

THE JAPANESE DECISION FOR WAR

By LOUIS MORTON

IN THE fall of 1941, Japan was truly at the crossroad of her fate. Relations with the United States had deteriorated to the point where war, the Japanese leaders believed, could only be avoided by the renunciation of national objectives. The acceptance of American terms, they thought, would doom their country forever to dependence upon the West. The price of peace was too high, and as a last resort they chose to gamble on war rather than accept what appeared to them as the ignominy of a disgraceful surrender.

The path Japan had followed to this crossroad was a long one, but in 1936, when the Army had gained a predominant position in the life of the nation and its program had become the official policy of the government, the end was already in sight. It was in that year that Japan began preparing actively for the war which would make her the unchallenged leader of Asia. Military expenditures rose from slightly over one million yen in 1935 to almost four million the next year and by 1940 had climbed to seven million, or 65 per cent of the national budget. During the same period, the emphasis in production shifted markedly toward the heavy industries, the basis of a modern military machine. A measure of the importance of this economic advance was afforded by the increase in steel production, aviation, machine tools, and armaments.

Every effort was made also to stockpile weapons, equipment, and strategic raw materials such as oil, bauxite, iron ore, rubber, and chrome. Collecting reserve stocks of military equipment presented few problems, but the program for the accumulation of critical resources ran into serious difficulties and proved to be the weakest point in Japan's armor. The quantity of bauxite on hand in 1941, for example, represented only a nine-month supply, and iron ore, which had been consumed at a rapid rate by the war in China, was even scarcer.

Oil was the most critical item. Japan im-

ported heavily, as much as 37 million barrels in 1940, but there was never enough for military needs. Despite the drastic measures taken to curtail civilian consumption, including the practical abolition of its use for civilian motor traffic, oil remained in extremely short supply. By 1941 Japan had only 43 million barrels on hand, enough, if supplemented by resources within the Empire, for about two years of war under the most favorable circumstances. If the supply of oil were altogether cut off in the event of war, the Air Force would be able to operate for only one year, the Navy for about half that time.

The size of the Army and Navy also increased sharply after 1936. The number of conscripts doubled, and the Army, which in 1937 consisted of twenty-four divisions, had fifty at the end of 1940. Twenty-seven of these were in China, twelve in Manchuria, and the remainder in Korea and the Home Islands (including Formosa). The greatest proportionate increase was in the Japanese Army Air Forces which had 150 squadrons in 1941, almost 100 more than it had had four years earlier. A large portion of the pilots, both Army and Navy, had actual combat experience in China and in the border fighting with Soviet Russia.

Japan's naval forces, limited at first by the Washington Naval Conference of 1921 and then by the London Naval Conference of 1930, grew rapidly after 1936 when Japan withdrew from the naval conference of that year. In 1922 Japan had had only 547,000

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tons of combat shipping as compared to over twice that amount for the United States and Great Britain respectively. Deliveries under the naval construction program inaugurated in 1936 soon placed Japan in a much more favorable position. Twenty new vessels (55,360 tons) were completed in 1937; 63,589 tons the next year, and 259,159 tons in 1941. This tonnage represented one battleship of the *Yamato* class, eleven carriers, seven cruisers, and 37 destroyers—all modern, well-equipped, and well-manned ships. By 1941, Japanese combat tonnage had risen to about 1,500,000 tons, almost three times that of 1922, and Japan's fleet was more powerful than the combined United States-British fleet in the Pacific.

Despite these preparations for war, neither the Army nor the Navy developed, during the decade of the '30's, any specific plans for the use of this formidable military machine to gain the national objectives, in case diplomacy failed. There were in the files of the Supreme Command general statements of policy and annual operations plans. These, except for the China plan, dealt mainly with a defensive war against either the United States or Soviet Russia and emphasized that in no case would Japan fight more than one enemy at a time. The plans were, therefore, in the words of one Japanese officer, "outdated writings" and "utterly nonsensical."¹

This lack was partially overcome by the Army and Navy annual operations plans. In 1940 the Army plan, in addition to its provisions regarding China, emphasized defensive operations against Russia in Manchuria. The Navy's plan of that year provided for operations against the U. S. Fleet with the sole objective of gaining control of Far Eastern waters. Presumably the Philippines and Guam would be seized, and if Great Britain entered the war Japanese forces would occupy Hong Kong and Singapore. But the Navy had no plans to take any of these places, and the idea of attacking Burma, India, Australia, or the Netherlands Indies was "never contemplated." "Japan," wrote Gen. Shinichi Tanaka, Chief of the

¹ Deposition of Shinichi Tanaka, Exhibit No. 3027, International Military Tribunal of the Far East (IMTFE).

