

Reopen the Kimmel Case

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Naval Institute of Proceedings / December 1994

The allegation that Admiral Husband E. Kimmel knew of and ignored advice regarding the direction and extent to which he should have ordered long-range air reconnaissance prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor is false – and grounds to set it right exist.

Of all the alleged errors committed by Admiral Husband E. Kimmel at Pearl Harbor before and on 7 December 1941, his decision not to institute long-range 360° aerial reconnaissance over the approaches to Oahu after the “war warning” of 27 November has attracted the most attention. Apparently, this fault more than any other caused Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest J. King, in his 1944 endorsement of the Naval Court Of Inquiry – which had exonerated the former Commander-in-Chief of U.S. and Pacific Fleets from the finding of willful neglect pronounced by the Roberts Commission in 1942 – to charge him anew with “dereliction.”¹ And this, according to Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal, in his own endorsement of the Navy Court, was Kimmel’s “most grievous failure.”²

Although the responsibility to protect the Pacific Fleet at its moorings was originally the Army’s, a written agreement signed on 11 April 1941 by Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, Commanding General, Hawaiian Department, and his naval opposite number, Rear Admiral [p. 52] Claude C. Bloch, Commandant, 14th Naval District, shifted responsibility for distant reconnaissance to the Navy. The Army Air Forces would conduct defensive

¹*Hearings before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of Pearl Harbor Attack*, Congress of the United States, Seventy-Ninth Congress, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946) [hereafter cited as *PHA*], Part 39, p. 338. Kimmel’s full title was Commander-in-Chief of United States and Pacific Fleets.

²*Ibid.*, p.368.

air operations over and in the immediate vicinity of Oahu, and Bloch would make the decision when and if to institute long-range patrols.

Of lasting interest to students of Pearl Harbor, on 31 March 1941 the air-defense officers of the two services in Oahu – Major General Frederick L. Martin for the Army and Rear Admiral Patrick N. L. Bellinger for the Navy – had signed off on a report cannily predicting that a surprise air attack on Oahu would likely be launched at dawn, prior to a declaration of war, and from a distance inside 300 nautical miles. Martin was Commanding Officer, Hawaiian Air Force; Bellinger, among various other offices, was Commander, Naval Base Defense Air Force and Commander, Patrol Wing Two. Their prospectus could well be stapled to a dispatch from the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington the next day, 1 April, advising that “Axis Powers often begin activities in a particular field on Saturdays and Sundays or on national holidays of the country concerned...”³ As the Martin-Bellinger Joint Estimate emphasized, however, “The aircraft at present available in Hawaii are inadequate to maintain, for any extended period, from bases on Oahu, a patrol extensive enough to ensure that an air attack from an Orange [Japanese] carrier cannot arrive over Oahu as a complete surprise...” Again, the Martin-Bellinger report stated that, “In a dawn air attack there is a high probability that it could be delivered as a complete surprise in spite of any patrols we might be using...” Only within “narrow time limits” – a matter of days – could the in-commission PBY-3 and PBY-5 patrol bombers fly seaward through 360° to a distance (if possible) of the 800 nautical miles required to prevent a carrier from launching an attack without prior detection.⁴ Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, Director of War Plans at Main Navy, concurred in that assessment.

For a complete sweep on a 360° arc to the maximum range of the scout planes, 84 aircraft would be required on a single flight of 16 hours. Since the same planes and crews could not make such a flight every day, the Navy required a fleet of 250 operational aircraft if it hoped to conduct effective reconnaissance over a protracted period. Admiral Bloch, Bellinger’s superior, had only 49 patrol aircraft for this purpose in the first week of December (100 new PBY-5 Catalinas promised Kimmel had never arrived), most of

³ *PHA*, Part 4, p.1896.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Part 33, pp. 1183-1184. Cf. Part 8, pp. 3454-3455 The Martin-Bellinger estimate was prepared “practically in toto” by Patrol Wing Two; Part 26, p. 140 Range of the PBY’s was 700 miles, of the PBY-5s, 800.

