

PEARL HARBOR MYTHS AND REALITIES

By: Frank A. Schuler, Jr.

I believe that a full, well-informed work of the diplomatic history behind Pearl Harbor is yet to be written. Briefly, I was one of a small group of young Foreign Service Officers who, having learned the language and culture of Japan, came to understand the Japanese before the attack on Pearl Harbor. At that time the Division of Far Eastern Affairs of the Department of State was the preeminent instrument of U.S. policy-making with Japan.

Before World War II, the military depended upon the Department of State for their political intelligence. Ambassador Joseph C. Grew in Tokyo; Stanley K. Hornbeck, Political Advisor to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull; and Maxwell M. Hamilton, Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, and Joseph W. Ballantine, Advisor on Far Eastern Affairs, totally misread the Japanese threat. These men were duped by the Japanese into thinking they could secure a secret, negotiated détente with the Japanese. On the other hand, the Japanese were trying to bluff the United States into thinking they were prepared to limit their demands in Asia.

After Pearl Harbor these State Department officials, Mr. Hull's "principal advisors," and subordinates working for them, altered and withheld diplomatic documents so as to manipulate the evidence available to the investigative bodies that sat from 1942 thru 1946 to investigate the blame for the disaster. Unlike their military counterparts, these diplomats successfully avoided any intense scrutiny and in so doing saved their careers.

What now remains as history gives disproportionate attention to the military and only the barest critical appraisal of the diplomats. Historians have taken the edited Foreign Relations Series, the highly edited diaries of Grew, and his testimony before the Joint Congressional Committee and other investigative bodies at face value. These committees did not have the complete and factual data on which to make a reasoned judgment as this so-called source material is a jumble of truth and self-serving fiction.

Moreover, the role of the Japanese in diplomatic espionage, which was substantial, has never been fully told. Indeed, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East -- I.M.T.F.E. -- which was held after the war has never been made the subject of a comprehensive work, unlike its German counterpart.

The alteration of U.S.-Japan documents after Pearl Harbor became something of a legend among the old Far Eastern hands. Diplomats who had knowledge of the scheme to varying degrees are no longer alive. I was told about the "project," as it was referred to, by an old friend and senior colleague from my Japan days, William Turner. Bill, both taciturn and cautious, would never have disclosed unsubstantiated information.

I began my research in 1970 after which my wife joined to help me, she having worked in the Division of Far Eastern Affairs of the Department of State as well. I am convinced that the cause of the worst military disaster in our history remains unresolved because of the highly successful cover-up by the diplomats involved. What happened can only be reconstructed by someone who was "on the scene" at the time. My wife and I were.

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