

# Infamous Day of "East Wind, Rain"

-Richard Olivastro, Dec 7, 2008

It was early morning, Thursday, Dec. 4, 1941, when senior radio operator Ralph Briggs came on duty to his post at the U.S. Navy shortwave monitoring station in Maryland. The radio crackled as he tuned his receiver to a specific station in order to begin daily monitoring of the regional weather forecast from Radio Tokyo, Japan.

He began transcribing what he heard.

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A few miles away, at the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., Chief Petty Officer Kenichi Ogemoto also was listening to the weather report. When he heard the words, he rushed into the office of the naval attaché, Capt. Yuzuru Sanematsu, and shouted, "The winds blew!"

\* \* \*

Dutch naval intelligence in the Dutch East Indies, led by Lt. Gen. Hein Ter Poorten, had succeeded in intercepting and decrypting the Japanese naval message at their intercept station on Java Island.

\* \* \*

What all three men heard at 8 a.m. that day were words each was waiting for.

"Higashi no kaze ame." "East Wind, Rain."

Each of them knew what those words meant. They were one of three possible execute messages that Japanese diplomats around the world were told to listen for beginning on November 19. Those three words, meant war with the United States.

Briggs understood this and immediately began to teletype the message to Washington.

Poorten immediately sent all the details of the "Winds Execute" message to Col. Weijerman, the Dutch military attaché in Washington, to pass on to the highest U.S. military authorities.

At the Japanese Embassy, Ogemoto and Sanematsu directed the staff to gather all secret papers for burning, and prepare to destroy all code hardware and cipher codes.

Meanwhile, in Tokyo, Japanese officials were going over the final note to the American government. The note will not include a simple declaration of war. Instead, it would say, "In

view of the attitude of the American Government it must be concluded that it is impossible to reach an agreement through further negotiations."

The Japanese officials decide this note will be delivered at 1 p.m., Washington time. Thirty minutes before the surprise attack.

Back in the U.S., and at stations around the world, the monitoring of Japanese transmissions continues.

On Friday, Dec. 5, "All Japanese international shipping has returned to home port."

On Saturday, Dec. 6, Japan, "Sends the first segments of a 14-part message to its embassy in Washington, ordering them to present their final demands to the United States at 1 p.m. Washington time, tomorrow."

Again, the message is intercepted and decoded by the U.S. Navy's Cryptographic Department Lt. Cmdr. Alvin Kramer shows the message to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who reads the document, and says: "This means war."

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That afternoon, the Japanese strike force, which departed the Kuril Islands 12 days earlier -- and encountered no ships along the way -- is north of Hawaii. Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo orders his fleet to increase speed to 25 knots and soon approaches its destination point.

At 21:00 hours, the Japanese fleet reaches the 158th meridian, 490 sea miles north of the Hawaii Islands. Nagumo sends this message to his warriors: "The fate of the Empire rests on this enterprise. Every man must devote himself totally to the task at hand."

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Before dawn, at 6 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 7, the six Japanese carriers launched 181 planes including torpedo bombers, dive bombers, horizontal bombers and fighters. Later, 170 planes constitute a second wave in the attack.

As the first wave wings south, about 6:30 a.m., a U.S. Navy vessel and a PBY Flying Boat spot an unidentified submarine periscope following an American vessel into Pearl Harbor. "*They attack and sink it. They also immediately message base command as to what has happened, (but) no one sounded a general alarm.*"

Around 30 minutes later, a U.S. Army radar station detected "a huge blip [that] filled the entire screen." The soldiers on duty phoned an alert to their HQ but "there was no one at the plotting table." An officer called back within minutes but told them, "Not to worry."

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The alert American servicemen who spotted the Japanese submarine and the approaching Japanese air strike force acted promptly. The Navy attacked and sunk the sub; and, the Army radar technicians alerted their command center.

The officers who were alerted would later explain they did not consider the reports significant enough to take action. "The report of the submarine sinking was handled 'routinely,' and the radar sighting was passed off as an approaching group of American planes due to arrive that morning."

Tactically, the Japanese strike force "achieved complete surprise when they hit American ships and military installations on Oahu shortly before 8 a.m."

Thus, some say, the U.S. was caught napping.

But, the truth is, that Sunday morning, 67 years ago, some American 'lower brass' were 'asleep' on duty and made two fatal tactical mistakes.

The sinking of an unidentified submarine attempting to sneak into your naval base harbor should immediately sound alarms heard by all levels.

If those individuals had reacted appropriately, the Japanese would not have achieved total tactical surprise despite the fact the strike force was only 55 minutes out.

While the top Naval and Army Commanders responsible for Pearl Harbor and the surrounding installations on Oahu were kept in the dark, the president and many others in the military chain of command were well aware of the intelligence intercepts the U.S. and our allies were getting by having the Japanese codes.

Strategically, the record becomes somewhat clearer - and more nauseating - every passing year.

If only America's senior political and military officials had handled their jobs more responsibly, alerted all U.S. commanders appropriately of what they knew, strategically, of Japanese plans and force actions under way. Then, if the attack could not be thwarted, American forces would have been prepared to inflict a heavy price on the attacking Japanese strike force.

But that was not to be.

As a result, 2,403 Americans gave their lives that fateful day. There were 1,187 military and civilian wounded.

The shock of the attack jolted Americans out of innocence, forged a national will that galvanized America and a generation that would lead the fight and win WW-II.