

Chapter 9

Vilification and Encouragement

The most disgraceful feature of the whole tragic affair was the evident determination on the part of Washington to fasten the blame on Hawaiian Commanders. Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, U.S.N., Ret

The flood of abuse and misrepresentation began immediately after the attack. My court-martial was demanded on the floor of the House of Representatives on Monday, December 8, 1941. After the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Frank Knox, reported to the President the result of his inspection at Pearl Harbor, additional statements were released which augmented the campaign of vilification. When the Roberts report was published a veritable hurricane of charges were hurled indiscriminately at Short and me. On April 6, 1942, at Pikeville, Kentucky, Mr. Andrew J. May, chairman of the military affairs committee of the House of Representatives, suggested in a speech that Admiral Kimmel and General Short should be shot!

I received many abusive and threatening letters most of them from people quite evidently unbalanced. Some of these letters were from people, as identified by themselves, who should not have been infected with the hysteria which Mr. May and some of his colleagues in the Congress did everything in their power to promote.

Three of the less virulent letters are quoted. The letters from the two judges were sent to the Navy Department with a request for action. I was informed that the Navy Department would do nothing.

Municipal Court San Francisco, Calif.
Twain Michelsen, Judge February 8, 1942
Hall of Justice,
San Francisco

Rear Admiral Husband E. Kimmel,
Fairmont Hotel,
San Francisco.

Dear Sir:

If it is possible, under Navy regulations, for you to request a general court-martial for the purpose of determining who, or what, was responsible for the Pearl Harbor debacle, would it not be in keeping with the proprieties for you, as well as Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, to pursue such a course?

I am confident that the people of America will never forget the culpability that has been attached to both yourself and Short. Equally sure am I that history will forever point an accusatory finger at both of you, and to your memory, when each has passed to the realm where so many of our men were so suddenly hurled because of your joint neglect and utter stupidity.

Surely, there isn't much for you and Short to live for, — unless a general court-martial would bring forth a page from the shameful chapter of Pearl Harbor that might shed a little more light on the entire picture and thus, however possible, clean from the hands of both of you the blood of your unsuspecting victims. That would, it seems to me, be the honorable thing for you to do, instead of to ask for "retirement."

Sincerely,
Twain Michelsen

Central 2020
2021

George Edward Mix
(Former Circuit Judge)
Law Offices,
601-606 International Office Bldg.
722 Chestnut Street,
St. Louis, Mo. February 11, 1942

Husband Kimmel,
c/o Adjutant General's Office,
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

As an American citizen, taxpayer, graduate of Yale University, and as one whose ancestors have fought in all the wars in which this country has been engaged, I suggest that instead of your cowardly act in asking to be relieved from duty and Placed on the taxpayers' payroll at \$6000.00 per year, and in view of the millions of dollars worth of taxpayers' property destroyed in Pearl Harbor by reason of your carelessness, negligence and thoughtlessness, that you try to show that you are a real man by using a pistol and ending your existence, as you are certainly of no use to yourself nor the American people.

An American citizen,

GM

George E. Mix

315 Johnson Avenue
Los Gatos, California
January 28, 1942

Admiral Husband E. Kimmel
Fairmount Hotel
San Francisco, California

Dear Sir:

In the interest of plain justice I wish to bring something to your attention. It is bad enough, I am sure, to be blamed for neglect of duty, but I think you should have the privilege of refuting and denying malicious gossip which hurts the Navy and makes you appear as a traitor, which I am sure you are not. I hope you can do something about the following:

On New Year's Eve, in San Francisco, I was told by a Spanish lady that someone connected with the Spanish council, and who had "just returned from Honolulu and so knew all about it", that the reason the Navy leader was off guard at Pearl Harbor on December the seventh was because he was spending the

night with a Japanese woman. I passed that by as malicious gossip until the story, somewhat twisted by time and distance was repeated to me here in Los Gatos yesterday by a U.S. citizen of German parentage whose informant quoted "the Portuguese council from Hawaii." This time the story stated that the leaders of army and navy were holding an all-night Japanese party. This looks like deliberate foreign propaganda to discredit members of the Defense to me, doesn't it to you?