Army's First Bureau (Operations), "had no capacity to meet the needs of a crisis . . . with drastic measures on a grand scale."

The absence of specific plans reflecting the nation's expansionist policy is remarkable. The preparation of military and naval plans implementing national objectives is the major function of a general staff and was routine in the United States and other democratic countries where the armed services were much more closely controlled than in Japan. The fact that the Japanese general staff—which had studied in the best schools in Europe—had failed to prepare such plans as late as 1940 cannot be attributed either to peaceful intentions or to a supreme confidence in diplomacy. It was based solely on a realistic appreciation of Japan's economic weakness and her lack of the strategic resources required for modern warfare.

The situation in the Far East in late 1940, after Germany had overrun Western Europe, was favorable for Japanese expansion. For the first time since World War I the Japanese saw an opportunity to establish a new order in Southeast Asia at the expense of the British, the Dutch, and the French. While diplomatic arrangements were made to insure Russian and American neutrality, the Japanese Army and Navy began in the fall of the year to prepare more actively for war while laying the basis for military action in the south. Renewed efforts were made to stockpile vital resources, and in late October the Total War Research Institute was established to study the problems presented by total war.

In December, 1940, the Army took the first overt step to prepare for operations in Southeast Asia when it directed three divisions, then in South China, to begin training for combat in tropical areas. Soon after, the commanders in China and Formosa were ordered to study the problems involved in such operations and to make special studies of the geography, terrain, and climate of Malaya, Indochina, the Netherlands Indies, Thailand, and Burma. At the same time Japanese pilots were flying reconnaissance missions and taking aerial photographs over the Malayan coast and the Philippines while the War Ministry and Foreign Office were printing military currency for use in the southern



THESE JAPANESE NAVAL OFFICERS PLAYED MAJOR ROLES IN THE DISCUSSIONS PRELIMINARY TO WORLD WAR II

Admiral Osamu Nagano, left above, advised the Japanese Emperor to draw away from the Axis and make every effort to maintain peace with the United States, for he believed that shortage of oil made eventual naval victory impossible. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, right above, conceived the plan for the attack on Pearl Harbor and insisted on its feasibility and necessity.

area. It was at this time, too, in January, 1941, that Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the *Combined Fleet*, conceived the idea of a carrier-based air attack on Pearl Harbor and began the study which finally resulted in the Pearl Harbor plan.² The signs of a shift from a defensive to an offensive strategy were abundantly clear.

While these military measures were under way, the diplomats had been busy, too. Their goal had been set in July, 1940, when the Konoye Government came into office. At that time national objectives had been defined as:

1. The establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere to include English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese possessions in the Far East and in the Pacific. Ultimately, India, Australia, and the Philippines would be included.

2. A military and political alliance with the Axis.

3. A non-aggression pact with Russia.

4. A quick conclusion to the war in China.

Of these, only two had been achieved by the spring of 1941. The Tripartite Pact had been signed in September of the previous year and a neutrality pact concluded with Russia on April 13, 1941. Expansion by diplomacy had failed everywhere, except in Thailand. By agreement with Vichy France—and Hitler's aid—Japan had obtained the right to military occupation of Tonkin Province and the use of air bases and military facilities in French Indochina. The war in China was no nearer conclusion than it had been a year earlier and the negotiations with the United States, begun in February, 1941, had made little progress. Finally, all efforts to wring economic concessions from the Dutch to gain more oil and petroleum products had met with failure.

The German invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941 caught the Japanese by surprise and so altered the international situation that the Japanese were forced to re-examine altogether the program established in July of the previous year. There were some in the Japanese Government, notably Foreign Minister

² For a complete account of the development of the Pearl Harbor plan, see the article by Robert E. Ward, "The Inside Story of the Pearl Harbor Plan" in the December, 1951, issue of the PROCEEDINGS.

