

Japan's Master Spy and the Dinner Party

About three weeks after the September 13 memorandum, Frank came home with an invitation for dinner at the residence of the Counselor of the Japanese Embassy, Sadao Iguchi. The invitation indicated the dinner was being co-hosted by Hidenari Terasaki, reportedly Secretary of Embassy. Also included were the Smythes, Bob a China specialist, and his wife, Jane. Jane and I became "buddies" during the summer as we "dropped cards" on the wives of the senior officials in the Department of State, both a dubious and tedious custom which seemed to serve no useful purpose other than to harass those of us who had to do it. The wives were never at home, or so it was alleged by someone who answered the door, silver tray in hand, to accept the cards. Jane and I laughed about it as we wondered what was done with the cards. No one we knew had ever received an invitation as a result.

The appointed evening for the dinner arrived. The Iguchis lived in a very large apartment at the Broadmoor, then and still, a posh apartment on Connecticut Avenue. The apartment was beautifully furnished, a combination of European and Japanese pieces. The dinner was a feast, consisting of a combination of Japanese as well as American food – all very hard to resist.

Dinner being over, the men retired to one of the living room for coffee, brandy and conversation while Mrs. Iguchi led us to a small alcove at the corner end of the living room. We had barely started to sip our liqueurs when Gwen suddenly turned to Mrs. Iguchi and said something to her in Japanese. Turning to me, Gwen Terasaki said, "I hope you don't mind. I haven't seen Jane for quite a while and would like to catch up on our friendship."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Iguchi had gotten up and was leading them to what appeared to be a small library, leaving me to wonder how I would be able to communicate with her as neither of us spoke the other's language. But, we could exchange smiles, which we did, for the next half-hour. Suddenly noticing a book on Japanese art on a nearby table I grabbed it as though it was a life preserver. It helped. She even started to examine the book with me.

I was so relieved when Jane and Gwen returned though it was obvious they both had been crying, especially Gwen, who had applied too much powder around her eyes. Both seemed serious. Mrs. Iguchi offered them a brandy which they accepted with enthusiasm. Discussion of the weather was a safe topic as it had been an unusually hot day for October. Time moved slowly as one or the other of us tried to break the moments of silence which kept recurring.

Jane suddenly looked toward the men, hoping to catch Bob's eye. As I followed her glance I saw Bob discreetly as possible, pointing toward his wrist watch, after which, it was up to Jane to bring the evening to an end. It really had been an enjoyable evening and when we said as much it was with all honesty. I wondered how we could ever reciprocate. However, that would soon be determined by an event completely out of our control.

As we walked through the hallway to the elevators, Jane, in a whisper, said to Bob, "You won't believe what I have to tell you."

"Well, if it's that good, you'd better wait until we're in the car."

The elevator seemed so long in coming. No one said a word, even though the elevator was empty.

Arriving in the lobby, Frank asked the doorman to have the car brought around.

We decided to wait outside, it was such a beautiful evening.

Jane was beside herself. She was finding it difficult to wait, saying, "You won't believe what I have to tell you."

"Quiet down Jane. It can wait until we're in the car."

Once in the car Bob said, "now, what is this big news you have to tell?"

"Bob, it's almost too frightening to think about. But, it can mean only one thing."

"What's that? Get to the point." Bob was getting impatient.

“Well, I think Japan is going to make war against the United States. At least we’re on the verge of it.”

“Wait a minute, let’s start at the beginning. Exactly what did Gwen say?”

“She said she wanted to explain herself to me so that I would understand after it all happened. I asked her, what was going to happen, what did she mean?”

She said that, after much soul-searching and agonizing, that she had had to make a big decision between her country and her husband and that she had finally decided to remain with her husband. She went on about how difficult this was for her. She said she wanted me, and you Bob, to understand her so that we wouldn’t think too badly about what she was going to do.

“In other words, she was talking about having to decide between Hidenari and her own country?”

“I’m sure that was what she was trying to say. When I tried to get her to be more specific she said it was all she could say, adding, that she would probably never see me again. But that she would never forget what good friends we’d been through the years.”

“Did she mention the word war?”

“No, she didn’t. Bob, how much more could she say without coming right out and compromising Hidenari?”

“Did she mention him?”

“No. He may not even know she talked to me about this. The way she put it at one point was that something terrible was going to happen between Japan and the United States.”

“She actually said that in so many words?” Frank asked.

“Yes. And my knees started to shake.” I was suddenly terrified. To put it bluntly, it scared the hell out of me.”

“What do you think, Frank?” Bob asked.

“I think it’s important enough to report to Max,” meaning Hamilton.

“Frank, you’re incorrigible,” I said. “You can’t possibly believe that Max will listen – after what happened three weeks ago.”

Bob, interrupting before Frank could answer said, “I agree. Why don’t you draft a memo in the morning. We’ll go over it together and see where we go from there.”

Everything went according to plan. When the memo was ready it was decided between them that Bob would take it to Hamilton, Frank having said, “I think it’s best that you give it to him. He thinks I’m paranoid about the Japanese. He may be more receptive if you hand it to him.”

Frank waited impatiently for Bob’s return. It wasn’t too long before Bob came back. Not a good sign, thought Frank.

“How did it go?”

Bob thrust his right hand forward. In it was a crumpled sheet of paper. “This is how it went,” he said in disgust and throwing the ball of paper on Frank’s desk.

“Didn’t he say anything at all?”

“He did, he said that ‘it was a case of two hysterical women not knowing what they were talking about,’ which is pretty funny coming from him, the master in the hysterics department.”

“What do you think we should do?”

“It’s futile, Frank. It’s like beating a dead horse.”

This was written by Frank [Schuler]

Frank knew there was no way in the world he could possibly pursue the matter further, having already stepped over the safety zone as a junior officer.

One week later Frank came home with the news that he had been transferred to Antigua, a small island in the Carribean, to open a consulate to deal with the British and our armed forces – the new Lend Lease negotiations.

The attached letter of December 9, 1941 from J. Edgar Hoover to Adolf A. Berle, Assistant Secretary of State is very revealing as to the behavior of the Terasakis after the attack – in light of the happenings at the dinner party. The octagonal stamp – the FE stamp – of Dec. 12, 1941 indicates that Bob Smythe, “RLS” signed off on the letter along with Hornbeck. When he did he must have thought of Frank’s and his efforts a few weeks earlier.