

Encyclopedia of Leadership

PEARL HARBOR

Perhaps once or twice in a century; a nation undergoes an event so unexpected, so shocking, and so traumatic that the event becomes a turning point in history. One such event was the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. In the perspective of history, the span of sixty-plus years is only a flash, but it is a long time in the life of an individual. Those people who remember Pearl Harbor as a direct experience have reached senior-citizen status, yet the subject continues to fascinate them and their descendants. Why?

No doubt one reason is the irrational but undeniable glamour of defeat; the people of the United States are winners, but they remember and sympathize with their losers. Another reason is the puzzle aspect. The merciful years have erased much of the pain and anger, but the subject remains an eternal double-crossed puzzle in which the clues help fill in the story, and the story helps provide the clues. However, instead of clarifying the subject, the years have compounded it.

How could it have happened? How could the Japanese have sailed more than 4,800 kilometers across the Pacific without being seen? How could they have developed a torpedo that would not sink in the mud of Pearl Harbor (which was less than 10 meters deep)? How could they have

developed a bomb weighing 780 kilograms that would penetrate the deck of a battleship? How could they have refueled three times in the cold northern Pacific on the way to their target? How could they have avoided air detection when they came within 400 kilometers of their target? How could the Japanese have caught the U.S. fleet napping at Pearl Harbor, the Gibraltar of Asia, and sink or damage 8 battleships, kill more than 2,400 men, wound 1,178, destroy almost 300 aircraft and damage another 128 but not get caught? Their losses were only 29 aircraft, 129 men, 1 major submarine, and 5 midget submarines.

Where were the U.S. carriers? What about radar? How much did President Franklin D. Roosevelt know? What about the Japanese submarines caught in the harbor? Was there a third wave? Why did the Japanese not finish off the U.S. fleet when they could have? How about the breaking of the Japanese code? Could it happen again? These and other questions are still being asked and studied more than six decades later.

The myth that still exists today sprang from these questions: that the Japanese could not have bombed Pearl Harbor without outside help; that leaders in Washington had access to the Japanese secret code and, led by President Roosevelt, knew about the impending attack but allowed it to happen because they needed an

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excuse to get the United States into World War II.

However, none of that myth has ever been proven, and the debate continues. After more than sixty years, most historians have concluded that Japan's success was due to its excellent leadership and that the U.S. failures were due to poor leadership. The Japanese were simply better at the operational level.

Japanese Comdr. Isoroku Yamamoto had to report only to the naval minister, Vice Adm. Shigetaro Shimada, and to Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. Shimada, Yamamoto's friend and colleague, had just been promoted to his position, and Yamamoto had just replaced him as commander of the Japanese Navy. The prime minister usually allowed Yamamoto to do what he wanted. Yamamoto was responsible to no one else, nor did he have to coordinate any of his operational activities with the Japanese army.

On the other hand, the two U.S. commanders at Pearl Harbor, Lt. Gen. Walter Short and Adm. Husband Kimmel, had to coordinate their activities between themselves and their two separate staffs. They then had to answer in Washington to the chief of naval operations, Admiral Harold R. Stark, and to the Army chief of staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, who in turn had to report to the secretary of war, Henry Stimson, and the secretary of the

navy, Frank Knox. If one includes the leaders of both houses of Congress and President Roosevelt, plus the free U.S. press, it becomes clear that it was much harder for Short and Kimmel to make decisions and to coordinate their functions. After an operation began, Yamamoto could make his decisions with his own staffs and effect change. The United States had to work together at all levels, and this became its Achilles heel.

DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

There is no shortage of books on leadership and definitions of leadership. Leaders and the characteristics of leadership are constantly being defined and redefined. These definitions and characteristics have crossed over into many disciplines, creating an absence of consensus. In the field of military science, people debate leadership and the role of the leader. These debates include the leader versus the manager, whether leadership is an art or a science, and whether leadership is inherited or can be taught.

