



MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

Japanese Steamed to Attack While Kurusu 'Negotiated'

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By WILLIAM HARLAN HALE

Don't believe that the Japanese ordered their dawn assault only yesterday. The fact is that they ordered it not days ago, but weeks ago.

While Japan's special envoy, Saburo Kurusu, was busy talking in Washington, the ships that were to attack us were already on their way. While he was stalling and waiting "for instructions," they were getting into position. More than that: they had their orders before Kurusu even started talking.

Some simple facts of Pacific speed and distance prove the truth of this.

Start with the simplest. A Japanese submarine yesterday torpedoed an American transport 1300 miles off our West Coast. To reach that point, she first had to travel at least 3000 miles. In case she set out from a home base in Japan proper, rather than from an advanced base in the mandated islands, the distance was 3500 miles or more. Japan has the world's largest submarines, and they are capable of cruising to San Francisco and back without refueling; but to do so they would have to conserve their oil stores carefully. Although their top speed on the surface is 20 knots, on long runs they cannot average more than 15.

Figure it out for yourself. To do 3000 miles at 15 knots—that is, about 350 miles a day—takes nine days. To do 3500 takes 10 or 11. Allow an extra day or so for heavy weather or for making detours to avoid being seen before zero hour; then add another day or two at the start for readying the ship for her long grind at sea—and you get a total of two weeks.

Two weeks ago, on Nov. 23, Saburo Kurusu was declaring in Washington that he was "hopeful" of peace.

Now take the aircraft carrier whose torpedo planes blasted the Pearl Harbor base. She undoubtedly started from Kure or Sasebo on Japan's Inland Sea; the mandated islands offer no good anchorages for vessels of such size. If she had been steaming alone, she might have hit an average of 23 knots, thus coming into range within only six days. But she was not alone: she was steaming in company.

Smaller Radius

The Japanese, with probably only seven carriers—some of them small and overage—cannot afford to lose any of them on isolated forays. The ship surely was escorted by cruisers and probably by battleships. The cruisers wouldn't have cut down her steaming time, but the battleships would have.

Especially since they were Japanese battleships. For most of these ships were built between 20 and 30 years ago for service in home waters and they have nothing like the cruising radius that ours do. That is,

they can't make the trip to Hawaiian waters and back—a matter of 6000 to 7000 miles—and still have enough oil left in their bunkers for another couple of thousand miles for maneuvering, without refueling. That means they have to carry tankers with them. That in turn means they have to reduce their pace to what the tankers can do. And that is 17 or 18 knots at best.

Figure it out again. The assaulting Japanese Fleet steaming at 18 knots would take more than a week to reach Hawaiian waters by the direct route. But it certainly did not follow that route: in order to avoid being spotted it probably swung well to the north. And that cost another day or two. The submarines with which it struck a rendezvous (and there are early reports of four submarines having been sunk by American forces off Pearl Harbor) started some days earlier. Before that, a week was required to assemble and dispose the force. And the decision which led up to these orders was not made in a moment.

Three Weeks

That brings us back about three weeks.

Three weeks ago, on Nov. 16, Kurusu reached Washington and, wreathed in smiles, informed the American people, "I greet you from the bottom of my heart."

The Japanese striking fleet, on leaving port, may have pretended it was putting out for "exercises." But it was not "exercising" in mid-Pacific. No admiralty in threatening times puts its ships into disputed waters unless it means action. The commander-in-chief's first assignment, in case of imminent danger of war, is to assemble his ships at their bases and to bring them up to full battle strength. The moment he then puts to sea, he is making war.

CIO Leader Supports War

Full support for an immediate declaration of war and maximum defense production was pledged in a telegram sent to FDR by Lewis Merrill, president of the United Office and Professional Workers, CIO, and a member of the CIO executive board. "You can count on labor for maximum armament production and maximum support of our military and naval efforts," the telegram said.