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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

"Days of Infamy"

Sir:

In John Lundstrom's review of John Costello's book *Days of Infamy* (*Naval War College Review*, Autumn 1995) which deals with the early days of the U.S.-British war with the Japanese, as well as in the full book itself, which I read well before I came upon Lundstrom's review, I noted what is a frequent practice of military analysts and historians in considering anything having to do with the actions, decisions, and leadership of General Douglas MacArthur. He is, it seems, automatically assumed to have been wrong, incompetent, bumbling, and a whole series of other pejorative adjectives regardless of the situation he was in. In book after book, article after article, review after review, it seems almost guaranteed that I will find General MacArthur automatically viewed in a very negative light. No other general in military history that I am aware of is so frequently the object of attack.

As for the destruction of the B-17 bombers on Clark Field on December 8, 1941, Costello, like so many other military historians, conveys a false version of the actual event, the result of inadequate research. The planes had in fact been airborne since the morning to avoid being caught on the ground. Later in the day they landed for refueling and maintenance and preparation for a bombing run in Formosa, and so the pilots and crew could eat. Radar picked up the approaching Japanese air attack. However, static prevented the warning from being received by radio, the teletype operator was out to lunch and did not receive the teletype warning, and although a telephonic warning was received

at Clark Field, the officer in charge strangely and inexplicably failed to pass it along. And that, not MacArthur's incompetence, was the explanation for why our planes were caught on the ground at Clark Field.

And of course John Costello can't pass up the chance to smear MacArthur for being "indecisive" in not immediately letting Air Corps General Brereton launch a strike upon Formosa without reconnaissance, without escort, and with early-version B-17As and B-17Bs, far inferior in capabilities to the later-version B-17s of the war in Europe. But if MacArthur had let Brereton conduct his stab-in-the-dark, as it were, Formosa strike, and it had ended in disaster, as it most likely would have, John Costello and the other MacArthur detractors would be damning MacArthur for being irresponsibly impulsive.

In their eyes, as in the eyes of so many military historians, MacArthur could never do anything undeserving of the most intense condemnation, regardless of the facts and the aspects of any situation involving MacArthur.

Joseph Forbes
Pittsburgh, Penna.

Sir:

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, there are those who persist in maintaining that the ultimate blame for the Pearl Harbor disaster rests with Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short. John B. Lundstrom's review of John Costello's book *Days of Infamy* (Autumn 1995) is the latest example.

In conceding that MacArthur was derelict in allowing his B-17 fleet to be caught on the ground, Lundstrom states that two wrongs do not make a right. In effect, according to Lundstrom, MacArthur, Kimmel, and Short bore equal responsibility.

Lundstrom would give the casual and uninformed reader the impression that Kimmel had a reckless disregard for Japanese naval air power, stating that with such an attitude Kimmel would not worry that Japanese carriers would threaten his ships in Pearl Harbor, a clear implication of complacency on Kimmel's part. In reality, the record shows that on 6 December 1941, while the only two carriers that he had in service were out delivering planes to Wake and other outlying islands, Kimmel pondered the idea of taking his ships to sea in order to be ready for operations upon the commencement of hostilities; but he decided that it would be too dangerous to get underway without air cover, hardly an indication of disregard for Japanese air power. In addition, to get underway on the weekend would violate Washington's order to avoid alarming the local population.

In attempting to support his claim that Kimmel underrated the Japanese, Lundstrom cites Edward S. Miller's book *War Plan Orange*, which describes Kimmel as a "black shoe" gunnery type who viewed air power as an auxiliary to the battle line. True enough, but that was a widely held view in the Navy prior to Pearl Harbor. However, it hardly indicates that Kimmel was unaware of the danger posed by Japanese air power, as Lundstrom would have the reader believe.

The transfer of planes from Hawaii to the outer islands, on Admiral Harold R. Starks's orders, was tacit confirmation from Washington that it did not consider Hawaii to be in immediate danger. Moreover, the War Warning of 27 November 1941 strongly indicated that the immediate threat was in Southeast Asia.

Yet, despite all indications from Washington that his position was relatively secure, Kimmel was far from complacent. He issued a Fleet Directive calling for extreme vigilance and ordered depth-bombing of all contacts suspected to be hostile in the Fleet operating area, a fact noted by Miller in *War Plan Orange*.

General Short's instructions from Washington warned only against sabotage and alarming the local population. He advised Washington of the steps that he had taken, and since he received no reply, he naturally assumed approval.

It should also be noted that despite the unexpectedness of the attack, both the Army and Navy reacted very quickly. Even the Japanese expressed surprise at the quickness of the American response.

According to Lundstrom, Costello used MacArthur as a straw man to take Kimmel and Short off the hook. The available evidence certainly precludes the need for that. Lundstrom also states that Costello avoids a discussion of Kimmel's battle plans, the apparent implication being that such a discussion would weaken Costello's case. Kimmel's battle plans and philosophy are not the issue, but whether or not he took all of the steps necessary on the basis of the information that was available to him; all of the evidence is clearly in his favor.

Lundstrom either has not read *Days of Infamy* or *War Plan Orange* very carefully, or he has taken material out of context to support his case. In summary, his review is very distorted and misleading.

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Editor's note:

On 3 January 1996, after a seven-month review requested by Senator Strom Thurmond, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Undersecretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), Edwin Dorn, released a fifty-

page report conceding that blame for the disaster at Pearl Harbor "should be broadly shared" but concluding that "the intelligence available to Admiral Kimmel and General Short was sufficient to justify a higher level of vigilance than they chose to maintain."