Perhaps Omar Bradley, a famous U.S. general in World War II, said it best when he wrote that leadership for the military is intangible and no weapon invented can replace it. He felt that it is most common and least understood; that it may be directed or undirected. Searching the literature of

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the field, the most common definition for military leadership is that a good leader is one who is able to motivate others to do things they normally would not do. In the military context, leadership is motivating soldiers and sailors to accomplish their mission.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

The literature also contains a spate of characteristics of good leadership. Among them are intelligence, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, integrity, knowledge of job, ability to delegate, vision, communication skills, social awareness, self-confidence, ability to adapt to change, coordination, initiative, will, values, decision-making ethic, motivation, trust, ability to take charge, direction, clear idea, self-discipline, willingness to sacrifice, physical fitness, knowledge of their followers, knowledge of the enemy, character, courage, and competence. Four of these will be used to depict the variation among the commanders involved with Pearl Harbor and to analyze why the Japanese were more successful. The four characteristics are vision, knowledge of job (understanding the mission), ability to delegate (choice of staff), and communication skills.

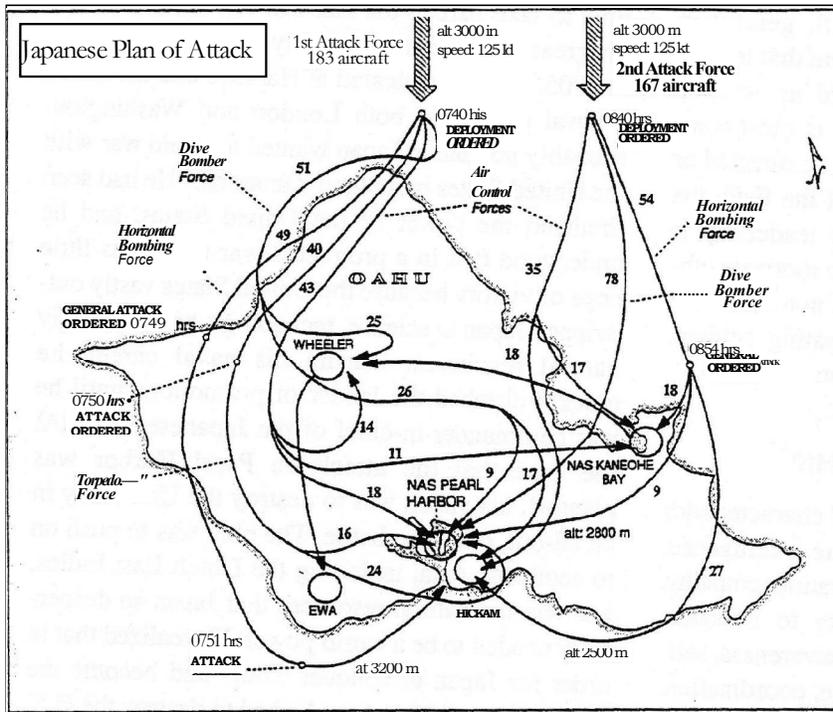
In the military, the commander is in charge and is responsible for what happens—the good and the bad. When one wins, one gets the credit, and

when one loses, one takes the blame. Although many men can be praised and blamed for the Pearl Harbor fiasco, Yamamoto more than any other man was responsible for the Japanese success at Pearl Harbor. Husband Kimmel and Walter Short have to bear the blame for the U.S. failure. These three men were the major actors on that day that Roosevelt dubbed "a day of infamy."

YAMAMOTO: BACKGROUND & VISION

Isoroku Yamamoto was born in 1880 and graduated from the Japanese Naval Academy in 1904, just in time to take part in the Russian-Japanese War and the great Japanese naval victory at Tsushima Straits in 1905. He was educated at Harvard and served as a naval attaché in both London and Washington. Probably no man in Japan wanted to avoid war with the United States more than Yamamoto. He had seen firsthand the power of the United States, and he understood that in a protracted war there was little hope of victory because the United States vastly outstripped Japan in science, technology, and especially natural resources. During his naval career, he quickly climbed the ladder of promotions until he was commander-in-chief of the Japanese Navy. At the time that the attack on Pearl Harbor was planned, his vision was to destroy the U.S. Navy in an all-out, one-time

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The plan by which the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Source: D. M. Goldstein; used with permission.

battle. The plan was to push on to Southeast Asia, including the Dutch East Indies, and win the natural resources that Japan so desperately needed to be a world power. He realized that in order for Japan to conquer China and become the hegemonic power in Asia, he had to destroy the U.S. fleet, which was located at Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii.

