

Nov. 16, 1984

COUNTDOWN TO PEARL HARBOR

Conventional wisdom has for the most part had it that history repeats itself. If that is so, it is more than fitting to recall as we approach the 43rd anniversary of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor what was known to the Department of State almost a year before that fateful event. It was the last Week in January of 1941 that the American Ambassador to Japan at that time, Joseph Grew, sent a "cable" to the Secretary of State, regarding a possible Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This cable, or telegram, dated January 27, 1941, received at 6:38 a.m. on that date, reads as follows:

This copy was made by the Archivist directly from the original (in 1970) EXHIBIT 1
located in the National Archives (Wash. D.C.) 135, Department of State (PAS)

00378

TELEGRAM RECEIVED

FROM

KD
This telegram must be
closely paraphrased be-
fore being communicated
to anyone. (D)

Secretary of State,
Washington.

125, January 27, 6 p.m.

My Peruvian Colleague told a member of my
staff that he had heard from many sources in-
cluding a Japanese source that the Japanese
military forces planned, in the event of trouble
with the United States, to attempt a surprise ~~case~~
attack on Pearl Harbor using all of their military
facilities. He added that although the project
seemed fantastic the fact that he had heard it
from many sources prompted him to pass on the
information.

GREW.

Tokyo.
Dated January 27, 1941
Rec'd. 6:38 a.m.

COPIES IN PARAPHRASE
SENT TO C.I.A. AND
M.I.D. IN CONFIDENCE
1/27/41

711.94/1935
FS/FF
CONFIDENTIAL FILE

DECLASSIFIED
Authority UNO730032
By [Signature] NARA Date 4/29/94

The telegram identified as Exhibit 15 of Joint Committee on page 1042 of the "Congressional Investigation Pearl Harbor Attack," the last of eight investigations of the attack on Pearl Harbor, had the notation in the upper left corner: "This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone" (emphasis supplied). Its authenticity is evidenced by the octagonal stamp in the upper right-hand corner of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, bearing the initials of all the Foreign Service Officers who saw it, including the writer, and dated January 27, 1941:

Some days later, as was customary, a diplomatic courier brought to the Division a two-to-three page despatch from Ambassador Grew in Tokyo. Like the telegram, the despatch identified the source of the information as Grew's Peruvian colleague, Minister Ricardo Rivera Schreiber, and went into some detail regarding the circumstance under which Schreiber reportedly had obtained this intelligence information. The writer, then a career Foreign Service Officer, who had served from 1930 to 1940 in Japan, had just been assigned to the then Division of Far Eastern Affairs of the Department of State in Washington. The writer recalls vividly, as does his wife, (also working in the Division at that time) the contents of the despatch which in substance stated as follows:

Schreiber reported that his Japanese valet, a trusted employee of the Peruvian Legation in Tokyo for many years, with a number of close relatives in Peru, had confided to Schreiber that he had attended a geisha party with his brother the evening before. His brother was assigned to Japanese Naval Intelligence in Tokyo. After having consumed a great deal of sake, the valet's brother had enlivened the conversation by slapping his knees and describing with considerable bravado Admiral Yosuke Yamamoto's plan to attack Pearl Harbor.

The despatch from Grew, however, had a highly important and fatal last sentence, to wit: "The Embassy places no credence in Minister Schreiber's story." Tragically, this "no credence" evaluation of the intelligence information was accepted, for the most part, by the officers in charge of U.S. relations with Japan assigned to the Far Eastern Division of the Department of State. The writer knows that the contents of the despatch were never conveyed to the Secretary of State Cordell Hull or the White House as the "no credence" evaluation placed upon the information precluded its being reported to anyone in the upper echelons of our government. It is interesting to note here that the "despatch" no longer exists -- only the "telegram" remains. Up until last year the only written evidence of the "no credence" evaluation is the fact that the Navy Liaison Officer to the Far Eastern Division, Captain (later Admiral) Rosco E. 'Pinky' Schuirman, reported to his superiors in the Office of Naval Intelligence that he placed no credence in Minister Schreiber's story (emphasis supplied). It was customary for the Navy Liaison Officer to be briefed orally by State Department officials on incoming and outgoing telegrams and despatches on an "eyes only" basis. The words "no credence" were repeated again in a memorandum on the subject by the office of Naval Intelligence, and once more in a memorandum from the Chief of that office to the Secretary of the Navy.

