

# **Six Myths of the Traditional Pearl Harbor Story**

## **Six Myths of the Traditional Pearl Harbor Story**

Michael T. Griffith

2012

@All Rights Reserved

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, continues to be a subject of intense interest and controversy. The six myths discussed herein, though long refuted, are still repeated in many books and articles that defend the traditional Pearl Harbor story. The basic elements of the traditional story are that President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and other senior government officials had no idea the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbor, and that the attack caught our forces there by surprise and did so much damage because the commanders in Hawaii failed to do their duty. The six myths examined in this article are not the only myths of the traditional version of the attack, but they are among the most prominent ones found in traditionalist writings on the subject. These myths are frequently stated with a tone of absolute certainty, but, as we shall see, they are indeed myths.

**MYTH:** There is nothing suspicious about the fact that General George Marshall's crucial December 7 warning to Pearl Harbor was sent from the War Department's message center about an hour before the attack

occurred.

**FACT:** General Marshall could have simply picked up the scrambler phone on his desk and warned the Army commander in Hawaii, General Walter Short. Marshall could have also used the Navy radio system or the FBI radio system to contact Short. In fact, Admiral Harold Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, even suggested to Marshall that he use the Navy radio system to notify the Navy commanders in the Pacific, including Admiral Husband Kimmel in Hawaii, but Marshall refused.

And what about the fact that Marshall's warning was not even sent as a priority message and was not even marked as urgent?

**MYTH:** The fact that General Marshall's warning message was sent via commercial telegram is no reason to suspect foul play. Marshall intended for the message to be sent via Army radio from the War Department's message center. However, atmospheric conditions prevented radio communications between D.C. and Pearl Harbor, and so the message was sent as a commercial telegram. The choice of commercial telegram, while possibly not the best means of communication, was chosen for reasons given to the investigations.

**FACT:** The Army Pearl Harbor Board debunked these excuses in 1944:

The Message Center of the War Department, which is charged with the

expeditious handling of messages, decided to send this vital message by commercial R.C.A. instead of War Department radio, because it could not get through on its own net. Why this message was not sent by the Navy radio, by F.B.I. radio, or by telephone, and why these means of possibly more rapid communication were not investigated, is not satisfactorily explained. The explanation that "secrecy" was paramount does not appear to apply to these means. . . .

It is to be noted in this connection that not only was the F.B.I. radio working between Washington and Honolulu on December 6-7, but that testimony shows numerous telephone conversations were conducted just after the attack, over the telephone between Washington and Honolulu. . . .

The status of communications between Washington and Hawaii on the morning of December 7th and for 24 hours previous to that time was as follows: The Hawaiian Department had a scrambler telephone connection direct with Washington by which you could ordinarily get a message through from Washington to Hawaii in ten or fifteen minutes. After the attack on December 7, Colonel Fielder (G-2) himself talked to Washington twice on this phone and received a call from Washington on the same phone. . . .[1]

General Short noted that if Marshall "had used the scrambler phone and gotten it through in ten or fifteen minutes we would probably have gotten more of the import and a clearer idea of danger from that message and we would have had time to warm up the planes and get them in the air to meet any attack." [2]

Admiral Kimmel noted Marshall's inexcusable delay in sending the December 7 warning message and concluded that Marshall was acting in compliance with "high political direction," i.e., FDR. He reached the same conclusion about Admiral Stark's failure to warn him that morning as well. As the Chief of Naval Operations, Stark had the authority to call Kimmel directly. Admiral Kimmel also noted that there were no delays in messages sent between Washington and Pearl Harbor via the Navy radio system on the morning of the attack:

General George C. Marshall's warning . . . was sent in a non-priority status by commercial circuit when he had on his desk a telephone [the scrambler phone] with a direct connection to the commanding general in Hawaii! The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Harold R. Stark, made no attempt to send information about the intercepts or a warning to me via the highly dependable and rapid naval communication service [the Navy radio system], which could also have been used to transmit Marshall's message. There were no delays in the transmission of messages between Washington and Pearl Harbor over the naval communication circuit. During the interval when Marshall's message was in transit, a routine message was received at my headquarters, decoded, and delivered within less than one hour after it was filed in the Navy Department in Washington. An urgent priority message would have been transmitted, decoded, and delivered in less than half an hour.

This lack of action on the part of the War and Navy Departments must have been in accordance with high political direction. . . .[3]

Furthermore, as the Army Pearl Harbor Board noted, Marshall's decision to use only one means of communication to send his warning message violated fundamental military procedure:

It is important to observe that only one means of communication was selected by Washington. That decision violated all rules requiring the use of multiple means of communication in an emergency.[4]

General Short also commented on this strange violation of procedure:

It is standard staff procedure and doctrine that all important or emergency messages should be sent by all available means of communication, which in this case would have included the scrambler telephones which had been frequently used between the War Department and Fort Shafter [Short's office was located on Fort Shafter]. Col. Phillips [Short's chief of staff] and General Marshall did confer by scrambler phone later in the day on December 7.[5]