Many people do not know the difference between Spaniards and Portuguese, a "wop" is a "wop" from either country. Allowing for the element of time and distance the two stories seem to have a common origin, apparently the first-"the someone connected with the Spanish council who had just arrived from Honolulu." Such stories are apt to be the expression of that nasty instinct of humans to kick a man when he is down, but if it is part of the foreign propaganda, you should, for the sake of the honorable history of our Navy track it down and stop it.

You see I have a personal interest in the Navy; our family also had a Commander of the U.S. Fleet to write history about. I refer to Commodore Preble of Barbary Coast fame, who was also engaged in chasing pirates off the seas.

Sincerely yours,
S/ Donna Preble

(copy Ss- 5/5/42)

In spite of the half truths and outright lies constantly being published about Short and me the sound common sense of the American people was evidenced by many letters which showed they were not impressed by the Roberts report and other statements.

I quote one of them.

Admiral Husband Kimmel
San Francisco,
Calif.

Feb. 1, 1942

Dear Admiral Kimmel:

I wanted to send you the enclosed clipping from the Los Angeles Examiner of Jan. 27, 1942, but have procrastinated a few days. I think it bespeaks the opinions of a great part of the rank and file of Americans; in fact, anyone who reads carefully the Commission's report could hardly come to any other con-

clusion. You have a multitude of supporters, Admiral, in this time of trial. Keep up your spirit. We can believe nothing else than that you have now, and always had the safety and welfare of the U.S.A. and its Navy foremost in your heart, mind and energies.

May God see that right prevails and that He may protect you against these accusations.

Sincerely,
Mr. & Mrs. Geo. W. Jones
403 Kenoak Dr.
Pomona, California

From officers and enlisted men with whom I had served I received a great number of understanding letters. I quote a few of them

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
Service Above Self
He Profits Most Who Serves Best
Central Office, 35 East Wacker Drive,
Chicago, U.S.A.

18 December, 1941
(non-official,
personal communication)

Admiral Husband E. Kimmel
United States Navy
Washington, District of Columbia
Dear Sir:

No matter what the newspapers say — no matter what the public thinks — and no matter what is finally published I will never believe that you were negligent in your duty to the U.S. Navy or to your country. And I consider myself a loyal American citizen in every sense of the word.

I feel so sure of my convictions on this point because I served under you aboard the U.S.S. ARKANSAS as a member of the Hospital Corps. (Dr. Myron C. Baker was our senior medical officer). When I was aboard the "Arky" you, "Skipper" de Steiger and Dr. Baker were my ideals. You were real "Navy" to me; "regulation as hell," as some of my shipmates used to say, but fine officers, gentlemen and sailors. And I can never believe anything else. After leaving the Navy I completed my high school education, then attended the University of Illinois until I received my A.B. degree. For a few years after graduation there were numerous ups and downs, but for the past seven or eight years I've had a little success — which my wife sometimes likes to boast about. But good position or not I anticipate the

day when I'll be back in the Navy to help win this damnable war. I believe that if it were possible to obtain the consensus of others who served under you it would be in agreement with my attitude—that you are not the type of officer who could ever be labeled as incompetent in your profession. I damned near cried when I read the paper this morning.

With best wishes for a satisfactory outcome in the present investigation so that the new year will bring you added success and happiness, I am,

Most sincerely,
Russel A. Perry, Ex-Pharmacists Mate,
U.S. Navy

210 Lexington Avenue,
Providence, R.I.
3-8-42

Admiral H. E. Kimmel:

Dear Sir:

I don't expect you to remember me but I served under your command in 1924 and 1925 aboard the U.S.S. PREBLE. In fact I was the engineer in your gig for one year, and served in your division until January 1927 aboard the U.S.S. PRUITT.

As I am back in the service I have refrained from addressing you until you were retired. But now I feel that even though I might be breaking regulations you will be generous enough to overlook it.

After three and one half years under your command I believe I can safely say that I am expressing the opinion of your entire crew when I say that with you in command I would gladly serve on any vessel, in any waters and on any mission.

