a low ebb.” That day, too, he received Admiral Stark’s letter of November 25. He agreed with Stark’s view that “an attack on the Philippines” might be embarrassing, but that “an advance into Thailand, Indochina, Burma Road area [was] most likely.”

In the afternoon Short and Kimmel conferred. They soon got into a grim discussion of what they could do to carry out assigned war plans when and if war broke out. Both were thinking, of course, of planned naval and air raids into the Marshall Islands and of security measures for Wake and Midway. There was no mention of like measures for Oahu. Nor did Admiral Kimmel think to mention to General Short his latest intelligence reports about the burning of Japanese codes or the missing aircraft carriers.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Thursday, December 4

A mixed bag of Magic intercepts available to both Stark and Marshall gave clear indication of Japanese intentions to go to war. Instructions came to Ambassador Nomura to completely destroy one of the two special machines for secret coding, but to hold the other and its cipher key—which should be in his personal possession—“until the last minute.” One intercepted message, considered to be relatively insignificant, was to the Japanese consul at Honolulu; he was to “investigate completely the fleet-bases in the neighborhood of the Hawaiian military reservation.”

Stark and Marshall concerned themselves with routine activities.

Honolulu, Thursday, December 4

Admiral Kimmel conferred with two of his senior task-force commanders, scheduled to sail the next day on combined training-alert missions. Kimmel’s intention was that, should war break out, these forces would be available for raids into the Marshall Island group in accordance with existing war plans. Both task-force commanders understood their war-plan missions; both were aware in general of the tense international situation. Kimmel, therefore, felt he was under no obligation to inform either of Washington’s November 27 “war warning” message. The net naval situation on Oahu now was that the entire carrier force of the Pacific Fleet was either at sea or about to steam and that the approaches to the island from the west would be scouted for several days to come.

Kimmel felt that these steps would ensure a reconnaissance search of a large portion of the central Pacific Ocean, as extensive as his limited aircraft strength would permit. But, from the Hawaiian Islands north to the Aleutians, both sea and air were still bare of American reconnaissance. Kimmel and Short did not meet that day.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Friday, December 5

Both War and Navy departments were busy compiling data for President Roosevelt on Japanese sea, land, and air strength concentrating in French Indochina and adjacent areas. In an intercepted Japanese message from Washington, Ambassador Nomura told Tokyo that in case of Japanese invasion of Thailand, joint military action by Great Britain and the United States “is a definite certainty, with or without a declaration of war.” Another, from Tokyo, reiterated the previous instructions about destruction of codes and coding machines.

Admiral Stark, conferring with staff officers, decided no further warning orders need be sent to overseas naval commanders; the message of November 27 was adequate. All concurred.

Honolulu, Friday, December 5

Short read with interest a cryptic message from G-2 in Washington to his intelligence officer, directing him to get in touch with the Navy immediately “regarding broadcasts from Tokyo reference weather.” So Lieutenant Colonel George W. Bicknell, assistant G-2, gave the General all facts obtainable from his own office and from Kimmel’s headquarters. Short was informed by Kimmel of the departure of the two naval task forces.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Saturday, December 6

Reports of increasing Japanese concentration and movements in Indochina, South China, and the South China Sea absorbed Stark and Marshall, as well as all the other members of the War Cabinet from the President down. Mr. Roosevelt, the service chiefs were glad to learn, had decided that he would personally warn Emperor Hirohito that further aggressions might lead to war and urge the Japanese ruler that withdrawal of his forces from Indochina “would result in the assurance of peace throughout the whole of the South Pacific area.”

Late in the afternoon Magic plucked out of the air thirteen parts of a fourteen-part memorandum from Tokyo to the Japanese envoys. This much of the message summarized negotiations from the Japanese viewpoint, concluding that the American note of November 26 was not “a basis of negotiations.” The envoys were instructed to handle it carefully, since “the situation is extremely delicate.”

Distribution of this intercept was curious. Decoding was completed after office hours. General Sherman A. Miles, Army G-2, saw no need to disturb either the Secretary of War, General Marshall, or General Gerow at their homes. Some Navy people saw the message. Stark, who was at the theater, learned of it when he returned home and found that he was expected to call the White House. The President had received the intercept, as had the State Department. The details of the conversation are not known, but presumably the President told Stark, as he had earlier said to Harry Hopkins: “This means war!”

NOTES: _____

Honolulu, Saturday, December 6

In the daily radio intelligence summary received that morning from Washington, Kimmel was again struck by lack of information on the location of Japanese carriers. In other dispatches, however, there was considerable information about different kinds of Japanese activity. He received a copy of Admiral Hart’s message reporting on the movement of the two convoys south of Indochina. And he received a message from Washington authorizing him, “in view of the international situation and the exposed position of our outlying Pacific Islands,” to order the destruction of classified documents at these islands, “now or under later conditions of greater emergency.” Neither the Admiral nor any member of his staff saw any need to pass on any information to the Army. Presumably General Short was getting it all through Army channels.

Carefully checking the reported locations of all fleet units and projecting their planned routes for the next twenty-four hours, Admiral Kimmel again made his daily revision of his personal check-list memorandum: “Steps to be taken in case of American-Japanese war within the next twenty-four hours.”