Yosuke Matsuoka, who believed that Japan should now postpone the plans for southward expansion and instead turn north to attack Russia and obtain the oil in Sakhalin. The Army group, led by the War Minister, General Hideki Tojo, insisted that the nation must go south, where the oil and rubber lay. The Navy temporized while Premier Fumimaro Konoye wanted to reach agreement with the United States whose hand in the Far East had been strengthened by Germany's attack on Russia. The outcome was the program adopted on July 2 by the Conference in the Imperial Presence.³

The July 2 decision put to rest once and for all the notion of an attack upon Russia—and led to the dropping of Matsuoka a few weeks later. The Imperial Conference decided that regardless of any change in the international situation, Japan would adhere to its plan for the domination of the southern area, as the military wished. If a favorable opportunity arose to take advantage of the German-Soviet war, the nation should be ready to do so. Negotiations with the United States were to be continued, as Konoye wanted, but at the same time preparations for war with the Western powers would be pushed to completion. Finally, steps to bring about Chiang's surrender would be taken and plans for the occupation of Thailand and Indochina were to be executed immediately. "We will not be deterred," the Imperial Conference decreed, "by the possibility of being involved in a war with England and America."

The Army and Navy immediately began final preparations for the next move south. The troops which later landed in the Philippines and in Malaya began amphibious training along the China and Indochina coast, on Hainan Island, and on Formosa. Those units which later fought in Hong Kong received training in night fighting near Canton. The three divisions in South China which had been alerted for operations in tropical areas were prepared for action in Indochina. Wherever possible the Japa-

³ This body was an extra-constitutional one which met from time to time to decide problems of state. It consisted usually of the chief members of the Government and the Army and Navy staffs. The Emperor attended but did not participate actively.

nese selected training areas which offered conditions approximating those in which they might later fight.

The Navy, meanwhile, had assembled most of its combat forces and organized them for operations. Within the month it had activated the 5th, 6th (Submarines), and *Southern Expeditionary Fleets* as well as three air fleets—the 1st, 3d, and 11th. Almost complete, too, was the conversion of 630,000 tons of shipping for war purposes, supplemented within a few months by an additional 490,000 tons (265 vessels).

Action came on July 25, when, after an ultimatum to the Vichy Government, Japanese troops, in defiance of American opposition, moved into southern Indochina. Although the French, with prompting from Hitler, acquiesced in this raid on their empire, neither the United States nor Great Britain was as obliging. The former broke off the negotiations then in progress in Washington, and on July 26 President Roosevelt, against the advice of his military and naval chiefs, issued an order freezing Japanese assets in the United States. Since Japan no longer had the dollars with which to purchase the urgently needed materials of war, the effect of this measure—which the British and Dutch supported—was to create an economic blockade of Japan. So seriously did Admiral Harold R. Stark regard this move that he warned his Far East Commander, Admiral Thomas C. Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, to take precautions for any eventuality, although he did not expect the Japanese to open hostilities immediately.

The Japanese were completely surprised by this drastic reaction to their move into Indochina and held a series of urgent conferences to review their situation and their readiness for war, if war should come. The picture was not encouraging. The powerful Planning Board which coordinated the vast, complex structure of Japan's war economy found the country's resources meager and only enough, in view of the blockade, for a quick decisive war. "If the present condition is left unchecked," asserted Teiichi Suzuki, President of the Board, "Japan will find herself totally exhausted and unable to rise in the future."⁴

⁴ Statement in Japanese Study No. 150, "Political Strategy Prior to Outbreak of War," Part IV, pp. 9, 73-77.

The blockade, he believed, would bring about Japan's collapse within two years, and he urged that a final decision on war or peace be made "without hesitation."

The Navy's view was equally gloomy. There was only enough oil, the Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Osamu Nagano, told the Emperor, to maintain the fleet under war conditions for one and a half years, and he was doubtful if Japan could win a sweeping victory in that time. His advice to the Emperor, therefore, was to draw away from the Axis, abandon the Tripartite Pact, and make every effort to reach agreement with the United States.

The Army and other powerful forces in the Japanese government were not as pessimistic and doubted the value of Nagano's advice. They thought there was enough oil on hand to wage war and that renunciation of the Tripartite Pact would not necessarily bring about a change in U. S.-Japanese relations. Marquis Koichi Kido, the Emperor's chief adviser, discussed the problem with Prince Konoye, the premier, and the two of them agreed to defer judgment and, before making a decision on war or peace, require the Army and Navy to work out their difference and reach agreement on a common program.

It was at this point that serious staff work began to produce a strategy for war designed to gain the riches of the Indies against the opposition of the Americans and British. The first studies were made by the Total War Research Institute, a subordinate body of the Planning Board. Forecasting the course of events during the next six months, the Institute called for the invasion of the Netherlands Indies in November, followed the next month by surprise attacks on British and American possessions in the Far East. Russia, too, the Institute believed, would enter the war, probably between April and October 1942, and Japan must expect to be hit from the air by planes based on Russia's Far Eastern air and naval bases and make plans to meet this threat.

