



H-Gram 002: Wake Island

29 December 2016

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100th Anniversary of World War I

1. The Zimmerman Telegram: Early Cyber Warfare?

In one of the greatest Intelligence success stories of all time, on 16 January 1917, British Naval Intelligence intercepted and subsequently decoded a telegram from the German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmerman, to the German Ambassador in Mexico, via the German Embassy in Washington DC, informing that Germany would resume "ruthless" (Zimmerman's word, in German of course) unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917. The telegram went on to state that in the event the United States did not remain neutral, the German Ambassador was to approach the Mexican government with an offer of alliance and assistance to "re-conquer" U.S. territory previously taken from Mexico. The British Director



Wake Island. Aerial photograph taken from a PBY patrol plane on May 25, 1941, looking west along the northern side of Wake, with Peale Island in the center and right middle distance and Wilkes Island in the left distance (80-G-411160).

of Naval Intelligence, Captain Reginald "Blinker" Hall, passed the contents of the telegram to the U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom on 20 February. Of note, the British intercepted the coded telegram via a tap on U.S. diplomatic communications (more on that later.) Although it was the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare that caused the U.S. to break diplomatic relations with Germany on 3 February, when the text of the telegram was released to the public by President Wilson on 28 Feb, it inflamed public opinion against Germany, while also provoking an intense backlash from those opposed to going to war, who branded it as a "fake" concocted by the British to draw the U.S. into the war. The result has been a 100 years of misinformation and a

mountain of conspiracy theory. The success of the British Navy signals interception and code-breaking operation (known at the time as "Room 40") served as a major impetus for similar U.S. efforts that laid the foundation of later U.S. success in WWII, and in particular, the Battle of Midway. (See attachment H-002-1 for more on the Zimmerman Telegram.)

75th Anniversary of World War II

2. Worst Christmas in U.S. Naval History

When Admiral Chester W. Nimitz stepped off a flying boat off Ford Island on Christmas Day, 1941 to assume command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the magnitude of the challenge facing him is almost incomprehensible today, as he saw the shattered fleet, bloated bodies still being fished from the harbor, and experienced the over-powering stench of oil, death and defeat. Nimitz' first question after he got on the oil-slimed launch to take him across the harbor concerned the status of the defense of Wake Island and the relief plan. When informed that Wake had fallen and the relief operation cancelled (the two actions were simultaneous, neither caused the other, but that was not known at the time) Nimitz fell silent as he immediately grasped the impact of what Admiral Joseph Reeves (a former four-star Commander of the U.S. Fleet and member of the Roberts Commission, already investigating why the U.S. was surprised at Pearl Harbor) termed "a disgrace to the U.S. Navy."

The less than 500 valiant Marine defenders of Wake Island had already been lionized in the press as the "Alamo of the Pacific," having driven off the first Japanese amphibious assault on 11 Dec with heavy Japanese losses (two destroyers sunk with almost all hands, and multiple ships damaged) - this was the only amphibious assault in the Pacific War to be driven off by shore battery fire, and the first Japanese surface warships to be sunk. The U.S. Navy Commanders did not know at the time that in the final Japanese assault on 23 December,

the Marine defenders had killed the great majority of the initial landing force (over 800 Japanese KIA) nor did the commanders on Wake Island, who arguably surrendered prematurely, mistaking raised Japanese flags on the island as victory symbols, rather than their intended purpose to avoid friendly fire from their own ships.