The British and the French, having taken their hits in 1940 from the Germans, were no longer viable foes. Many of Yamamoto's colleagues believed that his plan was impossible, but he pursued it to its conclusion and several times threatened to resign if he did not get his way. Although not a pilot, he had been closely

associated with naval aviation and had realized its great potential for years. He became an advocate of naval air power through the positions to which he was successively appointed, including commander of the First Carrier Division and director of the Aeronautical Department of the Japanese Navy.

When he became commander of the Japanese Navy in 1940, Yamamoto fought for two essential points: a

heavy emphasis on air warfare and the advancement of the battle line toward Hawaii so that he could fight the great all-out battle. His plan was simple: destroy the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, then move south and either sue for peace (wishly hoping that the United States would have no stomach to fight a war against him) or, if the United States chose to fight, use the resources he then would have at his disposal to engage in a protracted war, which he knew would be almost impossible to win. Thus, he set out to implement his plan.

Yamamoto specified that his fleet would have carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, but no battleships to slow him down. His plan was predicated on the maximum

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use of air power: His fleet would have the greatest concentration of air power ever assembled. His plan called for six aircraft carriers with over 360 airplanes. He appointed an excellent staff led by Comdr. Minoru Genda and Comdr. Mitsuo Fuchida. Yamamoto was a charismatic leader who was determined to get his way, and when he put his plan into motion, he never looked back.

HUSBAND KIMMEL: BACKGROUND AND VISION

Husband Kimmel was born in 1882 in Henderson, Kentucky. In 1900, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, where he excelled in navigation, seamanship, ordnance, and languages.

He was rated second in his class in efficiency. Throughout his naval career, his insistence on order, routine, and efficiency was his hallmark. He graduated thirteenth in his class of sixty-two in 1904.

Nothing in his early career indicated the bad luck that he was to have by being at Pearl Harbor at the wrong time. In fact, his career up to Pearl Harbor was highly successful. In 1933 he realized the dream of every naval officer: command of a battleship, the New York. Later he went on to command a battle force of several battleships. Three elements stood out in his early career before he

obtained flag rank: an excellent record in gunnery, important staff assignments, and a solid background in battleships.

In 1939, Kimmel was assigned as a budget officer to the Navy Department, where he became known as an excellent administrator. After several assignments in that department, he was assigned late in 1939 aboard the Honolulu as commander of a cruiser battle force where he did an outstanding job, demonstrating a keen knowledge of naval history, tactics, and strategy. By 1941, just prior to Pearl Harbor, his fitness reports bulged with high ratings and predictions of great things to come. When he was appointed commander-in-chief of the U.S. fleet, he was selected over many men who were his senior. Although he had some creative imagination, he was not a big advocate of air power, and he assumed his new command as a highly regarded, intelligent man who demanded and got the respect of his subordinates but who lacked a genuine sense of humor.

Although equal in rank in the command structure to Yamamoto, Kimmel did not have the free rein that his adversary had, and he had constantly to confer with Washington on most important matters. He was mainly a battleship advocate, and his vision of the role of aircraft carriers and the role of the U.S. fleet in Hawaii was completely different from

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the Japanese commander's.

WALTER SHORT: BACKGROUND AND VISION

Kimmel's counterpart for the army was Lt. Gen. Walter Short. Born in Fillmore, Illinois, in 1880, Short graduated from the University of Illinois in 1902. In March of that year, he received a direct commission, and for almost forty years his personal history exemplified a typical infantry officer of his generation. He spent his early career in various stateside positions, mainly in charge of training. Just prior to World War I, he accompanied the Sixteenth Infantry Division to Mexico to fight Pancho Villa under Gen. George Pershing. In 1917, during World War I, he racked up a respectable record performing duty with the French and the British forces. Short was an excellent weapons officer, and he helped train officers in machine gun training. He stayed on after the armistice until 1919 as officer in charge of the Third Army's training unit.