These studies, as well as others, were discussed heatedly by the Army and Navy staffs during the tense days that followed. From these discussions emerged four alternative lines of strategy. The first was similar to that advocated by the Total War Re-

search Institute and called for the seizure initially of the Netherlands Indies, followed by attack on the Philippines and Malaya. The second line of action envisaged a step-by-step progressive advance in a clockwise direction from the Philippines to Borneo, Java, Sumatra, and finally to Malaya. The reverse, counterclockwise, from Malaya through the Indies to the Philippines constituted the third course considered by the planners. Finally, it was proposed that Malaya and the Philippines be attacked simultaneously, after which the Netherlands Indies would be assaulted from north and east. Admiral Yamamoto's plan for a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor did not enter into the calculations of the planners at this time.

Which of these four strategic concepts should they adopt? The first course, the Army and Navy planners agreed, would leave their forces exposed to attack from the Philippines and Malaya while the Indies were being occupied. It was therefore discarded as too hazardous. The Navy preferred the second plan for an advance starting with the Philippines; it posed no special problems in the concentration of troops and left no seaward flanks exposed. The Army planners pointed out, however, that under this schedule by the time Malaya was reached the alerted Allies would have had time to build up their defenses and ward off the invasion forces. It, too, was discarded. The Army preferred the third course, to attack Malaya first and by-pass the Philippines, hoping in this way to lull the Americans into a false sense of security and delay their entry into the war. To this line of action, the naval planners objected strenuously, pointing out that it would leave the powerful American air and naval forces in the Philippines intact, in position to cut Japan's line of communication southward to the Indies and Malaya.

The fourth course, simultaneous attacks against the Philippines and Malaya followed by an advance against the Indies from two directions, created serious problems of coordination and timing. But because it was the only strategic line of action which compromised the views of both services, it was the one finally adopted in mid-August. For the first time the Japanese had a realistic

strategy for offensive operations which was based on the existing international situation and was designed to achieve the goals of national policy against a coalition of probable enemies.

Once a general outline of strategy had been decided upon, the Army and Navy staffs began the detailed work required to produce operational plans. The Army's work went slowly and did not get under way until after the first week of September. In contrast, the Navy planners moved swiftly and by the end of August had all but completed their work. The plans they worked out were based on older plans for seizing and holding bases in the Western Pacific. But they had now as well Yamamoto's completed plan for a Pearl Harbor attack and a request that it be included in the overall war plan.

Between 10-13 September, "table-top" maneuvers were held at the Tokyo Naval War College. When the session ended, there was agreement on the operation schedules for the seizure of the Philippines, Malaya, the Netherlands Indies, Burma, and islands in the South Pacific. The question of the Pearl Harbor attack, however, was still unresolved. The exercise had demonstrated that a Pearl Harbor strike was practicable but many felt that it was too risky, that the U. S. Pacific Fleet might not be in port on the day of the attack, and that the danger of discovery during the long voyage to Hawaii was too great.

Against the almost unanimous opposition of the naval planners, Admiral Yamamoto remained adamant. Unless the American fleet could be destroyed at one blow at the start of the war, he insisted, the Japanese would probably fail in their effort to seize the Netherlands Indies and Malaya. And even if they were successful, he predicted that they would be unable to hold any of their gains for long. The force of this argument was undoubtedly strengthened by the knowledge that defenses in the mandated islands, despite the accelerated program of fortifications in the last two years, were far from complete. A determined effort by the Pacific Fleet might well result in disaster. When these arguments failed to convince the naval staff Admiral Yamamoto threatened to resign if his plan was not adopted. This threat from one of the most gifted and

senior officers of the Navy at a time when his services would be most needed was too much for the opposition. In mid-October the Pearl Harbor attack plan was formally adopted and incorporated into the larger plan for war.

This larger plan, which was virtually complete by October 20 and was the one the Japanese followed when war came, had as its immediate objective the capture of the rich Dutch and British possessions in Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. To secure these areas, the Japanese believed it necessary to destroy or neutralize the American fleet at Pearl Harbor and to deprive the United States of its base in the Philippines. America's line of communications across the Pacific was to be cut by the seizure of Wake and Guam.

