

1925 Reporter Predicted Japanese Pearl Harbor Attack - The Great Pacific War

-Lindsey Williams

Remember Pearl Harbor?

Thirty years ago this week - on Dec. 7, 1941 - Americans had this place and this date etched in their memory.

But the Japanese had a retentive memory then that enabled them to fashion the sneak attack, and subsequent Pacific naval war, from the pages of a book written sixteen years previously by an English reporter.

It is a startling but true fact that Hector C. Bywater, naval correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph, prophesied the Pacific campaign of World War II in uncanny detail in 1925.

Evidence published just a year ago by William H. Honan in the American Heritage, proves that the Japanese high command followed Bywater's blueprint almost to the letter - all except the warnings that Japan could not defeat an aroused United States.

"The Great Pacific War" opens with Japan's seizure of Manchuria, Formosa and Korea. "But in thus pursuing a policy which aimed at the virtual enslavement of China, Japan had inevitably drawn upon herself the hostility of the Powers," wrote Bywater.

An ensuing exchange of diplomatic notes between Japan and the United States are described as "bellicose" and "truculent" on the part of Japan and "courteously worded" by the Americans who are "determined to prevent the catastrophe of war." It is in the midst of these negotiations that Japan strikes by surprise.

Bywater wrote that the "complete destruction" of the U.S. Pacific fleet would come off Manila Bay as our Asiatic Squadron cruised in open sea. This was one of the book's few variations from subsequent reality.

At a time when the aircraft carrier was hardly more than an experiment, Bywater predicted that the Japanese attack would be led by carrier-based airplanes!

Simultaneously with the surprise attack on the U.S. fleet, Bywater postulated that the Japanese would invade Guam and the Philippines. He said the Guam attack would start with air bombardment followed by naval bombardment and the landing of troops by specially designed amphibious vessels.

"Large motor-propelled barges or pontoons were carried on board the Japanese transports for landing tanks and artillery," wrote Bywater. After fitful skirmishes, he concluded, the American Marines would be compelled to surrender, as was the case on Dec. 10, 1941.

The actual Philippines invasion by the Japanese at the start of the Pacific war followed closely the script set down by Bywater.

"The chief danger the Japanese perceived," wrote Bywater, "would come from the American aircraft. Moreover, thirty machines of a new and powerful type would have just arrived from the United States."

In reality, thirty-five new B-17 Flying Fortresses did start arriving in late November 1941 and several flew into Pearl Harbor while the Japanese attack was underway.

Hostilities in the Philippines would commence when Japanese planes "heavily bombed the aerodrome at Dagupan," said Bywater. In the real attack Clark Field - which had replaced nearby Dagupan - was bombed and strafed.

Bywater wrote that the Japanese would give a wide berth to the fortress at Corregidor guarding Manila Bay and the heavily fortified base on Subic Bay until the islands were secured. Then, the bypassed strong points would be starved and bombed into submission - as precisely happened in the real life events.

Bywater's predictions of the Philippines invasion included major landings "at Lingayen Gulf, northwest of Manila, and in Lamon Bay between Cabalete and Alabat Islands southeast of Manila." The two forces would then converge on Manila "simultaneously from north and south."

The second largest island of the Philippine archipelago, Mindanao, would be invaded with a landing at Sindangan Bay.

The total invading force, he estimated, would consist of "an approximate strength of 100,000 men."

Bywater's informed estimate was astonishing.

The Japanese invading force consisted of 100,000 men.

There were two main landings on the Island of Luzon - one at Lingayen Gulf and the other at Lamon Bay, precisely between Cabalete and Alabat islands!

A third major landing party attacked the island of Mindanao.

Bywater postulated that the United States would have to defeat Japan with a slow, island-by-island march across the Pacific. The route he traced was only slightly south of that actually traveled by American admirals during the early 40's.

Bywater imagined that once the Americans were within striking distance of retaking the Philippines, the Japanese Navy would be massed to stop them. The two navies would then fight a tremendous naval engagement that would become the turning point of the war. It was as if Bywater saw the Battle of Midway in his mind's eye.

Even the desperate Kamikaze tactic of fanatic Japanese airmen was foreseen by Bywater. Seeing defeat imminent, the Japanese aviators "never hesitated to ram when otherwise balked of their prey, preferring to immolate themselves," he wrote.

Bywater did not foresee the atomic bomb, but he did predict a dramatic end of the war. He wrote that the United States, desiring to spare itself and the Japanese the horror of all-out invasion, carried out a "demonstration" air raid on Tokyo in which the "bombs" contained leaflets urging the Japanese to surrender rather than "waste more lives."

General Jimmy Doolittle did lead a demonstration bombing raid against Tokyo, of course; and, later, millions of leaflets were showered on Japanese cities.

In Bywater's account the demonstration did bring the Japanese to their senses and a treaty of peace was signed stripping the enemy of many of its island possessions.

"The Great Pacific War" was published while Isoroku Yamamoto - the admiral who masterminded the Japanese naval strategy in World War II - was an attaché with the Japanese embassy in Washington, D.C.

The novel was featured in the New York Times' widely circulated book section in 1925, and the Japanese embassy registered an official protest over the review declaring it "provocative."

Bywater's prophecies that the Imperial Navy would be shattered, the Philippines retaken, and the Japanese homeland bombed were all brushed aside by the influential naval intelligence officer, Kinoaki Matsuo. The officer argued that Japan would display "a courage a hundred times higher than ordinary," being possessed of "a burning determination to win."

What tragedy that the Japanese, having taken Bywater's theories seriously, failed to heed his warnings as well.

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