A group called the Pearl Harbor History Associates (PHHA) runs a website that purports to refute evidence of conspiracy in the Pearl Harbor case. The PHHA's "Myths of Pearl Harbor" article notes that Marshall's message arrived in Hawaii at 7:33 a.m., Hawaii time, 22 minutes before the attack began, and it argues that if there had been a conspiracy no warning would have been sent:

It is important to note that the message *did* arrive in Hawaii at 7:33 am T.H. Time, and was delayed due to the attack. Why send it at all if the conspirators didn't want to tip their hand?[6]

First off, even if the message had arrived at 7:03 instead of 7:33, it would not have been decoded and delivered to Kimmel and Short in time to do any good—because, as mentioned, it was not sent as a priority message and was not even marked as urgent. Furthermore, the time of 7:33 a.m. is the time the message was received at the RCA station in Hawaii. The message was not delivered to the signal office of the Army's Hawaiian Department on Fort Shafter until 11:45 a.m., nearly four hours after the attack, and it was not delivered to the Hawaiian Department's Adjutant General until 2:58 p.m., seven hours after the attack (the attack occurred at 7:55 a.m.) Incidentally, the message was filed at the War Department's message center at 12:01, which means it took 32 minutes just to reach RCA Hawaii. But, again, even if the message had arrived at RCA Hawaii at 7:03, it would not have reached Kimmel and Short in time because it was sent at routine precedence and was not even flagged as urgent.

And it is worth asking again: Why on earth did Marshall not ensure that his crucial warning was sent as a priority message? Why was the message not even marked as urgent? Are we supposed to believe that he was so utterly clueless and incompetent that it did not occur to him to at least ensure the warning was sent as a priority transmission and flagged as urgent?

As for the argument that no warning would have been sent if there had

been a conspiracy, how would Marshall have explained the failure to send any kind of a warning after he had read the decrypted 14-part Japanese diplomatic cable and its accompanying time-of-delivery message? It would have been impossible for him to explain such a decision. He had no choice but to send a warning, so he stalled and stalled as long as he dared before sending it.

Moreover, even when Marshall was informed that his message might take 40 minutes to reach Hawaii, he refused to use the scrambler phone or the Navy radio system. At around 11:55 a.m., Colonel Rufus Bratton, having just delivered Marshall's warning to the War Department's message center, informed Marshall that the message center had advised him that it might take 40 minutes for his warning to reach Hawaii. Even then, Marshall still refused to use the scrambler phone or the Navy radio system. Marshall told the JCC that he recognized that the 1:00 p.m. delivery time for the 14-part Japanese diplomatic cable indicated something momentous might happen at that time or shortly afterward, and he knew that 1:00 p.m. in Washington was 7:30 a.m. in Hawaii. Yet, when informed that his message might take 40 minutes to reach Hawaii, i.e., that it might not get there until 7:35 or 7:40, he did *nothing*. Are we really supposed to believe that Marshall thought his warning would do any good if it arrived *after* the 1:00 p.m. delivery time? The only rational explanation for his failure to use the Navy radio system or the scrambler phone is that he was trying to ensure that his warning would arrive too late to do any good.

**MYTH:** General Marshall had a very good reason for not using the scrambler phone: he feared that the Japanese would overhear his warning if he used the scrambler phone and that they would then know that at least some of their codes had been broken.

**FACT: This makes no sense. Marshall could have told Kimmel and Short to put their forces on alert without saying a word about Japanese intercepts. Or, he could have used a cover story to justify the warning. For example, he could have said that an American maritime ship or a commercial aircraft had spotted Japanese naval ships northwest of Hawaii, or that an American spy in Tokyo had reported that a Japanese fleet was nearing Hawaii. These or similar obvious options would have occurred to any person of even average intelligence. It is very hard to believe they did not occur to Marshall.**

**Marshall also floated the ludicrous claim that another reason he decided against using the scrambler phone was that he was afraid that if the Japanese intercepted his warning they would regard the warning itself as an act of provocation![7]**

**George Morgenstern, an award-winning investigative journalist who served in the Marines during World War II, did not buy Marshall's story:**

**Marshall's explanation that he refrained from using the scrambler telephone for fear of causing "a leak that would embarrass the State Department" [i.e., an incident that the Japanese could misrepresent as a provocation] is illogical for at least two reasons. The first is that if the Japanese had overheard him talking to Short, they would have been left with the same two alternatives they already had in the absence of such a conversation: either to carry through the attack as planned, or to abandon it. The second is that, despite Roosevelt's caution against**

committing any overt act, the War Department on November 27 had issued orders which, if carried out before December 7, would almost certainly have led to hostilities.[8]

Morgenstern was referring to the War Department's November 27 order to conduct aerial reconnaissance in the Marshall Islands to confirm reports of Japanese ship concentrations there. Of course, such a reconnaissance flight could have been far more easily construed as an overt act of "provocation" than a phone call to General Short telling him to put Pearl Harbor's defenses on alert. Senator Homer Ferguson of the 1946 Joint Committee of Congress (JCC) that investigated the Pearl Harbor attack noted this and asked Marshall, "How could the use of a telephone be considered an overt act in comparison with this flight?" Marshall dodged the question with the lame reply that "it was a matter of judgment." [9]