Between the world wars, Short was an old-line army officer who attended the Army Command and General Staff College and the Army War College. He did several tours of duty in Washington and in the field and in 1937 was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. With the outbreak of World War II, he received assignments to command Fort

Hamilton in New York and Camp Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina, both training bases. Finally, he was sent to Pearl Harbor. There was no controversy about his assignment, unlike Kimmel's. He was not promoted over others, and this was to be his final assignment before retirement.

In summarizing Short's career, one gets the picture of a confident, capable, conscientious officer, neither brilliant nor overly aggressive but competent and honest enough to do a good job. The one drawback might be that he had too many assignments involving training missions. Such a background could suggest that he might mistake the shadow for substance and regard training as an end in itself. Ultimately, in fact, he never understood that his mission was to defend the fleet. He thought that it would be to defend Hawaii from ground attack and sabotage.

His failure to recognize this became one of the major causes of the catastrophe at Pearl Harbor -- the unclarity of the commanders' understanding of their mission. Both Kimmel and Short would have major problems in their interpretation and vision about what to do on 7 December, and both in essence would pursue their own ends without meaningful coordination. Yamamoto and his staff would not.

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KNOWLEDGE OF JOB (UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION): YAMAMOTO

Yamamoto understood his mission and certainly planned well for it, but even he had a blind spot. He failed to realize the strategic necessity of destroying the oil and fuel storage tanks and the dry docks at Pearl Harbor. Had he done so, this catastrophic damage to the United States would have set it back for six months because most refueling and repairs would have had to be done at San Diego, California, and other stateside bases nearly 4,800 kilometers away. His not destroying the dry docks and fuel storage tanks allowed the U.S. fleet to refuel and repair at Pearl Harbor, greatly reducing the logistic, supply, and maintenance problems.

In all other aspects, Yamamoto's plan was almost flawless, and the technological advances in dive bombing, torpedo bombing, refueling, and using air power were brilliant. He and his staff expected to lose at least two aircraft carriers, and they lost none. The final outcome was successful beyond his wildest dream.

KNOWLEDGE OF JOB (UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION): KIMMEL

Kimmel was dedicated. He was obsessed with the physical part of his job, and he seemed to feel guilty if he

were not on the job every minute of the day. As one staff officer commented, Kimmel spent more time and money on paint and polish than the Japanese spent on fuel. He devoted so much of his time to details that he left himself little time to think, to analyze relationships of events, or to see the bigger picture and grasp broad meanings. He left little room for the intangibles of command -- intuition and flair -- such things that separate great leaders from merely competent ones.

When he received a warning message on 27 November that indicated that the Japanese were moving toward Southeast Asia and that war might be imminent, he continued training. He failed to initiate long-range patrols; he failed to put up his submarine nets; he failed to take into account that the Japanese just might attack his ships in port. He suffered from the defects of his virtues. The very qualities that could have made him a real fighting admiral -- physical courage, effectiveness, and offensive mind-set worked against him in this situation, which called for dynamic defensive action.

KNOWLEDGE OF JOB (UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION): SHORT

Short did not understand that his mission was to defend the fleet -- not Pearl Harbor -- from attack, and he

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did not think much of air power. He frittered away some of his resources by using many pilots in non-flying jobs such as personnel, logistics, and communications. Because he was worried about sabotage, he sought to protect his airplanes by lining them up bumper-to-bumper, thus making them easy targets for the Japanese pilots. The planes were so vulnerable during the attack that most were destroyed before they could get off the ground -- like bowling pins hit by a bowling ball. His understanding of radar was even worse. He failed to communicate with his men at the radar sites or to have his staff explain radar's proper use.

The first wave of Japanese planes was picked up on the radar screen approximately one hour before the attack at about 212 kilometers from Pearl Harbor. This sighting was reported to Short's operation center but never passed on to him. Failure to understand the mission and failure to understand the new technology were two of his most grievous errors.

ABILITY TO DELEGATE (CHOICE OF STAFF): YAMAMOTO

Although Yamamoto was the one person most responsible for conceiving the plan to attack Pearl Harbor and using his dynamic personality and incontestable prestige to push it through to acceptance, its

success depended upon the workings of his staff and the efforts of dozens of other people. Here Yamamoto was at his best. Choosing his people carefully, he assembled the cream of the Japanese Navy, and he delegated to this group the operation and minute planning of the whole operation. One cannot say that without this excellent staff he would have failed, but without them it would not have been the same. The best and brightest were assigned to the mission: the best brains and the best equipment, the *crème de la crème* of Japan. To these men Yamamoto gave his trust. He delegated and trusted them to come up with the plan and its implementation. Although he was consulted and made some input, they did the spade work.