It is important to reaffirm here that despite intensive research for more than a decade the despatch is nowhere to be found. Moreover, its contents were never conveyed to any of the eight bodies which attempted to get at the cause of the disaster.

Only the telegram, Exhibit No. 15, was presented by the Department of State officials as evidence of their alertness before the Pearl Harbor attack. And the telegram was erroneously referred to as a "despatch" throughout the investigation hearings. In Grew's testimony before the various bodies it is significant that he always alluded to the telegram as a despatch. He played along with the mistaken interpretation of the telegram as a despatch, knowing full well, as the most junior Foreign Service Officer would, that there was a distinct difference between a despatch and a telegram in Foreign Service terms. It is ironic that despite all the queries put to him by members of the investigative committees not a single member questioned the difference between a telegram and a despatch while looking at Exhibit 15 which was clearly labeled as a "telegram." This telegram-despatch misnomer was the missing link in the interrogation of Grew.

However, one member of the congressional committee did, with caution, express some reservations with respect to the role of the diplomats in the Pearl Harbor disaster. In closing the hearings on July 22, 1946, Senator Ferguson (R. Mich.) said:

"... [T]he State Department should supplement Congress' Pearl Harbor report with 'diplomatic facts' ... [H]e was sure the joint committee which reported its findings on the December 7, 1941, debacle last night did not get all the information in which the public is entitled about international negotiations bearing on the inquiry We did not want the people and historians to believe we had all the facts."

In the fall of 1982 the writer and his wife, through a stroke of fate and luck, were put in touch with Mrs. Teresa K. de Rivera Schreiber, the widow of Minister Schreiber. Mrs. Schreiber sent her attorney to Washington from Lima to meet with the Schulers for the express purpose of establishing their bona fides. Having been satisfied on that score and, after several months of correspondence, Mrs. Schreiber prepared an affidavit based on her husband's unpublished memoirs and her own recollections. She had been with her husband throughout his service in Japan, including the critical months before Pearl Harbor, and even after. Her affidavit was sworn to before the U.S. Consul General at the American Embassy in Lima in May of 1983. Mrs. Schreiber stated that she was preparing the instrument "out of a strong desire to set the record straight as far as her husband's invaluable and unsung contribution to the United States was concerned." Salient portions of the affidavit read as follows:

"In September of 1940 ... Minister Rivera Schreiber found out that a Japanese employee of the Peruvian Consulate in Yokohama was an agent of the secret military police [the dreaded Kempei] and that as such, he had important secret information. The Minister reached this conclusion thanks to the chief of his domestic staff, also a Japanese with whom the aforesaid employee talked at length on each of his frequent espionage visits to the Peruvian Legation.

"The information received by the Minister about [the surprise attack on the American naval base] extended over a period of two months. During that period he gradually gathered the data which his domestic servant spontaneously supplied him which coincided with the trips to Tokyo of the employee of the Peruvian Consulate in Yokohama. Initial information had it that the Japanese squadron would, in a surprise move, sink the American fleet; according to the second report the operation was to take place in the Central Pacific; and according to a third report, it was to be carried out by aircraft." At first,

Schreiber hesitated to lend credence to the information but he became fully convinced when a "Japanese friend ... a professor of Spanish literature at the University of Tokyo ... confided to him -- about January 26, 1941 -- that he had proof that at that very time aircraft carriers of the Japanese fleet were steaming toward southern Japan with a view to beginning tests for the air attack which they were planning against the American fleet at Pearl Harbor and that they would use a small Japanese island for those tests.