After the first attack on Wake Island (which Admiral Husband Kimmel had well-before the war correctly predicted would be an initial Japanese objective), the Pacific Fleet Commander, still Kimmel, had approved an audacious plan to use three U.S. aircraft carriers, with Wake as the bait, to spring a trap on the predicted next Japanese assault, in many respects the blueprint for what Nimitz later did at Midway. With 20/20 hindsight, Kimmel's plan probably would have worked, as the Japanese allocated only two carriers (as predicted by the PACFLT N2, Edwin Layton) in a half-hearted show of support, leaving the assault force and covering force of four heavy cruisers without effective fighter cover for extended periods. However, Admiral Kimmel was ordered relieved on 17 Dec, and command and responsibility for executing the aggressive plan transferred to Vice Admiral William Pye, the Battle Force Commander, whose flagship, the USS California (BB-44), was on the bottom of Pearl Harbor. Ultimately, rather than seizing an opportunity to trap the Japanese, Pye became concerned that the Japanese were planning to spring a trap on him. Pye had many valid reasons for his caution, but indecision and a defeatist attitude amongst the disorganized combined PACFLT/Battle Force staff at the time contributed significantly to other factors, including weather, that turned the aborted relief effort into one of the sorriest episodes in U.S. naval history. In the end, the U.S. Navy chose to sacrifice the Marine defenders of Wake Island (and over 1,000 civilian construction workers) rather than accept any risk to the three U.S. aircraft carriers in the area at the time. (Our brother Marines will occasionally use Guadalcanal as an example of being abandoned by the U.S. Navy, however over three times as many U.S. Sailors died defending

Guadalcanal as Marines died on it. In the case of Wake Island, however, the charge is valid.) For more on Wake Island, see attachment H-002-2A and for more on VADM Pye's decision see attachment H-002-2B.

3. Featured Archival Document

Nimitz diary: see attachment H-002-3.

4. Featured Artifact

Wake Island sword: see attachment H-002-4



"Asheville's Defiance." Painting by Tom Freeman.

H-002-1: Zimmerman Telegram

H-Gram 002, [Attachment 1](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

29 December 2016

In the first days of WWI, the British successfully executed a rather audacious plan (first formulated in 1911) to use a cable ship to cut German trans-oceanic cables close to their source off Germany, in order to force the Germans onto wireless or other paths that could be intercepted. As a result, German diplomatic communications from Berlin to their embassy in Washington DC, with the agreement of the neutral U.S., were passed to the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, which forwarded the traffic

via the U.S. diplomatic cable to Washington. This cable went via a relay station in England, which was monitored by British Naval Intelligence, unbeknownst to the U.S. or Germany. A U.S. caveat was that German diplomatic traffic on this cable was to be passed in the clear, however, in the case of the Zimmerman telegram, the Germans convinced the U.S. Ambassador to pass it in code without informing him of the content. By this time of the war, British Naval Intelligence could break several German codes (so could British Military Intelligence, but cooperation between the two was extremely strained) including the new code used for the Zimmerman telegram. The success of British code-breaking was the result of multiple fortuitous events, of which one of the most significant was the

grounding of the German light cruiser Magdeburg in the early days of the war off Russian-occupied Estonia, and the resulting Russian capture and sharing of several German code books.

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Reginald Hall, initially did not want to release the contents of the telegram to the United States, fearing (rightly) that it would end up in the public domain. Doing so would present the British with three major problems;

- 1. Keep the Germans from learning that their codes had been broken.
- 2. Keep the U.S. from learning that our diplomatic cable was being monitored
- 3. Convince the U.S. that the telegram was genuine.

To solve these problems, British Intelligence ran an operation in Mexico to bribe a commercial telegraph company employee to provide a copy of the coded telegram (the transmission from the German Embassy in Washington to Mexico City was in an older code that the British were prepared to "sacrifice" for the greater good of getting the Americans in the war on their side). The British also provided details of the older code to the U.S., so that the U.S. could locate the message in the U.S. commercial company records and verify the authenticity of the message. However, when the message was released to the public, the British and the U.S. used a cover story that a British agent had stolen a clear-text version in Mexico (providing the first spark for the decades of conspiracy theories.) Zimmerman himself also (somewhat inexplicably) admitted in a public press conference with American journalists on 3 Mar 1917 that the telegram was authentic, which even though it was true, only further fueled the doubters.

The public release was the first the Mexican government knew of the proposal, and President Carranza formed a military commission to study the details, which concluded that it would not be possible or desirable to invade the U.S. (among other things citing that the U.S. populations was "better supplied with arms than most populations.") Nevertheless, anti-American sentiment in Mexico was very high, stemming from General Pershing's cross-border campaigns against bandit/"freedom fighter" Pancho Villa, multiple U.S. violations of Mexican sovereignty during the protracted Mexican Civil War, and especially the major U.S. Navy intervention at Vera Cruz in 1914. As a result, German agents and military advisors had a significant presence in Mexico well before the Zimmerman telegram, and these agents would conduct some spectacular sabotage in the U.S. after the U.S. entered the war. Nevertheless, Mexico opted to sit out the First World War. Mexico did join on the Allied side in WWII in March 1942 after Nazi German U-boats sank two Mexican tankers in the Gulf of Mexico.

