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## Pearl Harbor: The Continuing Controversy

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Trefousse, Hans L. *Pearl Harbor: The Continuing Controversy*. Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing, 1982. 215pp. \$6.50

This book is part of the extensive series of Anvil paperbacks prepared for use in college courses, and was obviously designed for undergraduate students who are new to the controversy over the reasons why US forces in Hawaii were taken by surprise. Trefousse presents a defense of Franklin Roosevelt against charges by the late president's critics that somehow Roosevelt maneuvered the Japanese into attacking the US Fleet so that he could openly support Britain in its struggle against Germany. Trefousse includes over one hundred pages of documents relating to the attack, including deciphered Japanese messages, official state papers (such as the Tripartite Pact) and excerpts from testimony given to the Naval Board of Inquiry. There is also a brief but comprehensive bibliography of major books and papers which address the issue of a possible conspiracy at the highest level of the US government to incite the Japanese to war.

The problem with this version of *Pearl Harbor* is that it confronts the wrong issue. Trefousse refutes the charges of past critics such as Harry Elmer Barnes and Charles Beard, but he also notes (rather late) that "Even modern revisionists no longer maintain that the fleet was deliberately exposed at Pearl Harbor to provide Japan with a worthwhile target." The only "modern revisionist" who

Beard left off is John Toland, and Toland's argument (in *Infamy*, 1982) is basically that Roosevelt allowed the attack to take place. The claim that Roosevelt deliberately set up Pearl Harbor by gradually and carefully leaving the Japanese no other alternative is just not taken seriously anymore, and Trefousse can be accused of wasting time on what is, in effect, a "nonissue." Remember, though, that Trefousse has written for undergraduates unfamiliar with the evolution of the Pearl Harbor controversy who may nevertheless harbor strong opinions about Roosevelt's culpability and motives. Even given this important qualification, however, it is still fair to say that Trefousse misses the point of much recent controversy about the attack.

In fact, writers such as John Costello (*The Pacific War*, 1981) have argued that the real focus of attention should not be on Roosevelt but on Winston Churchill. Costello believes that somehow British code-breakers got wind of the Japanese attack plans and that Churchill chose not to warn Roosevelt because he knew Pearl Harbor would bring the United States into the war. Costello's conjectures run afoul of the very pertinent claim that they are based completely on circumstantial evidence. Costello's rejoinder has been that we may learn the truth when Churchill's most confidential papers are finally opened in the 21st century. Trefousse is a healthy and concise antidote to such speculation, if only because he demonstrates that it makes little sense to put the blame for

Pearl Harbor on one individual or office. However, the strange disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* on 19 November 1941, coupled with the fact that not everything is yet known about the work of US and British code-breakers and radio traffic analysts in the Pacific in the fall of 1941, means that the controversy over who knew or inferred how much (and when) will continue. (In his *Who Sank the Sydney?*, published by Cassell, Milbourne, in 1981, Michael D. Montgomery claims the Australian cruiser was sunk by a Japanese submarine, and that the Australian government may have known this.)

There are two matters which Trefousse did not consider but which he should have: (1) the rapid destruction of Army air power in the Philippines in light of General MacArthur's claims that it was the key to his defenses and despite the fact that his forces had ample warning that the war was on, and (2) what Admiral Kimmel might have done to resist the Japanese attack on Hawaii if he had been given one or several days' warning. Pearl Harbor was bad enough, but what about the Philippines? Why didn't MacArthur's forces develop the kind of ground observer organization which Major General Claire Chennault's Chinese allies created to warn the American Volunteer Group? Why didn't Army B-17s attack Japanese airfields on Formosa before the Japanese could raid Clark Field in the Philippines? These are important questions, and they

should be considered whenever the causes of Pearl Harbor are argued.

Perhaps a more obvious question is whether Kimmel could have defeated the Japanese with the Navy and Army forces available in Hawaii in 1941. What if the "Winds-Execute" message had indeed been intercepted and translated by Navy code-breakers on 4 December? What if its specific "meaning" had been grasped immediately and Kimmel warned? Had Kimmel sent his eight battleships to California immediately, he might have saved them. However, the approaching Japanese were by then committed to attack. They might have been recalled by a signal from Tokyo, but they might also have worked over Pearl Harbor and/or searched for Kimmel's carriers. *Lexington* and *Enterprise* were Kimmel's only available carriers on 4 December. Together, they did not have the force to overwhelm the six attacking Japanese carriers, even if they were to hit first. To strike the Japanese with some hope of success, Kimmel would have had to rely on Army bombers, but the Army's bomber strength in Hawaii was minimal because of the effort to pass B-17s through to the Philippines.

Kimmel's position was nearly impossible. He had been told not to attack first; he had also been denied the resources he needed to absorb the first blow and then return the attack; finally, he was expected not to lose. His predecessor, who strongly protested against this situation, was relieved. Kimmel accepted the situation. Could he have made it

acceptable? That is the interesting question—not whether Roosevelt knew something he did not reveal or whether Churchill withheld vital intelligence from Roosevelt. Kimmel was outnumbered and his enemy had the initiative. What could he have done? Thinking about that question is important because there are US military commanders today who find themselves in a similar situation. *Pearl Harbor: The Continuing Controversy*, like most of the literature on the topic, does not address that question. It is, however, an accurate summary of the other issues raised by investigators of the attack, and its lengthy documents section is valuable even to people who have some knowledge of the Pearl Harbor debate.

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Goldrick, James. *The King's Ships Were at Sea: The War in the North Sea August 1914-February 1915*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1984. 356pp. \$21.95

This work by an Australian naval officer starts with late June 1914, when the newly enlarged Kiel Canal permitted the German navy to swing between the North Sea and the Baltic. After a comparison of British and German naval strengths and the steps that led to war, James Goldrick correctly notes that "The North Sea was to be the critical theatre of operations for both British and Germans." He sketches the geographical and material advantages and

disadvantages on both sides and notes that the British Board of Admiralty was much better than the German organization. The latter, with three offices where one would do, resulted in departmental in-fighting and an inability to agree upon policy. Goldrick's vignettes of major naval leaders are well done, as are the characteristics he gives of all classes of surface ships, submarines, aircraft, and lighter-than-aircraft.

After these introductory chapters Goldrick concentrates upon operations: the firing of the first shots; the northern and southern blockades of the North Sea by the British and French; reciprocal use of submarines, minelayers, and major combatants; the crossing of the British Expeditionary Force; and, except for the Battle of the Heligoland Bight on 28 August, the inactivity of the High Seas Fleet until the end of 1914. The chapter devoted to that battle contains an excellent analysis of the successes and failures of the commanders, ships, and weapons on both sides.

Chapter 5 deals with the first operations undertaken by submarines. The sinking of warships and then of merchant ships by U-boats opened German eyes to the submarines' utility for blockade and a war of attrition against the British fleet. If the British rushed to develop anti-submarine devices and doctrine, the careful Adm. John R. Jellicoe's caution grew with respect to his fleet's operations. Germany meanwhile occupied twenty-one miles along the Flemish coast and built U-