"A Smart Man Becoming Wise"

Sir:

I was disappointed in the seeming superficiality of the review of Robert S. McNamara's book, *In Retrospect*, in the Autumn 1995 issue of the *Naval War College Review* (pages 111–114). I think that the reviewer missed much of the instructive value of the book and of what Secretary McNamara may have been trying to accomplish with his reopening of the painful subject of Viet Nam.

Chapter 11 should be required reading for all concerned with political theory and the development of policy. The questions outlined therein are a primer in political science. Few serving officers know this material or can put it into juxtaposition with the events of the sixties and seventies. It is essential that they do so and carry the lessons forward to the present day and the developing national debate over American involvement in Bosnia.

It is necessary to separate feelings about the individual, McNamara, from the forces that he and the others in the American leadership were facing. It is also necessary to remember that there are distinct differences between the adjectives "smart" and "wise." There are also distinctly different implications in the phrases "doing the 'thing' right" and "doing the right 'thing.'" By his failure to recognize the latter distinction, the Secretary did a disservice to himself and to his president. That trap was set by his, and his advisors', failure to recognize the limits of their individual and collective brilliance.

Your reviewer cites the idiocy of body counts. That was a symptom, along with many other meaningless metrics, of the weaknesses inherent in technocratic approaches to the management and direction of large, complex enterprises. In Operations Research we are alert to the possibilities of harmful sub-optimization. McNamara was a disciple of Hitch and McKean, but he failed to internalize their warnings. He became lost in the maze that he created in the name of quantitative management. These traps abound today—in health care management, in various aspects of national and international security assessments, and in our piecemeal approaches to equipping, provisioning, and training our armed forces.

Many who dealt directly with Secretary McNamara saw him as an intellectual bully. He brooked no dissent; he disparaged data or information that ran counter to his world view. He was far from being alone in those shortcomings. In the fragmented approach that the U.S. took to policy formulation during the

sixties—at the height of the Cold War—one found inconsistent sub-optimizations: some at State, some at Defense, some to accommodate allies. Few objected. Those who did were castigated by the president, by McNamara, by the “hard-liners.” We in the military were not without blame. How does one explain the metamorphosis in reporting from the field in Viet Nam to the glowing estimates of success in the Pentagon? Interservice rivalries, budget battles, and careers all became aspects of the mind-sets of the “best and brightest” descendants of the OSS of World War II. How did McNamara’s management metrics deal with those subjective and judgmental issues? They couldn’t. And that is what McNamara was trying to say.

Why say it now? In the current debate about America’s role in Bosnia, there are many parallels with Viet Nam; a “domino theory,” concern (in both U.S. political parties) about the rampaging right, presidential advisors ignorant of the military, a military that finds it difficult to downsize gracefully, and the widespread incredulity that there can be limits to American power.

In Chapter 11 the author summarizes questions that were not asked (or answers not heeded); traces some of the consequences of the dominating concerns of politics; and admits that the greatest mistake that he, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon made was to exclude the American people from the formulation of the policies that cost the lives of their sons and daughters. In so doing, Secretary McNamara has made the contribution to his country that a smart man now becoming wise can make.

Albert M. Bottoms
Monterey, California

“The Silent War”

Sir:

Captain Duane L. Whitlock’s excellent article “The Silent War against the Japanese Navy” (*Naval War College Review*, Autumn 1995) is an enlightening account of the decipherment of the Japanese operating codes during the Second World War. In the article, Captain Whitlock makes numerous references to the Japanese “Kata Kana” telegraphic code. Although he provides an accurate description of this code, which is based upon Japanese syllabary and was used for commercial as well as military applications, I feel a listing of the code would have been useful.

Those readers who are interested in communications intelligence during the Second World War, in telegraphy, or in the Japanese language will be interested to know that the Kata Kana telegraphic code can be found in an English-language source. It was prepared by a Mr. Taketomi, secretary of the Japanese Embassy

130 Naval War College Review

in Washington, for publication in Mary Texanna Loomis's *Radio Theory and Operating for the Radio Student and Practical Operator*, 3d rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Loomis Publishing Co., 1927), p. 812.

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Lowell, Mass.

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**The Problem of Mines: A Technical Symposium
Monterey, Calif., 18–22 November 1996**

This symposium is a joint undertaking of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, the Office of Naval Research, and the Mine Warfare Association, with active involvement by the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Defense agencies. Participation by nongovernmental, industrial, and academic groups is encouraged.

The Symposium will address technologies of mines, military aspects of mine countermeasures on land and at sea, and humanitarian demining. The focus is on emergent technologies, including those associated with autonomous mine countermeasures vehicles.

The Symposium announcement, call for papers, and registration information can be obtained from, and displays and presentations arranged with, Prof. Albert M. Bottoms, Ellis E. Johnson Chair of Mine Warfare, Code UW, Naval Postgraduate School, 586 Dyer Rd., Monterey, Calif., 93943; tel. (408) 656-3770, fax (408) 656-3679; e-mail ambottom@nps.navy.mil.

Announcement of Forum and Call for Papers

The journal *Military and Naval History Forum* announces the fourth annual Military and Naval History Forum, to be held on 7–8 March 1997, in Lancaster, Penna. Papers are invited: the Forum will consider any original idea in any period of military and naval history (deadline 15 November 1996). For information, contact Rose Mary Shelton, Department of History and Politics, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va., 24450; e-mail rms@vmi.edu.