

Book review of Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision by Roberta Wohlstetter

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PEARL HARBOR: Warning and Decision. By *Roberta Wohlstetter*. (Stanford University Press. 1962.; Pp. 426. \$7.50.)

"If our intelligence systems and all our other channels of information failed to produce an accurate image of Japanese intentions and capabilities, it was not for want of the relevant materials. Never before have we had so complete an intelligence picture of the enemy."

Thus does Roberta Wohlstetter start the seventh and last chapter of her magnificent analysis of the circumstances leading to the disaster of 7 December 1941. Winner of the Bancroft Prize for 1963 and now in its third printing, her book is the most objective examination of the intelligence failure culminated at Pearl Harbor yet published.¹ She makes extensive use of the 39-volume Report of the congressional Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack as basic source material, but works out her own exceptionally fine study of the intelligence reporting, processing, and estimating.

After her sweeping initial statement in Chapter Seven, Mrs. Wohlstetter qualifies it. She points out that "no single person or agency ever had at any given moment all the signals existing." And while the decision-makers had at hand an impressive amount of information on the enemy, "they did not have the complete list of targets [estimated to be the objectives of an evidently imminent seaborne attack), since none of the last-minute estimates included Pearl Harbor. They did not know the exact hour and date for opening the attack. They did not have an accurate knowledge of Japanese capabilities or of Japanese ability to accept very high risks.... If we could enumerate accurately the British and Dutch targets ... [of] a Japanese attack ... either on November 30 or December 7, why were we not expecting a specific danger to ourselves?"

Several reasons are offered. "It is much easier after the event to sort the relevant from the irrelevant signals ... Before the event [a signal] is obscure and pregnant with conflicting meanings . . . In Washington, Pearl Harbor signals were competing with a vast number of signals from the European theater ... In short, we failed to anticipate Pearl Harbor not for want of the relevant materials, but because of a plethora of irrelevant ones."

Examples are cited which "illustrate ... the very human tendency to pay

attention to signals that support current expectations about enemy behavior." There were other problems for the analysts: there had been previous alert situations and false alarms; the enemy tried to keep relevant signals quiet and conducted an elaborate deception program; there was such careful control over the most important information that "only a very few key individuals saw these secret [MAGIC] messages, and they saw them only briefly. They had no opportunity or time to make a critical review of the material, and each one assumed that others who had seen it would arrive at identical interpretations."

There were interservice and interservice rivalries and a general disregard for intelligence. "The most glaring example of rivalry in the Pearl Harbor case was that between Naval War Plans and Naval Intelligence. A general prejudice against intellectuals and specialists, not confined to the military but unfortunately widely held in America, also made it difficult for intelligence experts to be heard ... Low budgets for American intelligence departments reflected the low prestige of this activity, whereas in England, Germany, and Japan, 1941 budgets reached a height that was regarded by the American Congress as quite beyond reason."

The doctrinal conclusions the author arrives at in her study are not optimistic. These include:

"The fact that intelligence predictions must be based on moves that are almost always reversible makes understandable the reluctance of the intelligence analyst to make bold assertions."

"In spite of the vast increase in expenditures for collecting and analyzing intelligence data and in spite of advances in the art of machine decoding and machine translation, the balance of the advantage seems clearly to have shifted since Pearl Harbor in favor of a surprise attacker. The benefits to be expected from achieving surprise have increased enormously and the penalties for losing the initiative in an all-out war have grown correspondingly."

"If the study of Pearl Harbor has anything to offer for the future, it is this: We have to accept the fact of uncertainty and learn to live with it. No magic, in code or otherwise, will provide certainty. Our plans must work without it."

While such disturbing conclusions are justified by the history of the Pearl Harbor catastrophe, in which the lack of any capability for systematic analysis and unified estimates loomed large, they are perhaps less fully applicable today than Mrs. Wohlstetter believes. Nothing, to be sure, will "provide certainty," but the postwar development of the U.S. intelligence effort has substantially eliminated many of the problems and weaknesses, horrendous to contemplate in the brilliance of our 20-20 hindsight, which she describes.

The preceding chapters of the book make a careful analysis of the intelligence organization at Pearl Harbor and a much more penetrating study of Washington intelligence. Particular attention is devoted to signals intelligence, notably to MAGIC intercepts, the "Winds" messages, Japanese espionage reporting, and frequency analysis. There is a look at the three earlier alerts in 1941-June 17, July 25, and October 16-and the effect these had on reactions in December, and careful consideration is given both to diplomatic reporting and to the able press coverage of the deterioration of Japanese-American relations. Finally there is a good study of the Japanese planning which highlights the fact that the Pearl Harbor attack was not finally settled upon until the last minute, a circumstance that did not make the problem any easier for U.S. intelligence.

This is a required textbook for intelligence officers-a little slow-going in spots, but on the whole exceedingly well done.

-L. B. Kirkpatrick

THE QUIET CANADIAN: The Secret Service Story of Sir William Stephenson. By H. Montgomery Hyde. (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd. 1962. Pp. 255. 25/-.) Also under title ROOM 3603. (New York: Farrar Strauss & Co. 1963. \$4.50.)

On 8 November 1962, in the British House of Commons, Lt. Colonel Cordeaux, Conservative member from Nottingham, Central, arose to ask

the Attorney General whether he would authorize the prosecution of Hamish Hamilton, Ltd. and Mr. Montgomery Hyde on the ground that *The Quiet Canadian* contains breaches of the Official Secrets Act. Sir John Hobson, the Attorney General, answered "No."

