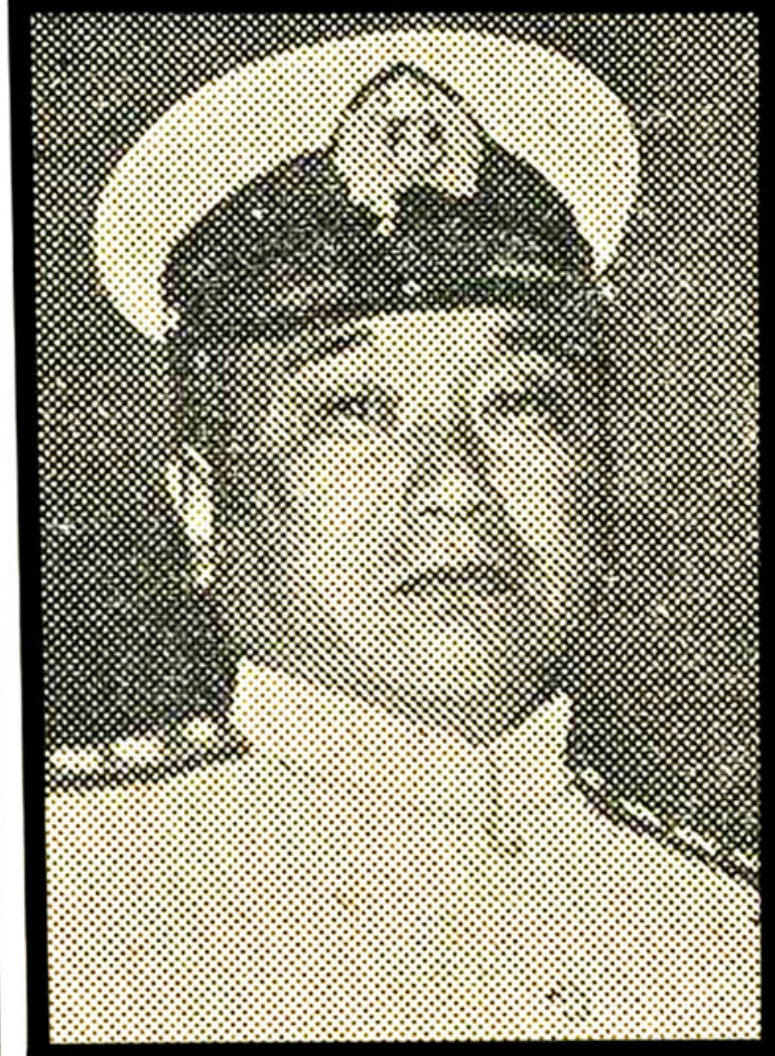
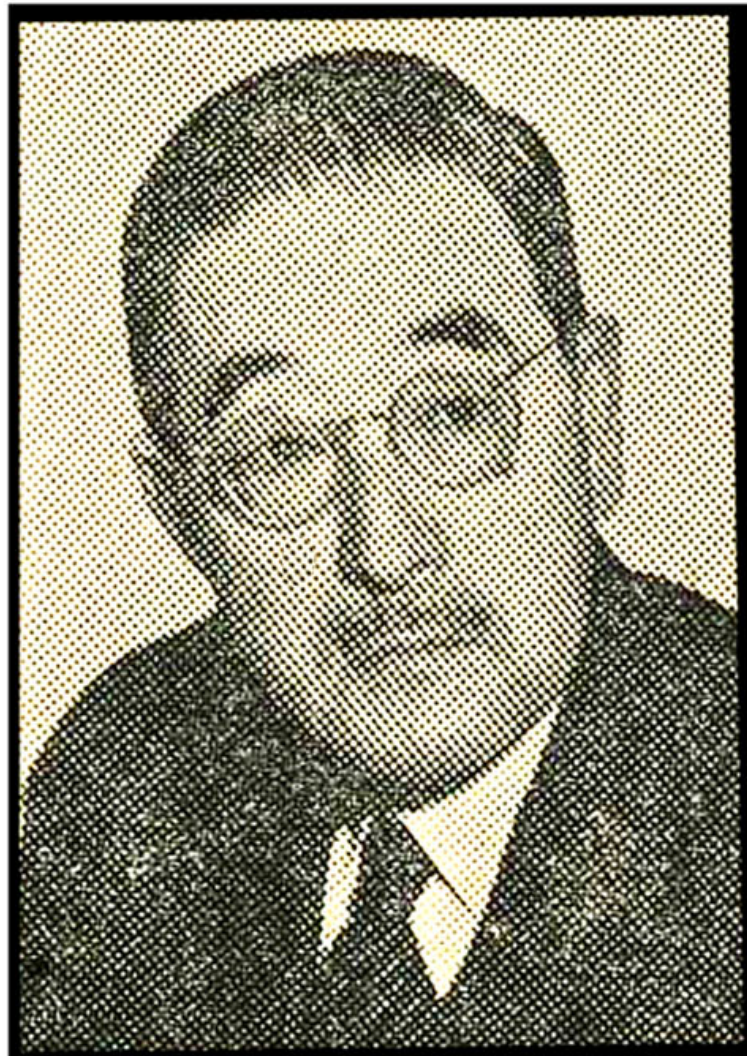


Mr. Moto on the Telephone: He Told Us the Japs Were Coming



Kurusu and Yamamoto

Out of the Pearl Harbor investigation last week came a decoded telephone conversation made on Nov. 27, 1941, two weeks before the Japs attacked, that had all the elements of a penny-dreadful spy thriller. By the time it was decoded the next day by American intelligence officers who had tapped it, Washington was in possession of one additional piece of advance knowledge that war was imminent.