Furthermore, if the concern over avoiding action that could be interpreted as provocative was genuine, why did FDR, on December 2, personally order that three Navy vessels conduct what was obviously an unnecessary and provocative "defensive information patrol" in the Gulf of Siam, directly in the path of the Japanese naval force that was heading down the coast of Indochina? As Morgenstern noted, "This was only one of the long series of attempts by Roosevelt to create an 'incident' which would plunge the United States into war." [10]

**MYTH:** The 14-part Japanese diplomatic cable was not a declaration of war, and did not even break off diplomatic relations. Beyond a recapitulation of Japanese complaints against the U.S., the United

Kingdom, and the Netherlands, there doesn't seem to be any real point to the message at all.

**FACT:** This is an amazingly erroneous claim to make given the facts on record. Among other things, the 14-part message declared that negotiations were over and that any hope of peace in the Pacific had been lost. When President Roosevelt and other senior officials read the decrypts of the first 13 parts of the 14-part message on December 6, they recognized that for all intents and purposes it was a declaration of war, even though it was not labeled as such. In fact, when Roosevelt finished reading the first 13 parts, he turned to his top aide, Harry Hopkins, and said, "This means war." [11]

The fact that the 14-part message was a war declaration is even more evident when we consider the two messages that accompanied it: the code-destruction message and the time-of-delivery message, both of which were decrypted and forwarded with the 14-part message. The code-destruction message directed that the Embassy destroy the remaining cipher machine, all cipher codes, and any other secret documents. Such actions had long been recognized as obvious indications of imminent war. The time-of-delivery message specified that the 14-part message was to be delivered to the American government at exactly 1:00 p.m., Eastern time. As mentioned, 1:00 p.m. on the East Coast was 7:30 a.m. in Hawaii, shortly after sunrise there, and military authorities had long recognized that this was an ideal time for a surprise air attack. The potential implication of the timing was recognized immediately. Historian John Toland:

[Colonel Rufus] Bratton had been frantically trying to locate Marshall for half an hour. For he had received not only the fourteenth part [of the 14-part message] but another message instructing Nomura [the Japanese ambassador] to deliver the entire message to [Secretary of State Cordell] Hull at 1 p.m. He was stunned. One p.m. Washington time would be about sunrise in Hawaii. The implication was staggering. . . . He then guardedly telephoned [General Sherman] Miles at his home [General Miles was the Army G-2, i.e., Army Intelligence]. The general was impressed by Bratton's tone and started off for the Munitions Building. As soon as Miles arrived he accompanied Bratton to [General Leonard] Gerow's office [head of the War Plans Division]. Miles urged that the Philippines, Hawaii, Panama, and the West Coast be alerted. But nothing could be done until Marshall showed up.[12]

So the head of Army Intelligence, General Miles, concluded that the 14-part message and its accompanying time-of-delivery instruction justified sending a warning—not only to Hawaii, but to the West Coast, Panama, and the Philippines.

The JCC minority report noted that the “chief intelligence officers of the Army . . . immediately appreciated” the significance of the 1:00 p.m. delivery time, and that the 14-part message and its delivery instruction led the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Theodore Wilkinson, to urge that the Pacific Fleet be sent a warning. The minority reported noted other important facts on this issue:

The relation of 1 p. m. Washington time to early morning in Hawaii was pointed out to Admiral Stark (Tr., Vol. 49, pp. [9146-9148](#), [9154-9156](#),

[9236-9254](#); Vol. 26, pp. 4679, 4685). It meant dawn in Hawaii—the strategic time at which to launch an attack. Admiral Stark was urged by the Director of Naval Intelligence to send a warning to the fleet (Tr., Vol. 26, p. 4673). The chief intelligence officers of the Army had the "1 p. m. message" by 9 a. m. Washington time, immediately appreciated its significance, but did not succeed in bringing to General Marshall's attention until nearly several hours later (Tr., Vol. 62, pp. [12077-12078](#), [12079-12081](#)). Marshall was horseback riding in Virginia. No action was taken by the Army until he saw and read the 1 p. m. message and related intercepts, at which time he sent a message to General Short which went over commercial facilities and was received after the Pearl Harbor attack (Tr., Vol. 18, pp. [2935-2939](#), Vol. 45, p. 8396). Admiral Stark took no action on this information except to agree to the inclusion in the belated Army message of instructions to General Short to advise Admiral Kimmel of its contents (Tr., Vol. 32, pp. [5814-5816](#)).