Comdr. Minoru Genda was the foremost planner and Comdr. Mitsuo Fuchida the flight leader. Under them were superb staffs who led and were never micromanaged. They alone did the planning, organizing, and coordination of the attack. They worked in close harmony, spent hours rehearsing, took nothing for granted, and were readily accessible to each other. They were the major reason the attack was so successful.

ABILITY TO DELEGATE (CHOICE OF STAFF): SHORT

When Short assumed command, he waved aside a report prepared for him by his predecessor, Maj. Gen.

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Charles D. Heron, who later testified before the congressional committee investigating the attack that Short touched base with him over the defense plans but never asked him his opinion about the true threat. Short took the position that his job was to defend the island and that the fleet would take care of itself; he fell into the old rut as a training officer and worried more about disrupting his training than coordinating the defense of the island. His staff was afraid of him, and he often went into angry tirades when he was not happy. His staff was not of the caliber of Yamamoto's or even Kimmel's. Short seldom delegated and very seldom informed his staff of war plan changes. He used his staff daily to train. His intelligence officer was a poor choice and did not even have a security clearance. In his office he had information, found after the attack, that, had he processed it properly, would have helped Short and perhaps even tipped him off that something was going to happen. This intelligence officer, Lt. Col. Kendall J. Fielder, was given the position not because he was good but solely because he was a friend of Short.

Instead of taking his chief of staff, Col. Walter C. Phillips, to meetings with him, Short took other friends. He seldom attended departmental meetings and did not have a good grasp of what his intelligence and operations officers were

doing. He assumed that they were coordinating and getting the information from each other, but this was not the case, and they were often frustrated. There was little exchange of information among his staff members, and he dealt with each on a one-on-one basis. He attended staff meetings only when he thought that there were important matters to discuss and then did not stay long. Hence, there was a breakdown in communications between the staff and the commanding general that would prove costly.

ABILITY TO DELEGATE (CHOICE OF STAFF): KIMMEL

Kimmel acted just the opposite of Short. He conferred almost daily with his staff members, who never hesitated to tell him what they thought, although he did not listen to them at key times. For instance, a joint report by Rear Adm. Patrick N. L. Bellinger, commander of the naval air arm, and Maj. Gen. Frederik L. Martin, commander of the army air forces in Hawaii, predicted the attack and how the Japanese would execute it. A later report by Col. William E. Farthing, commander of Hickam Air Force Base, also predicted the attack and how it would possibly take place. Both reports placed the attack on a Sunday morning.

Kimmel's intelligence officers also warned him several times of the impending attack, but he ignored

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them. In addition to warnings that relations between Japan and the United States were about to break off, U.S. newspapers, some as early as 1931, had predicted war between the two countries and discussed problems between them. The Honolulu Star Bulletin News predicted an attack one week before it actually happened.

Coordination between Kimmel's staff and Short's staff was almost nonexistent, and Kimmel failed to pass on to Short more than a dozen important messages that contained information that Short should have received. Kimmel never briefed and seldom talked to Adm. Claude Bloch, commander of the Fourteenth Naval District, who was responsible for the fleet's defense. The lines of communication between his air arm commander, Rear Adm. Patrick Bellinger, and Bloch, as well as between Martin and Bloch, were nonexistent. Short and Kimmel played golf together, but there was little coordination between the two. Yamamoto had none of these problems.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: YAMAMOTO

When the charismatic Yamamoto spoke, the navy and the country listened. He and his staff were friendly and approachable. After the plan was formulated, it was clear and concise. All aspects, from

maintenance to operations to logistics, were coordinated. Each group pilot and team practiced and knew what to do; in fact, if anything they practiced too long and too much and maybe underestimated potential outcomes and what they could do. The lines of command went from Yamamoto to Vice Adm. Chuichi Nagumo, the task force commander, to Fuchida, the leader of the attack, through Genda and the staff. The navy department in Tokyo and the ships at sea had no problem communicating, even though the ships maintained radio silence and their equipment was sealed so that they could not broadcast in the open. They communicated by means of searchlights and flags.