On the Washington end of the trans-pacific phone call was Saburo Kurusu, Japanese special envoy to the United States; on the Tokyo end, Yeisuke Yamamoto, chief of the American division of the Japanese Foreign Office. To them, President Roosevelt was "Miss Kimiko," Secretary of State Cordell Hull, "Miss Umeko," and the possible outbreak of war, "the birth of a child." The conversation, together with the decode and the interceptor's comments, follows:

KURUSU: "Hello, hello. This is Kurusu."

YAMAMOTO: "This is Yamamoto."

KURUSU: "Yes, hello, hello."

(Unable to get Yamamoto for about six or eight seconds, he said aside:)

KURUSU: "Oh, I see, they're making a record of this [in Tokyo], huh?"

KURUSU: "Hello. Sorry to trouble you so often."

YAMAMOTO: "How did the matrimonial question get along today?"

(How did the negotiations go today?)

KURUSU: "Oh, haven't you got our telegram* yet? It was sent—let me see—at about 6—no 7 o'clock. Seven o'clock. About three hours ago."

"There wasn't much that was different from what Miss Umeko said yesterday."

YAMAMOTO: "Oh, there wasn't much difference?"

That Blessed Event: **KURUSU:** "No, there wasn't. As before, that southward matter—that south, SOUTH—southward matter, is having considerable effect. You know, southward matter."

YAMAMOTO: (Obviously trying to indicate the serious effect that Japanese concentrations, etc. in French Indo-China were having on the conversations in Washington. He tries to do this without getting away from the "Miss Umeko, childbirth, marriage" character of the voice code.) "Oh, the south matter? It's effective?"

KURUSU: "Yes, and at one time, the matrimonial question seemed as if it would be settled."

*Outline of interview on Nov. 27, with Roosevelt-Hull-Kurusu-Nomura.

Mr. Moto

(“Yes, and at one time it looked as though we could reach an agreement.”)

KURUSU: “But—well, of course, there are other matters involved too, but—that was it—that was the monkey wrench. Details are included in the telegram* which should arrive very shortly. It is not very long and you’ll be able to read it quickly.”

KURUSU: “How do things look there? Does it seem as if a child might be born?”

(“Does it seem as if a crisis is at hand?”)

YAMAMOTO: (In a definite tone): “Yes, the birth of the child seems imminent.”

(“Yes, a crisis does appear imminent.”)

KURUSU: (Surprised): “It does seem as if the birth is going to take place?”

(“A crisis does appear imminent?”)

KURUSU: “In which direction . . .”

(Stopped himself very abruptly at this slip which went outside the character of the voice code. Then to cover up the slip, he continued:)

KURUSU: “Is it to be a boy or a girl?”

YAMAMOTO: (Hesitated, then laughing at his hesitation, took up Kurusu’s cue to reestablish the voice-code character of the talk. The “boy, girl, healthy” byplay has no other significance:)

YAMAMOTO: “It seems as if it will be a strong healthy boy.”

KURUSU: “Oh, it’s to be a strong healthy boy?”

YAMAMOTO: “Yes.

“Did you make any statement [to the newspapers] regarding your talk with Miss Kimiko today?”

KURUSU: “No, nothing. Nothing except the mere fact that we met.”

YAMAMOTO: “Regarding the matter contained in the telegram** of the other day, although no definite decision has been made yet, please be advised that effecting it will be difficult.”

KURUSU: “Oh, it is difficult, huh?”

YAMAMOTO: “Yes, it is.”

KURUSU: “Well, I guess there’s nothing more that can be done then.”

YAMAMOTO: “Then, today . . .”

KURUSU: “Today?”

To Wed or Not? YAMAMOTO: “The matrimonial question, that is, the matter pertaining to arranging a marriage—don’t break them off.”

(“Regarding negotiations, don’t break them off.”)

KURUSU: “Not break them? You mean talks. (Helplessly): Oh, my.”

KURUSU: “Well, I’ll do what I can. (Pause.) Please read carefully what Miss Kimiko had to say as contained in today’s telegram.”*

YAMAMOTO: “From what time to what time were your talks today?”

KURUSU: “Oh, today’s was from 2:30.”

(Much repeating of the numeral 2.)

KURUSU: “Oh, you mean the duration? Oh, that was for about an hour.”

YAMAMOTO: “Regarding the matrimonial question. I shall send you another message. However, please bear in mind that the matter of the other day is a very difficult one.”

KURUSU: “But without anything—they want to keep carrying on the matrimonial question. They do. In the meantime we’re faced with the excitement of having a child born. On top of that

**Reporting the two proposals presented by the United States on Nov. 26.

Mr. Moto

Tokugawa is really champing at the bit, isn't he? Tokugawa is, isn't he?"

("But without anything—they want to keep on negotiating. In the meantime we have a crisis on hand and the army is champing at the bit. You know the army.")

KURUSU: "That's why I doubt if anything can be done."

YAMAMOTO: "I don't think it's as bad as that."

YAMAMOTO: "Well—we can't sell a mountain."

("Well—we can't yield.")

KURUSU: "Oh sure, I know that. That isn't even a debatable question any more."

YAMAMOTO: "Well, then, although we can't yield, we'll give you some kind of a reply to that telegram."

KURUSU: "In any event, Miss Kimiko is leaving town tomorrow, and will remain in the country until Wednesday."

YAMAMOTO: "Will you please continue to do your best."

KURUSU: "Oh, yes. I'll do my best. And Nomura's doing everything, too."

YAMAMOTO: "Oh, all right. In today's talks, there wasn't anything of special interest then?"

KURUSU: "No, nothing of particular interest, except that it is quite clear now that that southward—ah—the south, the south matter is having considerable effect."

YAMAMOTO: "I see. Well, then, good-by."

KURUSU: "Good-By."

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