Over at Fort Shafter, Army headquarters, the daily staff conference was as usual presided over by Colonel Walter C. Phillips, chief of staff. General Short did not normally attend these meetings. It was reported that the Japanese

consulate in Honolulu was busily burning and destroying secret papers, significant in light of similar reports throughout the world already noted in the intercepts. This was reported to Short. Later in the evening, Short was notified of information passed on from the FBI of some suspicious long-distance telephone messages, mentioning searchlights, ships at Pearl, and a type of code. Short says the messenger is, “too intelligence-conscious.” In any event they could talk about it again in the morning. The district intelligence officer of the Navy decided that the transcript should be studied further by a Japanese linguist and so put the FBI report away until Monday morning. Admiral Kimmel was not informed.

NOTES: _____

Washington, Sunday, December 7

By 8 A.M. the last part of the Japanese memorandum—Part Fourteen—had been intercepted, transcribed, and was ready for distribution. Both Army and Navy intelligence officers were slightly surprised at its mild tone: “The Japanese Government regrets...that it is impossible to reach an agreement through further negotiations.”

It doesn’t get to Marshall until 11: 15 a.m. Marshall read quickly but carefully, as was usual with him. Then—“Something is going to happen at one o’clock,” he told the officers. “When they specified a day, that of course had significance, but not comparable to an hour.” Approval and decoding protocols held up the message. He pondered telephoning, but was held back by concerns that the Japanese may be listening. He then finds out the message can be delivered in 30 minutes. He was satisfied and never checked on it again. It was 6:30 in Hawaii. If he had checked, he would have found out that the decoding facility could not get in contact with Honolulu for a variety of reasons.

NOTES: _____

Honolulu, Sunday, December 7

The 30-minute message sent by Marshall does not reach Short’s desk until 2:58 p.m. in Hawaii. It was 9:58 p.m. in Washington. The messenger boy carrying General Marshall’s message speedily found himself involved in trouble. Not until 11:45 could he thread his way through traffic jams, road blocks, and general confusion to reach the Fort Shatter signal office, which was itself swamped in traffic by this time. Short rushed a copy to Admiral Kimmel, who read it, remarked—perhaps unnecessarily—that it was not of the slightest interest any more, and dropped it into the wastebasket.

NOTES: _____

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

Trial Notes



DIRECTIONS: As the defense and the prosecution present their case, take notes on the key points that will help in making your decision on Kimmel and Short's accountability for the attack at Pearl Harbor.

PROSECUTION:

DEFENSE:

Do you find both Kimmel and Short accountable for the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Why or why not?

Who is accountable?

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

OFFICIAL'S TRIAL NOTES



DIRECTIONS: Use the space below to make notes or comments that you will present at the trial.

POSITION: _____

NOTES:

THE PEARL HARBOR TRIAL

AT FAULT HANDOUT



No disaster of the magnitude of Pearl Harbor could have occurred without the failure—somewhere and somehow—of leadership. A total of eight separate official investigations searched for scapegoats, and found them. The Japan might well have inflicted defeat upon our Pacific Fleet and our Army forces in Hawaii regardless of how well alerted they may have been on December 7, 1941. It makes no difference that on December 7 the President and the Secretary of State—like the civilian Secretaries of War and Navy—had their eyes fixed on the Japanese threat in Southeast Asia.

Were military failures responsible for Pearl Harbor?

In Washington the most important of these were the following:

1. The War Department staff, over which General Marshall presided, was at the time a complicated but “one-man” shop, where delegation of responsibility was the exception rather than the rule. When Marshall was absent, the operational wheels tended to freeze. This situation was to some extent due to cumbersome organization, to some extent due to the personality of the Chief of Staff.
2. General Marshall, in a letter to General Short on February 7, 1941, stressed that “the risk of sabotage and the risk involved in a surprise raid by air and submarine constitute the real perils of the [Hawaiian] situation.” Yet, although definitely warning General Short on November 27 of the threat of war, and ordering him to report the measures he would take in response, Marshall did not check up on those measures; moreover, he was unaware that Short had done no more than to take routine precautions against sabotage. And General Gerow, heading the War Plans Division of General Marshall’s General Staff—as he testified later in taking full responsibility for this slip—had not made any provision for following up operational orders. The net result was that both Marshall and Short remained the whole time in blissful ignorance of a vital misinterpretation of orders.
3. Marshall and Admiral Stark—and indeed all members of their staffs who knew the situation—permitted themselves to be hypnotized by the concrete evidence of the aggressive Japanese build-up in Southeast Asia which threatened our Philippines outpost.
4. Finally, on December 7, having indicated his full realization of the significance of the “one o’clock” intercept—that less than two hours now separated peace and war—and having decided not to use his “scrambler” telephone, Marshall failed to require surveillance and positive report on the delivery of his final warning.

THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The report of the Army Pearl Harbor Board, submitted to the Secretary of War on October 20, 1944, apportioned a share of the blame for the surprise to the War and Navy Departments and their top military officers in Washington. Even so, the service inquiries concluded that General Short and Admiral Kimmel had sufficient information to realize that war was imminent and had no excuse for inadequate security measures. They were not courtmartialed, despite their requests, largely for political reasons. In this they were grievously wronged, for they had a right to be heard in their own defense.

