

## Intelligence in Public Media

### Japan's Spy at Pearl Harbor: Memoir of an Imperial Navy Secret Agent

Takeo Yoshikawa. McFarland, 2020. 308, photos, maps, chapter notes, index. Translated by Andrew Mitchell.

#### Reviewed by Stephen C. Mercado

Secrets can take decades to surface. In 1953, the year after the Allied occupation of Japan ended, a local newspaper broke the news to the Japanese public that an intelligence officer of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), operating from Japan's consulate general in Honolulu, had gathered intelligence on Pearl Harbor and other US military facilities in the Hawaiian islands in the months leading to the IJN's surprise attack in December 1941. Nearly 20 years after the raid, Marine Lt. Col. Norman Sanford, an assistant naval attache at our embassy in Tokyo, interviewed at length the former intelligence officer, Yoshikawa Takeo.<sup>a</sup> The US Naval Institute published the result, "Top Secret Assignment," in the December 1960 issue of its monthly *Proceedings*.<sup>b</sup> One year later, CBS aired an episode of its series *The Twentieth Century*, "The Man Who Spied on Pearl Harbor," starring anchor-man Walter Cronkite and featuring Yoshikawa, to mark the 20th anniversary of the attack. In December 1963, a prominent Japanese company published the intelligence officer's memoir.<sup>c</sup> Best-selling author John Toland interviewed him in writing his monumental history of the Japanese empire, *The Rising Sun*, published one year shy of Pearl Harbor's 30th anniversary. This year, nearly eight decades after the Japanese Navy's attack, Yoshikawa's memoir is at last available to an international audience with its publication in English translation.

Yoshikawa Takeo, commissioned an ensign following his graduation in 1933 as a member of the IJN Academy's 61st class, suffered early in his naval career a serious ailment that led to a long convalescence and his placement on the reserve list. Yoshikawa returned to duty in late 1936 as an intelligence officer in the 8th Section (British Empire) of the IJN Third Bureau (Intelligence). For several years, he followed developments in the Royal Navy through intelligence covertly gathered as well as such sources as British naval publications,<sup>d</sup> radio broadcasts, Foreign Ministry reports, and information gleaned from cooperative Japanese trading companies, ships' crewmen, and residents living abroad.

In 1940, NGS 5th Section (Americas) ordered him to go under diplomatic cover to the consulate general in Honolulu to gather intelligence there. His assignment was part of an IJN effort to strengthen its intelligence network in the United States. Yoshikawa recalls without details one unidentified staff officer leaving NGS around that time for the West Coast of the United States, following another one already there.<sup>e</sup>

Yoshikawa arrived at the consulate general in Honolulu in March 1941, identified as Vice-Consul Tadashi Morimura, his real identity known only to Consul-General Kita Nagao. His putative consular duties involved handling cases of Japanese-Americans

a. Japanese names in this review appear in traditional Japanese order, surname preceding givenname.

b. US Naval Institute, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1960/december/top-secret-assignment>. Accessed 18 March 2020.

c. Yoshikawa Takeo, *Higashi no kaze, ame: Shinjuwan supai no kaiso* [East Wind, Rain: Memoir of the Pearl Harbor Spy] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1963). Another publisher reprinted the book in 1985 under the title *Shinjuwan supai no kaiso* [Memoir of the Pearl Harbor Spy], which I have used to review this book. Finally, the publisher Mainichi Wanz re-issued the book in 2015 and again in 2018 under the title *Watakushi wa Shinjuwan supai datta* [I Was the Pearl Harbor Spy]. This third publisher was the source for the English translation under review.

d. These publications included London's Navy List and three publications of the Jane's series: *Fighting Ships*, *Merchant Ships*, and *Aircraft*. Oddly, the translation omits reference to the Jane's publications, all found in the Japanese original.

e. Japanese military intelligence expert Kotani Ken of the Defense Ministry's National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS) identifies the West Coast operatives as Cdr. Tachibana Itaru, based in Los Angeles, and Lt. Cdr. Okada Sadatomo, sent to Seattle. See his "Japanese Intelligence in WWII: Successes and Failures," [http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2009/bulletin\\_e2009\\_2.pdf](http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2009/bulletin_e2009_2.pdf). Accessed 18 March 2020. I earlier reviewed two of Dr. Kotani's books in *Studies in Intelligence* 54, No. 1 (March 2010), <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/volume-54-number-1/japanese-intelligence-in-world-war-ii.html>. Accessed 18 March 2020.

