

1995

Days of Infamy

John B. Lundstrom

John Costello

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

Recommended Citation

Lundstrom, John B. and Costello, John (1995) "Days of Infamy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 48 : No. 4 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol48/iss4/23>

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, vol. III, *British Intelligence The Second World War* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979–1990).

ROBERT W. COSGRIFF
Commander, U.S. Navy, Ret.
American Military University

Costello, John. *Days of Infamy*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994. 448pp. \$24

The flood of books and articles about the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, i.e., the traumatic entry of the United States into the Pacific War, shows no sign of abating. Whetted by documents—particularly those on intelligence—still being grudgingly declassified in Washington and London, historians are laboring to discover what the principal players actually knew and when they knew it. Opinion is bitterly divided over whether the commanders at Pearl Harbor, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and General Walter C. Short (both of whom received harsh official censure), or President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his closest Washington advisers, General George C. Marshall and Admiral Harold R. Stark, caused one of America's worst defeats.

One of the latest efforts to assess where the blame for Pearl Harbor lies is John Costello's *Days of Infamy*. In two of his previous works, *The Pacific War, 1941–1945* (1981) and (as coauthor) the prize-winning memoir of Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton, "*And I Was There*": *Pearl Harbor and Midway—Breaking the Secrets* (1985), Costello landed squarely in the Kimmel-Short camp. Now he has broadened the scope of his inquiry to

include the overall Allied strategy in the Far East, especially the destruction on 8 December at Clark Field on Luzon of nearly half the Far East Air Force, which so contributed to the fall of the Philippines. For that reason Costello makes plural the now-familiar reference to the Pearl Harbor attack—"days of infamy." To the leaders in Washington and London Costello adds the arrogant but indecisive commander in the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur, as one of those most accountable for the December debacle.

Costello contends that in the summer of 1941 American strategists, enthralled by exaggerated claims for the efficacy of land-based air power, reversed their traditional strategy by shifting the entire center of gravity of Pacific defense five thousand miles westward from Hawaii. This projection of American power to the far more vulnerable Philippines led to an agreement with Britain for mutual defense in the Far East should Japan attack either power's territories. Despite the fact that American forces would not complete the necessary buildup until the spring of 1942, Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill pursued a hard line against Japan that ill served their defense strategy when war broke out early.

Thus in Costello's view the American senior commanders relied unrealistically upon the modest number of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bombers in the Philippines—not the Pacific Fleet's battleships and carriers based at Pearl Harbor—as their principal offensive weapon against the Japanese. For Costello this interpretation serves two purposes. First, it

reduces the strategic role and hence the responsibility of Kimmel and Short in Hawaii, and second, it highlights MacArthur's failure to use properly the valuable resources entrusted to him.

MacArthur deservedly takes his lumps for responding so slowly to the outbreak of war and losing so many aircraft to surprise attack. Yet Costello's criticisms of MacArthur's conduct in the Formosa bombing controversy reveal nothing new. To some extent, the author has set up MacArthur as a straw man to allow the Hawaiian commanders off the hook for being so surprised in their placid backwater.

Costello greatly understates the value of the Pacific Fleet as a deterrent for Japan. Of course, it is obvious in hindsight that by 1941 the old American battleships were useless for modern naval warfare, but did Kimmel or the Japanese think so? Although citing Edward S. Miller's superb *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (1991), Costello gingerly avoids the true implications of Miller's revelations about Kimmel's prewar battle plan, other than to offer vague statements about proposals for immediate attacks on Japanese bases in the Marshalls. In fact, Miller demonstrated that Kimmel (a "black-shoe" battleship man to the bottom of his soles) hoped to entice the Combined Fleet into a battleship action off Wake Island. An admiral who thought his battlewagons would prevail at sea despite superior numbers of Japanese carriers would have little worry that these selfsame flattops could threaten his supposedly well protected lair.

The strength of Costello's book is its wealth of recently released information on cryptography. He provides a cogent discussion of U.S. and British efforts to break the Japanese naval cipher JN-25b and elaborates on what both countries might have known of Japanese intentions prior to the war. Costello details the intelligence that Washington failed to provide Kimmel and that, in the author's opinion, would have led to greater vigilance at Pearl Harbor. Yet in noting that Kimmel chose not to inform his colleague Short of the imminent destruction by the Japanese of their cipher machines, Costello doubts that the general would have acted any differently had he known. Perhaps the leaders in Washington felt the same way about Kimmel.

Costello is rightly outraged at the cruel treatment of Kimmel and Short, in contrast to the heroic stature accorded to MacArthur despite his many blunders in the Philippines. MacArthur should also have been quietly relieved of command, but two wrongs do not make a right. The true secret of Pearl Harbor and the disaster of the Philippines is the gross underestimation of the Imperial Japanese Navy by all Allied commanders from Roosevelt and Churchill on down, but for which only Kimmel and Short suffered.

JOHN B. LUNDSTROM
Milwaukee Public Museum

Loxton, Bruce with Coulthard-Clark, Chris. *The Shame of Savo: The Sinking of HMAS Canberra—Anatomy of a Naval Disaster*. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1994. 319pp. A\$34.95