Chapter 1
Background to Pearl Harbor

The President shall be the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States. — Constitution of the United States.

1. Responsibility

It is now more than a decade since the tragic news from Pearl Harbor made millions of Americans aware that some people in high office had committed blunders of such magnitude that our national security was gravely imperiled. The question immediately arose as to the best procedures to be followed in the matter of fixing responsibility for these blunders. Quite obviously, Congress bore no burden of responsibility for the disaster. The attack on the morning of December 7, 1941, was a fiery answer to Secretary of State Cordell Hull's ultimatum to Japan of November 26, which, in Hull's own words to Secretary of War Stimson had "broken the whole matter off. . . . I have washed my hands of it and it is now in the hands of you and Knox-the Army and the Navy."[1] As Captain Oliver Lyttleton, British Minister of Supplies, remarked on June 20, 1944, "America provoked Japan to such an extent that the Japanese were forced to attack Pearl Harbor." And as Stimson himself said, "The question was how we should maneuver them into firing the first shot without allowing too much damage to ourselves. It was a difficult proposition."[2] The real story of that policy of pressure upon Japan was largely revealed in the hearings before the joint congressional committee on the investigation of the Pearl Harbor attack. Needless to say, neither General Short nor I had any clear perception of the fact that the Roosevelt Administration was pursuing a course of action that made war with Japan inevitable. We did know that in the Atlantic a state of undeclared war existed. It seemed obvious to us that conflict in the Pacific was neither necessary nor desirable. War on two fronts would present a grave question that our best military minds would find difficult to answer.

At Pearl Harbor, General Short and I knew only a small part of the political story behind the Japanese attack. Care was taken not to send us the intercepted Japanese messages which told in great detail each step in the Japanese program. The revealing passage in the Diary of Secretary Stimson, November 25, 1941, in which he outlines to Roosevelt the strategy of maneuvering the Japanese into striking the first blow at America, was, of course, unknown to us. But we did know, after December 7, that some one in Washington in high office had either blundered badly or had consciously pursued a policy that led straight to Pearl Harbor.

Until this day I have kept silence on the subject of Pearl Harbor and the historical facts centered around Washington that made such a tragedy possible. When these facts were first brought out, I could not bring myself to the point of actually writing about them. Nor could I bring myself to set down the details of the abuse and maltreatment heaped upon me by what appeared to be an organized effort, at first quite successful, to place the entire blame on General Short and myself.

Now however I deem it my duty to

speak out. What took place in Washington must be so clearly placed on the public record that no group of persons in administrative power will ever dare again to invite another Pearl Harbor and then place the blame on the officers in the fleet and in the field.

The actions in Washington, which for a time so tragically impaired the national security, made our own officers and enlisted men a decoy for a desperate and resourceful nation. Those individuals in Washington charged with the duty of supplying orders and information to the commanders at Pearl Harbor can not evade their responsibility for the complete success of the attack and its terrible consequences.

For three months prior to the attack on the fleet a wealth of vital information received in Washington was withheld from the commanders in Hawaii. The information received during the ten days preceding the attack clearly pointed to the fleet at Pearl Harbor as the Japanese objective, yet not one word of warning and none of this information was given to the Hawaiian commanders.

When Mr. Frank Knox, the Secretary of the Navy, arrived in Pearl a few days after the attack, his first question to me was: “Did you receive my message on Saturday night?” He was convinced a warning message had been sent to me the night before the attack. Repeated efforts by various investigations failed to find any trace of such a message.

Secretary Knox's question is of great significance, for it clearly shows that he had been aware of the seriousness of the situation and firmly believed that a warning message had been sent the night before the attack. Who or what stopped the Secretary's message has never been determined but certainly it must have been a result of action by someone in high authority.