Mr. Hull [Secretary of State], Mr. Stimson [Secretary of War], and Mr. Knox [Secretary of the Navy] had the 1 p. m. message at their conference about 10:30 a. m., Washington time, December 7 (Tr., Vol. 55, p. 10473). The relation of Washington time to time in Hawaii and the Philippines was brought to their attention (Tr., Vol. 5, pp. [10473-10475](#)). Mr. Stimson's notes describing the Sunday morning conference state:

"Today is the day that the Japanese are going to bring their answer to Hull and everything in MAGIC indicated they had been keeping the time back until now in order to accomplish something hanging in the air. Knox and I arranged conference with Hull at 10:30 and we talked the whole matter over. Hull very certain that the Japs are planning some devilry and *we are all wondering where the blow will strike* (Tr., Vol. 70, p. 14428)."[13]

As indicated above, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox was another official who understood that the time-of-delivery message indicated that an attack was imminent. Knox said the following in his secret December 15 report to FDR:

Neither Short nor Kimmel, at the time of the attack, had any knowledge of the plain intimations of some surprise move, made clear in Washington, through the interception of Japanese instructions to Nomura, *in which a surprise move of some kind was clearly indicated by the insistence upon the precise time of Nomura's reply to Hull, at 1 o'clock on Sunday.*[14]

So according to Knox, a "surprise move" was "clearly indicated" by the 1:00 o'clock delivery time. Indeed it was.

**MYTH:** The "bomb plot messages" regarding the location of ships in Pearl Harbor did not give a clear indication that Pearl Harbor would be attacked, since the Japanese were seeking similar information about other American ports. Nobody realized that these messages evidenced an intention to attack Pearl Harbor. Therefore, the failure to tell Kimmel and Short about them was an innocent, understandable mistake.

**FACT:** Several intelligence officers recognized that the first bomb plot message, sent on September 24, represented a grid system for a bombing attack and they urged that the Hawaiian commanders be told about the message (their urgings were rejected). The follow-up bomb

plot messages made it even more obvious that the Japanese had an unusual, unique, and very suspicious interest in Pearl Harbor. But assuming for the sake of argument that no one realized the significance of these messages, why, then, did FDR, Marshall, Stark, and a handful of other top officials withhold them from the Roberts Commission in 1941? Why did they desperately try to withhold them from the Army Pearl Harbor Board and the Navy Court of Inquiry in 1944? And why did they try to prevent them from being published by the JCC in 1946?

Toland provides an overview of the bomb plot messages and notes that not one of them was forwarded to Kimmel or Short, even though intelligence officers urged that this be done:

The consul's message [that contained the first 13 parts of the 14-part diplomatic cable] was by no means the only one that morning [6 December] which indicated the Japanese might be planning a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Two months earlier S.I.S., the U.S. Army Signal Intelligence Service, had decrypted a message [the bomb plot message] from Tokyo to Consul Kita dividing the waters of Pearl Harbor into five areas and asking for the exact locations of Kimmel's warships and carriers. Both Army and Navy intelligence officers in Washington guessed this could be a grid system for a bombing attack. Several of these men urged that Kimmel and Short be warned but for some reason their superiors would not allow this. Three other messages between Tokyo and Kita also indicated unusual Japanese interest in Pearl Harbor. One instructed Ensign Takeo Yoshikawa, a naval spy posing as one of Kita's assistants, to report all ship movements in Pearl Harbor "twice a week"; another ordered Yoshikawa to subject the fleet air bases on Oahu to special scrutiny; and a third, on November 8, requested information about strategic points around Honolulu. None of these messages was

sent to Kimmel or Short.[15]

Even the Democratic majority of the JCC, as determined as they were to deny any evidence of foreknowledge or foul play, had to admit that the September 24 bomb plot message requested information about Pearl Harbor that was not requested about any other harbor:

In endeavoring to evaluate the intercepted dispatch of September 24 and related dispatches, it is to be borne in mind that the Japanese were insistent in their desire to secure information concerning the location and movements of American vessels everywhere and not merely at Pearl Harbor. There are no other dispatches before the committee, however, in which Tokyo manifested an interest concerning the disposition of ships *within* a harbor, as in the case of the "berthing plan," as distinguished from the desire to know whether a vessel was at a particular harbor. Viewing the September 24 instructions to her Honolulu consul in this light, it would appear that Tokyo was manifesting an unusual interest in the presence of our Pacific fleet and the detailed location thereof in Pearl Harbor.[16]

Admiral Kimmel pointed out the unique nature of the information that the Japanese requested about Pearl Harbor in the September 24 bomb plot message, and he observed that no one had a greater right than he did to know about that message:

No other harbor or base in American territory or possessions was divided into subareas by Japan. In no other area was the Japanese government

seeking information as to whether two or more vessels were alongside the same wharf. . . .

With the dispatch of September 24 and those which followed, there was a significant and ominous change in the character of the information which the Japanese government sought and obtained. The espionage then directed was of an unusual character and outside the realm of reasonable suspicion. It was no longer merely directed to ascertaining the general whereabouts of ships of the fleet. It was directed to the presence of particular ships and particular areas, to such minute detail as what ships were double-docked at the same wharf.

In the period immediately preceding the attack, the Japanese consul general in Hawaii was directed by Tokyo to report even when there were no movements of ships in and out of Pearl Harbor. These Japanese instructions and reports pointed to an attack by Japan upon the ships in Pearl Harbor. The information sought and obtained, with such painstaking detail, had no other conceivable usefulness from a military viewpoint. Its utility was in planning and executing an attack upon the ships in port. Its effective value was lost completely when the ships left their reported berthings in Pearl Harbor.