which were being used for training in anticipation of offensive combat assignments stipulated in War Plan Pac-46, which included, within 13 days after the start of war, a raid by surface and air striking forces against Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands. For those planes spare parts were extremely scarce – many of the Catalinas on hand were grounded by cracked engine nose sections – experienced aviation machinist mates were also in short supply, and there were no spare crews. In sum, extended reconnaissance would have incapacitated many of the PBYS after just a few days of flight. Six long-range Army B-17D bombers, the only ones in operating condition on the island, were being used to train crews for the Philippine Air Force, but they were available in an emergency.⁵ The Army also made available 20 short-legged B-18 medium bombers, But they were useful only for 20-miles-out inshore patrol. When there, General Martin’s chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel James A. Mollison, “complained bitterly” that the B-18 was “a very bad airplane for that purpose,” since, with its poor visibility, “it is pretty hard to pick up anything in the water.”⁶

At the hearings of 1945-1946 before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Rear Admiral Charles H. McMorris, Kimmel’s war plans officer, testified that, after receipt of the 27 November warning, Kimmel’s staff carefully considered the availability of flyable patrol planes, the status of training, the patrol wings’ responsibility for supplying trained personnel for new squadrons, the tasks assigned the wings in WPPac-46, and the fact that, given aircraft shortages and maintenance limitations, seaward patrols would be “largely token searches.”⁷ The question was one on which Kimmel and his staff had gone up and down the scale many times.

The conclusion, McMorris stated, was that “training would suffer heavily and that if we were called upon to conduct a war, that we would find a large proportion of our planes needing engine overhaul at the time we most

⁵Kimmel told the Joint Committee that 250 aircraft would be required for distant reconnaissance (Ibid., Part 6, p. 2533); Bellinger said “approximately 200” (Part 26, p. 124). On the number of flyable patrol bombers available to him at Oahu on 6-7 December, Bloch testified, “. . . There were 72 patrol bombers available and two squadrons of 24 were at Midway, leaving 48, and 12 under overhaul, leaving 50. I meant 36;” Part 22, p. 487. Kimmel testified that 49 Navy patrol planes were in flyable condition (Part 6, p. 2532); Bellinger also said 49 (Part 22, p. 558). On the operational B-17s see Part 27, p. 419; Part 12, p.323; Part 7, p. 3203.

⁶Ibid., Part 27, p. 423.

⁷Ibid., Part 32, p. 570f.

required their services.”⁸ Exhaustion of crews was another consideration. Kimmel and Bloch therefore decided to concentrate on expansion training until more aircraft, or more information, became available. The Navy Court in 1944 judged: “The omission of this reconnaissance was not due to oversight or neglect. It was the result of a military decision, reached after much deliberation and consultation with experienced officers, and after weighing the information at hand and all the factors involved . . .”⁹ Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, senior Naval Air Force commander, Hawaiian area, stated after the war: “Any admiral worth his stars would have made the same choice.”¹⁰

On 7 December, air patrols from the at-sea carriers *Enterprise* (CV-6) and *Lexington* (CV-2), heading task forces from Wake and toward Midway, respectively, were patrolling far to the west and west-northwest of Oahu. As the forces proceeded, morning and afternoon squadrons covered a 400-nautical-mile strand of ocean along their paths. Patrol wings on Oahu were active as well. At 0800, five minutes after the Japanese attack began, three dawn patrol planes took off on a regular short-range security search of the fleet operating area between the north and northwest sectors.¹¹ Patrol Wing 1 was preparing to send out two more search planes to the northwest, when they were destroyed by Japanese aircraft; it then diverted two planes of the earlier flight to cover a westerly sector. The lone plane on north-northwest search, about 450 nautical miles away, failed to sight the Japanese aircraft on their flights in or out. The Pearl Harbor attack came from due north.