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renouncing their Japanese citizenship.<sup>a</sup> When not at the office, Yoshikawa was touring Oahu and other Hawaiian islands to gather intelligence. He would take taxis on roads that passed by military facilities en route to some supposed tourist destination, fly over bases on aerial tours, attend a local air show to assess pilot skill, ride on a glass bottom boat to assess Kaneohe Bay's suitability for naval operations, and swim at various beaches to conduct hydrographic surveys. His favorite observation post was on Alewa Heights at the Shunchoro Tea House, run by a Japanese immigrant couple, from the second floor of which he enjoyed a clear view of the warships at Pearl Harbor. Returning to the consulate general, he would report his intelligence by diplomatic telegram to Tokyo.<sup>b</sup>

In addition to direct observation, Yoshikawa would obtain military information from close reading of the local press. He would also elicit details from sailors on liberty, buying them drinks to loosen their tongues. He also sought collaborators among the large community of Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans. Although many were willing and eager to help, Yoshikawa found them lacking in military knowledge and discretion. He claimed, fearing compromise, not to have recruited any of them as agents. Nevertheless, members of the Japanese community played supporting roles. The Japanese lady who ran the tea house suspected Yoshikawa for spending so much time observing Pearl Harbor from her establishment's second floor but never reported him.

Yoshikawa often took the young Japanese-American women from the tea house with him on his trips around Hawaii, calculating that the dates at his side would make him appear less suspicious. He made regular use of a Japanese-American military veteran, a driver in the employ of the consulate general for over 20 years, whom he valued for his being "trusted by the Americans."<sup>c</sup> Another Japanese-American working at the consulate

general bought at least one airplane ticket in his own name for Yoshikawa, who wished to avoid suspicion by buying too many tickets himself. He also turned often to a favorite taxi driver, an immigrant with Japanese military experience, who on at least one occasion hid his taxi outside the consulate general to help Yoshikawa avoid surveillance at the beginning of his route.

Yoshikawa took various actions to avoid or shake off possible tails. One technique was to enter a shop, purchase clothing and change into it before exiting the store with a new look. On at least one occasion, having taken time to darken his skin by extensive sunbathing and dressed in casual clothing, he attempted to enter a sensitive area disguised as a Filipino. Yoshikawa also took various routes to detect or escape surveillance, at times departing the consulate general by hopping over a compound wall, crossing a stream, and reaching the main road before catching a taxi. He would also use multiple modes of transportation on a single trip, hailing a cab outside the consulate general and then hopping a bus before taking a second taxi on the way to his destination.

After IJN pilots attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Yoshikawa was immediately taken into custody with the rest of the consulate general staff. Not informed of the raid's timing, he was unable to execute his planned transfer to Mexico. There followed a nerve-racking period of interrogation in Arizona and a cross-country trip before he sailed from New York in June 1942 with Japanese diplomats from throughout the United States in a prisoner exchange conducted by Washington and Tokyo.

Following his return to Japan, Yoshikawa returned to NGS Third Bureau's 5th Section, working under Rear Admiral Takeuchi Kaoru. Part of his intelligence work involved interrogating American prisoners of war held at the IJN's secret detention site in Ofuna,<sup>d</sup> near Tokyo.