The occupation of the Netherlands Indies would complete the first phase of the war and would, the Japanese planners estimated, require five months. The Philippines they expected to take in 50 days, Malaya in 100, the Indies in 150. After that time the Japanese would consolidate their position and strengthen the bases along the perimeter of their newly-gained empire to form a powerful defensive perimeter around the southern area, the home islands, and the vital shipping lanes connecting Japan with her sources of supply. From within this ring of bases they could, they felt, repulse any Allied attack against the strategic area within it, or make such an attack so expensive and time-consuming as to discourage the effort altogether.

The planners anticipated that certain events might require an alteration in their strategy and outlined alternative courses of action to be followed in each contingency. The first possibility was that the Japanese-American negotiations then in progress in Washington would prove successful. If this unexpected success was achieved, all operations were to be suspended, even if the final order to attack had been issued. The second possibility was that the United States might take hostile action before the attack on Pearl Harbor by sending elements of the Pacific Fleet to the Far East. In that event, the *Combined Fleet* would be deployed to intercept American naval forces while the attacks

against the Philippines and Malaya proceeded according to schedule.

The possibility of a Soviet attack, or of a joint U. S.-Soviet invasion from the north, was a spectre which haunted the Japanese. To meet such a contingency, Japanese ground forces in Manchuria were to be strengthened while air units from the home islands and China were to be transferred to meet the new threat. Thereafter, the attack would proceed on schedule.

The forces required to execute this vast plan for conquest were very carefully calculated by *Imperial General Headquarters*. A large force had to be left in Manchuria, and an even larger one in China. Garrisons for Korea, Formosa, the home islands, and other positions required additional forces. Thus, only a small fraction of the Japanese Army was available for operations in the south. Of the total strength of the Army's 51 divisions, 59 mixed brigades, and 1,500 first-line planes, *Imperial General Headquarters* could allocate only 11 divisions and two air groups (700 planes) to the operations in the south. In contrast, the bulk of the Navy's combat forces, organized under the *Combined Fleet*, were available for operations.

In the execution of this complicated and intricate plan, the Japanese planners realized, success would depend on careful timing and on the closest cooperation between ground, naval, and air forces. No provision was made for unified command of all services then, or later. Instead, separate agreements were made between Army and Fleet commanders for each operation. These agreements provided simply for cooperation at the time of landing and for the distribution of forces.

In addition to supporting the Army's operations in the south, the *Combined Fleet* had other important missions. Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most spectacular, was that assigned the *Pearl Harbor Striking Force*. Later, this force was to support operations of the *4th Fleet* in the capture of Guam and the Bismarck Archipelago, and then assist in the southern operations. The *6th Fleet* (submarines) was to operate in Hawaiian waters and along the west coast of the United States to observe the movements of the U. S. Pacific Fleet and



Official U. S. Army Photograph

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT SIGNS THE FORMAL DECLARATION OF WAR

The Japanese government under the influence of General Tojo and his followers believed that the future of Japan was dependent upon the seizure of French, Dutch, and British territory in the Far East, even if such action brought on war with the United States. Finally, resigned to the inevitability of general war, they decided to include American possessions and forces in their initial offensives.

make surprise attacks on shipping. The *5th Fleet* was to patrol the waters east of Japan, in readiness for enemy surprise attacks, and, above all, to keep on the alert against Russia.

While the military and naval staffs were perfecting their plans, the political leaders of Japan—and these included generals and admirals—sought to achieve their goal by negotiation and diplomacy. The premier, Prince Konoye, with the tacit support of the naval minister, who was still concerned over the shortage of oil, argued for a more conciliatory attitude toward the United States. General Tojo, the war minister, thought there was little profit in this course; the Army would never accept the American terms for a settlement in China. These differences were imperfectly resolved on September 6 when it was agreed that negotiations with the United States would continue. But so would the preparations for war which were to be completed by the end of October. “If by the early part of October,”

the Japanese stated, “there is no reasonable hope of having our demands agreed to in the diplomatic negotiations . . . we will immediately decide to open hostilities against America.”⁵ A special effort was to be made to prevent the United States and the Soviet Union from acting in unison against Japan.

