



*Betrayal at Pearl Harbor*, by James Rusbridger & Eric Nave, © 1991 Captain Eric Nave and James Rusbridger, Summit Books 1991.

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March 1937: The British Chiefs of Staff calculate that Singapore could only resist 70 days waiting for the arrival of a fleet assuming Britain would not be at war with Germany. Many promises were made including to Australia. An Australian inquiry in London in the summer of 1939 finds out that the intervention time has climbed to 90 days. After the fall of France the RN realizes that their fleet will not be implemented by the French fleet. The Chiefs of Staff asked the governor of Singapore, Sir Shenton Thomas, who happened to be in London on leave, for his views. The final report of the Chiefs of Staff was considered by the War Cabinet on 5 August 1940. The report stated that Britain was not in a position to go to war against Japan for French Indochina or Siam. Only appeasement could be considered. The report also made it quite clear that no reinforcements could be spared from the European theater of war, that the RN could not produce a Far East fleet, and that Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies were all indefensible in the face of a Japanese attack.

Churchill considered the report so pessimistic that he decided NOT to have his War Cabinet discuss it or to send copies to Australia and New Zealand. He agrees to send a copy to Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, C-in-C Far East, in Singapore but that it should not be seen by anyone else, including the governor. The report was sent by sea mail from Liverpool in late September on the freighter *Automedon*. Meanwhile the German Navy armed raider *Atlantis* or

*Ship 16* (also known to the RN as Raider C, commanded by Captain Bernhard Rogge, first officer Lieutenant Ulrich Mohr) was prowling the Indian Ocean disguised under many flags as a freighter. After boarding and sinking several British freighters and capturing merchant BAMS codes, Capt Rogge knew about and waited the *Automedon* off the Nicobar Islands on 11 Nov 1940. After a token fight Lt. Mohr boarded the *Automedon* and, besides finding a treasure trove, made history. Along with an impressive inventory of codes, MI-6 reports, currency and up-to-date British intelligence information on the Japanese, he found and understood the War Cabinet report.

Rogge sailed immediately to Japan and delivered the mail to the German Embassy in Tokyo (Adm Wenneker) on 5 December. Wenneker sent it to Germany via Vladivostok, Moscow by train in the care of Paul Kamenz, a German naval officer. On 7 Dec., Wenneker sent a four-part cipher telegram to Berlin using an Enigma machine but the message cannot be intercepted as it went by Postal Telegraph across the USSR (maybe it was intercepted, as the Soviets monitored everything that traveled in their territory and kept the secret or, were told anyhow by their allies, the Germans). Wenneker's telegram is immediately shown to Hitler who scrawled in the margin, "This is of the utmost importance" and on 12 Dec. ordered a copy to be given to the Japanese naval attaché, Captain Yokoi. Yokoi sent his own shortened version to Tokyo enciphered as 97 – Shiki In-ji-ki san Gata (Coral to the Americans) which could not be read by the US Navy until the spring of 1943.

On the same day (12 Dec), authorized by Berlin, Wenneker hands over to Vice Adm Kondo, Vice Chairman of the Japanese Naval General Staff the copy of the British War Cabinet report. Kondo believed the authenticity of this incredible windfall only after Adm Wenneker explained the manner in which the document had been captured and the loss of life involved. The report was considered so important and secret that its circulation was limited only to the most senior members of the Naval General Staff. That is why, in the midst of the Pearl Harbor project

planning, after confirmation of the technical feasibility given by the Taranto attack, Adm Yamamoto changed his mind about the strategic safety of a Pearl Harbor or any other attack in the sense that Japan would have to contend ONLY with the US Navy in case of hostilities. This sends right out the window the still current legend that Singapore was thrown away by local incompetence and that its heavy guns were pointed the wrong way. Singapore was already written off. Brooke-Popham was never told and Churchill never told the Americans or anyone else in the Commonwealth about the War Cabinet report.

At about the same time Churchill was trying to impress FDR sending him *Notes on Action at Taranto* hoping it would encourage the Americans to station units of the US Pacific Fleet at Singapore.

Yamamoto was still in doubt even after receiving the Japanese and the German (Gronau and Jepsen) reports on Taranto. Only one month later he had discovered that there would be no fleet at Singapore and the fortress, which was indefensible, had already been 'abandoned.'

It is therefore a legitimate conclusion that the capture of the Chiefs of Staff report from the *Automedon* was the catalyst that sent the Japanese on the path to Pearl Harbor . By any standards, the incident remains one of the worst intelligence disasters in history.

For his feat, after the fall of Singapore in 1942, Capt Rogge received from the Emperor of Japan a samurai sword of honor, that been given to only two other Germans, Hermann Goering and Erwin Rommel.

