

WAR DEPARTMENT

Exhibit #37

File # 33

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Transcript of original notes
taken by Comdr A. R. Carr
in the interrogation of
admiral yorio SAWAMOTO

INTERROGATION OF
ADMIRAL YORIO SAWAMOTO, I.J.N.

Date and Time - 26 November 1945, approximately 1400-1600.
Place - Room 303, N.Y.K. Building, Tokyo, Japan.
Present - Commander Denzel R. Carr, USNR, Interrogator.
Admiral Yorio Sawamoto, I.J.N.

Name - Yorio Sawamoto
Date of Birth - 15 November 1886 (Meizi 19).
Naval Academy Graduation - December 1908 (Meizi 41).
Retirement - 5 September 1945.
Address - 110 Kakinokizaka, Meguro-ku, Tokyo-to.

Q. When was the decision made to open hostilities?

A. At the cabinet meeting of 1 December 1941.

Q. Was the date of opening hostilities fixed?

A. It was set for 8 December. This was decided at the time of the cabinet meeting (of 1 December 1941).

Q. Was the matter of the declaration of war decided upon at that time?

(Insert Annex A of 4 December)

A. That agreement was reached between Naval authorities and the Foreign Office. I remember that it was to have been an hour's notice and Admiral Nagano's press report (a few weeks ago) was the first I had heard about a half-hour's notice.

(Admiral Sawamoto explained the difference between Military administration (Gunsei) and Operations or Command (Tōsui), the former headed by Admiral Simada (Shimada) and the latter by Admiral Nagano. The Navy Ministry (Kaigunsyō) was the highest organ of Naval administration and the Naval General Staff (Gunreibu) was the highest organ of operations.)

Q. Could Naval administration permit any indefiniteness about the date and hour of delivery to Washington of the declaration of war?

A. No.

Q. Did Naval operations plan the surprise attack?

A. I would say rather that operations (Tōsuibu) took the initiative. Since it would have been difficult to carry out an effective attack if there had been too long a lapse, I believe that it was decided to allow about an hour. (Tōsuibu de initiative ga atta. Amari nagai zikan o oite wa, yūkōna kōgeki ga dekinikui kara, itizikan gurai to iu yō ni kimerareta to omotte imasu.) This was based on common sense, but I am not absolutely certain of the facts leading to this decision.

Q. Wasn't an hour's notice too long with communications as they were?

A. Communications between Washington and Pearl Harbor were very good, so not more than ten minutes were necessary to get a message through.

Q. From whom did you hear the account of arrangements regarding the notification?

A. I heard it from the Head of the Naval Affairs Bureau (Gunmukyokutyō), Vice Admiral Takazumi Oka. The competent authorities (Syumukyokuin) of the Naval Affairs Bureau were under the admiral. The Naval procedure was for the two representatives of the Navy Ministry to the Foreign Office to arrange the plans and then submit them to Togo and Nagano for approval, but in this particular case I don't know whether the usual procedure was followed.

Q. Then what is your view of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor?

A. In the Sea Battle of Hawaii we took the initiative and attacked; it was not a sneak attack. (Hawai Kaisen wa initiative o totte, kōgeki sita; kisyū dewa nakatta.) The diplomatic situation was very delicate or acute. In such circumstances a moment's notice would do.

Q. What would the situation have been if the roles had been reversed?

A. Thirty minutes would have been ample as between the Japanese Navy Ministry and the Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet. It would have taken considerably longer to notify all subordinate commands.

Q. Would coded messages have made a great difference?

A. If the messages are brief, there is very little difference between code and clear messages, but otherwise there is a great deal.

Q. When was Order No. 1 issued and by whom?

A. There was one by the Commander-in-Chief of the Submarine Fleet (Sensuikantai). I think the first order by Admiral Yamamoto was issued after 1 December, which was the date of the Cabinet decision.

Q. When did the Cabinet meet on 1 December?

A. In the forenoon. Before this there were several conferences in November.

Q. What was your recollection of the wording of the order that sent the Japanese Fleet into battle?

A. Zyūnigatu yōka igo sakusen-kōdō o tore. (On or after 8 December take tactical action.) This was issued as a hōtyoku order (i.e., as one with Imperial sanction) and the details can be obtained from the Naval General Staff (Gunreibu).

Q. Was this hōtyoku order final?

A. It ordered the fleet to carry out tactical action, but I think that if a compromise settlement (daketu) had been reached (in the Washington negotiations), the fleet could have been withdrawn as late as the sixth.

I, Yorio Sawamoto, Admiral, I.J.N., hereby state that the foregoing questions and answers have been explained to me in English and Japanese by Commander Denzel R. Carr, USNR, 2d Lieutenant Fred H. Uyehara, AUS, and Mr. Douglas T. Wada, Naval interpreter, that I understand them as written, that I made these statements, and that they are true.

/s/ Yorio Sawamoto.

ANNEX A

(A clarification of ultimatum led to considerable amplification of the original statement. This amplification was made on 4 December 1945.)

- Q. Was the matter of the declaration of war decided upon at that time?
- A. I thought that the notification of a severance of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States was to have been delivered to Secretary Hull about one hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor. I understood that this was not a declaration of war, but an ultimatum. In December 1941 I did not realize that an ultimatum had to have a time limit. The requirement of a time limit in an ultimatum was explained to me for the first time this morning. After transmittal of what I considered an ultimatum I understood that an order was to be expected from the Naval General Staff which would make it permissible for the Japanese Fleet to open sakusen kodo.
- Q. What do you understand by sakusen kodo?
- A. It has a broad meaning which includes both strategic and tactical action.
- Q. Did you at that time consider it to be a strategic or a tactical action?
- A. It was susceptible of either interpretation.
- Q. Do you think the nature of the action could be left to the discretion of the individual fleet commanders? Didn't the Pearl Harbor action have to precede the action in Malaya or in China waters, for example?
- A. The details were kept very secret. They were known only to the forces concerned. Even if the attack on Pearl Harbor had been delayed, it would not have been possible to defer the action of the other fleets.
- Q. If the negotiations in Washington had been successful, could all the fleets have been recalled before execution of existing orders?
- A. If there had been an interval between the receipt of news of a successful conclusion of the negotiations in Washington and the ordered attack on Pearl Harbor, it would have been possible to stay the execution of existing orders. I do not feel confident that the fleet could have been recalled as late as the seventh of December, but I do believe it could have been recalled on the sixth. The time necessitated by going through the channels of command would make these statements seem reasonable.
- Q. Is this your personal estimate?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Was there to your knowledge an official estimate or a definite plan or method of recall?

A. I have a feeling that there was such a plan, but I can no longer recall the details as to the date of latest possible withdrawal.