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HEAD QUARTERS  
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY  
(PACIFIC)  
APO 234 c/o PM San Francisco

INTERROGATION NO. 507

PLACE: TOKYO  
DATE: 28 November 1945



Division of Origin: Military Studies

Subject: The Emperor's position in respect to political and military developments, 1936-1945

Person interrogated and background:

Admiral HYAKUTAKE; born 1878; graduated Naval College 1892; graduate of Naval Staff College; Captain H.I.M.S. IMATE: Cmdr., 3rd Fleet; CINC, Sasebo Naval Station; Member Supreme Military Council; Grand Chamberlain to the Emperor 1936 - August 1944; Appointed Member of Privy Council September 1944 to fill vacancy left when Admiral Suzuk; became President of the Council.

Where interrogated: Home of Admiral Hyakutake

Interrogator: Colonel Ramsay D. POTTS, AC

Interpreter: Mr. T.H. SHIMANOCHI, a Japanese National

Allied Officers Present: Lt Cmdr NICHOLS, USNR  
Lt Cmdr WILDS, USNR

SUMMARY

At the opening of the interview Admiral Hyakutake was presented with the enclosed summary of the subjects to be covered. Having considered the topics, he expressed doubt as to his ability to give satisfactory answers, explaining that since the incident of February 26th, 1936 the Emperor had required his Grand Chamberlains to remain inactive in politics for reasons of their personal safety. He stated that the chief function of the Grand Chamberlain was personal attendance to the Emperor and that the Grand Chamberlain was rarely involved in affairs of the state, being present only at interviews granted by the Emperor to premiers designate and to plenipotentiaries leaving for or returning from diplomatic posts abroad. He pointed out that Grand Chamberlains were appointed as civilian and that therefore no significance should be attached to the fact that several were selected as Grand Chamberlains had been admirals. Insisting that this was a matter of coincidence and did not indicate any predominating naval influence. It was therefore agreed that replies made by the Admiral would be considered as merely personal opinions based on observations made during his tenure of office.

The Admiral was unable to give any information concerning pressure groups which sought access to the Emperor nor was he able to suggest any considerations which might have induced the Emperor to approve war plans against the United States. He stated, however, that it was customary on the basis of the Japanese Constitution for the Emperor to approve plans and policies submitted to him through the proper channels or by the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy as the product of agreed opinion. He could not provide any information based on facts regarding the Emperor's feelings in connection with the Manchurian Incident, but was certain that "the Emperor was gravely concerned over the situation."

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The Admiral was not in a position to discuss the extent of the Army's influence over the Navy, but said that at the time of Tojo's appointment as Premier he wondered if at last the Army had become as powerful in politics as it had been in feudal times, indicating that he considered Tojo's appointment significant since in any case the Army had been politically dominant since the beginning of the Jeiji era. He recalled that the audience granted by the Emperor other than the customary assignment of discharging his responsibilities in accordance with the Constitution.

In connection with pressure brought to bear upon the Navy by the Army, the Admiral observed that the Navy might have been able to prevent war against the United States by stubbornly opposing such a plan, thereby causing the collapse of the government. He personally had disapproved of the Navy's policy of concurring with the Army since what he himself had read and observed had convinced him that a war against an enemy so superior in resources and industrial capacity would be a superhuman undertaking. When pressed for an opinion of the Emperor's feelings in the matter he stated that the Emperor had always been profoundly interested in the nation's foreign relations and had continually exercised extreme care in the pursuit of a policy of peace and that he believed the Emperor was deeply concerned over the prevailing situation, but the Admiral would not say whether the Emperor was opposed to Japan's drift towards the European aggressor nations.

Regarding the sudden end of the war, Admiral Hyakutake indicated that he himself had experienced no strong feelings in the matter other than sympathy for the Emperor and sorrow over the state into which the Japanese nation had fallen.