Respectfully,
/s/ Raymond Printy

Coronado, California,
December 16, 1941

Dear Kimmel,

I want you to know that Mrs. Senn and I have absolute confidence in you, your leadership and the Naval Forces under your command.

I know of no officer who I had rather see lead our Fleet into battle and I know my son Elliott feels the same way for he has frequently said so. You may always know that you are constantly in my thoughts.

/s/ Thos J. Senn,
Rear Admiral,
Thomas J. Senn, USN, Retired

Bureau of Navigation
Memorandum
December 19, 1941

Dear Kimmel,

Just a line to let you know that my unbounded faith in your ability, energy, judgment, and devotion to duty has been not one whit diminished.

Stand firm.

I am still at your service.

My best to you all and the Dave Clarks.

Sincerely,
Hal Bowen

I concur

C. W. Nimitz

[Rear Admiral H. G. Bowen, U.S. Navy, at that time chief of the Bureau of Engineering in the Navy Department, now a Vice Admiral. Rear Admiral C. W. Nimitz, U.S. Navy, at that time chief of the Bureau of Navigation in the Navy Department. Now a Fleet Admiral.]

Norfolk, Virginia,
January 26, 1942

Dear Kim,

While anything I may write you will probably not give you much comfort, I just can't help letting you know, that I know, in spite of the findings of the Roberts Board, that you were not guilty of anything either in the way of dereliction of duty or in your judgment.

I, probably as much, if not more, than any high ranking officer have studied the Hawaiian Defense — and the Pacific situation in general, having spent 8 years at our War College — been Chief of Staff of the Fleet, and Assistant Chief of Operations. I know how the State Department always prevented our Navy from doing anything which Japan might in any way consider an offensive move, or a slap at their delicate feelings. I know how impossible it has been to get our own Navy Department to obtain the essentials for carrying on a great war. And what I think is important, I don't believe there is a single high ranking officer whether so called air minded or not, — who believed that Japan would or could make such an attack on Pearl Harbor. And, of course, I also know that it is the Army's business to defend a Naval Base, and that ships at a base are there for rest, recreation, and repairs.

I have always felt that the entire blame for this whole affair lies right in Washington — but, of course there is no way that I can see to

get at the culprits. So they have to find a goat and the mantle falls on you, who through circumstances happens to be the CinC.

If the Department contemplates taking any action against you in this matter, and if I can be of any service to you as an expert, or in any other way, I hope you will call on me. My kindest thoughts and best regards.

Sincerely and sympathetically,
/s/ Joe Taussig

[From Vice Admiral Joseph K. Taussig, U.S. Navy, Retired, at that time president of the Hampton Roads Sanitation Commission.]

Washington —
December 17th

Dear Kim

I wish to express in writing — what I feel you already know that you have my sincere regrets over what has occurred — it is something that might well have happened to any of us!

The ingratitude — the ruthlessness — of "democracies" may not be the subject of the proverbs but it is none-the-less a reality!

Please be sure of my very real regards for you and of my good wishes for you — in every way

Most sincerely yours
King

[The letters dated December 17th (1941) and February 27 (1942) signed King are from the then Admiral Ernest J. King now Fleet Admiral.]

UNITED STATES FLEET

Washington—
February 27th

Dear Kimmel

It is high time that I wrote to you to say that, while I appreciate the task set for the Roberts Commission, the reading of the report leaves me with the definite feeling that much was omitted that was germane to the inquiry — which the commission was aware of — which they probably left out for "reasons of state" the all — powerful public must be presented with a report which named names — not necessarily all of the names — but enough to make the public feel that the commission had done its duty that the report could receive approval.

It is wholly hindsight to say this or that as to events or as to people. All of the "breaks"

went against us. I am confident that, almost without exception, the same thing would have happened whether you and Short were there or any other Navy or Army officers — the set-up was "that way," physically and psychologically, premised on the attitude here in Washington as to the realities of the case — not only as to "ways and means" placed at your disposal but as to the several progressive steps which led to the break with J apan! No one thought the Japs would strike-or even that they were ready to strike!

Please be assured of my good will and good wishes. Do not fail to let me know if there is anyway in which I can be of service to you.

