

1996

Scapegoats: A Defense of Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor

Robert J. Cressman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Cressman, Robert J. (1996) "Scapegoats: A Defense of Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 49 : No. 3 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol49/iss3/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

the Second World War. It follows that the strongest aspect of this work is his grasp of details for submarine and ASW operations during the two great wars of the first half of the century. Although he adds little to his previous work, this presentation is thorough, readable, and almost always on the mark.

The author's expertise in other areas is less evident, however, and the absence of detailed analysis and footnotes detracts from the credibility of his more controversial conclusions. For example, he asserts that the main British and German battle fleets spent most of World War I in port due to "the unexpected deterrent effect of the submarine." A few pages later, he claims that the main Austrian fleet remained in port to serve as "a 'fleet in being,' to offset which the enemy would always have to keep on hand superior forces that would therefore be unable to operate elsewhere." He examines no other plausible explanations, nor does he offer any references for these two seemingly inconsistent positions.

Other such unsupported conclusions are presented as fact throughout the book. For example, the reader is instructed (without evidence) that "after the Cold War the main preoccupation of American submariners . . . was to justify the retention of such a stupendously expensive fleet." The author simplistically claims that since the 1960s the two principal tactical targets of the Soviet-Russian submarine force have been American aircraft carriers and SSBNs, not mentioning at all the bastion defense-in-depth for Soviet-Russian SSBNs. Also, van der Vat entirely dismisses the nuclear deterrence theory in a single paragraph, denying that

nuclear deterrence contributed to peace between the two superpowers. He cites as evidence the limited wars against proxies in which both superpowers found themselves embroiled. He also argues that the submarine, a weapons delivery platform that "has matched or overtaken . . . the battleship and battle-cruiser, the aircraft-carrier and cruiser, the strategic bomber and even the land-based missile," has become "a white elephant, if not a strategic dinosaur."

The absence of rigorous analysis is a serious flaw of this work. *Stealth at Sea* may have a place on the bookshelf of the general reader interested in World War I and World War II submarine history, but there is little here for the serious military analyst or the professional naval officer. The definitive history of the submarine has yet to be written.

DAVID HILDEBRANDT

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Beach, Edward L. *Scapegoats: A Defense of Kimmel and Short at Pearl Harbor.*

Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 212pp. \$24.95

On 7 December 1941, the devastating success of the Japanese naval air attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, as well as on nearby air and military installations, resulted in the relief from command of both Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, commander of the U.S. Army's Hawaiian Department. In light of the many subsequent investigations

into the disaster, one finds it incredible that Captain Edward L. Beach, USN, Ret., can state in his 1995 publication that the United States has “never come to grips with the question of who was responsible . . . for the unawareness of our troops and naval forces in Hawaii” (p. 1).

There was more dereliction of duty in Washington, Beach believes, than on Oahu. His view suggests a “revisionist” theory that, simply put, declares that those in Washington (reading Japan’s high-level diplomatic [PURPLE] cipher) possessed information that could have alerted Hawaii to impending danger but failed to share it with Kimmel and Short. Beach faults Washington for not warning them.

Yet on 27 November 1941 a “war warning” was sent; on 1 December, the Japanese navy abruptly changed its call signs; and as late as 2 December Kimmel’s fleet intelligence officer confessed that he had no idea where the Japanese carriers were. A destroyer and one of the seven (not one, as Beach states on page 136) PBY Catalinas aloft on 7 December attacked a midget submarine operating off the harbor entrance around 0640. Even more damning is the evidence furnished by Short’s early warning radar, which actually detected the incoming Japanese planes around 0720. It was disregarded. Commanders possessing even a rudimentary concern for the defense of their forces should have detected clues of hostile intent. Edward S. Miller’s *War Plan Orange* speculates that Kimmel’s prevailing obsession with the offensive so obscured his vision that the admiral did not in fact make the proper defen-

sive deployment directed by the warning of 27 November. Beach contends, however, that Kimmel and Short were “wrongly used by circumstances far beyond their control, and in which they had no part.”

Beach declares that his goal is to “reinterpret” history, not to revise or rewrite it. To do so, however, the author must thoroughly know his sources. Beach does not. The nature of the errors in *Scapagoats* prompts one to wonder how the author can “reinterpret” the larger issues when he is so careless with the details. For example, concerning the transfer of ships to the Atlantic Fleet in the spring of 1941, Beach states that the carrier *Wasp* was “held in the Atlantic and employed in the support of Malta” (p. 14)—something that did not happen until the spring of 1942. He gives the arrival of the Japanese envoy, Kurusu Saburo, in Washington as on 4 November 1941—an interesting feat since that diplomat did not leave Manila until 8 November (p. 30). It was the carrier HMS *Indomitable*, not the *Illustrious*, that was earmarked to accompany HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* on their ill-fated mission to the Far East (p. 92), and he refers to the stores ship *Antares* as a “small repair ship” (p. 100). The author also contradicts himself when he states that Pearl Harbor, “the principal U.S. Navy base in the Pacific Ocean,” had been put out of action by the Japanese attack (p. 102); soon thereafter, he asserts that the United States benefited from Japan’s failure to put the base out of action by not attacking tank farms or repair facilities (p. 107).

There is no bibliography but rather an annotated list of "references" that range from the thirty-nine-volume *Congressional Hearings*, through secondary works of varying quality and applicability, to personal correspondence. Two important bibliographic omissions are Forrest Pogue's biography of General George C. Marshall, and B. Mitchell Simpson's biography of Admiral Harold R. Stark.

Scapegoats is an unfortunate title, reflecting a misunderstanding of Leviticus 16. Far from being mute creatures sacrificed or made to bear the sins of others, Kimmel and Short suffered for their own sins of omission. Short seems to have understood this, but Kimmel's stubborn refusal to admit any responsibility for his role in the Pearl Harbor disaster demonstrates that he never did.

ROBERT J. CRESSMAN
Naval Historical Center

Mullins, Wayman C., ed. *1942, Issue in Doubt: Symposium on the War in the Pacific by the Admiral Nimitz Museum*. Austin, Texas: Eakin, 1994. 310pp. \$29.95

"The reader will find this book fascinating and uniquely informative," promises Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, former Chief of Naval Operations, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a contributor to this work. Overall, this is an accurate observation about a book that addresses one of the most critical years in the Pacific War. It covers the dark days following the Pearl Harbor disaster, to the second half of that year, when the Allies blunted the

Japanese offensives and gradually seized the strategic initiative.

In March 1992, veterans of the Pacific battles of 1942, along with a group of distinguished writers and historians, gathered in San Antonio, Texas, to take part in a symposium to ensure that the lessons of that fateful year would be recorded for future generations. They did not rehash strategies and tactics of the Pacific but instead looked at the impact that the first full year of war for the United States had on the human element. Wayman Mullins has compiled a collection of essays presented at that symposium, held in the Admiral Nimitz Museum.

In the preface and in short introductory comments for each essay, Mullins serves as moderator, placing each narrative in context. All the major battles of 1942 are examined. Roughly a third of the book deals with the grimmest portion of 1942, when the demise of the American-British-Dutch-Australian ("ABDA") command, the fall of Singapore and the Philippines, and a string of similar disasters made the Japanese appear invincible. The remaining essays are concerned with the gradual turning of the tide at the Coral Sea and Midway, and on New Guinea and Guadalcanal.

If this were all the book had to offer, however, it would be nothing more than a review of previous works. What makes it unique is its treatment of the human dimension. For example, the role of women caught in the maelstrom of the Pacific in 1942, largely ignored in earlier histories, is given adequate treatment, as is the Japanese view-