As an aside, Captain William Reginald Hall (nicknamed "blinker" due to a nervous facial twitch) became the Director of Royal Navy Intelligence in WWI after health issues resulted in him relinquishing command of the battle cruiser HMS Queen Mary (later sunk at Jutland with almost all hands). While in command of the Queen Mary, Hall instituted a number of "firsts" (in any Navy), including the first "three section" watch (previously had been 12/12), the first shipboard chapel, first shipboard washing machines, and first shipboard movie projection capability, which led him to being accused by contemporaries of "coddling" his crew. Hall proved to be extraordinarily capable and innovative in his role as Director of Naval Intelligence as well, promoted to Rear Admiral in 1917, and ultimately full-Admiral on the retired list in 1926.



Wrecked Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighters of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211), photographed by the Wake airstrip sometime after the Japanese captured the island on 23 December 1941 (80-G-179006).

H-002- 2A: Wake Island

*H-Gram 002, [Attachment 2A](#)
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29 December 2016*

On the morning of 8 December (7 December, Pearl Harbor time) 36 Japanese twin-engine bombers from Kwajalein struck the U.S. outpost at Wake Island, a small atoll that served as a refueling stop for Pan-Am Clipper flying boats between Hawaii and Guam. Although Wake was alerted to the state of war with Japan, with no radar on the island, a pounding surf that drowned out the noise of planes, and favorable cloud conditions, the Japanese avoided detection by the four airborne Marine Wildcat fighter combat air patrol, and achieved surprise, destroying the

remaining eight Wildcat's on the runway (the 12 Wildcats of VMF-211 had only arrived from USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) on 4 Dec and no revetments had been completed yet) and killing almost half of the Marine aviation personnel (23 of 50) and wounding more. The bombers strafed the Pan Am Clipper that had just returned to Wake after aborting its flight to Guam upon word of war, but it was able to take on all Pan Am employees (except for native Chamorro workers who were left behind) and return to Hawaii. The bombers returned twice more in the next two days, bombing decoy gun positions (the Marines had moved the guns in anticipation that the Japanese would strike them next and made log decoys) and fighters shot down two bombers, however a lucky hit on dynamite storage of the civilian construction company upgrading the airfield and dredging the lagoon, caused massive secondary

explosions that destroyed large quantities of ammunition.

The first Japanese amphibious assault occurred at dawn on 11 December as a Japanese force of older light cruisers and destroyers opened fire in an ineffective shore bombardment. Marine shore batteries (5" and 3" guns) held fire under orders of Senior officer Commander Winfield Cunningham and Marine detachment commander Major James P.S. Devereaux (both later claimed credit), until the Japanese ships were well in range. The Marine guns hit Rear Admiral Kajioka's flagship, the light cruiser IJN *Yubari*, on the second salvo, eventually scoring eleven hits with serious damage. Marine gunners hit the destroyer IJN *Hayate* in the magazine which exploded with the loss of all hands but one (168) the first Japanese surface combatant sunk by the U.S. in the war (planes from USS *Enterprise* had sunk the Japanese submarine *I-70* off Oahu on 10 Dec.) Other ships were hit and damaged, and the Japanese aborted the landing before any troops went ashore. Marine Wildcats strafed and bombed the retreating Japanese, damaging more ships and hitting the depth charge racks on the destroyer IJN *Kisaragi*, which exploded and sank with the loss of all hands (157). In subsequent days, Marine fighters and anti-aircraft accounted for 28 Japanese aircraft downed or damaged, but by the second Japanese assault on 23 Jan, despite extensive cannibalization, all Marine fighters had been lost or were no longer flyable. Following the first attack it was widely reported that the Wake Island senior officer, Commander Winfield Cunningham, sent a message to Hawaii requesting "send more Japs." This is not true; the phrase originated in cryptographic "padding" - non-sensical phrases inserted into coded messages to complicate enemy code-breaking efforts (the same was true of the famous "the world wonders" phrase in Nimitz' message to Halsey during the Battle of Leyte Gulf inquiring into the whereabouts of TF-34). The situation on Wake was desperate and both Cunningham and Devereaux knew it.