In the weeks that followed, Premier Konoye, his nerves already on edge as the result of an attempt on his life, worked feverishly to reach agreement with the United States before the October deadline. But without success. By October 10 the negotiations, in the words of Foreign Minister Teijiro Toyoda, Matsuoka’s successor, had “slowly but surely . . . reached the decisive stage.” Meanwhile the Army and Navy pushed hard for a decision. Oil stocks were steadily diminishing, and the most favorable

⁵ IMTFE, Deposition Doc No. 1579; Prince Konoye Memoirs in *Pearl Harbor Hearings*, Part 20, pp. 4022-23. The wording and meaning of this statement is the subject of considerable dispute.

time for landing operations as well as the long voyage across the northern Pacific was close at hand. Further delay might mean postponement until the spring, when climatic conditions for a Soviet attack in Manchuria would be favorable. The decision on war would have to be made, wrote the chiefs of the Army and Navy General Staffs, by October 15 at the latest.

In an effort to gain time Konoye tried desperately to persuade Tojo to extend the deadline, now fixed at the 15th. This Tojo refused to do and Konoye had no recourse finally but to resign and on October 18 the war minister was named premier. The fate of Japan was in the hands of its generals.

From October 18 to November 5, the members of the new Cabinet and other high officials, meeting in an almost continuous series of conferences, considered every aspect of Japan's position and the possibilities of each line of action. Finally, on the 5th a decision was reached. Like that made on September 6, the new decision called for a continuation of the negotiations with the United States, and, if no settlement was reached by then, to open hostilities. The deadline set was November 25, later extended to the 29th.

The decision made, preparations for war were pushed to completion. On the 5th, the *Combined Fleet* commander received his orders and at the same time issued his own order for the forthcoming operations. During the remainder of the month the fleet was assembled, and on the 25th the *Pearl Harbor Striking Force* was ordered into Hawaiian waters.

Southern Army was established and assigned its mission on November 6, with instructions to prepare a plan of operations in the event negotiations failed. At the same time *Imperial General Headquarters* issued an "outline of strategy" which called for simultaneous operations against the Philippines and Malaya. At a meeting in Tokyo on November 10, the ground and naval commanders completed the details of their plans for joint action, and on the 20th orders for the attack were issued, with the caution that they be held until the negotiations in Washington were concluded.

On Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura,

who had been negotiating with the Americans in Washington since February, now rested the responsibility for the last effort to reach an understanding with the United States. From Tokyo he had received two separate proposals for submission as a basis of agreement, the second, Proposal B, to be offered only if the first was rejected. On November 7, Nomura handed Hull Proposal A which on the 15th was rejected by Mr. Hull on the ground that the offer to withdraw troops from China and Indo-China was indefinite and uncertain and that the United States could not agree to the Japanese definition of non-discrimination in trade.

Proposal B was presented by Nomura and his newly-arrived colleague Saburo Kurusu to the American Secretary of State on the 20th. Though the Americans knew that this was to be Japan's last offer, they found it unacceptable also. It would have assured, wrote Mr. Hull, "Japan's domination of the Pacific, placing us in serious danger for decades to come." The commitments which the United States would have been required to make under Proposal B, he thought, were so far-reaching as to make its acceptance virtually a surrender to Japan.

This rejection of Japan's last offer, many felt, ought to be softened by a reasonable counterproposal. The military and naval chiefs wanted one to gain time to complete their own preparations and for a few days there was serious discussion in Washington of a *modus vivendi*. Finally, at a meeting in the White House on November 26, the President and Mr. Hull agreed that the small results expected from the *modus vivendi* did not justify the risk of alienating the Chinese. That afternoon, therefore, when the Secretary of State handed the Japanese Ambassador his final answer to Proposal B he omitted the *modus vivendi*. This date marked the real end of the negotiations.

The deadline set by the Japanese, November 29, arrived with no settlement and no further possibility of profitable negotiations without a Japanese withdrawal from China. This they would not accept, but to gain a few more days they instructed Nomura and Kurusu to continue the conversations in Washington. Meanwhile the force scheduled

to attack Pearl Harbor made its way across the North Pacific, and elements of the *Southern Army* assembled for their various tasks.

