

(1) "MAGIC" & other "decided Japanese intercepted messages."

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I never heard of "MAGIC" until the fall of 1981, when I saw a write-up, and photograph, of members of an Army Radio Intercept unit on Hawaii in 1941, in a copy of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association magazine "GRAM." They would copy coded Japanese radio messages and forward them on to Washington, D.C.

Then I first learned the full impact of "Magic" - code name for the decoding of the Japanese consular "Purple" code, and when I read about it in "At Dawn We Slept" - Gordon W. Prange, "The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor" - Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, USN (Retired), and "Infamy - Pearl Harbor and its aftermath" - John Toland

After a lapse of about thirty-five years, when I left Pearl Harbor and WWII completely out of my mind, my interest was renewed when I attended the PHSA National Conventions in Hawaii (40th Anniversary) in 1981, and San Antonio 1982

During those two conventions I talked with many survivors, including some from the USS Whitney (a destroyer tender) where I was stationed as a Pay Clerk USN, in 1941, as well as others from various ships. Talking to these men brought back memories and recollections of December 7th and the stressful periods of time before and after that date.

Returning from the 1981 Convention I documented my memories, including the brief I submitted when I applied for membership in PITSA.

Reading "At Dawn We Slept" filled in many blank spots in my understanding of "The Secrets of Pearl Harbor" - one of which was "MAGIC". First, I learned that the Japanese coded "MAGIC" messages were being decoded in Washington D.C. - by the Army and Navy jointly, with a very restricted distribution, but the CincPac - at Hawaii was not on the distribution list - even when it was apparent the War with Japan was imminent in early December 1941!

This is not a critical review of the three Pearl Harbor reference books listed herein, rather it is to introduce some of my personal, and hereto, unrecorded experiences.

In the fall of 1941 Rear Admiral Thoolalas, Commander Destroyers, Pacific Fleet, was using the USS WHITNEY as his temporary flagship. As a result the Ship's Company Coding Board, consisting of our Communications Officer, and the Supply Department Officers, i.e. LCDR. Charles School, our Splicing Officer, Chief Pay Cash Forest Brown, and myself were present to serve on the Com des Pac Coding Board.

I was on coding watch late in November when I either decoded a "War Warning" message (either the original one of Nov. 27, or a rebroadcast) or it was decoded on the watch ahead of me and still on our file board. I believe it was the former that I personally decoded it. It was indelibly stamped on my mind - this is a War Warning.

Admiral Theobald makes no mention of his having received the "war warning" message; but, it is obvious that its distribution via the Navy Communication than was indicated in At Dawn We Slept. Therefore, if Comdespac was on the distribution list, all other Pacific Ty PP Commanders also received it!

Further more, relying on vague memory over the years, it is my personal recollection, that the particular message - War Warning, another similar message, or a version of it was repeated over the same system at least once more, and possibly twice! - Prior Dec. 1941!

It is possible the information may be on record, and in print in some location unknown to me. But there will never be any doubt in my mind as having seen a "War Warning" message" as my duty as a coding officer on the staff of Command, Destroyer Pacific Fleet in later November 1941!

Without going into too much detail, some of my earlier naval experiences gave me a good insight into the Navy Communication system and the operation of a Battleship staff.

From May 1932 until July 1936 I was an enlisted member on the Flag allowance of Commanding Battleship Division THREE, at various times our flagship was the USS ARIZONA, TENNESSEE, NEVADA, MARYLAND, NEW MEXICO, MISSISSIPPI and IDAHO. Ratings held yeoman 3rd, 2nd and 1st - the last year. 1935-1936, I was the administrative writer (Yeoman) - which meant I took some dictation, and also brought most of his official mail to him for signature.

When I first reported for duty on the staff-flag allowance, I was a communication yeoman, handling the traffic received by the radio men, standing regular watches. Most first year ensigns had to serve time as Communication Watch officers

Changing the subject slightly, as I watched the radio men stare at their watches, I was glad that I had failed to qualify in Radio School in NTS (Naval Academy) in 1929; while it nearly broke my heart at the time, I then figured out it was the best favor they could have done for me - as I finally wound up as a yeoman, a pay clerk and by WWII a permanent Supply Corps officer - serving a total of 33 1/2 years active duty.

The Flag yeoman also were required to act as telephone talkers in Flag Plot during Fleet exercises, and I always had a fear one of us would give a "Turn two" instead of "Two Turn" as we passed the word to Flag Radio, but we never did! (Luckily, if we had we'd probably had a collision of the old battleships!))