The planning, training, and logistics before the attack and the communications among the participants during the attack proceeded with few problems.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: KIMMEL AND SHORT

Many of the problems for the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor revolved around communications coordination and the failure of the leaders to communicate with and understand each other. The commanders failed to confer not only with each other but also with their senior officers. For example, the army had one code alert system, which went from one to three, "one" being full alert and "three"

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being sabotage alert. The navy had a system set up just the opposite, where "code one" meant sabotage and "code three" meant combat or full alert. The two arms were supposed to have the same codes, so people in Washington thought that when Short went on code three he was on full alert, not sabotage alert.

The leaders and staff in Washington assumed that Kimmel had all the information that they themselves had, and he, in turn, assumed that the leaders and staff in Washington knew what he was doing. In reality, neither was sure what the other intended or was doing.

Hence, Pearl Harbor for the United States was full of examples of failure to communicate: interpreting messages incorrectly, making incorrect assumptions about what the field commanders and staff knew, failing to follow up on orders, issuing too many classified messages, which then had to be declassified, having rigid procedures such as locking up ordnance on alert so that it would take a command order to get to the ammunition, being too complacent when on alert, fostering jealousy between the naval and air forces and between the army and navy, and failing to define authority and responsibility. Of all the characteristics of good leadership and command not exhibited at Pearl Harbor, failure to communicate, coordinate, and understand orders and

procedures probably was the major reason for the U.S. failure.

THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

"Pearl Harbor never dies and no living person has seen the end of it." So Admiral Kimmel's lawyer told this writer some forty years ago. Never has anyone made a truer statement about Pearl Harbor. The arguments about who, what, when, and where at Pearl Harbor will probably go on ad infinitum. Yamamoto and his staff were extremely well organized. They planned, coordinated, managed, directed, and used the principles of war, such as concentration, objective, security, and surprise, better than their U.S. counterparts. Much of their success had to do with the nature of their government. In Japan's monarchical system of government, Yamamoto had to answer only to two people: Prime Minister Hideki Tojo and Emperor Hirohito. Neither one ever challenged him: Tojo was afraid of him, and the emperor respected him. Yamamoto did not have to worry, as Kimmel and Short did, about the constraints of a democratic society. Perhaps it is not fair to judge them as equals, but among the characteristics and factors of leadership such as vision, communications, decision making, and general application of the principles of war, Japan was far ahead of the United States.

Yamamoto's plan had one major

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flaw—it did not go far enough. Had he planned to destroy the dry docks and fuel dumps, he would have done far more damage. Nevertheless, from a tactical point of view it was still a huge success. From a strategic point of view, however, it was another story. He made a fatal miscalculation in attacking the United States because he awoke a sleeping giant. He had studied and lived in the United States, and he knew that he could not win a protracted war against a country so endowed in resources and technology, but he did it anyway. He gambled and lost. The tactics drove the strategy, and hence, although Pearl Harbor was a tactical victory for the Japanese, it was a strategic mistake. Despite this mistake, Yamamoto displayed all the characteristics that make a leader great; even though he lost in the end, he will go down in history as a winner because he was a great charismatic leader.

Kimmel and Short were good men but not good leaders. They lacked vision, charisma, and the ability to plan, coordinate, direct, and control. They made errors of omission and commission, and although they were not solely responsible for the failure to be ready for the attack on Pearl Harbor, they were unfortunately there. In the military the old axiom always holds true: The man in charge is the one who gets either the credit or the

blame. Kimmel and Short were in charge, and they failed to produce. They and their staffs made mistake after mistake, from using reconnaissance poorly to lifting the protective submarine nets in the harbor, from misinterpreting messages to implementing a confusing alert system, from keeping ammunition locked up in the armories to lining the planes up bumper to bumper and shooting down their own fighters and bombers. In the final analysis, on that Sunday morning of 7 December 1941, at dawn they slept.

—Donald M. Goldstein

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