

VOLUME I

The Reminiscences
of
Captain Henri Smith-Hutton
U. S. Navy (Retired)

U. S. Naval Institute
Annapolis, Maryland

1976

Preface

Volume I of the memoirs of Captain Henri Smith-Hutton, U.S.N. (Ret.) covers the first half of his notable career as an Intelligence Officer in the United States Navy. Captain Paul Ryan, U.S.N. (Ret.) of the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California has been the interviewer. This volume takes us through Captain Smith-Hutton's confinement along with all members of the U. S. Embassy Staff in Tokyo after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The story concludes with the Captain's return to the United States on the SS GRIPSHOLM for duties on the staff of COMINCH. The balance of his career is covered in Volume II of the Memoirs.

Captain Smith-Hutton has read the transcript and made the necessary corrections. The entire MS has been re-typed. A subject index has been added for the convenience of the user.

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June, 1976

Interview No. 28 with Captain Henri Smith-Hutton, U.S. Navy
(Retired)

Place: Stanford, California

Date: July 18, 1974

Subject: Biography

By: Captain Paul B. Ryan

Q: Captain, in the last session we were discussing events in Japan, the environment of the summer of 1941. About this time there was a report from a Latin American diplomat to the effect that Pearl Harbor might be suddenly attacked. Can you give the background on that?

Smith-Hutton: In January 1941 Ambassador Grew heard the rumor circulating in Tokyo that in the event of a break between the United States and Japan, the Japanese would make an all-out surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. He talked to me about it, and said that he understood that one of the main sources of the rumor was Dr. Rivero-Schreiber, the Peruvian Minister in Japan. I said that rumors like this had circulated from time to time, but that I hadn't heard this one. When he said he was reporting it to the State Department, I understood why even though it was impossible to verify it, and I added that with all the talk of war there was always the speculation among diplomats and newsmen about what each country might do.

Q: Captain, did you base your opinion on the history of previous surprise attacks by the Japanese Navy?

Smith-Hutton: Yes. I said that the Japanese could act very quickly and make a surprise attack, whereas our country had to have a vote of Congress before we could go to war and that while I thought this rumor was just a rumor, since it was most unlikely that the Japanese planners would let their real plans get out of the secret category, it was logical for them to concentrate an attack on our fleet no matter where it was, whether it was in Hawaii or on the west coast, and that our commanders must be very vigilant. I said that the Japanese had a history of making surprise attacks. Naturally, such rumors could not be confirmed nor traced to any particular sources, but surprise was a favorite Japanese method and we should remember it. We all knew that.

Q: I appreciated that the ONI was receiving copies of Ambassador Grew's dispatches to the State Department. Did you find it necessary at any time to parallel his dispatches with information of your own?

Smith-Hutton: Occasionally I did. In this particular report, I didn't feel it was necessary. I knew the report would reach the Navy Department and the Office of Intelligence. Once in a while I sent a report when I thought it was desirable to emphasize the Ambassador's original report. I did from time to time send parallel reports because I thought it would be useful just to make my opinions known. In this particular case I didn't, as I felt it wasn't necessary.

Q: I'm sure the message was really read in the Navy Department.

Smith-Hutton: Yes, it was. I understood that from later conversations.

Q: Captain, you probably know that in early '41, I believe, the U.S. Government made a very secret agreement with the British and Dutch governments to come to their aid in the event of trouble in the Far East. Were you or Ambassador Grew aware of this secret agreement?

Smith-Hutton: No, we weren't aware of this agreement, and we did not realize we were so committed to the support of the British and the Dutch.

Q: That confirms Ambassador Grew's diary when he said on October 19, 1941, "Why on earth should we rush headlong into war? When Hitler is defeated, the Japanese problem will solve itself." He obviously didn't know about it either.

Captain, in 22 June 19⁴1, Admiral Toyoda became the Foreign Minister in Prince Konoye's cabinet. Did you know Admiral Toyoda?

Smith-Hutton: Yes, I knew him quite well. He was a soft-spoken officer, who spoke English well, having been in England as Assistant Naval Attache and as Naval Attache. He was one of the group of senior naval officers which included Nomura and Yonai, who were pro-Anglo-Saxon not pro-German. He was well known in Tokyo for his