

Admission of MAGIC Demolishes FDR's Claim of Surprise

Percy L. Greaves, Jr.

We now come to the critical twenty-four hour period before the attack. What did the leaders in Washington know? When did they know it? What did they do about it? Unfortunately, the testimony is a jumbled mass of contradictions. Most witnesses swore under oath that they had performed their duties. Nonetheless, valuable hours were lost before responsible persons took actions that available information clearly indicated. The record seems to make clear one thing—junior officers were very reluctant to testify to facts that might embarrass their superiors. Undoubtedly there were private conferences before each investigation at which the involved officers tried to agree on how they would testify. In fact, some witnesses admitted this was so. They had merely met to refresh their joint memories. However, there were also cases where witnesses later changed their original testimony, given with the aid of notes written in December 1941, in order to conform with what they considered the wishes of their superiors.

Any serious attempt to account for the tremendous losses at Pearl Harbor must attempt to explain why the Hawaiian commanders were so ill prepared to repel the attack, They were taken completely by surprise. The first question is: Given the information available to them, did the Hawaiian Commanders make reasonably intelligent decisions? Were the Army's sabotage alert and the Navy's preparations to carry out the War Plans calling for raids on Japanese islands reasonably proper policies for the period from November 27 to December 7, 1941? As requested, Short had reported the measures taken. Kimmel was certainly carrying out the instructions received in the November 27 message. They were both acting in conformity with the orders and information sent them.

This reduces the pertinent query to: Did Washington officials have information which, if known in Hawaii, would have improved the defensive situation for the Fleet, the available planes and the ground forces? If so, when did the Washington officials have this information and what did they do about it?

The most important information the Washington commanders had, which the Pearl Harbor commanders did not, was the detailed knowledge revealed by a reading of the intercepted Japanese messages. This included not only the detailed reports Tokyo had requested on the movements and conditions within Pearl Harbor, but also the rapid deterioration of Japan's economic conditions and U.S.-Japanese diplomatic relations, as specifically related by Japan's "deadline" messages, her reaction to our ultimatum, the contacts with Hitler and Mussolini, the code destruction orders and the series of last minute messages that were intercepted starting early on the morning of December 6th. The knowledge gained from these intercepts supplies the key that opens the door to the determination of the responsibilities for the Pearl Harbor disaster.

Secrecy of MAGIC

Before and during the war the information gained from these intercepts could not be leaked or revealed to the public and thus also to the Japanese. The later reading of Japan's Naval codes made possible our greatest naval victories in the Pacific. The reading of Japan's diplomatic codes, those involved in our pre-Pearl Harbor intelligence, also provided much valuable

information. Before V-E Day, we were able to intercept and read all the Japanese messages between Berlin and Tokyo. After V-E Day we intercepted and read Japan's futile plea for the Soviet Union to act as an intermediary in negotiating an end to the war.

All this, however, does not relieve the Washington officials of responsibility for failing to change the alert conditions in Hawaii during the week, days or hours preceding the attack. It does, however, suggest a reason why those responsible for this failure to take such action might seek to keep all knowledge of these intercepts off the public record. It may also explain why an Army officer, in a position to know, twice told this author -- once in the presence of General Bonner Fellers and again in the presence of General Albert C. Wedemeyer -- that shortly after Pearl Harbor General Marshall warned his staff officers they would have to go to their graves with this secret. This informant refused to let his name be used because he feared it might affect his son's Army career. It may also explain why Captain Safford could not find many of the pertinent intercepts in the files when he first looked for them in early 1944.

Marshall was the chief protagonist for keeping knowledge of the intercepts permanently secret. It was by his order that an attempt was made to keep such information from the secret Army and Navy investigations authorized by Congress. Stark also desired to keep this vital information from the secret wartime investigations conducted by trusted Army generals and Navy admirals, all with the highest security clearances. Accordingly, those who first testified under oath before the Navy Court of Inquiry and the Army Pearl Harbor Board failed to reveal any hint of the full truth known to them. Most of them sought refuge in the obfuscating reply, "I do not recall." Some avoided direct answers, pleading that the question was irrelevant or immaterial. Others refused to answer because they claimed to do so would not be in the public interest, or because it would force them to disclose a "state secret."

