

## Reviews

**The Pearl Harbor Myth: Rethinking the Unthinkable**

George Victor. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007. 353 pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Refs. Index. \$27.50

Reviewed by Rear Admiral T. A. Brooks, U.S. Navy (Retired)

This book is yet another "President Franklin Delano Roosevelt knew the attack on Pearl Harbor was coming and deliberately allowed it to occur so as to get the United States into the war and save Britain from defeat" recitation. It is a tired genre, and the author presents no new evidence. Rather, he parrots the same threadbare arguments used in any number of other revisionist histories. Most are thoroughly discredited. But Americans seem to love conspiracy theories, and this probably will not be the last book written on this very contentious proposition.

Sadly, the author rests his book on the unproven-and almost surely unprovable-contention that FDR knew Pearl Harbor to be the target. The remainder of the book, however, is well written, arguments are well presented, and the quality of research is excellent. Indeed, it is one of the most scholarly and extensively footnoted works on the subject since Roberta Wohlstetter's *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford University Press, 1962) and Gordon Prange's works.

The book presents three primary arguments: that FDR knew that a Japanese attack was coming and knew the target to be Pearl Harbor; that he deliberately provoked the Japanese into attacking; and there was a massive cover-up.

The author's strongest case concerns the attempts of senior officials in Washington-General George C. Marshall, Admiral Harold Stark, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, and Secretary of State Cordell Hull, among others-to cover up their mistakes with regard to the Pearl Harbor attack, and to fix the blame on Admiral Husband Kimmel and Lieutenant General Walter Short, the Hawaii commanders at the time of attack.

Victor demonstrates conclusively that senior Army and Navy officials commit-

ted perjury, suborned perjury, destroyed evidence, and intimidated witnesses. Testimony during the nine investigations of the attack presents a sordid picture of Washington officials covering themselves at the expense of the two Pearl Harbor commanders. No matter what one believes regarding the culpability of Kimmel and Short and thinks of the decision to summarily relieve them of their commands, the fact is well established that their seniors in Washington shared culpability and acted in a disgraceful fashion in their attempt to deflect all the blame. For this reason alone, a compelling case can be made to restore Kimmel and Short to their pre-war ranks.

The author also makes a persuasive case that the actions FDR took with regard to trade embargoes and particularly in negotiations with the Japanese probably did, in fact, provoke them. The President knew war with Japan was inevitable. Had he accepted Japanese proposals in the fall of 1941 and not issued his "Ten Point" ultimatum on 26

November, war might have been delayed by a few months.

Inasmuch as U.S. military readiness would have greatly profited from a delay, it is indeed curious that he chose the hard line. But was that a deliberate tactic to provoke war, or was it a miscalculation that precipitated the

inevitable? The author makes the reader stop and give that question some serious thought.

It is a shame that Victor did not limit his argument to Roosevelt knowing that an attack was imminent, but not knowing where it would fall. That position is eminently supportable and well-presented. To make the argument that FDR knew that Pearl Harbor was the target goes too far. Contrary to the author's allegations, the United States had not yet broken JN25B, the Japanese Navy's primary code. His contention that Japanese diplomatic codes, which had been broken, contained information revealing the target is completely erroneous.

In dealing with this prior knowledge issue, Victor relied on Robert Stinnett's *Day of Deceit* (The Free Press, 2000) and Mark Emerson Willey's *Pearl Harbor; Mother of All Conspiracies* (Xlibris, 2000), which are two of the most consistently erroneous works on the subject. He makes no use of official histories published by the Naval Security Group and the National Security Agency, and ignores excellent research on the subject such as Stephen Budiansky's "Too Late for Pearl Harbor" (U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, December 1999).

He also ignored writings and interviews with eyewitnesses such as Lieutenant Commander Phil Jacobsen and Rear Admiral Mac Showers. Jacobsen's writings on the subject are readily available in *Eyewitness to History* (published by U.S. Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association, 2006), but apparently were not consulted by the author, as they are not cited in the book.

There are, of course, a number of other unanswered questions regarding events of late November and early December 1941. Where were Marshall and Stark on the evening before Pearl Harbor? Was there a late-night meeting at the White House that was subsequently denied by all? Why didn't Stark follow through on telephoning Kimmel with a warning on Saturday night? Was an "East Wind Rain" message intercepted and, if so, what happened to the record of the intercept? These are fascinating questions, but they almost surely will never be answered. The author presents the questions and draws conclusions, but adds nothing new.

The unbalanced result greatly diminishes the book and relegates it to the pile of not-to-be-taken-seriously revisionist histories. The quality of the writing and the quality of the research done by the author on the other issues covered in the book deserve better than that.

Rear Admiral Brooks spent a 33-year career as a Naval Intelligence officer. He retired in 1991 as Director of Naval Intelligence.