⁸Ibid. Kimmel stated before the Joint Committee: “I had been ordered, not once but twice, to be prepared to carry out the raids on the Marshalls under WPL-46, which meant the extended use of the fleet patrol planes from advanced bases in war operations;” Part 6, p. 2534. It should be stated, for balance, that McMorris did not believe that there was any chance of a surprise Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor. For Kimmel’s combat authorization under WPPac-46 both at the commencement of war and at M180 – 180 days after the start of hostilities – see Part 9, pp. 4279-4282. Cf. Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 294-312.

⁹Ibid., Part 39, pp. 308-309.

¹⁰FADM William F. Halsey and LCDR J. Bryan III, *Admiral Halsey’s Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1947), p. 71.

¹¹PHA, Part 8, pp. 3471, 3508-3509. It is interesting that at the lower, operational level, the patrol wings thought that the northwest sector was the most vulnerable. In the hearings, Bellinger’s Operations Officer, LCDR Logan C. Ramsey, stated that, “. . . We had decided the northwest sector was the most likely line of approach, and in our drills the squadron in the highest degree of readiness was always ordered to take up that sector from 315 to 00.” Part 32, p. 452.

In his second endorsement to the Navy Court, Admiral King argued that Kimmel should have conducted long-range searches at least “in the more dangerous sectors.”¹² Which these were he did not say. But, in King’s support, certain historians readily told us. Gordon W. Prange, in *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History* (1986), spoke authoritatively: “. . . A 360° search was not needed. Carefully reasoned estimates, such as the Martin-Bellinger and Farthing reports, existed postulating that the most dangerous sectors were the north and northwest. These could have been covered adequately if not ideally.”¹³ Prange went on to state that, “. . . The evaluation of the north as being indeed the most dangerous sector was too well documented for serious questioning.”¹⁴ That Kimmel had ignored clear and precise warnings about the north and northwest sectors constituted Prange’s most damaging charge against him, made in a chapter titled, after Forrestal, “His Most Grievous Failure.”

A *New York Times* review (5 January 1986) by Pacific War historian Ronald H. Spector picked up and repeated the Prange charge. Two years later, on 5 January 1988, as Director of Naval History in the Department of the Navy, Spector wrote to Secretary of the Navy James H. Webb, Jr., via Admiral C. A. H. Trost, then-Chief of Naval Operations, recommending that Kimmel not be promoted to full admiral posthumously on the retired list, as Kimmel’s two surviving sons were petitioning. Spector added that, as for “my personal views of Admiral Kimmel’s conduct,” stated in his *Times* piece and in a book chapter, both of which he enclosed, “I see no reason to alter them at this time.”¹⁵ Admiral Trost concurred with his recommendation.¹⁶

Spector’s statements in the *Times* included the following: “. . . As the Prange book points out, two of Kimmel’s principal air chiefs, Comdr. (later Admiral) Arthur C. Davis and Rear Adm. Patrick Bellinger, both told the joint Congressional committee investigating Pearl Harbor after the end of the war they had believed ‘the greatest possibility of a successful air attack lay in an attack coming in from a sector of the north because of the prevailing

¹²Ibid., Part 39, p. 344.

¹³Gordon W. Prange, with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine Dillon, *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986) p. 441.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 449.

¹⁵Kimmel Family Papers [hereafter cited KFP], Memorandum (copy), Ronald H. Spector to Secretary of the Navy via Chief of Naval Operations, 5 January 1988, p. 2.