Safford Exposes the Secret

The chief protagonist for revealing the news learned from reading the intercepts was Captain L.F. Safford. In 1941, he had been in charge of the Communications Security Section of Naval Communications. Later, for his work in solving foreign codes and constructing our own, Congress awarded Safford \$100,000. Like millions of less informed Americans, Safford at first blamed Admiral Kimmel for the terrible losses at Pearl Harbor. Then, to his amazement, he found out that his superiors had not provided Kimmel with the benefit of the information that his Section had decoded in the months before the attack. His sense of injustice was aroused.

This led him to take two steps which were later to lead to the eventual revelations that both the wartime and first postwar Administrations sought to keep secret. In February 1944, he called on retired Admiral Kimmel in New York and, from notes and memory, related to him much of the information available in Washington that would have been of great value to the Pearl Harbor commanders.

Fearing war casualties, Kimmel sought a wartime recording of "testimony pertinent to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor." As a result of Kimmel's prodding, Secretary Knox appointed the retired Admiral Thomas C. Hart to travel where necessary to record such testimony. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, Hart had been the Commander in Chief of our Asiatic Fleet based in the Philippines. On April 28, 1944, Hart met informally with Safford to learn what he knew. From memory, Safford related some of his pre-Pearl Harbor knowledge, which he had gained from decrypting Japanese intercepts. This was news to Hart. He cautioned Safford

against making statements he could not prove and instructed him to return the next day to give formal testimony.

Safford returned to the Navy Department and made a search for copies of the pertinent intercepts. He could not find them in either the Navy or War Department files. Nevertheless, he testified the next day from notes and memory as to what he and his superiors knew pre-Pearl Harbor. Then Hart asked him:

21. Q: Is there any documentary report which shows the date and hours of delivery of the foregoing information to various officials?

A: There is no documentary evidence.

22. Q: Are you able to state, from memory, the date and hour on which the important information, say, from 1 December onward, was transmitted?

A: I can, from my recollection of Lieutenant Commander Kramer's verbal reports to me.

23. Q: Please give what you recall....

At that time, Safford's remarkable testimony contained one misstatement, viz.:

The "Winds Message" was last seen by myself about December 14, 1941, when the papers which had been distributed in early December were assembled by Kramer [Navy courier], checked by myself, and then turned over to the Director of Naval Communications for use as evidence before the Roberts Commission, according to my understanding at the time.

Actually, the intercepts were never made available to the Roberts Commission.

After speaking again with Kramer, Safford later testified before the Hewitt Inquiry that the assembled messages were given to James Forrestal "about 9 December 1941." The following day Kramer corroborated this. Forrestal became Acting Secretary of the Navy while Knox was out in Hawaii investigating the attack for FDR. As Under Secretary, Forrestal had not been privileged to see the intercepts. After the attack he learned about them and as Acting Secretary requested copies.

Forrestal's appointment schedule for December 10, 1941, shows entries for Commander McCollum of Far East Intelligence at 3:47 and Kramer at 4:49. Kramer recalled explaining to him "the way things shaped up from this traffic." It was this bundle of intercepts shown to Forrestal that Safford located some months later in a Navy safe. Safford, in one of his many meetings with this author, told him that he, Safford, then duplicated them and had copies replaced in both the Army and Navy files. Thus, they were available for the later investigations. However, the "Winds Execute" message was not among them.

Kimmel's Struggle Succeeds

The Navy Court of Inquiry, authorized by Congress, opened hearings on July 31, 1944. With the information furnished him by Safford, Kimmel and his attorneys made every effort to have the intercepts introduced as essential evidence. As an "interested party," Kimmel and his attorneys were permitted to attend the NCI secret sessions. At the end of each witness's testimony, a representative of each "interested party" was permitted to ask questions.

At the end of that first short session, Kimmel stated before the court of three Admirals:

I have been branded throughout this country as the one responsible for the Pearl Harbor disaster. I feel that this investigation should go far enough to disclose all the facts in connection with the matter and that witnesses from the Army, from the State Department, or from any other federal department ought to be called before this court in order to establish the facts that are necessary. It will be a long time before I am afforded any other opportunity to refute the statements made in the report of the Roberts Commission. People may die who can make statements before this court sufficient to establish the facts and to refute the utterly false and misleading statements made throughout the Roberts Commission.