"Such definitive and precise information, which coincided in every respect with the data received from the other source, persuaded him of the probability of the attack on Pearl Harbor....

"Without wasting a minute, he (Schreiber) personally telephoned Mr. Joseph Grew ... and they agreed to meet immediately. ... The American Ambassador appeared to be quite moved by and immensely grateful for this friendly gesture and literally said, 'This is a great service you are rendering to my country and to the world. I am attributing all the more importance to it as my intelligence service had already given me some relevant information. Let us please jointly agree on a cable to be sent to the Department of State.'

"...Dr. Rivera Schreiber now thinks it is perfectly clear that Mr. Grew distorted the truth as he was convinced that he was the principal party in the effort to prevent war between his country and Japan and that consequently he should not contradict his own opinions with the extremely serious information so entrusted to him."

According to the affidavit, nine months later, November 1941, Minister Schreiber attended a reception Ambassador Grew was giving for the soon departing head of the Polish mission. During the reception Schreiber asked Grew about the American government's reaction to the intelligence he had conveyed to Grew. Grew replied:

"The time elapsed has lessened the merit of the information and he was sure of the successful outcome of the Kurusu Mission to the United States, which he had encouraged, and that Dr. Rivera could be sure that there would be no war," adding, "I have arranged to remain in Tokyo for four more years."

Mrs. Schreiber further swears on the basis of her husband's memoirs:

"Since the Minister of Peru was on the same ship as Ambassador Grew [when they were repatriated], he did not hesitate to point out to [Grew] that the events had occurred in exactly the same way as he reported to him in January of 1941, to which Mr. Grew, visibly unmoved, replied: 'Yes, indeed, lamentably so; but what you reported to me was conveyed by me that same day to my government.' "...

"During the entire voyage Grew kept completely silent on this delicate matter while Dr. Rivera Schreiber adhered to his noble idea of being under the international obligation of friendship between his country and the United States, for he felt that his information -- from the moment he had entrusted it to Mr. Grew -- belonged to the American Government and that it played an important part in its military and domestic policy. The Peruvian Foreign Office, which in due course had received the report on its Minister's interview in Tokyo with Mr. Grew, maintained the same noble attitude and has done so until now."

"The years which have elapsed, Mr. Grew's memoirs, and all the publications which have appeared about the attack on Pearl Harbor now allow a change to be made in the discreet stand of the former Peruvian Minister to Tokyo and call for a rectification. And this is the first time that it is being made public that on January 26, 1941, the American Ambassador in Tokyo was personally warned by the Peruvian Minister, Dr. Rivera Schreiber, on the strength of precise information, that the Japanese air force would attack the naval base at Pearl Harbor."

Parenthetically, the writer, during World War II, as Chief of the Japan Branch of the Office of War Information in Washington, saw cables (still being held "secret" by executive order), reporting on numerous speeches made in Latin American capitals by Schreiber, who had become his country's Foreign Minister, in which he asserted that he had warned the United States about the Japanese plan to attack Pearl Harbor. He spoke of his frustrations because the intelligence he had conveyed to Ambassador Grew in Tokyo had been ignored.

In the closing paragraph of her affidavit Mrs. Schreiber expresses the belief that the American public will recognize the importance to history of the clarification of her husband's actions.