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a. Tokyo recognized the children of Japanese as Japanese citizens, no matter where they were born. According to US law, persons born on American soil were citizens of the United States, although their immigrant parents were denied citizenship. Some Japanese Americans, in joining the US military or generally seeking to counter suspicions regarding their loyalty, went to consular offices in Honolulu or elsewhere in the United States to renounce their Japanese citizenship.

b. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, having destroyed its files in advance of the Allied Occupation, Yoshikawa wrote his memoir relying on the translations of the communications intercepted in Washington's MAGIC program. Yoshikawa in his memoir's preface, untranslated, thanked Tominaga Kengo, a IJN officer who served as a historian after the war in the Self-Defense Forces War History Section, for providing him the MAGIC materials.

c. The translation, oddly, renders the original as "highly respected by US officials." This is one of numerous instances of the original text being rewritten, rather than translated.

d. One of the prisoners at Ofuna was Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic runner who served as a bombardier in the US Army Air Corps. Laura Hillenbrand told his story in the best-selling biography *Unbroken* (2010), which then became a popular movie (2014) directed by

Increasingly frustrated by the difference between what he knew as an intelligence officer and the unbelievable front-line military reporting and Tokyo propaganda he encountered, Yoshikawa left NGS before the war's end to work in war production.

With Tokyo's surrender and the arrival of Allied occupation forces, Yoshikawa realized he was again in danger of detection and prosecution for his intelligence activities in Honolulu and the prisoner interrogations at Ofuna. He soon went into hiding, disguised as a Buddhist monk. As such, he evaded arrest until the danger had passed near the end of the occupation period. By 1951, Yoshikawa felt secure enough to accept the invitation of Gordon Prange, historian at MacArthur's General Headquarters for an interview there on his operations in Honolulu. In 1961, he returned to Honolulu and joined Walter Cronkite for the filming of the story of his intelligence gathering for the CBS series *The Twentieth Century*.

It is gratifying for this student of Japanese intelligence history to see at last an English translation of Yoshikawa's memoir. Japan has an abundant intelligence literature, almost none of it available in languages other than Japanese, so let us hope that more translations appear. If publishers are seeking candidates, here are two recommendations:

- Hori Eizo, an intelligence officer of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) who served after the war as a defense attaché of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force in Bonn, wrote an insightful memoir whose merits include his clear-headed analysis of IJA intelligence. Hori Eizo, *Daihonei Sanbo no joho senki: Joho naki kokka no higeki* [Intelligence Warfare Record of an Imperial General Headquarters Staff Officer: The Tragedy of a Country without Intelligence]. Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1989.

- Onodera Yuriko, wife of Major General Onodera Makoto, wartime military attaché in Sweden, assisted her husband's intelligence activities in various ways, including helping him as a code clerk. Her memoir has appeared in German translation but awaits publication in English. Onodera Yuriko, *Barutokai no hotori ni te: Bukan no tsuma no Daitoa Senso* [On the Shores of the Baltic Sea: The Greater East Asia War as Experienced by the Wife of a Military Attache]. Tokyo: Kyodo Tsushinsha, 1985.<sup>a</sup>

Less gratifying for this reviewer was discovering the numerous errors, omissions, and substitutions in the English translation. Among the errors, a good many are simply sloppy. One example is Yoshikawa's reference to the "imposing aiguillette," the ornamental braided cord worn from the shoulder on the uniform of each naval staff officer. In translation, it becomes a "shiny badge." Among the omissions is the cutting of Yoshikawa's boast about the many foreign women with whom he had slept. Finally, some sentences are less faithful translations than substitutions of new text not found in the original. For example, Yoshikawa wrote of the Western colonization of North Africa and countries along the Indian Ocean, with each subject population "suppressed by the military power of the metropolitan state." The phrase is embroidered and expanded in the translation as: "yet all were in awe of the power of the occupying armies and feared their repressive force."

Knowing that the translation suffers from such problems, students of intelligence history can still profit from reading this book. Let us hope for more Japanese intelligence memoirs and more rigorous editing in future publications.



*The reviewer:* Stephen Mercado is a former Open Source Enterprise officer. He enjoys reading intelligence history in several languages.

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Angelina Jolie.

a. Her son, the diplomat Onodera Ryoji, and daughter-in-law, the artist Mareile Onodera, translated her work into German: *An den Gestaden der Ostsee*, Tokyo: OAG, 1999. As a side note, Onodera Yuriko, in addition to writing a fascinating memoir, translated into Japanese from the Swedish the Moomin children stories of Tove Jansson.