The first witness, Admiral Stark, was asked his reason for detaching some ships from the Pacific Fleet for duty in the Atlantic early in 1941. Stark sought to go off the record as he thought "making this matter public would be detrimental to the best interests of the United States." Kimmel objected and his objection was upheld. Stark then stated his reason for shifting these ships was that the move was in accordance with WPL-46. This war plan was based on the secret ABC agreement with the British, which Administration defenders have tried to contend was only a tentative proposal, no part of which went into effect before we were actually at war.

Kimmel and his attorneys kept trying to get relevant evidence into the record over the objections of witnesses and the Court's judge Advocate. On Friday, August 25, 1944, at the close of his testimony before the Army Pearl Harbor Board, Kimmel was asked:

Admiral, is there anything that you want to tell the Board now which may not have been said by you or not brought out by other witnesses in the hearing before the Roberts Commission? ...

Admiral KIMMEL: Since Pearl Harbor, information has come to my knowledge that vital information in the hands of the War and Navy Departments was not supplied to responsible officers in Hawaii; in particular, that the War and Navy Departments knew that Japan had set a deadline ... for the signing of an agreement ... that on 26 November an ultimatum was delivered to Japan by the United States. This was done notwithstanding a joint recommendation to the President by General Marshall and Admiral Stark that no ultimatum of any kind should be made to Japan. I had been advised of this recommendation and had received no qualification of that information. I had no knowledge of the delivery of the ultimatum to Japan on 26 November, 1941. I am further certain that several days prior to 7 December, 1941 there was information in the War Department and the Navy Department that Japan would attack the United States ... that there was information in the War and Navy Departments on 6 December, 1941, that the hour of attack was momentarily imminent, and early on 7 December, 1941, the precise time of the attack was known. It was known at least three or probably four hours before the attack. All this information was denied to General Short and to me. I feel that we were entitled to it.... Had we been furnished this information as little as two or three

hours before the attack, which was easily feasible and possible, much could have been done.

The Admiral was told by General Russell, a member of the Army Board, that:

Some of the things to which you have referred may become the subject of further investigation before the Board is through.... It might come to pass that we would want the source of certain information referred to by you in your statement. Would you be willing to cooperate with us to the extent that we might be furnished the source of the information contained in your statement?

Admiral KIMMEL: I will cooperate to the best of my ability, in conformity with the restrictions which have been imposed upon me.

Kimmel's difficulties and final success in getting the Japanese intercepts into the record have been well told in Chapter Seven of John Toland's *Infamy*. Except for an inconsequential error in one date, his account is both accurate and highly interesting. This author can vouch for it. In addition to his familiarity with the official record, this author had a number of confirming conversations with Admiral Kimmel and his two top counsels, Charles B. Rugg and Captain Robert A. Lavender, all of whom were dead when Toland undertook his painstaking research.

The intercepts were finally introduced before the Navy Court on August 28, 1944, after Secretary Forrestal reversed the previous decision to exclude them. They were introduced as TOP SECRET evidence to be extracted from the record and deposited with the Secretary of the Navy. This action was taken in the interest of national security and the successful prosecution of the war.

Stark's counsel immediately protested:

We object to bringing those documents in on the ground that the use which may be made of them in these proceedings may disclose secrets which should be held inviolate for the best prosecution of the war. Our objection is not because of what the documents themselves may contain but because their use here may compromise many years of hard work the results of which are most important to the Nation's future interest. We can have no assurance the wide publicity of parts or even all of these proceedings will not eventuate.

Stark's objection was not sustained by the court.

En route to Hawaii, the Army Pearl Harbor Board (APHB) took testimony in San Francisco. While there, the Board's President, General George Grunert, addressed a letter to General Marshall on August 30, 1944. This letter said, in part:

Information, apparently material, has been brought to the attention of the Board, which it did not have when you testified. Hence, the Board requests that you subject yourself to a rehearing as early as possible after the Board's return to Washington, D.C., now scheduled for Sunday, September 24, 1944.