No one had a more direct and immediate interest in the security of the fleet in Pearl Harbor than its commander-in-chief. No one had a greater right than I to know that Japan had carved up Pearl Harbor into sub-areas and was seeking and receiving reports as to the precise berthings in that harbor of ships of the fleet. I had been sent Mr. Grew's report earlier in the year with positive advice from the Navy Department that no credence

was to be placed in the rumored Japanese plans for an attack on Pearl Harbor. I was then told that no Japanese move against Pearl Harbor appeared "imminent or planned for in the foreseeable future." Certainly I was entitled to know when information in the Navy Department completely altered the information and advice previously given to me.[17]

It is worth noting that General Douglas MacArthur's staff officers discerned that the bomb plot messages indicated preparation for a bombing raid. A staff report from MacArthur's headquarters noted that they had concluded that those messages signaled that Pearl Harbor was being targeted for a bombing attack:

It was known that the Japanese counsel in Honolulu cabled Tokyo reports on general ship movements. In October his instructions were "sharpened." Tokyo called for specific instead of general reports. In November the daily reports were on a grid system of the inner harbor with coordinate locations of American men of war [i.e., battleships]. This was no longer a case of diplomatic curiosity; coordinate grid is the classical method for pinpoint target designation. Our battleships had suddenly become targets.[18]

**MYTH:** There was no "Winds" execute message broadcast until after the attack, and the execute message that was transmitted was the "West Wind Clear" message, not the "East Wind Rain" one. The story of the interception of a December 4 "East Wind Rain" execute message rests almost entirely on the unsupported testimony of Captain Laurance Safford. The JCC shredded Safford's story way back in 1946. The fact that the execute message was not an "East Wind Rain" message and that

it was not sent until after the attack has been firmly established in a recent study by two historians from the National Security Agency. Even if there had been such a message, it would not have meant imminent war anyway, and would not have provided any actionable intelligence. What's more, the November 19 message that describes the "Winds" code words proves that the "East Wind Rain" code was merely intended to notify Japanese diplomats around the world that Japan's relations with America and England were at risk of being severed soon.

**FACT:** For starters, no one denied that a "Winds" execute message had been intercepted a few days before the attack until 1944. Even the Roberts Commission did not dispute the existence of the December 4 execute message. Nor did the Army Pearl Harbor Board. Nor did the Navy Court of Inquiry. A couple officers were confused about whether it was an "East Wind Rain" or "West Wind Clear" execute message, but no one denied there was a pre-attack "Winds" execute message until FDR sought to discredit the incriminating reports submitted by the Army Pearl Harbor Board and the Navy Court of Inquiry.

The 1989 BBC documentary *Sacrifice at Pearl Harbor* presents evidence that at least two Western intelligence services intercepted the "East Wind Rain" execute message on December 4. The documentary includes interviews with Eric Nave and Ralph Briggs, two cryptographers who were involved with the interception and processing of the "Winds" code message (Nave) and the subsequent "East Wind Rain" execute message (Briggs). The "Winds" code message explained the code words that would be used to signal war with America, England, or Russia. "East Wind Rain" meant war with America (however, some who saw it interpreted it as meaning war with both America and England).

Nave was a senior Australian cryptographer and was so renowned that he was sometimes called "the father of British code breaking in the Far East." Nave was on duty in Melbourne, Australia, when the "Winds" code message was broadcast on November 19. Nave helped transmit a copy of the message to Commodore J. W. Durnford of the Australian Navy. In 1991, Nave teamed up with James Rusbridger to write *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor*. Nave and Rusbridger note that the "East Wind Rain" execute message was intercepted on December 4 by Lt. Charles Dixon, a cryptographer with the New Zealand Army, at a listening post near Hong Kong:

News broadcasts from Tokyo that carried the "execute" weather forecasts were designed to be heard around the world—in Britain, Western Europe, Australia, and South America—and were repeated several times during the day of December 4. They had been easily picked up in Melbourne, and FECB [British Far East Combined Bureau] had no problem hearing them at their powerful intercept station on Stonecutters Island in Hong Kong, which could eavesdrop on everything sent by radio from Japan. . . .

Both parts of the Winds message [the code and the subsequent execute] were received by Lieutenant Charles Dixon, RNZVR [Royal New Zealand Volunteer Reserve], a code breaker stationed at Stonecutters Island in 1941. After the surrender of Hong Kong, on 25 December 1941, Dixon was a prisoner of war with other officers, including Lieutenant Cedric Brown, RNVR [Royal Naval Reserve]. Dixon told Brown of receiving both parts of the message, and how surprised he was that the Americans were caught unprepared at Pearl Harbor because of the information he had been

receiving and decoding in Hong Kong on behalf of FECB, which he assumed was being passed on to the Americans. Charles Dixon died in New Zealand on 10 June 1985 at the age of seventy-seven. Cedric Brown was the senior naval officer on the C-in-C's staff in charge of codes and ciphers.[19]

Ralph Briggs was a Navy chief petty officer and a Japanese linguist stationed at the Naval Communication Station in Cheltenham, Maryland. He served as a chief watch supervisor. He reported that he personally intercepted the "East Wind Rain" execute message on December 4.