Minister Schreiber's warning should have its place in the history of the Pearl Harbor disaster. What also should have their place in history and seems to have been forgotten or purposely obscured for reasons of national policy are the facts regarding the preparations for the attack. These facts, bearing out the Schreiber warning, were fully brought to light in Tokyo at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (I.M.T.F.E.), the War Crimes trial of the Japanese held from April 29, 1946 until November 13, 1948. According to the record, the Empire of Japan in early 1941 was about to undertake the conquest of the entire Pacific area at least to the westward of Hawaii and extending to the South Seas and to India (emphasis added). The Tribunal concluded that the greatest obstacle to Japan's approved plans to move southward was the United States Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese plan had to take into consideration the fact that the Pacific fleet would probably be used to prevent them from taking Singapore, which, of course, they eventually did very shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

It was revealed publicly for the first time at the Trial that the plan to attack Pearl Harbor and destroy the United States Pacific Fleet while it lay at anchor was approved and submitted to and implemented by the Imperial general Headquarters as early as January of 1941.

Contrary to the "no credence" evaluation placed on the information supplied by Schreiber to Ambassador Grew in Tokyo and reported to the Department of State's Far Eastern Division, the Japanese did plan to attack Pearl Harbor. The plan was to organize a task force to deliver an aerial attack on the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. To avoid detection and take Pearl Harbor completely by surprise, the task force would take a northern route little used by commercial shipping. Japanese leaders concluded that if the attack on Pearl Harbor was a success and resulted in the destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, they could seize all the strategic places in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. The United States, they felt, would be unable to marshal enough naval strength in the Pacific in time to dislodge the Japanese by counter-attack. And -- that's the way it worked out for the next two years of the war!

According to documents captured from the Germans when the war in Europe came to an end in May 1945, General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin, told German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on February 22, 1941, that preparations for the

attack on Singapore would be complete by the end of May of that year. Oshima continued that as a precaution, preparations were also being made for war upon the United States as well as upon Great Britain. He further told von Ribbentrop that the occupation of the Philippines had been included in the preparations.

The Japanese Navy began training and practice in the Inland Sea for the attack on Pearl Harbor in late May of 1941, according to testimony at the trial in Tokyo. Practice in dive bombing was undertaken meanwhile at Kagoshima in Kyushu, one of the western-most main islands of Japan, where the terrain is similar to that at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese took a lesson from the book of the British at Taranto, Italy, in 1940, where torpedo bombing of warships was highly successful. In the summer of 1941 the Japanese practiced the tactic in shallow water like that around Pearl Harbor. They had developed and had been experimenting with shallow water torpedoes since May of 1941. At the same time, practice for refueling at sea which would be required for the northern route to Pearl Harbor was undertaken.

Japan occupied the southern part of French Indo-China in July of 1941. It was adduced at the Tokyo Trial that the reason for the occupation was to secure bases for an attack upon Singapore, preliminary to an attack on the Netherland East Indies. These bases also presented a threat to the Philippines. When the Japanese did attack Singapore, they used troops from Saigon. Planes from bases built up in southern French Indo-China also

participated in the attack. An American observer of the Tokyo Trial would keep in mind that these movements to the south by the Japanese made it essential that they take out the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

On August 27, 1941, Prince Konoye, the Japanese Prime Minister, wrote to President Roosevelt asking for a personal meeting. Apologists for Japan have made a great deal throughout the years of the fact that the Department of State and the White House declined to have such a meeting. They pointed out the assurances in Konoye's letter that Japan would get out of French Indo-China once the China "Incident" was settled. Actually, if one reads the transcript of the War Crimes Trial in Tokyo, one learns not only how false were Japanese representations about French Indo-China but also the deceptions practiced by Konoye and all Japanese officials as well. Included were Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu who were purposefully sent to Washington to delude and lull officials in Washington, D.C. -- in the Far Eastern Division of the Department of State, the Secretary of State himself, and the President of the United States. Their so-called "peace talks," held over a period of months before the attack were a matter of considerable concern to some officials in the United States and other governments, and to a number of private individuals who were privy to what was going on.