In a succeeding chapter of this account I have set forth the substance of the tremendously significant Japanese intercepts, received and decoded in Washington on December 6 and December 7, 1941, that were withheld from Pearl Harbor.[3]

General George C. Marshall's warning,[4] belatedly dispatched at 11:52 A.M.Washington time — 6:22 A.M. Pearl Harbor time on Sunday, December 7, was sent in a non priority status by commercial circuit when he had on his desk a telephone with a direct connection to the headquarters of 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 by the highly dependable and rapid naval communication service, 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 both the War and Navy Departments must have been in accordance with high political direction, because the officers in both these departments repeatedly demonstrated both before and after Pearl Harbor that they were not careless, inefficient or

incompetent. One or two of them might have slipped up, but certainly not all of them concertedly. The two prime agencies responsible for keeping the field commanders informed and giving them orders were the War Department and the Navy Department. These two agencies were responsible only to the President of the United States. It is impossible to believe that both these agencies of such proved reliability and competence should simultaneously and repeatedly fail in such a crisis.

2. My Appointment to Command The Fleet

Near dusk on a Sunday afternoon in mid-January, 1941, I returned to the naval base at Pearl Harbor after a game of golf. At that time, as a rear admiral, I was in command of the cruisers of the battle force consisting of three divisions of light cruisers. Back of that particular assignment stretched a forty-year period since I had first left my native Kentucky to enter the Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1900. As a junior officer I had served in destroyers, battleships and cruisers. I had been a turret officer and a gunnery officer of battleship and cruiser, a squadron and fleet gunnery officer, and production officer of the U.S. naval gun factory in Washington, D.C. I had sailed around the world in the "white fleet" of sixteen battleships sent forth by President T. R. Roosevelt in 1907, and I had been an aide to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt when the latter visited the Pacific coast to help commemorate the opening of the Panama Canal. I had taken part in the pacification-of-Cuba campaign, and I had served off the west coast of Mexico during the troubled times when our forces were landing at Vera Cruz. I had demonstrated to the British Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow a photographic system for the analysis of gunnery scores which I had a major part in developing. Afterwards I served as squadron gunnery officer with the American battleships assigned to the British Grand Fleet in 1917 and 1918. As executive officer of the U.S.S. Arkansas, I was present at the surrender of the German fleet at Rosyth in 1918. I had seen service in the Far East as captain of the yard at Cavite in the Philippines, and as a destroyer division commander in our Asiatic Fleet on patrol duty during the Chinese revolution with a special detail to guard the flight of the round-the-world Army planes on their leg between Hong Kong and Calcutta. I commanded a squadron of destroyers, the battleship New York, and a heavy cruiser division in the Pacific Fleet. I served as chief-of-staff to the commander battleships of the battle force.

My shore duty included the Naval War College at Newport, assistant director of fleet training, officer in charge of the policy section, and director of ship movements in the office of the chief of naval operations in Washington, and a tour as budget officer of the Navy Department. In 1939 I had made a good will trip around South America with three heavy cruisers, visiting Venezuela, Brazil, the Argentine, Chile and Peru.

With this background of long service, I was still totally in the dark as to what awaited me when I came in from the golf course in January 1941 to be met at the fleet landing by one of my staff with the word for me to report immediately aboard the fleet flagship, then alongside one of the docks. When I came aboard I was escorted to the quarters of the chief-of-staff who showed me a dispatch from the Navy Department informing Admiral James O. Richardson that I was to relieve him as commander-in-chief about the first of February. My reactions at the time are stated in a letter to the Chief of Naval

Operations dated January 12, 1941:

> When I got the news of my prospective assignment, I was perfectly stunned. I hadn't any intimation that Richardson's relief was even being considered; and even had I known that his relief was being considered, I did not in my wildest dreams really think that I would get the job. Nevertheless, I am prepared to do everything I can when I take over on about the first of February.

Admiral Richardson was and is a friend of mine. I knew him to be a thoroughly capable officer. His summary removal was my first concern. I could see then and can see now no adequate reason for his removal from command in such a manner. I went immediately to his quarters in Honolulu to inform him that from my knowledge of his efficient command of the fleet there was no justification for his being relieved. I assured him that I did not know his relief was even being contemplated and that I had made no effort whatsoever to get the appointment. I felt very badly about Richardson's dismissal.