In response to the unexpected defeat, the Japanese detached two carriers (*Hiryu* and *Soryu*, with 108 aircraft) from the returning Pearl Harbor strike force, which commenced strikes on Wake on 21 Dec, and it was Zeros from the carriers that destroyed the last Marine fighters. The Japanese invasion force returned on 23 Dec, essentially the same force with replacements as the first attempt, still under the command of the much wiser RADM Kajioka. Japanese ships remained out of range of Marine shore batteries, and landed in positions not covered by the larger Marine guns under cover of darkness, and did not open fire until Japanese troops (bolstered by Special Naval Landing Force, i.e., Japanese "Marines") had reached shore. Nevertheless in bitter combat throughout the pre-dawn hours into the morning, the 450 Marine defenders killed or wounded virtually the entire initial Japanese landing force (over 800 KIA, over 300 WIA) although the Japanese had several hundred more in reserve afloat. However, inability to communicate (largely due to previous Japanese bombing) with isolated pockets of still-resisting Marines convinced Commander Cunningham that Japanese success was much greater than it was, and that further resistance was futile. Cunningham gave the order to surrender and Devereaux complied, although it took several hours to get the Marines in contact to comply. In the end, 49 U.S. Marines, 3 Navy and 70 civilian workers were killed, and two Marines MIA, during the entire course of the "siege" of Wake Island. The Japanese captured 433 U.S. service members (20 died in captivity) and 1,104 civilian workers (108 died in captivity). (Sources vary on some of these numbers.)

Of note, Marine pilot Captain Henry T. Elrod, who sank the destroyer *Kisaragi* and downed two Japanese aircraft, was posthumously awarded a Medal of Honor for his actions fighting as an infantryman during the second Japanese assault.

H-002- 2B: Vice Admiral Pye's Decision

H-Gram 002, *Attachment 2B*
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29 December 2016

Vice Admiral Pye's Controversial Decision

In a nutshell, Admiral Kimmel's plan to trap the Japanese at Wake consisted of three carriers, under the overall command of RADM Fletcher, who was slightly senior to RADM Aubrey Fitch, embarked in *Saratoga*. *Saratoga* would be the core of the relief effort. *Lexington* (RADM Wilson Brown embarked) would launch diversionary strikes into the Marshall Islands, but positioned to support *Saratoga*. *Enterprise* (RADM William Halsey embarked) would operate in vicinity of Midway to cover approaches to Oahu, or support *Saratoga* and *Lexington* as required.

With the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, it is easy to second-guess Vice Admiral Pye's decision to abort the Wake Island relief mission. However, there were numerous factors that influenced his decision.

Uncertain Intelligence. Aided by documents recovered from downed Japanese aircraft, Kimmel's Intelligence Officer, LCDR Edwin Layton, accurately determined that six Japanese aircraft carriers had participated in the strike on Pearl Harbor, and that they were returning to Japanese home waters. He assessed that the Japanese strike was a hit-and-run, and that neither a follow-up airstrike nor an invasion of Oahu were imminent. After the failed Japanese attempt at Wake Island, Layton further assessed that the Japanese would detach one carrier division (two carriers) from the strike force to soften up Wake in advance of a second attempt. Although Layton was correct, proof (except for six carriers) was



Vice Admiral William S. Pye, USN, photographed at Pearl Harbor, circa late 1941 or early 1942. He was Commander, Battle Force, from January 1941 until October 1942, and served as Acting Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, during 17-31 December 1941 (NH 82801).

lacking. The code-breaking effort of Commander Joseph Rochefort's team at Station Hypo, having finally been allowed by OP-20-G in Washington to switch their effort from the apparently unbreakable Japanese Admiral's Code to the Navy General Operating Code (later referred to as JN-25 series) was only beginning to bear fruit. Layton's assessments were based significantly on Hypo's "traffic analysis" of Japanese communications, which was potentially subject to Japanese deception. Having not been cut in on the somewhat "under-the-table" relationship between Rochefort, Layton and Kimmel before Pearl Harbor, Pye lacked a sustained relationship with Layton and trust in the intelligence he provided, trust that Nimitz showed later.