Nichols

- Q. I want to make it quite clear that I am not trying to fix any responsibility as such for starting the war, or for the MANCHURIAN incident, or for any of these things. I am simply trying to find out what forces were at work. What we are trying to do is to try to write an analysis of the effect of air in the war, and we desire to understand the background of events.
- A. The points listed on this memorandum impress me as being rather outside of the province of the post which I held as Grand Chamberlain, and so, before proceeding into the interrogations, if you will permit me I would like to explain, the place and function of the Grand Chamberlain:

The Grand Chamberlain is one who serves the Emperor at his side. However the Grand Chamberlain at no time interferes with or touches upon questions relating to military or political affairs; political and military matters are entirely outside the province of the Grand Chamberlain's work. Perhaps the only time in which the Grand Chamberlain had any contact with the Nation's political affairs is when he attends the audience given by the Emperor to a Premier Designate; which means, a man who has been designated as a Premier and commanded to form a cabinet but who, until the conclusion of the formation of the cabinet, is not in a responsible position.

There have been, although very rarely, cases which, by virtue of general misunderstanding, involved the Grand Chamberlain in affairs of the State. When I became Grand Chamberlain, the atmosphere among

the fighting services, the Government, and the civilian public in general, was in a state of unrest. His Majesty, having great concern over the matter, made it very clear that those serving him should not be involved in politics. For one thing, because of a very strong desire and concern to protect these close advisers from any possible harm. This being the case, I as Grand Chamberlain instructed my personal staff that at no time should they be involved in political affairs.

Q. I understand, however, that the Grand Chamberlain--and especially in your case--is in a position not to participate in, but to know about the influences that were working in this period that we've been speaking of. What groups were seeking access to the Emperor, what groups were exerting direct pressures? It is mainly in this that I am interested--not in your actual participation but in your position--what you observed in your position as confidant to the Emperor.

A. I do not recognize any specific pressure groups working directly. However I do believe that there were groups within the services or even within the Government whose ideas and actions served as a pressure on those sponsors above them which made the situation difficult and not in accordance with the Emperor's wishes.

Q. In clarification I would like to say this: You have a reputation for being dispassionate and completely disassociated from the storm of politics. Most of the people we've interrogated have some particular interest which colors their point of view, and I had hoped that, because of your peculiar position and because of your reputation for objectivity, that you would be able to comment upon some of these things--perhaps not from first-hand knowledge or actual association with the actual event itself, but from your peculiar position relative to the Throne.

Suppose I go ahead and ask some specific questions, and so far as possible you can give me your opinion or point of view on them, and if you are not in a position to know about those subjects, we can pass on to other questions:

Were you present at the interview which the Emperor granted to General UMEZU upon the appointment of General UMEZU to command the Kwantung Army?

A. No. At audiences granted to military or naval officers, the Grand Chamberlain is never in attendance except when a general or admiral is to retire. On such occasions when they are granted audiences, the Grand Chamberlain and the Aide-de-Camp are in attendance; otherwise, not.

Q. Do you know what the feeling of the Emperor was on the Manchurian Incident there--the month-and-a-half of fighting with Russia on the AMUR River?

A. As I said before, I have had no opportunities to hear His Majesty's opinions on such matters directly, but when I personally view the situation and the atmosphere which prevailed at that time, I can categorically say that His Majesty must have been extremely concerned over the incident.

Q. I think perhaps we'd better pass on to the persons and factors which induced the Emperor to approve the war plans against the United States. Leave out the persons; but can you give me an opinion on the considerations that induced the Emperor to approve the war plans against the United States?

A. That I don't know at all.

Q. Do you know, during this year previous to the outbreak of war with the United States, whether the Army was in such a dominant position that it could force the Naval Staff to concur in any such plan?

A. I don't know anything about it.

Q. I think we should perhaps pass on to the relative political influence of the Army and Navy. During the war we know that, because of General TOJO's peculiar position politically, the Army was dominant. Would you give me an expression of your opinion as to whether the Army had more influence with the Emperor than the Navy at any time, or was the influence approximately equal? Was there an impartial unjaudiced view of the whole matter on the part of the Emperor in showing favor to the two services all the way through?