Final details for the opening of hostilities were completed on the 30th at a meeting in Tokyo of the political and military leaders of Japan. At that time the attack on Pearl Harbor was discussed and agreement reached on the form and substance of the note which would formally end the negotiations and sever the relations between the two countries. Hostilities would follow but no declaration of war, it was decided, would be made in advance. The timing of the Japanese reply to Hull's note was also discussed and it was agreed that the naval staff would make the decision in order to gain the fullest advantage of surprise. The next day these decisions were formalized and sanctioned at a Conference in the Imperial Presence, and on the 2nd Army and Navy headquarters in Tokyo issued the order designating December 8 (Japanese Standard Time) as X-Day, the day when hostilities would begin. From Admiral Yamamoto's flagship went the message *Niitaka Yama Nobore* (climb Mount Niitaka), the prearranged signal for the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Various considerations underlay the choice of so early a date. Both the Army and Navy felt that delay would be disastrous. By March, 1942, America's naval superiority as well as the reinforcements in the Philippines would make the plan extremely hazardous, if not impossible of execution. Moreover, by that time the Americans and British would have completed their preparations in the Philippines and Malaya. Weather, too, was a decisive consideration in the Japanese plan. The conquest of Malaya would require five months and would have to be completed by the spring, the best time for military operations in Manchuria, in the event that Russia should decide to attack. Finally, December and January were favorable months for amphibious operations in the Philippines and elsewhere, with the tide and moon favoring the attacker.

The first week of December, 1941, was one of strain and nervous tension in Tokyo and Washington alike. On December 6 Nomura was instructed to deliver the final note to

Hull at 1300 the next day, shortly before the scheduled Pearl Harbor attack. Thirteen parts of this fourteen part note reached Washington before the end of the day, December 6, together with reports of two large Japanese convoys headed south off the coast of Indo-China. Already Japanese forces were rapidly approaching their destinations. The Pearl Harbor Force, after a voyage across the North Pacific, was heading southeast toward Oahu. On Formosa airfields the planes scheduled to hit Clark Field were lined up, and the troops for the invasion were standing by in their staging areas. (One force had already left by that time.) The invasion force for Guam was in position fifty miles north, on the island of Rota, and the Wake Force stood ready at Kwajalein. Advance units of General Tomoyuki Yamashita's *25th Army* had left Hainan in two convoys on December 4 on their way to Malaya and on the 6th were nearing British Malaya.

The fourteenth and last part of the Japanese note reached Washington on the morning of the 7th. Nomura's appointment with Hull was scheduled for 1345, and when he finally arrived the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor was already on his desk. It was some hours later that Ambassador Grew received from Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo the announcement that a state of war existed between Japan and the United States.

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From the vantage point of hindsight, Japan's decision to go to war appears as a supreme act of folly. By this decision the Japanese leaders appear to have deliberately committed their country to a hopeless struggle against a combination of powers vastly superior in potential industrial and military strength. This view has perhaps been most effectively presented by Admiral Morison who characterized the Pearl Harbor attack which brought the United States into the war as politically disastrous and strategically idiotic. "One can search military history in vain," concludes Morison, "for an operation more fatal to the aggressor."⁶

But to the Japanese, their decision, though

⁶ S. E. Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 132.

it involved risks, was not a reckless and foolhardy one. It was based, for one thing, on the expectation that the United States would be willing to negotiate for peace rather than fight a long and costly war. The Japanese leaders fully appreciated the industrial potential of the United States and that nation's ability to fight a major war on two fronts. But they had to accept this risk, as General Tojo said, "in order to tide over the present crisis for self-existence and self-defense."

The Japanese, it must be emphasized, did not seek the total defeat of the United States and had no intention of invading this country. They planned to fight a war of limited objectives and having once secured these objectives to set up a defense in such depth and make their reconquest so costly that the United States would find a settlement favorable to Japan an attractive alternative to a long war. To the Japanese leaders this seemed an entirely reasonable view. But there were fallacies in this concept which Admiral Yamamoto had pointed out when he wrote that it would not be enough "to take Guam and the Philippines nor even Hawaii and San Francisco." To gain victory he warned his countrymen, they would "have to march into Washington and sign the treaty in the White House."⁷ Here was a lesson about limited wars that went unheeded then and is still often neglected.

Perhaps the major Japanese error was their decision to attack the United States at all. Their strategic objectives lay in Southeast Asia and if they had limited their attacks to British and Dutch territory the United States might never have entered the war. Such a course would have involved risks, but it would have forced the United States to act first. And there was, in 1941, strong opposition to a move that would have appeared to a large part of the American people as an effort to pull British and Dutch chestnuts out of the fire. As it was, the Japanese relieved the United States government from the necessity of making a very difficult choice. The alternatives it faced in December, 1941, when the Japanese were clearly moving southward, were, either to

seek a declaration of war if Japan attacked the British and the Dutch in southeast Asia; to stand by idly while the Japanese secured the rich resources of Malaya and the Indies which would enable them to prosecute the war in China vigorously to an early end. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, with one blow, resolved all the problems and mobilized the American people behind a war against Japan as nothing else would have done.