The particular subjects on which the Board would like to get additional information follow:

The letter then listed the information that Kimmel had conveyed to the APHB on August 25th.

Upon receipt of this letter, Marshall gave an "oral instruction" to Colonel Carter W. Clarke to conduct an "investigation regarding the manner in which certain Top Secret communications were handled." This became known as Part I of the Clarke Investigation. Eight Army officers were secretly queried by Colonel Clarke and his aide on their knowledge of the MAGIC intercepts. Colonel Rufus S. Bratton, whom Marshall had recalled from Europe, appeared on four different days. He was the G-2 officer responsible for the pre-Pearl Harbor distribution of the Japanese intercepts. A written report was made to Marshall on September 20, but the investigation continued through September 28. So Marshall was prepared when he reappeared before the APHB on September 29, 1944.

Part II of the Clarke Investigation, 8 July 1945-13 August 1945, was the result of another "oral directive" by Marshall. Clarke was directed to investigate a 5 July 1945 statement by an Army officer before the Hewitt Inquiry. In reference to the "Winds Execute" message, the witness had stated:

Then, if I remember correctly, I asked Colonel Sadtler whether he had a copy, had ever gotten or seen a copy of this message, and his answer was, if I remember correctly ... that he had been told by somebody that the copies had been ordered or directed to be destroyed by General Marshall.

After questioning that witness and four Army officers, supposedly implicated, Carter Clarke, a Colonel during Part I and a Brigadier General during Part II, concluded:

I find that no written message implementing the Winds Code message was ever received by G-2, and I find that no records pertaining to Pearl Harbor have been destroyed by G-2 or by anybody connected with G-2.

Officers, not wishing to destroy their careers, denied saying what they had been reported as saying.)

Pilot Message Distribution

This brings us back to the events in the War Department during the 24 hours before the attack.

Colonel Rufus S. Bratton was the Army officer charged with the distribution of the Japanese intercepts to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and Chief of Staff, the Chief of War Plans Division and the Chief of Army Intelligence (G-2), His chief assistant was Colonel Carlisle C. Dusenbury. While the conditions of delivery of these intercepts in locked pouches would differ, the standard operating procedure, if both of these men were present, was for one to take a pouch to the State Department while the other made the deliveries within the War Department at the old Munitions Building. When deliveries were made after office hours, phone calls would be made to the residences of the recipients before attempting deliveries.

The first key Japanese intercept of this crucial period was the so-called Pilot message. This message announced that the long awaited Japanese answer to our November 26th ultimatum would shortly be transmitted by the "Purple" code in English. The Japanese Ambassadors were to put it "in nicely drafted form" and hold it for delivery at a time to be specified in a later message. The time sheet for this Pilot message shows it was intercepted by a Navy station on the West Coast from 7:15 to 7:20 a.m., East Coast time on December 6, 1941. It was teletyped in Japanese code to the Navy in Washington. The Army Signal Corps received it from the Navy more than four hours later at 12:05 p.m. This abnormal time delay was never accounted for. It was then decoded, translated and typed by the Army's Signal Intelligence Service before delivery to the Army and Navy officer couriers.

Bratton, the Army courier, testified he received the Pilot message "around about 2 o'clock" and distributed it "that afternoon about 3 o'clock." He stated it was delivered to the full fist of persons for whom he was responsible. He recalled discussing its contents with both Generals Gerow and Miles.

When asked about receipt of the Pilot message, General Marshall at first gave an indirect answer referring to the first 13 parts of the answer to the ultimatum mentioned in the Pilot message. He admitted he was in Washington that entire day. He further admitted there was someone on duty in his office who would have known where he was. Finally, as Senator Ferguson pressed he stated: "The point is I did not receive the [Pilot] message."

General Gerow, Chief of War Plans, took a position similar to his superior. When shown the message and asked about it, he replied: "I do not recall having received that message, sir." He too had a duty officer who "knew where to reach me, sir." This duty officer could go home "but he remained at his telephone so he could be reached at any time." General Gerow "had a search made" for the duty roster but had been unable to locate it. He did testify:

I think that I was down at the office myself until 6 or 7 or 8 o'clock. Of course, that was a very busy time and we had a lot of unfinished business.