Briggs' account is supported by a document released by the National Security Agency in 1980 (National Archives Document SRH-051). The document reveals that in 1977 the Naval Security Group interviewed Briggs regarding the execute message and that Briggs reported that he intercepted the "East Wind Rain" execute message on December 4, that he was later ordered by his superior officer not to testify to the JCC, and that he had discovered that the copies he had made of the message were missing from the station's files.[20]

Captain Safford was not the only senior military officer who had direct knowledge of the December 4 execute message, and the JCC by no means "shredded" his testimony. During the Navy Court of Inquiry and the Army Pearl Harbor Board investigations, two other senior military officers acknowledged seeing this message before the attack, and two additional senior officers testified that they were informed of the receipt of the message and that they discussed it with other officers.[21]

Moreover, after the war, two former attaches in the Japanese Embassy in Washington confirmed that the "East Wind Rain" execute message was broadcast on December 4.[22] The Japanese attaches were Yuzuru Sanematsu and Yoshimori Terai. Sanematsu was the ranking naval attache and the chief intelligence officer at the Japanese Embassy, and he went on to become a leading Japanese naval historian. In his 1980 book *Nichi-bei Joho Senki*, he confirmed his personal knowledge that the execute message was received at the Embassy on December 4.[23] In a 1982 interview, Terai confirmed Sanematsu's account. Terai explained that when he returned to the Embassy on the afternoon of December 4, he found his office in an uproar over the reception of the execute message.[24]

By the way, Captain Safford was arguably the Navy's best intelligence officer and was indisputably one of the most brilliant and influential intelligence analysts of World War II. Among other things, Safford single-handedly discovered that the Germans had broken Naval Cipher 3, and it was thanks to this discovery that Allied shipping losses in the Atlantic were dramatically reduced. After the war, the Department of the Navy awarded Safford with the Legion of Merit for his outstanding contributions to Navy communications security. In 1999, Safford was inducted into the Hall of Honor of the National Security Agency (NSA) and is recognized as the "father of U.S. Navy cryptology."

Safford knew for an absolute fact that top government officials were aware that the execute message was intercepted on December 4 because he had personally been involved in delivering a copy of the message to Admiral Leigh Noyes, the Director of Naval Communications.

In his testimony, Safford correctly noted that the execute message, which he called the "Winds Message," was intercepted at the Naval Communication Station in Cheltenham, Maryland, on December 4. This dovetails perfectly with Ralph Briggs' report that he intercepted the message at Cheltenham on that day. Said Safford,

There was a Winds Message. It meant war--and we knew it meant war. By the best estimate that can be made from my recollection and the circumstantial evidence now available, the "Winds Message" was part of a Japanese Overseas "News" Broadcast from Station JAP (Tokyo) on 11980 kilocycles beginning at 1330 Greenwich Civil Time on Thursday, December 4, 1941. This time corresponded to 10:30 p.m. Tokyo time and 8:30 a.m. Washington time, December 4, 1941. The broadcast was probably in Japanese Morse code, and was originally written in the Katakana form of written, plain-language Japanese. It was intercepted by the U.S. Navy at the big radio receiving station at Cheltenham, Maryland, which serves the Navy Department. It was recorded on a special typewriter, developed by the Navy, which types the Roman-letter equivalents of the Japanese characters. The Winds Message broadcast was forwarded to the Navy Department by TWX (teletypewriter exchange) from the teletype-transmitter in the "Intercept" receiving room at Cheltenham to "WA91," the page-printer located beside the GY Watch Officer's desk, in the Navy Department Communication Intelligence Unit under my command. I saw the Winds Message typed in page form on yellow teletype paper, with the translation written below. I immediately forwarded this message to my Commanding Officer (Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes, USN), thus fully discharging my responsibility in the matter. . . .

My final verification of the fact that the Winds Message translation was

typed and distributed lies in the fact that about December 15, 1941, I saw a copy of it in the special folder of messages which were being assembled for Admiral Noyes to present to the Roberts Commission. I checked these over with Kramer for completeness as well as for the elimination of irrelevant material. Kramer told me in 1944 that he had shown Assistant Secretary Forrestal a special set of Pre-Pearl Harbor messages about December 10, 1941, when Secretary Knox was making his personal investigation at Pearl Harbor, and that he discussed those messages with Mr. Forrestal for about two hours. This set of messages was apparently the basis and possibly the identical file that was given Admiral Noyes and shown to the Roberts Commission via Admiral Wilkinson. This was the last time I saw the Winds Message. I believe that the translation of the Winds Message was given the JD-1 Serial number of 7001, because this number is missing and unaccounted for, and comes within the range of messages translated on December 3 and 4, 1941.[25]

In all seriousness, those two NSA historians who have supposedly proven there was no pre-attack execute message argue that Safford "imagined" his account of the December 4 execute message.[26]