¹⁶KFP, First Endorsement on DIRNAVHIST MEMO OF 5 JANUARY 1988, CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (COPY).

wind conditions.’ There is also the written evidence of an official report on Hawaiian air defenses, completed in March 1941 [Martin-Bellinger], which, as the Prange book points out, predicted that an air attack was most likely to come from the north or northwest.”¹⁷

Three observations are warranted at this point. First, Admiral Davis never made such a statement at the joint congressional hearings. He did not even appear before those hearings. Nor did he make such a statement before any other official investigating body on the Pearl Harbor attack. Second, as for the so-called Farthing Report mentioned by Prange: Farthing was Air Forces Colonel William E. Farthing, commander of the Fifth Bombardment Group at Hickam Field, Hawaii, who drafted for General Martin’s signature, on 20 August 1941, a “Plan for the Employment of Long-Range Bombardment Aviation in the Defense of Oahu.” In it, besides stating that the only effective search would be 100% coverage through 360° to a radius of 833 nautical miles, he proposed that the enemy’s “most probable avenue of approach is the hemisphere from 0°, counterclockwise to 180 degrees around Oahu;” – the western half of the compass rose (!), which was no more exact a prediction than saying that a German invasion of France would come from the east – “the next most probable, the quadrant 180 degrees counter-clockwise to 90 degrees [south around to east]; the least probable, 90° to 0 degrees (due east on around back to north).”¹⁸ Third, the Martin-Bellinger Joint Estimate: At the end of the war, Bellinger did in fact testify in the hearings that the northwest and north sectors were considered the “most vital,” since the prevailing winds at Oahu were from the northeast, and thus enemy carriers could recover their aircraft while retiring from the area.¹⁹ But no record or witness states that Bellinger said this to Kimmel *at the time*.

In history nothing substitutes for examination of the actual documents. Contrary to the statements of Prange and Spector, the Martin-Bellinger report of March 1941 that represented what Bellinger thought at the time, the same estimate that he submitted to Kimmei and that Kimmel approved as governing doctrine, *nowhere states that the most dangerous sectors were the north and northwest*. The words “north” and “northwest” do not appear in

¹⁷Ronald H. Spector, “Someone Had Blundered, but Who?” New York Times Book Review, 5 January 1986, p. 10.

¹⁸*PHA*, Part 14, p. 1028.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Part 8, pp. 3453, 3504.

the text, nor do any equivalent nautical or numerical terms.²⁰ Through inadvertence, and obviously not intended by either party, the misrepresentation of this document by Prange and the then-Director of Naval History has had the effect, through Prange, of reinforcing Kimmel's image as the principal Navy scapegoat for Pearl Harbor, and through the Director, of substantiating a reason for denying Kimmel retroactive remedial justice, as sought by his two sons.

During his testimony before the Joint Congressional Committee on 31 January 1946, Bellinger stated sagely: "Hindsight is one thing and foresight is another. This situation at Pearl Harbor was another."²¹ But that self-expressed caution did not prevent him, on the same day, from answering Representative Frank B. Keefe (R-WI) with the lucidity of hindsight:

Mr. Keefe: I understand your testimony also to be – and you may correct me if I am in error – that as an airman familiar with the situation in Hawaii you were in agreement with Admiral Davis that the greatest possibility of a successful air attack lay in an attack coming in from the sector to the north because of the prevailing wind conditions; is that right? Admiral Bellinger: That is practically correct; yes, sir."²²

That this was not what he advised Admiral Kimmel at the time in the Martin-Bellinger Report becomes clear minutes later. Keefe uses an opinion alleged to be Admiral Davis', though the latter never expressed it in his testimony. But Bellinger probably had no way of knowing if he had or had not.

On the next page of the Keefe-Bellinger exchange, the dialogue dwelt on the prevailing wind conditions in the north and on how those winds favored a northern attack, since, as Keefe put it:

Mr. Keefe: So the best opportunity to get away is when the carriers are headed out away from Oahu and the planes can be recaptured by the carrier heading right into the wind?

Admiral Bellinger: Yes, sir.

²⁰The Martin-Bellinger estimate appears in three places in the hearings record; *Ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 379-382; Part 22, pp. 349-354; Part 33, pp. 1182-1186.

²¹*Ibid.*, Part 8, p. 3489.

²²*Ibid.*, Part 8, p. 3504. Prange put Keefe's words in the mouth of Bellinger: *Pearl Harbor*, p. 438.