Lt. Colonel Cordeaux persisted: "Is my right honorable and learned friend really telling the House that no breach of the official Secrets Act has taken place in the writing and publication of a book that describes the work of one of the head agents of the British Secret Intelligence Service? Can he assure us that the publication of this book had the full approval of the present head of the Service, and if it did, will he say what advice one should give to former members of the Service who will now, of course, be encouraged to cash in on their own personal knowledge of similar sensational events and interesting and intriguing bits of information, such as Sir Stuart Menzies' successors?" The Attorney General replied that he did not have any evidence of an offense having been committed and referred the other questions to the Prime Minister.

On 11 December in the House, Lt. Colonel Cordeaux asked the Prime Minister if he would consider amending the Official Secrets Act to strengthen it, and Mr. MacMillan replied that he thought the provisions of the Act were adequate. Lt. Colonel Cordeaux then said, "If my right honorable friend considers that the Act is adequate for its purposes, will he agree that it has not been enforced? For instance, does he agree that . . . *The Quiet Canadian* discloses the most flagrant breaches of the Official Secrets Act by one or more people, showing that the Act is not being enforced in the way it was after the First World War? If no action is taken under the Act as a result of the publication of this book, will it not be impossible to prevent other secret agents exploiting their own experiences for money and, moreover, impossible to prosecute them if they do?"

The Prime Minister: "I am informed that this book ... did not in fact prejudice current security in any way. I am informed also that any breach was inadvertent and due to a misunderstanding. In general, the requirements of the Act are widely understood and are well observed."

To this reviewer the discourse above presents in a new light what had seemed the enviable quiet effectiveness of the British Official Secrets Act in protecting intelligence operations from public knowledge. Having been concerned with the frustrating and often futile effort to restrain or restrict under American laws what appears in public media concerning

U.S. intelligence operations, I felt a bit of sympathetic shock on learning that our British counterparts have their problems too. The publication of this study is shocking indeed.

The work done in New York for British intelligence by "Little Bill" Stephenson was known to some of "Big Bill" Donovan's employees in the O.S.S. Exactly what British intelligence was doing in the United States, however, was closely held in Washington, and very little had hitherto been printed about it. Robert Sherwood, in editing *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*, had made a reference to it which gives the Hyde book its title:

There was established, by Roosevelt's order and despite State Department qualms, effectively close cooperation between J. Edgar Hoover and British Security Services under the direction of a quiet Canadian, William Stephenson. The purpose of this was the detection and frustration of espionage and sabotage activities in the Western Hemisphere. . . . It produced some remarkable results which were incalculably valuable. . . . Hoover was later decorated by the British and Stephenson by the U. S. Government for exploits which could be hardly advertised at the time.²

In a rather disjointed history, Mr. Hyde reveals how Stephenson, with the agreement of the FBI but unbeknown to the State Department, established a base for intelligence activities in the United States, creating an organization that operated first under the cover of the British Passport Control Office and later as the Statistics and Analysis Division of the Office of British Security Coordination. One of his first operations was concentrated on persuading the U.S. government to conclude the destroyers-for-bases deal with Britain. This, according to Mr. Hyde, "became inextricably a part of the broader purpose of promoting American intervention" in the war, an aim pursued by the use of covert propaganda among other means. Stephenson used the American press to advantage in exposing the activities of German Abwehr agents in the United States, in revealing that material prepared by the German Library of Information was being mailed under congressional franks, and in fighting the America First organization. He also worked against the German cartels and their organization here.

After the United States entered the war, Stephenson's principal efforts turned to intelligence collection, counterespionage, and covert action against the Axis powers and Vichy France. He worked closely with

British censorship in Bermuda, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Canada, and British intelligence in South America, but his own organization ultimately embraced about 1,000 men and women in the United States and another 2,000 elsewhere in the hemisphere. His countersabotage officers worked on security controls for war materials being produced here for Britain (on occasion taking protective action into their own hands), conducted more than 30,000 anti-sabotage inspections on British ships, and placed observers on neutral ships in U.S. ports. Hyde tells a fascinating story of operations against the Vichy French embassy in which the sexual lure played a part, mentions Stephenson's employment of fabricated letters and false documents, indicates that one of his collection requirements was information on internal U.S. politics, and gives the British version of the organization and development of the Office of the Coordinator of Information and its successor Office of Strategic Services.

One may suppose that Mr. Hyde's account, unlike some of the "inside" stories of U.S. intelligence operations, is relatively accurate, but the wisdom of placing it on the public record is extremely questionable.

-L. B. Kirkpatrick

1 The chief previously published works that deal significantly with the intelligence aspects of the Pearl Harbor disaster are the following: *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (Princeton University Press, 1950) by Herbert Fels, who had been a State Department officer at the time of the attack and in writing the book at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study had access to official U.S. documents and the papers of several of the participants; *Admiral Kimmel's Story* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), the naval commander's own apologia; *G. E. Morgenstern's Pearl Harbor* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1947), a journalist's portrayal of the attack as the result of a deliberate plot engineered by President Roosevelt; *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1954) by R. A. Theobald, a subordinate commander of Kimmel's at the time of the attack and his assistant during the investigations, who argues that a good share of the blame should have gone to the top officers, military and civilian, in Washington; *What Happened at Pearl Harbor?* (New York: Twayne, 1958), a compilation of documents bearing on the event, including extracts from the congressional investigation, edited by H. L. Trefousse; and the

Report of the congressional Joint Committee itself (USGPO, 1946). The 39 volumes of this Report include not only the testimony (Parts 1-11) and exhibits (Parts 12-21) placed before the Joint Committee but also the evidence developed in the earlier investigations by the (Supreme Court Justice) Roberts Commission (Parts 22-25), by Admiral Thomas C. Hart for the Secretary of the Navy (Part 26), by the Army Pearl Harbor.

2 Vol. I, p. 270.

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