The Japanese based much of their hope for success on the situation in Europe. The war there favored their plans, and they saw little possibility of an early peace. Germany, they believed, would defeat Russia, or at least gain military domination of the European continent, but they doubted that the Germans would be able to launch a successful invasion of England. At any rate, it was clear that both the British and Russians would be too preoccupied in Europe for some time to come to devote their attention to the Far East. The United States had an important stake in Europe, too; and would be unwilling to concentrate its forces in the Pacific, the Japanese estimated, so long as the outcome remained in doubt.

The possibility of avoiding war with the United States was seriously considered and discussed at length in Tokyo, but the Japanese were apparently convinced that if they moved south the United States would go to war. Their only hope lay in knocking out the fleet and removing the Philippine threat so that the United States would be unable to take offensive action for eighteen months to two years. By that time, the Japanese estimated, they would have secured the southern area and established themselves firmly behind a strong outer line of defense. With the resources thus won—the oil, rubber and bauxite,—they would be in a position to wage defensive warfare almost indefinitely, they believed. The United States, the Japanese reasoned, would be unable to sustain the major effort required to break through this defensive screen in the face of the losses imposed by their determined and well-trained foes. As a result, the Japanese leaders felt justified in their hopes that the United States would be forced to compromise and allow Japan to retain a substantial por-

⁷ Masuo Kato, *The Lost War*, p. 89.

tion of her gains, thus leaving the nation in a dominant position in Asia.

This plan was not entirely unrealistic in 1941, but it overlooked entirely the American reaction to Pearl Harbor and the refusal of the United States to fight a limited war—or Japan's ability to so limit it. The risks were recognized, but the alternatives were not estimated correctly. Yet, even had they appreciated fully the extent of the risks, they would probably have made the same decision. To them, correctly or incorrectly, the only choice was submission or war, and they chose the latter in the hope that their initial advantages and the rapid conquest of southern Asia would offset the enormous industrial and military potential of the enemy.

In the final analysis, the Japanese decision for war was the result of the conviction, sup-

ported by the economic measures imposed by the United States and America's policy in China, that the United States was determined to reduce Japan to a position of secondary importance. The nation, Tojo and his supporters felt, was doomed if it did not meet the challenge. In their view, Japan had no alternative but to go to war while she still had the power to do so. She might lose, but defeat was better than humiliation and submission. "Japan entered the war," wrote a member of the Imperial family, "with a tragic determination and in desperate self-abandonment." It was a gamble, admittedly, and Japan lost, but the spoils of war—China and the riches of Southeast Asia—went neither to the victor nor its allies. And aggression in Asia, a dozen years later, is still on the march.



BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

Contributed by LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ARTHUR E. BLIRER,
U. S. Naval Reserve (Inactive)

It was shortly before the July, 1944, invasion of Guam. Two Farragut Class Destroyers were giving close-in support to daylight operating underwater demolition teams along the Agat Bay-Facpi Point beach. Meanwhile heavier ships cruising south of Orote Peninsula provided heavy fire and air support. The few Jap shore batteries that opened fire were soon silenced.

But one enemy gun proved to be still operative. As the air spotter winged away, Mister Jap opened fire from a cleverly concealed hiding place somewhere in the heavy vegetation and rough, ravine-like, mainland end of Orote. His first effort splashed between DD ONE and DD TWO. Then he concentrated on the latter. His firing was wild, but none the less irritating. Finally, just as the returning air spotter pinpointed the Jap battery, a particularly close salvo partially concealed DD TWO from sight. Then a deep southern drawl sounded over TBS!

"Hello (Commodore on ONE). This is TWO. Say, who's supposed to be harassing who around here?"

PARADE REST!

Contributed by LIEUTENANT COMMANDER GAYNOR PEARSON
U. S. Naval Reserve

The old *Illinois*, renamed the *Prairie State*, was tied up alongside 127th Street in New York, where it was being used as a training ship for Naval Reserve midshipmen. Included in the orders for the midshipman sentry at the gate were the following: (1) To inform the Officer of the Deck of the approach of the Commanding Officer; and (2) to challenge everybody coming on or near his post.

One rainy evening the Captain unexpectedly appeared out of the darkness.

"Halt, who goes there?" challenged the sentry.

"Captain Smith," was the reply.

The bewildered sentry turned and started running for the gangway, so as to inform the OD.

"Well, sentry. Are you going to leave me here all night standing at attention?" the Captain demanded.

"No, sir, Captain," the sentry shouted. "Parade rest!"

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