The Army Pearl Harbor Board did not believe Safford was dreaming. As the JCC minority report noted, the Army Pearl Harbor Board concluded that the "East Wind Rain" execute message had been intercepted on or about December 4 but that all copies of it had been destroyed or were otherwise missing. The minority report also pointed out that Admiral Royal Ingersoll, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, had confirmed to the Hart Inquiry that the execute message was received a few days before the attack:

The Army Pearl Harbor Board also had evidence to the effect that the second or "activating" message from Japan [i.e., the execute message] had come and that it meant "War with England, War with America, Peace with Russia." According to the Board's report:

"This original message has now disappeared from the Navy files and cannot be found. It was in existence just after Pearl Harbor and was collected with other messages for submission to the Roberts commission. Copies were in existence in various places but they have all disappeared (Top secret p. 8)."

The evidence before this Committee [the JCC] bearing on the interception of the activating message from Tokyo and on the contention that it indicated hostilities between Japan and the Anglo-American combination covers hundreds of pages. Admittedly the evidence is confusing and conflicting [mostly because some officers began to change their stories in 1944, two years before the JCC convened], but after reviewing it, Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, deputy to Admiral Harold Stark, testified before the Hart Inquiry to questions 68 and 69:

"68. Q. During November or December 1941 were you cognizant of a special code which the Japanese had arranged under which they were to inform their nationals concerning against what nations they would make aggressive movements by means of a partial weather report?

"A. Yes; I do recall such messages.

**"69. Q. Do you recall having seen on or about 4 December the broadcast directive thus given indicating that the Japanese were about to attack both Britain and the United States?**

**"A. Yes." [27]**

**Additional evidence of the December 4 execute message comes from the remarkable fact that on that same day both the Japanese Navy and the American Navy changed their codes, and the American Navy directed remote Pacific installations to destroy excess codes and ciphers so they would not be captured by the Japanese. [28] Just a coincidence?**

**Is it also just a coincidence that on December 4 Captain Arthur McCollum, the head of the Far Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence, drafted a war warning for the Pacific Fleet commanders? McCollum was one of those officers who later falsely denied knowing about the execute message, but Captain Safford testified that he discussed the execute message with McCollum and that McCollum's original warning mentioned the execute message. [29]**

**As for the intended meaning of the "East Wind Rain" code, there is ample evidence that it was intended—and was widely interpreted—as a warning that war was about to begin, and obviously the Pearl Harbor attack proves that it was meant to warn of war. In referring to the November 19 "Winds" code message, Colonel Elliott Thorpe, an Army intelligence**

officer in Java, informed General Miles on December 5 that "Japan will notify her consuls of *war decision* in her foreign broadcasts as weather report at end." [30] Walter Foote, the U.S. Consulate General in the Netherlands East Indies, in speaking of the "Winds" codes, reported in a cable to the Secretary of State on December 4 that the phrase "East Wind Rain" would mean war with America: "When *crisis leading to worst* arises, following will be broadcast at end weather reports: one, east wind rain: *war with United States. . .*" [31] Colonel Otis Sadtler of the Army Communications Service told the Army Pearl Harbor Board that the codes in the November 19 message were intended to indicate "whether the *war* would be with the United States, Russia, or Great Britain, or any combination of them." [32] Similarly, as we saw above, the Hart Inquiry assumed that the "Winds" codes were intended to warn Japanese diplomatic stations when Japan was about to make "*aggressive movements*" against certain nations.[33] And on and on we could go.

## Endnotes

1. *Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board*, October 20, 1944, in *Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, Exhibit Number 145 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 139-141, [http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap\\_3c.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap_3c.html). Note: The Joint Committee's report will hereafter be cited as *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*.

2. *Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board*, p. 142, [http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap\\_3c.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap_3c.html).

3. Husband Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), p. 4.

4. *Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board*, p. 141,  
[http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap\\_3c.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/chap_3c.html).

5. *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, full-text version, p. 2940,  
[http://home.us.archive.org/stream/pearlharborattac07unit/pearlharborattac07unit\\_djvu.txt](http://home.us.archive.org/stream/pearlharborattac07unit/pearlharborattac07unit_djvu.txt).

6. "The Myths of Pearl Harbor,"  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/myths/index.html>.

7. *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, p. 226.

8. George Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947), p. 278.

9. Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, p. 279.

10. Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, p. 302.

11. *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, pp. 516-518.

12. John Toland, *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1983), p. 305.

13. Minority report, *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, pp. 529-530, emphasis added, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#514>

.

