

Dec. 6+1  
1941  
by John  
Albert

Prepared by  
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for Capt. Smith (history)  
undated but I believe  
about middle of 1944

So far as we are able to recall, the situation that prevailed in our office at the Munitions Building on Saturday, December 6th, and Sunday, the 7th of December, 1941, was as follows:

A number of people there had for a long time known that Japan was riding a tiger she did not dare to get off. Primarily to secure essential materials, she was carrying on a vast trade in the Americas, the Netherlands, Indies, and the Southwestern Pacific. Wherever possible she had more or less secretly fortified positions to secure her life lines. Her first idea seems to have been to make a vassal state of China (in the last analysis, a dream like Napoleon's vision of conquering the vastnesses of Russia or Hitler's fancy that he could take Moscow and do what Napoleon and others had failed to do). However, once started she could not stop and, as the American nations, except Argentina, began to give her the cold shoulder, she began negotiating for petroleum from the Indies.

Hopelessly did the Netherlandish authorities negotiate there for months, knowing what lay ahead. We later learned directly of their anguish, but already we had viewed closely those talks, heard shouts for vengeance by the Japanese officers there against the dastardly meddling Anglo-Saxons - a wonder these shouts did not immediately awaken terror in the minds of Americans.

All the while our industrialists in iron and textiles were carrying on a flourishing trade by hook or by crook with the Mikado's Empire. Maybe we had to trade with Japan some so as not to bring the festering sore to a head too soon, but we doubt it. In any case, Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Hull could go no further than the businessmen, always shouting for more liberty to kill liberty with, and the lethargy of our peace-loving public would allow them to go.

A matter of only several months before Pearl Harbor, we knew that Japan meant us no good. Her self-rationalized destiny to rule East Asia and eventually the world, as the Shinto text books put it, was being obstructed by the Americans, the British, and the Netherlanders. Her dream of Empire through military might (such as only Japanese legends could foster) was coming more and more to the front. The Japanese Military became more and more vociferous, and to us who knew what they meant, the deafness of the American public was amazing. From 1870 volume after volume of "Kukumin Tokuhon" (People's Readers) based on the newly invented warlike code called Shinto, clearly conclude with the words, "Our glorious Son of Heaven shall first be worshiped throughout East Asia and finally by the world".

Anxious to know how far they could go without provoking war with us, and also to keep trading with us, several months before Pearl Harbor, Mr. Nomura was presented with two proposals, one longer, called A, and one shorter, called B, to take to Mr. Hull. If Mr. Hull could be persuaded to accept A, well and good. If not, B was to be placed before

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him. The affable Mr. Nomura was amazed and asked for a helper like, say Mr. Kurusu. When Kurusu came the law was laid down to both of them by their superiors. These two men berated their government terribly, but it was no use. The nation was so much more important than the individual. In order, the two proposals had to be and were, in due course and procedure, turned down. Great was the wrath of the cursing Japanese officials in Tokyo (some say the Japanese do not curse, but when enraged they go beyond the bounds of our puny little cuss words), who then informed the two hapless envoys to play for time for a few days until contact was fully made with Hitler and Mussolini. This they did in unmistakable language. The predetermined deadline had passed; they were going to strike us before we dreamed, so they said, and Colonel Doud, Colonel Hayes, Colonel Minckler, Colonel Svensson, Colonel Aurel, Colonel Erskine, Colonel Rowlett, Mr. Cate, and ourself, at least, knew that war was as certain as death, or we felt sure that they knew it. I do not believe they would deny it.

Came Saturday noon and we translated a message to Mr. Nomura, asking him to stand by for a 14 part message in reply to a counterproposal presented by Mr. Hull after a conference between himself, Mr. Roosevelt and the several ambassadors concerned. This was to be presented, if I recall aright, at about 2 p. m. Sunday, the 7th, Washington time. The emphasis on the time gives the background of the event. The orders to the Japanese embassy to destroy everything pertaining to codes left in ourself, at the very least, no doubt that at about 2 p.m. on the following day, Sunday, we were to be shelled or bombed at some Pacific outpost. We thought it would be at Manila.

A little later that Saturday afternoon the reply came, and Mr. Cate translated it. A vicious reply it was, too, and at the regular closing time we went home only to be called immediately on the phone by Colonel Doud, asking us if we did not know that a state of war existed between America and Japan. We replied, "Certainly, but don't you think we are ready for them?" He replied, haltingly, "Well, I don't know. I hope so." While we were preparing to return Col. Doud called us again on the phone, telling us he would rather we came in at a little after midday on Sunday.

We went at that time. Scant personnel were there - Col. Hayes, Miss Susan Cronise, ourself, perhaps Col. Svensson. I do not recall who else, if anyone.

Shortly later the news reached us, and we were amazed - amazed not at the fact but at the place of the attack. Mr. Friedman understood the matter, and he, too, felt exactly as we did.

Personnel began to rain in. Col. Doud was red-eyed and worn. Colonels Hayes and Svensson were poker-faced, and matter of fact. (Several days later I witnessed several wills, among them Col. Hayes', I think.) He was, as I recall, rather distressed and I believe he said he had a brother in the area affected.

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We recall little that has happened since. We had by then reached the psychological and physical end of our rope, though heaven knows how we hung on three years or so more in the dreadful work it was a matter of duty to perform.