Criticality of the Aircraft Carriers. With the Pacific Fleets battleships on the bottom or damaged at Pearl Harbor (with the exception of USS *Colorado* on the West Coast) the three aircraft carriers then

in the Pacific (USS *Lexington* (CV-2), USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), and USS *Enterprise* (CV-6)) were all that opposed the Japanese, and were critical to defending Oahu against any Japanese air attack until additional land-based fighters could be shipped. Loss of any of the three would be grave. Almost as serious would be loss of the carriers' supporting oilers. Although there was plenty of fuel in Pearl Harbor's undamaged tanks (a critical Japanese error), tankers were in acutely short supply, especially those capable of underway refueling.

Japanese Land-based Air Threat. Even prior to Pearl Harbor, land-based aircraft were viewed as a significant threat to surface ships, including aircraft carriers, and naval ships operating in range of land-based aircraft did so with great caution and at significant risk. Japanese land-based bombers (torpedo and level) had made short work of the British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* in the South China Sea, with heavy loss of life (over 800 KIA) on 10 Dec 41. The impact of the action was profound, as *Prince of Wales* was amongst the most modern battleships in the world, yet succumbed with minimal loss to the Japanese. Wake Island was within extreme range of long-range twin-engine Japanese bombers operating from Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands. Pye was well aware of this threat and considered it significant. However, unlike the aircraft carriers that would have been involved in the Wake Island operations, the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had no air cover. In addition, the Japanese bombers were traversing great range without fighter escort, which would have made them more vulnerable to U.S. carrier-based fighters.

Inadequate U.S. surface ship anti-aircraft capability. As brutally demonstrated at Pearl Harbor, the anti-aircraft guns installed on U.S. warships were woefully inadequate in numbers, range, capability and reliability, especially against dive bombers. Also as shown at Pearl Harbor, and confirmed in AAA exercises afterwards, an

astonishingly high number of 5" anti-aircraft rounds were defective (on some ships, all of them.)

Japanese submarine threat. In the early days of the war, Japanese submarines were far more aggressive and effective than in later years. Over 25 Japanese submarines participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor, many operating from the Marshall Islands where they could potentially threaten the Wake Island operation. The constant barrage of false alarms further exaggerated an already serious threat. Pye's concerns about submarines were not unfounded. In January 42, the *Saratoga* was torpedoed and put out of action for months, and the oiler *Neches* was torpedoed and sunk.

Japanese carrier aviation threat. Reports from Wake Island on 21 Dec confirmed that Japanese carrier-based planes were attacking Wake, confirming the presence of Japanese carriers. Although Intelligence assessed two, there was no confirmation that there weren't more. Although Pye had been ashore during the attack on Pearl Harbor, he had seen his flagship sunk along with the rest of the battleships, and no doubt had a new-found and extremely healthy respect for the capability of Japanese carrier aircraft. The inability of Intelligence to confirm that the Wake Island relief force was not going to be ambushed by an even greater number of Japanese carriers was probably the principal reason for Pye's decision.

Delay. The U.S. naval forces involved in the relief effort encountered repeated delays for a host of reasons, although the primary impediment was insufficient practice in refueling underway in anything but calm sea states. The decision of RADM Fletcher to refuel his destroyers when they really didn't need to be refueled, resulted in *Saratoga* making only 100 miles toward Wake Island the day before it fell. Pye's decision to assign a specific rendezvous point for the *Lexington* to join with *Saratoga*, also came under

intense criticism as it held *Saratoga* back. *Saratoga* was about 600 miles from Wake when the mission was cancelled.

Hubris. Pye's decision was met with a storm of criticism by staff officers and aviators embarked on the aircraft carriers, who lobbied their commanders, including Fletcher, to ignore the order. In some cases officers were vocally insubordinate. Fitch actually recused himself to his cabin to avoid what was described as "mutinous" talk by his staff officers. This has gone down in the history books as imploring U.S. commanders to follow the example of Nelson before his victory at Copenhagen of putting his blind eye to the telescope to avoid seeing his commander's order to disengage. Nevertheless, although itching for a fight to avenge Pearl Harbor, few if any of the officers advocating such action had yet to feel the sting of a first-hand encounter with Japanese Naval Aviation. And as the Japanese were to show at Coral Sea, Eastern Solomons, and Santa Cruz, even just two of the Pearl Harbor veteran Japanese carriers (or even just Hiryu alone at Midway) could be extremely dangerous.

