

ARMY PEARL HARBOR BOARD EXHIBIT No. 20

CONFIDENTIAL

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ARMY SERVICE FORCES,
HEADQUARTERS FIRST SERVICE COMMAND,
Boston 15, Massachusetts, 18 August 1944.

Lieutenant General GEORGE GRUNERT, USA,
President, Army Pearl Harbor Board,
Munitions Building, War Department, Washington 25, D. C.

DEAR GENERAL GRUNERT: I am grateful to you for authorizing a transcript of my testimony to be sent to me for correction. I am returning it herewith with my personally penned corrections. There were certain minor errors, due to misunderstanding on the part of the stenographer as to what I said or inexact expressions on my part. There was one rather serious error, which I have also corrected, regarding the inevitability of war with Japan (pages 113 and 114), in which I either made or was understood to have made conflicting statements.

What strikes me forcibly in rereading my testimony is that it is quite inadequate to accomplish your stated purpose—to get “the War Department background and viewpoint prior to and leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack” (page 91). The questions propounded to me are no doubt relevant to the issue you have before you, in that they were designed to bring out various points and angles of that issue. But they were almost entirely confined to specific points in a very broad picture. The sum of my answers to these specific questions does not, as I see it, present more than a relatively small part of the background which I understand you desire. You may not consider it necessary to obtain this background from me; but I feel bound to say that my testimony, per se, misses the wood for the trees.

You are examining into what occurred at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7th and why it occurred. I submit that the causes of the disaster at Pearl Harbor cannot be judged solely from what happened in the Hawaiian Department, or what the War Department did or did not do with regard to the Hawaiian Department. Hawaii was only one of five United States areas vulnerable to Japanese attack should war ensue. It was, as a matter of fact, the strongest fortress in the world, measured in terms of garrison and armament strength. A great fleet was present in its waters. It offered less permanent military advantage to successful enemy attack than did the Panama Canal. Its defense against its sole potential enemy, Japan, had been the subject of continuous study by our Army and Navy for some 40 years. Many of these studies assumed the absence of our fleet from the Pacific, a crippling damage to the Panama Canal, and little or no warning in the way of strained diplomatic relations—conditions much less favorable to us than those of 1941. The Hawaiian defense plans, prepared [2] by responsible Commanding Generals and approved by the War Department, were both detailed and comprehensive. The Army garrison was commanded by a Lieutenant General, with the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet present in Hawaiian waters. I think it fair to say that these senior and responsible officers required no specific directives as to what they should or should not do under a threat of war, or, indeed, any warnings other than the knowledge of the serious situation then existing.

But this still does not give the whole picture. In 1941, up to at least November, the most poignant military concern of the United States lay in the outcome of the war in Europe. We were still feverishly preparing for “hemisphere defense.” The most obvious threat to the Western Hemisphere lay in the success of German arms, against which our lend-lease and other measures were progressively aligning us, and in subsequent Axis penetration through the “bulge” of Brazil. Even after Pearl Harbor, we rushed marines and air ground forces into northeastern Brazil, and I was sent on a hurried trip to South America for Intelligence purposes in this regard. Japan, on the other hand, was engaged in a war with China, none too successfully. Her military threat to us lay in her possible reaction to our own measures in belatedly cutting off her oil and scrap purchases in this country, and, still more belatedly, denying some of her ships the use of the Panama Canal.

It is true that we had Japan on the carpet in our diplomatic negotiations in Washington, and that it was becoming increasingly apparent that she would probably make some radical move. The military oligarchy that ruled her was not obtaining notable results in China, had failed to dislodge the Russians in the private war of the Kuantung Army in 1938 and '39, and was apparently losing face. This was particularly so in comparison with the great successes of the German Army up to December, 1941.

Nevertheless, it was none too apparent that the United States would be the next victim of Japanese aggression. As stated in the dispatch of November 27th, Japan's actions were unpredictable. She might well have attacked Russian Siberia and the Maritime Provinces, particularly in view of the then successful German invasion of European Russia. Or she might have elected to drive south against the Dutch East Indies. Or she might have taken the greater risk of including the British possessions in her southern drive. Or she might well have declined to take on any other enemy, and thrown her whole weight against China. I remember the Chinese military attaché coming to me in the fall of 1941, and stating his concern that the stiffening attitude of the Western Powers towards Japan might force the Japanese to throw everything in against China and clean her out. Or she might adopt the boldest and most dangerous of all of her alternatives and take on the two greatest naval powers in the world, plus the Dutch.

All of these factors and all of these contingencies were given due weight by the General Staff. The causes of the disaster at Pearl Harbor must be viewed in the light of the situation as a whole. An open [3] attack by Japan on the United States was by no means inevitable. One could only say that the tension was steadily growing because of our increasing cooperation with the Allies, particularly Britain; because of our diminishing willingness to supply Japan with essential materials of war; and because of our stiffening attitude in the negotiations in Washington. All of these major factors, producing increasing tension in Japan, were well known to our responsible commanders in Hawaii and elsewhere. The hasty dispatch of Admiral Nomura to Washington, and his passage through Honolulu, was but one of the clear signs of this increasing tension. The tension curve mounted dangerously on November 27th, signalized by the Chief of Staff in his dispatch to his higher commanders in the field. Finally there was the personal appeal of the President of the United States to the Emperor of Japan which, if my memory serves me, was published in the American press on Friday, December 5th, or the morning of Saturday, the 6th.

The Overseas Departments and the West Coast were fully informed of the essential elements of the mounting crisis, and the War Department knew that they were so informed. When one considers the Hawaiian garrison and the Fleet in that area, with but a single potential enemy in view and carefully prepared plans to meet him, the broad knowledge which they unquestionably had of the increasing tension should have been decisive. In Washington there was absolute confidence that that knowledge of the situation had been translated into full alert. This became very apparent on the morning of December 7th, when the only question on the sending of the final warning was whether it was necessary, or indeed advisable to prod further those commands which were actually facing the issue. The Chief of Naval Operations went so far as to refuse, on that ground, to send a warning similar to ours.

As Commanding General of the Philippine Department earlier in 1941, no doubt you are aware of the broad outlines of the picture I am trying to draw. The other members of your Board may or may not have similar knowledge. In any event, if you think it advisable to have on the record my testimony along these lines, as you seemed to indicate when I appeared before your Board last week, I will, of course, be happy to give it, and to answer any further questions which your Board may desire to ask.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

Sherman Miles,
SHERMAN MILES,
Major General, United States Army,
Commanding.