Sincerely yours
/s/ King

U.S.S. Trenton
At Sea
8 February 1942

My dear Kimmel,

The radio press this morning brought to me the very sad news that you and Short had applied for retirement.

I have known you intimately for many years; have talked "shop" with you both on board ship and ashore; know as well as anyone in the service the unselfish devotion you have given that service; have knowledge of the high ideals you have cherished and the untiring efforts you have made to bring your ships, your division and your fleet up to the standards they should meet which were definitely higher than those then obtaining. More over I know the professional ability character that goes with it. I know too that only one side of the Pearl Harbor story has been told the public and probably ever will be told.

So when I read the press this morning I know that the action taken had been carefully considered and was based on what you felt was for the best interest of your country. That is in keeping with how you have always acted. Your country and your navy always came first with you. And that is why you have my faith, my confidence and my deep affection. With love to you and Dorothy I am,

As always
/s/ Jack

[Rear Admiral John F. Shafroth, U.S. Navy.]

United States Pacific Fleet,
Commander Service Force,
March 6, 1942

Dear Admiral Kimmel,

While you were our Commander-in-Chief, I was loyal. I did work hard, but only followed my leader. This Fleet and Bill Calhoun have much for which to thank Admiral Kimmel.

We are working hard. I wish I could talk to you to say all that is in my heart. It is not necessary for me to reassure you of my friendship, my respect and my admiration.

All my senior Staff (My flag men) send best wishes.

Sincerely and gratefully,
/s/ Bill Calhoun

[Vice Admiral W. L. Calhoun, U.S. Navy.]

Department of the Navy
General Board
Washington

February 24, 1942

Dear Kimmel,

I received a recent letter from Theobald in which he said,

"Poor Kimmel. No one ever worked harder than he did. I was with him when he testified to Mr. Roberts and his friends — ! ! ! !

"One had to be proud of Kimmel. He backed away from nothing throughout his ordeal, kept his head up and did his level best during his last days as CinC, with everything tumbling about his head, and will carry to his grave the respect and well wishes of everyone who served under his command."

That is a fine tribute and one that I know is fully deserved.

Sincerely,
/s/ J. O. Richardson

If I can be of any service to you call on me.
[Admiral J. O. Richardson my predecessor as commander-in-chief.]

My feelings at the time and the situation in which I found myself can best be shown by quoting my letter on 22 February 1942 to Admiral Stark:

22 February 1942

Dear Betty:

I started writing this letter a few minutes after Pye gave me your letter of 21 February. I thank you for the letter and for the information contained therein. I also thank you for your other letters which I have not answered.

I understand from your letter that I will not be retired for the present, that I will be in a leave status until some further action is taken.

I submitted my request for retirement because I was notified that Short had done so and took that notification as a suggestion for me to do likewise. I submitted this request solely to permit the department to take whatever action they deemed best for the interests of the country. I did not submit it in order to escape censure or punishment.

When I was notified that the notification in regard to Short was not meant to put pressure on me, I submitted my second letter on the subject.

When the fact that Short and I had submitted requests for retirement was published to the country, I was astounded that the department would put Short and me in such light before the public.

On February 19, I received notification signed by the Secretary that I would be placed on the Retired list on March 1, 1942. Paragraph 2 of this letter states, "This approval of your request for retirement is without condonation of any offense or prejudice to future disciplinary action."

I do not understand this paragraph unless it is to be published to the country as a promise that I will be disciplined at some future time.

I stand ready at any time to accept the consequences of my acts. I do not wish to embarrass the government in the conduct of the war. I do feel, however, that my crucifixion before the public has about reached the limit. I am in daily receipt of letters from irresponsible people over the country taking me to task and even threatening to kill me. I am not particularly concerned except as it shows the effect on the public of articles published about me.

I feel that the publication of paragraph two of the Secretary's letter of February 16 will further inflame the public and do me a great injustice.

I have kept my mouth shut and propose to

continue to do so as long as it is humanly possible.