Acting. Pye was also sensitive to the fact that he was the "acting" Pacific Fleet Commander until the arrival of Nimitz and felt some obligation to deliver to Nimitz all three carriers intact, which may also have affected his aggressiveness. It should be noted that Pye was a highly respected (despite predicting on 6 December that the Japanese would never attack the U.S.) and successful commander, regarded as one of the best strategic thinkers in the Navy (and as a member of the Knox-King-Pye Board in 1920 significantly shaped the future of U.S. Navy higher education.) Nevertheless, in a CNO favorite book, "The Rules of the Game" (about Jutland) is the observation that every senior commander that failed in battle had previously been judged successful by the system that promoted him.

Admiral Pye subsequently reverted to two-star, and became President of the Naval War College from 1942 to 1946. His son, LCDR John Briscoe Pye was lost along with all hands on the 13th war patrol of submarine USS *Swordfish* (the first U.S. submarine to sink a Japanese ship in Dec 41), off Kyushu in January 1945.

H-002-3: Nimitz Diary

H-Gram 002, [Attachment 3](#)

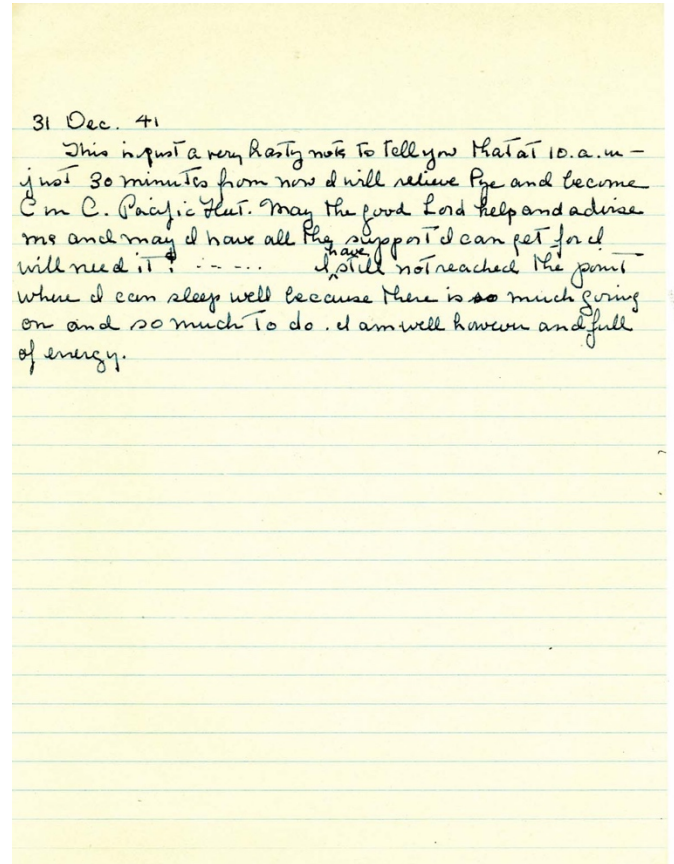
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

29 December 2016

Nimitz Diary

Amongst many significant historic documents preserved in the Navy's Operational Archives by NHHC is Admiral Nimitz' personal diary from WWII, which contains numerous insights to his thinking during many battles and major events of the war. Shown in the attachment is the original diary entry, in Nimitz' handwriting, made just before relieving VADM William S. Pye (who had relieved ADM Kimmel on 17 Dec) in a short ceremony aboard the submarine USS *Grayling* (SS-209). "31 Dec. 41 This is just a very hasty note to tell you that at 10.a.m. - just 30 minutes from now -- I will relieve Pye and become C in. C. Pacific Fleet [Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet]. May the good Lord help and advise me and may I have all the support I can get for I will need it. I have still not reached the point where I can sleep well because there is so much going on and so much to do. I am well however and full of energy."