-

[14. \*JCC Pearl Harbor Report\*, full-text version, p. 2337, emphases added, \[http://www.archive.org/stream/pearlharborattac05unit/pearlharborattac05unit\\\_djvu.txt\]\(http://www.archive.org/stream/pearlharborattac05unit/pearlharborattac05unit\_djvu.txt\); Morgenstern, \*Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War\*, p. 276.](http://www.archive.org/stream/pearlharborattac05unit/pearlharborattac05unit_djvu.txt)

-

[15. Toland, \*Infamy\*, p. 5.](#)

-

[16. \*JCC Pearl Harbor Report\*, p. 183, original emphasis.](#)

-

[17. Kimmel, \*Admiral Kimmel's Story\*, pp. 86-87.](#)

-

18. Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story*, pp. 88-89. Some traditionalists claim that FDR never saw the bomb plot message. However, Lt. Commander Alwin Kramer delivered it to him on October 9, along with a summary of its contents and a notation that read "interesting message" (*Additional Views of Mr. Keefe*, *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, p. 266-E, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/keefe.html>). Incidentally, the summary read as follows:

-

Tokyo directs special reports on ships in Pearl Harbor which is divided into five areas for the purpose of showing exact locations.

-

The minority report:

-

On October 9th, 1941 (ex. 2, p. 12), Lieutenant Commander Kramer of Naval Intelligence in Washington promptly distributed the Pearl Harbor "bomb plot" message to the President, the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Stark, the Director of Naval Communications, the Director of War Plans, and the Director of Naval Intelligence (Tr., Vol. 59 p. 11209). It bore the notation "interesting message" on a gist or flag (Tr., Vol. 59, p. 11207). It was accompanied by a summary of its contents as follows:

-

"Tokyo directs special reports on ships in Pearl Harbor which is divided into five areas for the purpose of showing exact locations" (Tr., Vol. 69, p. 11207). (Minority report, *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, pp. 518-519, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#520><http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#520>)

-

19. Eric Nave and James Rusbridger, *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1991), pp. 147, 275-276. Rusbridger obtained this information from an interview with Cedric Brown in 1988.

-

20. Steve Sniegoski, "The Case for Pearl Harbor Revisionism," *The Occidental Quarterly* (Winter 2001), volume 6, number 2, p. 25, <http://home.comcast.net/~transparentcabal/pearlharbor.pdf>.

-

21. Toland, *Infamy*, pp. 94-96, 106; Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, pp. 198-222.

-

22. Toland, *Infamy*, pp. 329-330; Percy Greaves, *Pearl Harbor: The Seeds and Fruits of Infamy* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010), p. 229.

-

23. Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichi-bei Joho Senki* (Tokyo: Tosho Shuppansha, 1980), pp. 146, 235; pp. 191, 232 in the 1982 edition; Greaves, *Pearl Harbor: The Seeds and Fruits of Infamy*, p. 229; Nave and Rusbridger, *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor*, pp. 147-148.

-

24. Toland, *Infamy*, p. 330.

-

25. "Statement Regarding Winds Message by Captain L.F. Safford, U.S. Navy, Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack," January 25, 1946,

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/PTO/Magic/Safford-Winds.html>; see also Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, pp. 206-210.

-

26. Robert Hanyok and David Mowry, *West Wind Clear: Cryptology and the Winds Message Controversy—A Documentary History, United States Cryptologic History, Series IV: World War II, Volume 10*, p. 99.

-

27. Minority report, *JCC Pearl Harbor Report*, p. 526, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#514>.

-

28. Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, pp. 209-210.

-

29. Toland, *Infamy*, p. 74.

-

30. Cable "From Thorpe for Miles War Dept. Code Intercept," December 5, 1941; Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, pp. 208-209, emphasis added. The Army Pearl Harbor Board noted that even if the intended meaning was a break in relations, this would have indicated that hostilities could be imminent:

-

There is a conflict as to the meaning of the "Winds" message, namely, as to whether it meant war or only a breach of diplomatic relations. (Tr., [28] Bratton B. 60-71; Safford C. 126-130; Sadtler D. 250; See also Top Secret Ex. "B", S. I. S. 25392 and 25432, both 19 November 1941) This conflict is not significant, however, as it was common knowledge that Japan might begin war prior to terminating diplomatic relations. (Top Secret Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board, Joint Committee Exhibit No. 157, p. 251, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/tsreport.html#5>. This was the top secret portion of the board's report.)

-

31. Dispatch from Foote to "Secretary of State, Washington," December 4, 1941, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/timeline/411204bpci.html>, emphasis added; Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War*, p. 209.

-

32. Top Secret Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board, Joint Committee Exhibit No. 157, p. 223; <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/army/tsreport.html#5>; Minority report, JCC Pearl Harbor Report, p. 526, emphasis added, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#514>.

-

33. Minority report, JCC Pearl Harbor Report, p. 526, emphasis added, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/minority.html#514>.

-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Michael T. Griffith holds a Master's degree in Theology from The Catholic Distance University, a Graduate Certificate in Ancient and Classical History from American Military University, a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College, two Associate in

Applied Science degrees from the Community College of the Air Force, and an Advanced Certificate of Civil War Studies and a Certificate of Civil War Studies from Carroll College. He is a two-time graduate of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, in Arabic and Hebrew, and of the U.S. Air Force Technical Training School in San Angelo, Texas, and has completed advanced Hebrew programs at Haifa University in Israel and at the Spiro Institute in London, England. He is also the author of five books on Mormonism and ancient texts and one book on the John F. Kennedy assassination.

-

Mike Griffith's Pearl Harbor Website

-

-

-