



**Association of Former Intelligence Officers**

Representing U.S. Intelligence Community  
Service, Education, Interest, and Support



## AFIO Exclusive Book Review (July 2024)

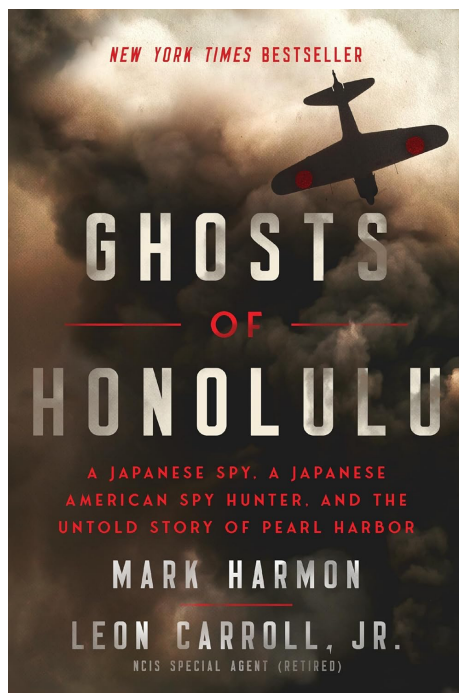
### *Ghosts of Honolulu: A Japanese Spy, A Japanese American Spy Hunter, and the Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*

by Mark Harmon and Leon Carroll, Jr.  
Harper Select  
November 2023

Review by former  
CIA Senior Operations Officer  
**John Atwell\***

**T**his New York Times Bestseller is a layman-level account of Imperial Japanese HUMINT, and FBI- and U.S. military-counterespionage, operations in Hawaii surrounding the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Penned by the hit TV series *NCIS*'s lead actor and a show advisor, a retired NCIS Special Agent, its popularity is easy to dismiss as clever marketing. Its

editing shortcomings are also easy to criticize as reflecting a rushed job for a quick mass-market release. This said, the book is not without its merits and the handsomely jacketed, slim volume (some 250 pages of story text) would look good on any intelligence officer's bookshelf.



It is a quick, easy, entertaining read, and a good introduction to the topic of Japanese spy work in the U.S. before Washington's entry into the war, for non-intel-specialists and professionals whose area- and time-period knowledge is outside the realm of WWII Pacific Theater espionage. It would make a good gift for war, spy, and intel history buffs. Any reader who has traveled to O'ahu will also appreciate the work on some level; it is dripping with references to familiar places, people, and cultural touchstones—Diamond Head, Iolani Palace, Neil S. Blaisdell, Fort Schafter, Shinto shrines, aloha shirts.)

(Order book here)

Classic spycraft permeates the story—elicitation, aliases, diplomatic cover, agent signaling systems, covert finance.

The Japanese Consulate General Honolulu's emergency document destruction procedures will resonate with readers who have served in an embassy abroad and domestic

counterintelligence officers who have watched smoke plumes over the more recently forcibly shuttered consulates of Russia (2017, San Francisco) and China (2020, Houston).

COMINT fans are well served. Featured are the intercept and decryption of Japanese military and diplomatic traffic, station HYPO at Pearl Harbor, Cavite Listening Post in the Philippines, and the work of U.S. military cryptanalysts and cryptographers. Included are accounts of the Office of Naval Intelligence's (ONI) and FBI's compromise of the Japanese consulate's communications through phone taps and the cooperation of a U.S. business that transmitted the mission's cable traffic.

Human visual surveillance of U.S. naval assets' movements from fixed observation posts plays a prominent role—a Japanese consular officer's home overlooking Lahaina Roads, Maui, an observant Pearl City shoreline shave ice vendor, and a Japanese "diplomat's" time at a tea house in Alewa Heights (and on island overflights for tourists).

While spotlighting intelligence history legends Takeo Yoshikawa (Japanese naval intel officer) and Douglas Wada (of the U.S. 14th Naval District Intelligence Office), the story also highlights lesser-known heroes—Honolulu's first FBI Special Agent in Charge, Robert Shivers, and Cecil Cogins, whose techniques laid the foundation of ONI's Manual of Investigations. Similarly, lesser-known intel shops are noted (the Army Corps of Intelligence Police, the Honolulu Police Department Espionage Bureau).

The work frequently cites Military Intelligence Service Veterans Club of Hawaii interviews, but also draws from congressional hearings (the Clausen Investigation, included), biographies (including Yoshikawa's), and declassified primary sources (FBI and military reports and memos, decrypted intercepts of Japanese communications). An article in AFIO's Journal, *The Intelligencer*, is also cited.

The short-story-like narrative is divided into small, easy-to-digest blocks. It admits, on occasion, to dramatizing documented events (conversations, interrogations, etc.) for literary effect. It jumps from location to location, scenario to scenario, character to character, in a story-telling technique often seen on television.

Mostly a historical-events account, it is peppered with commentary (a criticism of Navy Secretary Frank Knox's conflation of Hawaii's espionage situation with Norway's fifth-column activity in 1940, for instance.)

It has a generous font size, spacing, and margins and is written at a level that even a high-school student could enjoy. The \$29.99 MSRP seems steep for a work of this nature, but it is available through online booksellers for less than \$17 (hardcover) or \$15 (paperback and eBook).

\* **John Atwell** is a former CIA Senior Operations Officer and Hawaii resident. His 23-year, Pacific-focused intelligence career included foreign and domestic tours in locations where this book's story unfolds and collaboration with offices featured in the work. Mr. Atwell now lectures on intelligence and national security matters as part of a Homeland Security Certificate program at Hawaii Community College, he writes a monthly newspaper column on espionage matters (*The Island Intelligencer*, in the Hawaii Tribune Herald, available [here](#)), he curates an online repository of intelligence studies resources (available [here](#)), and he is a regular guest speaker for military retiree groups, historical societies, civic service organizations, and organizations for security professionals. Mr. Atwell is also the editor of **AFIO's Weekly Intelligence Notes**.