Mr. Keefe: That is, as I understood, your plan set out in the Martin-Bellinger Report. You set that out, did you not?

*Admiral Bellinger: No, sir, that is not in that report.*²³

Foresight caught up with hindsight only one page away. Kimmel, too, had to correct the Joint Committee when asked about Martin-Bellinger:

*The Vice Chairman: Yes – that rather emphasized the northern direction? Admiral Kimmel: No, it never emphasized the northern direction. It emphasized an attack on Hawaii.*²⁴

Commander Davis did not give his testimony in the congressional hearings, as Prange and Specter contend, but in the inquiry (conducted by Admiral Thomas C. Hart, U.S. Navy [Retired]) in 1944. Nor did Davis state there, as alleged, that he predicted an attack from “a sector of the north.” His actual response was as follows:

*Question: A considerable arc to the north and west and another 10 the south and west were the most important; is that true? Answer: Yes, sir, that is true, but it doesn't naturally follow that they would be certainly sufficient.*²⁵

So the south and west were of equal concern to Davis. But, to use current parlance, in 1941 Davis was out of the loop. As he acknowledged to the Hart Inquiry:

*“My duty as Fleet Aviation Officer was primarily, if not almost entirely, concerned with technical training and logistics matters. . . I, myself, had little to do with considerations of attack possibilities, and I do not recall ever being directly consulted on such matters by the Commander-in-Chief [Kimmel].”*²⁶

What sectors, if any, might Kimmel have thought were the most dangerous? He gave his answer at the hearings:

A search of all sectors of approach to an inland base is the only type of search that deserves the name. The selection of one sector around an island for concentration of distant search affords no real protection. After a while it may furnish some insurance that the enemy, having knowledge of the search plan, will choose some other sector within which to make his approach. The

²³ PHA, Part 8, p. 3505.

²⁴ Ibid., Part 6, p. 2661.

²⁵ Ibid., Part 26, p. 109.

²⁶ Ibid., Part 26, p. 104.

*search concentrated on the so-called “dangerous sector” then ceases to offer much prospect of detecting the enemy.*²⁷

In support of this reasoning, Kimmel’s relief as CinC-Pac, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, wrote a month after the attack, on 7 January 1942: “It cannot be assumed that any direction of approach may safely be left unguarded. . . Neglect of any sector is apt soon to be known.”²⁸

As for the northern “vacant sea,” Kimmel admitted at the hearings he had been greatly surprised that the Japanese chose such a route. Besides his doubts about the steaming range of their carriers and about their professional ability to plan and execute an attack of that force and daring, Kimmel thought that the rough northern seas at that time of year would deter any expedition of 3,500 miles along those latitudes. (As it happened, throughout most of the voyage the Japanese fleet encountered unusually smooth seas.)

Pearl Harbor had been “attacked” successfully from the northwest sector during Fleet Problem XIX in 1938, but if Kimmel had relied on that example and sent all his scout planes to the northwest, the patrols would have missed the Mitsubishiis, Nakajimas, and Aichis that roared down from due north. In thinking through possible attack scenarios Kimmel had the advice of two knowledgeable staff members – Admiral Halsey, who thought right up to 7 December that any attack on Oahu would come from the Marshalls to the southwest, and Fleet Intelligence Officer Lieutenant Commander Edwin T. Layton, who shared the same opinion. All three men were proved wrong – but not negligently so.

Of course, any commander who has been surprised in war would have acted differently if he had known beforehand what he learned only in retrospect. Had Kimmel known that a Japanese carrier fleet was steaming into his immediate north quarter, he surely would have shelved WPPac-46 and dispatched all his available patrol planes in that direction. At the hearings, Kimmel insisted that he would have set the war plan aside and gone to full reconnaissance if he had but received from Washington a copy of the decrypted “bomb plot” message that revealed how Japanese agents, at the request of their naval ministry, had, in Kimmel’s words, “carved up” Pearl Harbor to

²⁷Ibid., Part 6, p. 2533.