Nimitz' task was monumental, beginning with the exhausted and demoralized PACFLT Staff. Although the Navy responded heroically to the actual attack on Pearl Harbor, the adverse psychological impact of such an overwhelming defeat was profound, especially amongst those who had devoted enormous effort preparing for war, only to fail in such spectacular fashion. In the minds of much of the PACFLT staff, the Japanese went from being viewed as inferior to invincible overnight. The reality was bad enough, as the Japanese rolled up victory after victory immediately after Pearl Harbor, but what is not appreciated today is the effect of rampant rumors that wildly exaggerated Japanese capability and success even further, provoking panicked reactions, enormous confusion, and occasional



Nimitz Diary

friendly fire deaths. Multiple accounts described the decision to abandon Wake Island as darkest and most demoralizing point of the war for the PACFLT staff, even more than the Pearl Harbor attack itself. Despite this, upon assuming command, Admiral Nimitz fired no one. Other than bringing his Flag Secretary, Nimitz kept Kimmel's staff intact. In his initial address to the staff, never raising his voice, he calmly and coolly informed them that (based on his previous experience as the then equivalent of Navy N1) that the Bureau would not have assigned them to the PACFLT staff if they were not known to be very good. Nimitz admitted that they had taken a wallop, but radiated confidence that they would prevail in the end. Nimitz did offer to consider requests for sea duty, but would not approve transfer requests for other reasons. Nimitz understood that despite the defeat, the staff now had invaluable and irreplaceable experience

(lessons learned) and with the right attitude, the staff could be effective again. His approach was electrifying to the staff. Although Kimmel's Intelligence Officer, LCDR Edwin Layton, did request transfer to sea duty, Nimitz refused, stating "You will kill more Japs here" and retained Layton for the duration of the War.

Of note, although the story was later told that Nimitz chose the USS *Grayling* for the change of command because, "nothing else was afloat," that is not true. There were plenty of battle-ready Pacific Fleet ships to choose from, but Nimitz had an affinity for submarines from his early experience as a submarine officer. Prior to Nimitz, the PACFLT Flagship was the battleship USS *Pennsylvania* (BB-38), but for the duration of the war, the PACFLT Flagship was always a submarine, which given the disproportionate losses inflicted on the Japanese, and disproportionate losses suffered by the U.S. submarine fleet, Nimitz viewed as entirely appropriate. USS *Grayling* was lost with all-hands in September 1943 near the Philippines.



H-002-4: Wake Island Sword

*H-Gram 003, [Attachment 5](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
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This 500-year old katana (Samurai sword) was recently donated to the National Museum of the United States Navy by the family of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy. The Leahy family generously donated not only FADM Leahy's collection of historic swords, but also all of his military and diplomatic awards, honors, tributes and medals, plus other artifacts that define his remarkable career as a Naval officer, territorial Governor, Ambassador and Presidential advisor to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. This sword was surrendered by Company Commander Tetsu Matsudaira on Wake Island at the end of WWII on 4 September 1945 and was subsequently presented to FADM Leahy by RADM W.K. Harrill. We do not know the exact history of the sword, but it represents a very dark period in history. The commander of the Japanese invasion force (first and second assault), RADM Sadamichi Kajioka, impressed by the bravery and effectiveness of the resistance, ordered a halt to the execution of the approximately 1600 Marines, Navy and civilian personnel who surrendered at Wake Island.

During the next years, some prisoners were beheaded for various infractions or died of other causes, but most were eventually shipped to prison camps and forced labor in Japan and China. However, in October 1943, in anticipation of an imminent U.S. assault (which didn't happen) the Japanese garrison commander, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, ordered the execution of the 98 U.S. civilian workers who had been kept on the island for forced labor. The execution was carried out by machine gun. However one prisoner (whose identity was never known) escaped and carved into a rock "98 US PW 5-10-43" before being recaptured three weeks later and personally beheaded by RADM Sakaibara with a sword such as this. Although the Japanese attempted to blame the U.S. deaths on U.S. bombing, RADM Sakaibara was subsequently tried, convicted, and hanged for war crimes. The rock and inscription still exist as a monument on Wake Island.