General Miles, Chief of Army Intelligence, was another matter. Testifying before the Congressional Committee, in advance of General Marshall, he stated:

We were thoroughly prepared and had been for some days to receive an unfavorable reply to the message of November 26.

As to when he first knew of it, he testified he "certainly knew it" before he left for home that Saturday. He attended a dinner party that evening at the home of Admiral Wilkinson. At a later time, Senator Ferguson asked him:

How do you account personally for the pilot message not being delivered to General Marshall, the Chief of Staff, who was the only man under his testimony that could act, he or the President or the Secretary of War, as I understand his testimony? Now how do you account ... that that was not delivered on the day it was translated?

General MILES: Senator, my answer is, first that I had every reason to believe that General Marshall did receive the locked pouch which contained this message. I heard

his testimony this morning. I think he is mistaken in saying he did not receive that message on the afternoon of the 6th. .

Two days later, after Marshall had returned from the White House and completed his testimony, Miles returned to the witness seat.

Senator FERGUSON: Well, you knew the pilot message- and you know what I mean by the "pilot message"-was in on the 6th?

General MILES: Yes, sir.

Senator FERGUSON: Did you have any reason why that was not delivered to General Marshall?

General MILES: I testified, sir, to the best of my knowledge and belief it was in the Saturday afternoon locked pouch among several other messages, which you will find were translated on that day, and that it did go to General Marshall. He does not remember seeing it.

Japan's Much-Awaited Reply

Next came the first 13 parts of Japan's 14 part reply to our ultimatum of November 26. We had known since November 22nd, that if agreement was not reached by November 29th, "things are automatically going to happen." A week had passed since that date with no agreement. The Navy's West Coast intercept station started picking up these coded parts on the morning of December 6th at 8:03 a.m. Washington, D.C. time. The first five parts were picked up by 10 a.m. and they had the first 13 parts by 11:25 a.m. They were sent in batches by teletype to the Navy in Washington.

The first four parts were received before noon and the Navy's decryption section went to work on them. The Army's section had closed down at 1 p.m. By two o'clock the Navy was swamped with work and the Army was asked to recall three of their decrypters. They came in by about three o'clock. All the first thirteen parts were in Washington by 2:51 p.m. The Army decoded parts 9 and 10 while the Navy decoded the other 11 parts. They were in English, so no translation was necessary. All thirteen parts were typed up and ready for delivery about 9 p.m.

Bratton's first testimony of record was before the Clarke Investigation on September 14, 1944. He had with him "a memorandum which I made at the time for the record." He was not then asked any question about the Pilot message. When queried on September 15, 1944, about Japan's 14 part reply, he responded:

I believe that the message started coming into the Navy on the 6th. My recollection is that I transmitted a copy to the Secretary of State that night.

There were no other questions or references to December 6, in his testimony before the Marshall-sponsored Clarke Investigation.

Bratton next appeared before the APHB on three occasions -- September 30, October 2, and 6, 1944. His first appearance was the day after Marshall had testified.

Marshall had skipped over the question submitted to him in writing as to what the War Department knew on December 6, 1941. When later asked the same question orally, Marshall dodged a direct answer, referring to his testimony about December 7. He did finally say:

My understanding was--though I am not the best witness on this, and I am indulging largely in hearsay--that the major portion of that message was delivered to the Secretary of State on the night before, although I don't know.

On Bratton's first appearance before the APHB, he replied to a question concerning Japan's lengthy 14-part reply to our ultimatum:

I had had the bulk of it since the evening before, sir. It came in fourteen parts, I believe. Thirteen of those parts were received the afternoon and evening of the 6th and were delivered by me to the office of the Chief of Staff, the A.C. of S. G-2 [Miles], the office of the Secretary of State. The last part didn't come in, as I remember, until very late at night or very early in the morning of the 7th, and it was delivered at that time to those same agencies.

On his second appearance, he was asked:

General RUSSELL: Whom did you deliver them to that night?