²⁸FADM Nimitz to Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet [FADM King], 7 January 1942, quoted in Ibid., Part 6, p. 2533.

show the precise berthings of the fleet.²⁹

On 6 November 1944 Admiral King appended a second endorsement to the findings of the Navy Court of Inquiry that effectively reversed those findings where Kimmel was concerned. In it, among other areas of command negligence that King stated he detected, he cited Kimmel's failure to make an attempt at long-range patrolling at least in the "certain sectors more dangerous than others," without explaining which those were, except to say by way of example that Kimmel's immediate predecessor, Admiral James O. Richardson, had patrolled the southwest!³⁰

Almost exactly one month later, on the dismal anniversary day of 7 December, King received Kimmel at his office. In a lengthy aide-memoire, Kimmel recorded their conversation afterward.³¹ At that date Kimmel had not yet seen the findings of the Navy Court. He would not be apprised of them, or of his exculpation – and then only in a sanitized version to protect Magic-Purple intelligence – until 29 August 1945. According to the aide-memoire, King presented against him the one charge that apparently stood out above all others in his mind, since it was the only one discussed in the interview, as recorded by Kimmel in the third person: "King, however, found that Admiral Kimmel had made an error of judgment in not instituting a patrol off Pearl Harbor prior to 7 December 1941 to the limit that the planes available made it possible." Kimmel wondered if the testimony and the findings of the court were not to the contrary, and several paragraphs later in the memo he expressed his stupefaction in capital letters: "KING SAID THAT HE HAD NOT READ THE TESTIMONY GIVEN BEFORE THE COURT." (Nor had King written his own endorsement. It came from Vice Admiral Richard S. Edwards, his deputy chief of staff.³² Furthermore, in 1962 Admiral Harold R. Stark revealed that King had told him, "... He has signed the NCI endorsement without reading it.")³³

²⁹Ibid., Part 6, p. 2543.

³⁰Ibid., Part 39, p. 338.

³¹KFP, "Memorandum of Interview with Admiral King in Washington on Thursday, 7 December 1944," signed Husband E. Kimmel, 6 pp. n.d.

³²B. Mitchell Simpson, III, *Admiral Harold R. Stark: Architect of Victory 1939-1945* (Columbia University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 265.

³³Prange, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 230. Perhaps King read the court testimony in the post war years, since in 1948 he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy softening the language of his endorsement – Kimmel's were "errors of judgment," he wrote, "as distinguished from culpable inefficiency" – though without retracting the word "dereliction." KFP (copy),

In his memorandum of 5 January 1988 to Admiral Trost and Secretary Webb, recommending against the Kimmel sons' petition, Naval History Director Spector made prominent mention of King's endorsement. So, too, did Trost, in transmitting the memo to Webb. Obviously, King's opinion still counted for much, and, as indicated in the interview with Kimmel, the air-search problem seems to have been uppermost in the Fleet Admiral's mind; so, too, in the mind of the new Secretary, Forrestal, whom King brought along to concur in his endorsement,³⁴ and who judged that Kimmel's "most grievous failure was his failure to conduct long-range air reconnaissance in the most dangerous sectors from Oahu during the week preceding the attack."³⁵ This is not to say that Spector's memo to Secretary Webb omitted mention of other alleged missions or negligences for which either Kimmel or General Short, or both, have been blamed. He summed them up in this quotation from Prange's *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History*:

... The commanders on Oahu were not alert on December 7, 1941 – not when a Japanese task force could approach undiscovered to within 200 miles of Oahu; not when twenty-five enemy submarines surrounded the island; not when Japanese patrol planes could hover unchallenged over Lahaina and Pearl Harbor; not when the antiaircraft batteries were unready; not when most of the ammunition was locked up in magazines; not when U.S. fighters and bombers were bunched together at Wheeler and Hickam fields like coveys of quail; not when a U.S. destroyer could sink a Japanese submarine in the operating area without the Hawaiian Department being notified of the event...³⁶

No attempt has been made in this brief analysis to answer all the charges made against Kimmel and Short. The attempt here is focused more narrowly on distant reconnaissance. On that one point alone, Kimmel has been judged unfairly. Such would also be the opinion of Admiral Bellinger, who addressed the air-search problem before the Hart Inquiry in 1944:

... Considering shortages and deficiencies, other necessary deployment of forces, such as expansion training and development of facilities, and lacking unity of command, little if any more in the way of readiness could be expected.