Months later I was informed that Richardson had been removed from command because he hurt Mr. Roosevelt's feelings by some forceful recommendations presented personally to the President in October 1940. At this time, Richardson had urged that the Fleet be based on the West Coast where he believed it could be prepared for war much more efficiently and expeditiously than if it remained based on Pearl Harbor.

3. At Battle Station When Japs Attacked

My assigned living quarters at Pearl Harbor, on a hill overlooking the fleet anchorage, were about two hundred yards from the administrative headquarters of the fleet.

I spent the forenoon of December 6, 1941, in my office at fleet headquarters going over dispatches and reviewing the situation with Vice Admiral William S. Pye, the second in command of the fleet. In the afternoon I worked with Captain C. H. McMorris, the war plans officer, and Captain Walter S. De Laney, the operations officer. In the evening I went to dinner with Rear Admiral H. F. Leary at the Halekulani Hotel in Honolulu. I returned to my quarters and went to bed about 9:30 P.M.

I was called to the telephone about 7:30 A.M. December 7, 1941, to receive a report that the destroyer “Ward” had contacted and bombed a strange submarine. The “Ward” action appeared to be in compliance with my order of November 27, 1941, but because we had had so many fake contact reports I was waiting for an amplifying report from the “Ward” when the Jap planes began their attack on the fleet about 7:55 A.M., Honolulu time.

I came out of my quarters in time to see the Jap planes making their first attack on the battleships. I immediately boarded my waiting car and arrived at the fleet headquarters in less than ten minutes after the attack commenced. By this time all the antiaircraft guns in the fleet were in action.

4. General Short

General Walter C. Short arrived in Honolulu a few days after I relieved Admiral Richardson in command of the fleet. I had never met General Short. Mindful of the necessity of mutual understanding and cooperation between the two services in a situation where their interests were so intertwined as they were at Hawaii, I called upon General Short in civilian clothes at the quarters in Honolulu he was temporarily occupying

before he took over the duties of commanding general. I found him then and later to be a man of sound judgment and a competent soldier. My liking and respect for him increased as I came to know him better. In the next few months he and Admiral Bloch, the commandant of the naval district, worked out and put into effect a plan to coordinate the efforts of the Army and Navy air forces operating from Hawaiian air stations. I was convinced General Short greatly improved the efficiency of his command. He, like myself, was handicapped by personnel and material shortages and the influx of large numbers of untrained officers and enlisted men.

General Short and I were not "opposite numbers" in the sense that our total concerns and duties were coextensive. The responsibilities of the fleet under "War Plans" were far flung and offensive. Those of the Hawaiian Department were local and defensive. Because I was interested in the security of the fleet and the Hawaiian Islands, I gave General Short all the assistance I could, even in connection with local defensive measures which were exclusively under the Army's control. The aircraft warning service is a case in point. I took Army personnel to sea with the fleet so that they could be trained as radar operators. I assigned to the Army a naval officer, who had had experience in Britain with radar, to give any advice and assistance he could in connection with the aircraft warning net in Hawaii. General Short informed me his radar was operating and could give a 100-mile coverage. In joint Army-Navy drills it did perform satisfactorily. In the period before December 7, I was informed that the Army's radar was manned. It was so manned. It was only the day before the attack that a subordinate Army officer gave the permission to shut down at 7 A.M. on Sunday. Even despite this, one of the stations was operating after 7 A.M. on the morning of December 7, and obtained information about both the incoming and outgoing Japanese planes. This information was not passed on to the Navy because the subordinate Army officer to whom it was reported did not deem it important.

5. Relations With General Short

My relations with General Short, which were once the subject of considerable confusion in the public mind, have now been clarified by exhaustive investigations. I need not labor it. It has been established that our official and social relations were friendly, that we frequently conferred on official matters of common interest and invariably did so when either of us received messages which had any bearing on the development of the United States-Japanese situation, or on our several plans in preparing for war. As the Naval Court of Inquiry summarized the matter:

> Each was mindful of his own responsibility and of the responsibilities vested in the other. Each was informed of the measures being undertaken by the other in the defense of the Base to a degree sufficient for all useful purposes.[5]