On several occasions Kondo told Wenneker how this particular document had enabled Japan to open hostilities against the US so successfully. Wenneker's diary recalls: "Kondo repeatedly expressed to me how valuable the information in the (British) War Cabinet memorandum was for the (Japanese) navy. **Such a significant weakening of the British Empire could not have been identified from outward appearances.**"

On 30 Dec 1940, Naval Intelligence in Singapore sent a secret telegram to the Admiralty in London advising that one of the Norwegian prisoners taken from the *Ole Jacob* () had been interviewed by Mi-6 agents in Tokyo and had

reported that all the mail on board the *Automedon* had been seized by the Germans before it was sunk. From this date onward, London cannot have been in any doubt that the Chiefs of Staff report had fallen into enemy hands and that a copy would certainly have been passed to the Japanese.

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11 Nov 1940: The German raider *Atlantis* (Capt. Rogge) disguised as a Dutch transport boards the British transport *Automedon*, off the Nicobar islands, silencing its radio by cannon fire. The boarding party led by Ulrich Mohr reaps a treasure trove finding: a copy of the BAMS code book and superencipherment tables, \$ 6 million in new Straits currency, the entire secret mail for Far Eastern Command, Singapore, including new Royal Navy fleet codes and new sets of BAMS codes valid from 1 Jan 1941 and some 60 sealed packages containing secret mail from MI-6 to their stations in Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo, which included summaries of the latest intelligence reports of Japanese military and political activities. But in one green foreign Office canvas bag, heavily weighted, sealed, and marked "Safe Hand-British Master Only," was an envelope addressed to the C-in-C Far East, Singapore. And when Mohr opened this, he found inside a copy of the secret Chiefs of Staff report approved by the War Cabinet on 5 August and destined for Brooke-Popham.

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As Churchill and his senior naval advisers knew perfectly well that no superior British battlefleet would be available to defend Singapore, his comments were obviously meant to impress Roosevelt and were included in his report *Notes on the Action at Taranto*, which Churchill sent the President, hoping it would encourage the Americans to station units of the US Pacific Fleet at Singapore.

But Churchill was not alone in being impressed by Taranto. The Germans were also particularly impressed and sent Baron von Gronau, **who was** German air attaché at their embassy in Tokyo, and Colonel Johann Jebesen from Canaris's intelligence staff down to Taranto to find out exactly how the harbor defenses had been penetrated. Gronau gave a full report (It was Gronau's re-

port that prompted the Germans to arrange for one of their spies called Popov (who was in fact a double agent working for the British) to visit America and establish a network of agents.) to the Japanese Embassy in Berlin, which sent it by code over the landline to Tokyo. It was soon clear from Gronau's report that Taranto was a miniature version of what could be done in Pearl Harbor. But Yamamoto was still adamant that he would not risk splitting his forces in an attack against large modern fleets in both Singapore and Pearl Harbor.

Now, only a month later, he had discovered that there would be no fleet at Singapore and the fortress, which was indefensible, had already been abandoned.

It is therefore a legitimate conclusion that the capture of the Chiefs of Staff report from the *Automedon* was the catalyst that sent the Japanese on the path to Pearl Harbor and precipitated the disastrous attack on America's Pacific Fleet. By any standard, the incident remains one of the worst intelligence disasters in history.

After the fall of Singapore in 1942, the Japanese Emperor presented a samurai sword of honor to Rogge in recognition of his achievement. Only two other Germans received such an award – Hermann Goering and Erwin Rommel. On several occasions Kondo told Wenneker how this one particular document had enabled the Japanese to open hostilities against the United States so successfully. Wenneker's diary recalls: "Kondo repeatedly expressed to me how valuable the information contained in the (British) War Cabinet memorandum was for the (Japanese) navy. Such a significant weakening of the British Empire could not have been identified from outward appearances." (Wenneker's diary, 12 December 1940, in Chapman, *Price of Admiralty*. In his notes, Dr. Chapman comments:

The Japanese Navy was clearly aware that British naval forces in the Far East were steadily being transferred westward in the second half of 1940, but the defiant position adopted by (the British) had served to cover up the extent of British weakness. With this A1 intelligence about the real position, it is hardly surprising that subsequent efforts by Churchill and Eden to influence the Japanese position prior to Pearl Harbor were rather less than credible. From 1922, Japanese navy

planners had had to contend with the likelihood of a two-power threat in the Pacific. From the end of 1940 it is now evident that the... (Japanese) naval staff... could concentrate with single-minded equanimity on the US Pacific Fleet.

See also John Chapman, *Forty Years On*, vol. 5, part 1, pp. 68-86, *British Association for Japanese Studies*, 1980.)

James Rusbridger is Peter Wright's (*Spycatcher*) cousin. See *The Intelligence Game* by James Rusbridger, p. VIII