A. In my personal opinion, from as early as the MEIJI era, the Army had a more dominant influence than the Navy.

Q. In looking over the lists of the Emperor's close advisors, there seems to be a predominance of Naval personnel. Why, then, was the influence of the Army stronger than the influence of the Navy?

A. As I said before, in explaining the position and function of the Grand Chamberlain, we are in the service of His Majesty not as Admirals but as civilians, and it so happened that we retired Admirals were selected because the selection of the appointee was sought from a rather wide circle of persons; and so, I did not serve as Grand Chamberlain as an Admiral but as a civilian. In my personal observation there are no specific individuals or pressure groups working to influence the Emperor, but any one or any group formulating plans and pursuing those plans would advance those plans through the proper channels--via, the senior official in charge of the particular branch of politics or military affairs concerned.

In case political or military plans are advanced through such channels and they represent agreed opinion below, or if any plan is submitted by the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy or are advanced to the Emperor by previous agreement between the two branches, then, on the basis of the Japanese Constitution, it is the custom in Japan for the Emperor to approve them and not to veto them, and that these responsible officials are permitted to proceed on their responsibility.

Q. Then, any plan that would be of such a magnitude as to involve war with Britain and America, let's say, would have to be approved by the Army and the Navy both?

A. Of course, and by the Government, naturally.

Q. In the case of a decision of this magnitude, would the Emperor take any direct act in modifying the plan or in trying to have it reconsidered before he took action to approve it?

A. I am not acquainted at all with such details.

Q. I'd like you to express a personal opinion, as an observer on the scene, of what the considerations were which led the Navy to concur with the Army in planning the war against the United States. Could you give me an expression of personal opinion on this, the background of events which led up to war?

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- A. I am not acquainted at all with this matter, but I personally viewed with disfavor the policy pursued by the Navy at that time; nor did my position permit me to make inquiries on the position of the Navy in the matter.
- Q. When you say you viewed with disfavor the policy of the Navy, what particular policy of the Navy are you speaking of, at what particular time?
- A. Having been long retired at the time, I was not acquainted at all with the contents of the matter, but on the basis of my personal readings and observation of the American productive power, her resources, etc, it was my opinion that war against such an industrial power was gigantic task. That the Navy should approve of a policy of war against her made me wonder from where the Navy obtained such confidence as she appeared to have, but I was not at all familiar with the details.
- Q. If the Navy had disapproved of a war with the United States, could they have stood out and prevented this war by refusing to cooperate in such a plan as proposed by the Government and by the Army?
- A. I couldn't say very definitely, but I would presume that, if the Navy should stubbornly oppose such a plan, it would lead to the collapse of the Government and prevent the execution of such a plan; or, by the efforts of the Navy and change of Government as the result of its opposition, it might be able to influence the opposition to concur with the Navy's view.
- Q. Or to modify their plan in some way? Do you know any of the general factors connected with the resignation of Prince KONOYE just before the war with the United States?
- A. I do not know.
- Q. Can you tell us the background of events that led up to the acceptance of the Potsdam terms, the general feeling of the civilian population, what you heard at that time; and what you observed?
- A. Having been retired at the time, I was not familiar at all with the situation previous to the acceptance of the Potsdam terms. Having been bombed out, I was more or less preoccupied about moving hither and thither, trying to find a home.
- Q. Well, I think we should go back to the period before you retired. Previously you stated that you were present at audiences granted to the Premiers Designate. When General TOJO was appointed as Premier and came and had an audience with the Emperor, what commission, what objective did the Emperor assign to Premier TOJO before he assumed office?
- A. There having been about seven changes in the cabinet during my tenure of office, and having no records of those audiences, I cannot say; but as I recall, His Majesty usually urged the Premiers Designate to proceed with their work in accordance with the Constitution and his commands on those occasions concerned general and not specific matters.
- Q. The appointment of TOJO came at such a dramatic moment in world history that I wonder if you could recall any particular matter that the Emperor might have touched on at this time?