King to John L. Sullivan, 14 July 1948.

³⁴Simpson, *Harold R. Stark*, p. 265.

³⁵Fourth Endorsement to Record of Proceedings of Pearl Harbor Court of Inquiry, *PHA*, Part 39, p. 368.

³⁶KFP, Spector to Secretary of the Navy, p. 2; Prange, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 462.

*It is believed that Admiral Kimmel saw this picture very realistically and I know of no man who, under the circumstances, could have done more.*³⁷

The thousands who read Prange's book and Specter's review of it no doubt concluded that Admiral Kimmel must have been something of a dolt not to have heeded so clear and accurate a warning as Martin-Bellinger was alleged to contain; and not to have patrolled in the limited "more dangerous sectors," where the available aircraft allowed him to do so. It is regrettable that it has taken eight years since the date of Prange's "verdict of history" to correct the misrepresentation of Martin-Bellinger and to remove that one particular stone of obloquy from the Admiral's chest.

Like all historical conclusions, and all human enterprises for that matter, "verdicts of history" suffer from the defects of incompleteness or error. They are not reached by some final, objective working out of mathematical formulae. They are not judgments beyond which all further argument or dissent is futile. And we should not stand by, panting, for history to churn out its so-called verdicts at indeterminately appointed times. In a quip about the phrase, "in the long run," G. K. Chesterton said, "in the long run we'll all be dfead." Therefore, it might behoove us to be cautious in accepting as the last word the closing sentence of then-Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Frank B. Kelso II's recent denial of the Kimmel family petition, dated 1 July 1993: "It is in the best interests of both the U.S Navy and the Kimmel family that this matter be left to the verdict of history."³⁸ The preceding indicates how reliable the "verdict" was on Kimmel and Martin-Bellinger. We should never forget that history has a dynamic property that cannot be braked or hushed, particularly where a truth or a question of justice is concerned. And so we might be equally cautious in accepting the closing advice in Naval History Director Specter's memo to Admiral Trost and Secretary Webb, which reads:

*"Set it at rest."*³⁹

Should we not say instead, "Set it right," if an error of record has been used officially against a Navy veteran? And do it now?⁴⁰

³⁷ PHA, Part 26, p. 140.

³⁸ KFP, ADM Frank B. Kelso, US Navy, to Edward R. Kimmel, 1 July 1993.

³⁹ KFP, Specter to Secretary of the Navy, p. 3.

⁴⁰ The misrepresentation of Martin-Bellinger is passing into the literature. An example is Michael Slackman, *Target: Pearl Harbor* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press and Arizona Memorial Museum Association, 1990) p. 56, where it is alleged that Martin and

When presented with a draft of this article, and after a careful study of its contents, former CNO Admiral Trost wrote to Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton, under the date 4 October 1994, withdrawing his memorandum to Secretary Webb, dated 19 January 1988, and asking that the case of Admiral Kimmel be reopened. “I believe such action is owed to the Admiral,” he wrote, “to his sons, and to the Navy. No mistake should be allowed to stand in this sensitive matter, and I personally disavow my unwitting support of one.”⁴¹

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Bellinger “stated in their plan that the most likely method of attack was a surprise air raid by plans launched from carriers north of Oahu.”

⁴¹ADM Carlisle A. H. Trost, USN (ret.), to the Honorable John H. Dalton, Secretary of the Navy, Potomac, Maryland, 4 October 1994; copy with the author.