Later on, I was designated as Flag look-out, that meant I had my head phones, the Flag secretary's binoculars and I sat on top of the fighting top of the battleship with all the communication masts. On the MARYLAND-TENNESSEE

type I was inside the cage and view was more restricted.

I bring this up for two reasons, in a short period of time I learned to visually identify all the battleship type, over most of the individual BB's, and also the cruisers, couldn't identify individual destroyers, as well as smaller ships.

Also in Fleet exercises in those days 1932-1936, they usually would be done bombing attacks from the carriers SARATOGA and LEXINGTON.

After a few times, I learned that the planes usually started their dives "out of the sun" - from a height where they were not visible until they were in their dive, and they dove by squadron, fighters and bombers, as I recall. In the earlier exercises, it seemed that they "pulled out" at mast height, but later on they were required to pull out earlier.

When I became aware of these tactics I would watch for the "flash of the sun" on their wings as they started

therein, and probably the first two
plans would have commenced their dives
before warning could be telephoned to
Flag Plot. Of course, each individual
BB had their own lookouts, but I
believe my battle station was unusable,
and it is quite possible that I may
have been the first one to report these
dive bombing attacks.

As a personal after thought, I think
it is quite likely that the "Battleship
psychology" of the admirals during the
prelude of that the under-estimate
the potential damage from dive bombers,
as we still re-fought the Battle of
Jutland!

The reason I mention my learning to
identify by sight most of the Combatant
ships is that I can relate to the
ability of Yoshi Kawan (page 73-75) AT
DAWN Two Slept - to identify the
ships at anchor in Pearl Harbor from
a view from Aiea Heights.

In late 1941, I was on Aiea Heights
a number of times, and I recognized who

easy it was to identify the ships in their anchorages, and I speculate that with a telescope from one of the houses up there, you could literally read the log on the quarterdeck.

Once more going back to the young communication watch I served with on the TENNESSEE in 1932, most of them were listed as casualties as they commanded destroyers in the later days of the war with Japan. Very interesting!

This paper is much longer than I had anticipated, but I decided to record certain facts and memories.

A few days ago, I read an article in the "GRAM" telling of the "intercept" of a message giving the itinerary of Admiral YAMAMOTO on his inspection tour of the Bougainville area, and this being shot down by a flight of P-38's from Guadal Canal.

One more, I was on watch on the Com-
despac. Coding board when a message
came through (obviously from Cincpac)
telling of Admiral Yamamoto's
inspection tour itenerary, and stating
that P-38's were being sent to inter-
cept him. Later on, I also saw
another coded message in which he
was reported as intercepted and
shot down. Date: April 18 1942

While I didn't know how the
information was obtained by Cincpac,
it was my first experience with
seeing the results of "broken"
Japanese NAVAL Code. Note "Purple"
JWC4 Consular code.

Later on, when the USS WHITNEY
was anchored in Tongatabu prior to the
Battle of Midway, the commanding
officer continued to have his coding
board decode with the Comdespac
codes - as many messages as possible.

As I recall, we were informed by
Cincpac - through our own intercepts
over a higher classification

When the Saps attached Dutch Harbor
a plain English message was received
by the WHITNEY in Tongatabu, and
our Captain sounded "General Quarters!"

code then authorized for an
individual ship, reports of the
Japanese Fleet, as they departed
for their attacks on the Alaska
area and Midway. We also got
the code reports from the Guadal
Canal area.

This message continued right up
to the time of the attacks on the
Alaska area and Midway, and a
running report was also made
during the battle, and after ward.

As far as I know, the decoded messages
were seen only by the Commanding
officer, the Executive Officer, the Communications
officer, and the individual coding
officer who decoded the message.

I was detached from the USS Whitney
by dispatch received about mid night,
while on coding watch; the Flag of
Comdespac was due aboard the ship
next day. That evening the Commanding
officer ordered all the unauthorized
intercepted encoded messages destroyed.
I left the ship the next morning about

5 A.M. - didn't even have a chance to say good-bye to my friends - had someone aboard the WHITNEY ship May 1939. That was my last experience w/ the results of intercepted and decoded Japanese codes.

As a finale to the war up - I flew from New Caledonia, where the WHITNEY was, to Fiji, in a two-engine MARINER. Our last stop prior Pearl Harbor was Palmyra Island.

On the flight to Pearl Harbor, fully loaded, at 10,000 feet we lost one engine, eased down to 300 feet, and our experienced pilot (10 year piloting China Clippers to China and back) flew four hours with side doors open - on one engine, and with the crash boat waiting at Pearl Harbor, made the most beautiful landing you can imagine. Later in 1944, I found out that the Mariners were known as "Flying Coffins", they would disappear without even time for "May Day"!

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