The Imperial Conference met on September 6, 1941. At this meeting of the Conference, it was decided: that Japan should

move south (she had already done so in part by moving into southern French Indo-China); that an effort should be made for Japan to obtain her demands through negotiations with Great Britain and the United States; and that if her demands were not fulfilled by the beginning of October, a decision on the beginning of hostilities would be made. The so-called effort of Japan to obtain her demands by negotiation was merely shadow-boxing and playing for time. Japan well knew that the granting of these demands would mean complete hegemony for Japan in the Pacific to which the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands would never consent. Meanwhile, preparations for war were continuing at full speed.

Preparations for the attack on Pearl Harbor and training along the China coast for the attack on Malaya, the Philippines, the Netherland East Indies had drawn to a close. From September 2 to 13, 1941, the final "War Games" to work out details for this operation were held at the Naval War College in Tokyo. In attendance were a large number of high-ranking Japanese naval officers. The basic problems to be resolved were: (1) making certain of the details of the carrier attack on Pearl Harbor: and (2) establishing a schedule of operations for the occupation of Malaya, Burma, the Philippines and the Solomon and Central Pacific Islands. Admitted as evidence in the Tokyo Trial was Combined Fleet Secret Operations Order No. 1. The result of the "War Games" sessions was contained in this order issued later.

On September 24, 1941, Japanese Foreign Minister Toyoda instructed the Japanese Consul general in Honolulu, who was engaged

in intensive espionage, to use a new code for transmitting reports on the movements of the United States Pacific Fleet in Hawaiian waters. The reports were to contain the latest data on arrivals, departures, positions and anything of an unusual nature. Internal preparations for the attack continued at a rapid pace. General Tojo, then Minister of War, made a survey of these preparations to attack Pearl Harbor, reporting the results to Koichi Kido, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. Training manuals on landing operations and identification of Allied planes were issued by the Inspector General of Military Education. Operational maps were issued by the Ministry of War. The cabinet Printing Bureau continued to print occupation currency in pesos, dollars and guilders for use in the Philippines, Malaya and the Netherland East Indies.

War Minister Tojo, the Army Chief of Staff and other Army leaders, discussed with the German Ambassador in Tokyo, General Ott, in the first days of October of 1941, the subject of the decision for war. They told Ott that Japan had signed the Tripartite pact in order to carry out the southward advance and establish Japan in South East Asia. Britain had to be eliminated from the area. To accomplish the latter purpose it was necessary to keep the United States at bay and isolate the U.S.S.R. The attack on Pearl Harbor would keep the United States at bay. All of this was disclosed in captured German documents presented at the Tokyo War Crime Trial.

From testimony and documentary evidence produced at the Tokyo Trial, General Tojo, upon his assumption of the Office of Prime Minister in addition to his War Ministry portfolio, on October 14, 1941, immediately began strengthening the Japanese intelligence services. Plans were made for administration of the areas to be occupied. Additional invasion maps were prepared. The Japanese Army and Navy began issuing plans and regulations for joint operations for war. The final plans for war were completed by November 1, 1941, five weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor. These plans provided for attacks on Pearl Harbor, Singapore and various other American, British and Dutch possessions as well. Combined Fleet Operations Order No. 1, mentioned earlier, was issued November 4, 1941. The Order read:

"The Empire is expecting war to break out with the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands. When the decision is made to complete over-all preparations for operations, orders will be issued establishing the approximate date (Y-Day) for commencement of operations (sic) and announcing 'First Preparations for War.'"

The Order then continued with instructions that upon the announcement of Y-Day all fleets and forces, without further special orders, would organize and complete battle preparations and when directed by their commanding officers the various fleets and forces would proceed to their rendezvous and wait in readiness for the attack. The Order provided further:

"The time for outbreak of War (X-Day) will be given in an Imperial General Headquarters Order. This order will be given several days in advance. After 0000 hours, X-Day, a state of war will exist. Each force will commence operations according to plan."

For Japan -- there was no turning back!

Looking back on Pearl Harbor and bearing in mind the adage about history repeating itself, isn't it quite possible that the United States might let its guard down again as it did at the time of Pearl Harbor?