I regret the losses at Pearl Harbor just as keenly, or perhaps more keenly than any other American citizen. I wish that I had been smarter than I was and able to foresee what happened on December 7. I devoted all my energies to the job and made the dispositions which appeared to me to be called for. I cannot now reproach myself for any lack of effort.

I will not comment on the Report of the Commission, but you probably know what I think of it. I will say in passing that I was not made an interested party or a defendant.

All this I have been willing to accept for the good of the country out of my loyalty to the Nation, and to await the judgment of history when all the factors can be published.

But I do think that in all justice the department should do nothing further to inflame the public against me. I am entitled to some consideration even though you may consider I erred grievously.

You must appreciate that the beating I have taken leaves very little that can be added to my burden.

I appreciate your efforts on my behalf and will always value your friendship, which is a precious thing to me.

My kindest regards always.

/s/ H. E. Kimmel

To: Admiral H. R. Stark, U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations.

The campaign against Short and me continued through the years. On August 20, 1944, I found it necessary to write the letter which I quote:

280 Bronxville Road,
Bronxville 8, N. Y.
August 20, 1944

Senator Harry S. Truman,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Truman,

In an article appearing under your name in Collier's Magazine of August 26, 1944, you have made false statements concerning my conduct as Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor prior to the Japanese attack.

Your innuendo that General Short and I were not on speaking terms is not true. Your statements alleging failure to cooperate and coordinate our efforts are equally false. General Short and I, as well as our subordinates, coordinated the efforts of our commands in close, friendly, personal and official relationships.

The real story of the Pearl Harbor attack and the events preceding it has never been publicly told. This has not been my decision. For more than two and a half years I have been anxious to have the American people know all the facts.

The Roberts Report, upon which you rely, does not contain the basic truths of the Pearl Harbor Catastrophe. This is evident from the fact that no official action has ever been taken upon the basis of that Report. The Congress of the United States, of which you are a Member, has recognized the inadequacy of the Roberts Report by directing that the War and Navy Departments undertake a full investigation of the Pearl Harbor disaster.

Until I am afforded a hearing in open court, it is grossly unjust to repeat false charges against me, when, by official action, I have been persistently denied an opportunity to defend myself publicly.

I suggest that until such time as complete disclosure is made of the facts about Pearl Harbor, you refrain from repeating charges based on evidence that has never met the test of public scrutiny.

I ask for nothing more than an end to untruths, and half truths about this matter, until the entire story is given to our people, who, I am convinced, will be amazed by the truth.

I am releasing this letter to the press in the belief that the historic American sense of fair play will approve this action.

Very truly yours,
/s/ H. E. Kimmel,
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.(Ret.)

I never received a reply to this letter.

My wife also received letters of which the following is a sample:

136 East 30 Street,
New York City,
January 26, 1942

Mrs. Husband Kimmel,
Navy Department,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mrs. Kimmel:

My nephew came back from Hawaii with you on the Clipper and reported that because you would leave none of your luggage to follow by a slower route two Navy wives, who were pregnant were forced to cancel their passage. This, in addition to the report that you required an unusual amount of service en route, would seem to indicate a type of person not the best influence for a husband!

Very truly yours,
Eleanor Overman

This letter finally reached my wife when we were in Princeton, New Jersey, and she replied immediately.

Princeton, New Jersey,
March 23rd, 1942

My dear Mrs. Overman,

Your letter of January 26th reached me today. Your nephew is mistaken. I have never been to Hawaii and I have never travelled on a clipper.

Sincerely,
Dorothy K. Kimmel
(Mrs. Husband E. Kimmel)

Mrs. Overman replied promptly with a profuse apology but that did not stop this malicious lie.

Again in October of 1945 Bill Cunningham published in his column in the *Boston Herald* a statement to the effect that service hostesses in Hawaii were careful never to include Mrs. Kimmel and Mrs. Short as guests at the same time because their constant state of belligerency was embarrassing to all bystanders. It was only by chance that we heard of this canard and informed Mr. Cunningham that Mrs. Kimmel had never

been to Hawaii and that she and Mrs. Short had never met. Mr. Cunningham promptly apologized publicly in his column.

But there were hundreds of similar lies which were propagated and never overtaken.