Colonel BRATTON: To the office of the Chief of Staff, A.C. of S. G-2; WPD [Gerow]; and the State Department. I gave the Secretary of State's copy to the watch officer in the State Department, with the request that it be gotten to Mr. Hull immediately.

He was then asked,

when the President and leading Admirals had that message Saturday evening, why it was that the Chief of Staff [Marshall] was not called and advised, as were others, that this important document had been received. In view of the tenor of its contents ... why did not the Chief of Staff get that message?

Colonel BRATTON: I cannot verify it or prove it, at this time, but my recollection is that those three officers [Generals Marshall, Miles and Gerow] got their copies the evening of the 6th.

* * * * *

Colonel TOULMIN [APHB Executive Officer]: Is it your recollection that you handed that long 13-part message, on that evening, to the Secretary of the Chief of Staff?

Colonel BRATTON: Yes, sir.

Colonel TOULMIN: And it is your recollection that you handed it on that evening of December 6 to General Gerow, or some representative of General Gerow?

Colonel BRATTON: Yes.

Colonel TOULMIN: Did you hand it to General Gerow directly, or to his Secretary?

Colonel BRATTON: To his executive officer ... Colonel Gailey.

Colonel TOULMIN: And what is the name of the Secretary of the Chief of Staff?

Colonel BRATTON: Colonel Smith, Bedell Smith, now Lieutenant General

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Colonel TOULMIN: Did you talk to General Miles on the night of the 6th?

Colonel BRATTON: My recollection is that I did, sir.

Colonel TOULMIN: You talked to him on the phone, or in his office?

Colonel BRATTON: No, I believe I talked to him in his office.

* * * *

Colonel TOULMIN: And how about General Smith? Did you get any reaction from him, or any action, rather?

Colonel BRATTON: No. General Smith did not have access to these pouches. You mean General Bedell Smith?

Colonel TOULMIN: Yes.

Colonel BRATTON: He didn't have a key to the bag.

Colonel TOULMIN: Did you tell him that it was an important document in the locked pouch?

Colonel BRATTON: Yes, sir.

Colonel TOULMIN: And that the Chief of Staff should know about it?

Colonel BRATTON: Should see it right away.

Colonel TOULMIN: What was General Smith's response-that he would get in touch with the Chief of Staff, or would not?

Colonel BRATTON: It must have been, because if it had been otherwise, it would have registered on my memory.

On his third appearance before the APHB, the following interchange took place:

General RUSSELL: As I recall your testimony, you stated that you delivered it to this man Smith on Saturday night, is that correct?

Colonel BRATTON: That is correct, sir, to the best of my knowledge and belief. My recollection is that I found Colonel Smith in his office. It may have been one of the other secretaries, but my recollection is that it was Colonel Smith, and that I told him that this was a very important paper, and that General Marshall should see it at once. My recollection is that he said we would send it out to the General's quarters by courier. In any event, my mind was at rest about the Chief of Staff, I didn't worry about him any more that night.

General GRUNERT: Had this occurred frequently in the past?

Colonel BRATTON: Yes, sir.

General GRUNERT: So it was just a normal thing to say, "Here is a pouch that has got important stuff in it"?

Colonel BRATTON: No. When I thought that the Chief of Staff should see it at once, I made a point of telling Smith so, and he would say, "All right, I will sent it out by a special courier."

General GRUNERT: Did that happen very frequently?

Colonel BRATTON: It happened several times; yes, sir.

General GRUNERT: Now, about this time, most everything was important?

Colonel BRATTON: Most everything was important; and I was further urged on by the fact that if the Chief of Naval Operations ever got one of these things before General Marshall did and called him up to discuss it on the telephone with him, and the General hadn't gotten his copy, we all caught hell.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Percy L. Greaves was the chief of the minority staff on the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack. He authored two books about Pearl Harbor: *The Real Infamy of Pearl Harbor* and *Pearl Harbor: The Seeds and Fruits of Infamy*. He served for two years as the research director of the Republican National Committee. He

graduated in economics from Columbia University and New York University. He was a well-known free-market economist and for two years was the financial editor of the *United States News* (which later became *U.S. News & World Report*).