The real truth behind the carriers not being at the attack on Pearl Harbor was that carrier missions were fully under the control of the commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, who established the sailing dates and could have canceled the missions had he so desired. Even if Roosevelt had known, it was Kimmel who set the sailing dates. Unless there was a large conspiracy (which is doubtful), there was no way for Kimmel to know of the impending attack.

In the attempt to find blame for the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor Congress drew two accusations. One was the failure to fortify Guam. It was argued that scout planes from Guam could have spotted the Japanese task force before its surprise attack. At Washington Naval Conference of 1922 the United States pledged itself not to increase forts on Guam (17). In the aftermath of the war Congress drew the accusation that it refused to fortify Guam in order to prevent Pearl from having any warning (18). The real reason behind the failure to fortify Guam was that the Roosevelt Administration never asked for it. The Naval Expansion Act of May 17, 1938, created a review board for determining the need for additional bases. The fortification of Guam was to cost eighty million dollars. Roosevelt and the Bureau of the Budget sent Congress a bill that brought this figure down to five million. Representative E.E. Cox of Georgia informed the Naval Affairs Committee (19) that the fortification of Guam would be an important sub, naval, and air base. Here again the conspiracy theorists believe that Roosevelt engineered the Japanese attack because any Pacific advance would first have to crush Guam. The real reason for the refusal was that the build up on Guam might be taken as a threat. The real effect of the neglect of Guam was that it bolstered two of Japan’s beliefs, one was that isolationists ruled America, and that Washington would back down rather than risk offending Tokyo (20). In reality, it would have been virtually impossible for a scout based on Guam to have spotted Nagumo’s task force on its cruise (21).

The second action for which Congress drew accusation was the wire tapping of suspected spies. In the summer of 1941 Congress was to pass a bill that would have allowed the eavesdropping of communication of suspected spies. The bill would have allowed the FBI and armed forces intelligence officers to wire tap the phones of suspected spies. Burton K. Wheeler, chairman of the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee pigeonholed the bill and allowed it to die. The House of Representatives later defeated all other forms of similar legislation. In 1942, then Senator Truman told Congress that “the surprise attack on Hawaii was in no way due to the unwillingness of Congress to pass a law authorizing wire tapping.” The reality of the wire tapping in Honolulu was that it could not have revealed the Pearl Harbor attack because no conversation discussed Yamamoto’s plan (22).

The real controversy over Pearl Harbor centers on several Japanese messages and the breaking of the Japanese codes used to send those messages. MAGIC (23) had broken most of the Japanese codes and General Marshall (24) was very concerned that the Japanese would learn that the United States had broken their Purple code (25) The fact that America had broken the diplomatic codes was not difficult to hide, if one knew where to look. Thomas E. Dewy, the republican candidate for the Presidential election of 1944 learned that the United States had broken most of the Japanese codes prior to 1941. He planned to use the information to discredit Roosevelt, and accuse him of engineering the attack on Pearl Harbor. General Marshall convinced Dewy that general knowledge of the broken codes might prolong the war and persuaded him not to use the issue of breaking the Japanese codes in the campaign. While the public information of the broken codes would have discredited Roosevelt and assured him the election, Dewy, in the name of American lives, sacrificed the election for these patriotic reasons (26). American Intelligence was not the only country to have broken the Japanese codes. Conrad E.L. Helfrich of the Royal Netherlands Navy stated that the Dutch had broken the code and even stated that his country knew that the Japanese were going to strike Pearl Harbor (27).

The first of many messages surrounding the controversy of Pearl Harbor came in October of 1941 when the Army Signal Intelligence Service decrypted several messages from Tokyo to Consul General Nagao Kita at the American consulate. The first message divided the waters of Pearl Harbor into five areas and asked for the exact locations of Kimmel’s (28) warships and carriers.

Intelligence officers guessed Japan was forming a grid system for a bombing attack on Pearl. Three additional messages between Tokyo and Kita indicated unusual Japanese interest in Pearl Harbor. The first was for Ens. Takeo Yoshikawa, a naval spy posing as one of Kita’s assistants, to report all ship movements in Pearl Harbor twice a week. Next, Yoshikawa was to subject the fleet air bases on Oahu to special scrutiny. And, the third message, on November 8, 1941, requested information about the strategic points around Honolulu (29).

Of the Japanese messages decrypted, the two that had the greatest impact on Pearl Harbor conspiracy theories were the so-called “Winds” message and a 14 part message sent to the Japanese embassy. The “Winds” message was dispatched from the Foreign Ministry to Nomura on Nov. 29.

In case of emergency (danger of cutting off our diplomatic relations) and the cutting off of international communications, the following warning will be added in the middle of the daily Japanese language short wave news broadcast:

1. In case Japanese-U.S. relations in danger, HIGASHI NO KAZEAME [east wind, rain].


3. Japanese-British relations, NISHI NO KAZE HARE [west wind, clear]. This signal will be given in the middle and at the end as a weather forecast and each sentence will be repeated twice. When this is heard please destroy all code papers, etc.

This is as yet to be a completely secret arrangement. Forward as urgent intelligence.

Tokyo promptly followed this up with an amplification: When our diplomatic relations are becoming dangerous, we will add the following at the beginning and end of our general intelligence broadcasts:

1. If it is Japanese-U.S. relations, HIGASHI.

2. Japanese-U.S.S.R. relations, KITA.

3. Japanese-British relations, NISHI. The above will be repeated five times and included at the beginning and end. (30)

The “Winds” message alerted Washington that diplomatic relations with Japan were dangerously tense. However, there is doubt...