A. It was such a brief audience that the Emperor did not go into any detail regarding specific subjects.

Q. It was limited then to mere formalities of receiving the Premier Designate?

A. Yes. If you wish to have some observations of mine relative to the Emperor's feelings and attitudes, I should be glad to make one or two remarks.

Q. About what specific period?

A. During my tenure of office.

Q. Yes, I would like to have just personal opinions as to his feelings about the subjects we have covered.

A. When a Japanese plenipotentiary leaves for a foreign post or returns to Japan from a foreign post, it is customary for the Emperor to receive him in audience. His Majesty's remarks to a plenipotentiary leaving for a post would be "Gokuro" which is an expression of "Godspeed" as well as encouragement for the task he is undertaking, and the same remarks would be made to a plenipotentiary returning from a post, this time with a feeling of gratitude for the service that he had rendered in a foreign country. His Majesty has been very profoundly interested in the nation's foreign relations, and he has proceeded with his diplomatic interests with extreme care in pursuit of the policy of peace. This sentiment was very strongly expressed on the occasion of the new year when Japan greeted the 2600th year of the nation's founding. The poem composed by His Majesty at the opening of the year on this occasion was:

"West, East,  
Let there be intercourse  
In spirit of amity;  
This is my prayer  
At the dawn of the new year."

As one who has served close to the Emperor for a number of years, I was very profoundly impressed by this spirit expressed by the Emperor in the very midst of the hostilities with China. I have brought this matter to your attention in the hope that, by giving you some glimpse into that aspect of His Majesty's character and attitude, it might help you to understand some of the problems you are trying to probe.

Q. Did you notice at any time any concern on the part of the Emperor as to the course of events tying Japan in more closely with what we had termed and designated the European Aggressor Nations: Italy and Germany?

A. In my observations there were a number of things--or I might even say, a great number of things--over which the Emperor was very deeply concerned at this time, so I cannot say whether he was particularly concerned at all with the drift of Japan toward what you call the European Aggressor Nations, but observing from the sidelines, it is my impression that His Majesty was very anxious over the situation prevailing at the time.

Questions by Commander Wilds:

Q. Admiral, when did you first learn of the moves for peace?

A. After the Government's decision had already been passed.

- Q. At what time was that?
- A. August 14.
- Q. Were you surprised?
- A. I was not shocked nor surprised nor overjoyed. My emotions were confused.
- Q. Were you shocked, Admiral, that the decision had been made?
- A. Having gleaned items from the press, I was more or less prepared for such an eventuality, but as to the fate into which the country had fallen, I was taken with a feeling of sadness, and having served His Majesty up to the year previous, I immediately felt a very strong sense of sympathy toward His Majesty.
- Q. When you say that you were rather shocked by the state of the nation, do you mean that you did not realize the extent to which Japan's military forces in the field had been attrited--the extent of the losses that had been incurred? Is this what you meant? Prior to the surrender, did you know the extent to which various military forces had been defeated in the field?
- A. Yes, by the reports appearing in the newspapers.
- Q. Now, to go back just briefly to the beginning of the war: Why was TOJO named Premier?
- A. I do not know.
- Q. Did you expect that he would be named Premier, or were you surprised?
- A. I neither expected it nor was I surprised; but I only thought this: Has the Army at last become accured in a dominance similar to that held by the SHOGUN? Such was the feeling that I had at the time.
- Q. Admiral, would a more determined effort, a stronger effort on the part of the Emperor to avoid war have been effective?
- A. I made a few remarks purely in my capacity as private citizen expressing impressions which I had obtained during my years of service. Before you, Commander Wilds, came into this room, I had explained to the other gentlemen about the position and function of the Grand Chamberlain, which would enable you to understand why I am in no position whatsoever to reply to your question. The Grand Chamberlain has a very fixed function. He does not involve himself or participate in political or military matters whatsoever, and in this respect the Grand Chamberlain is very strictly and specifically instructed by His Majesty. This being the case, His Majesty does not disclose one iota of any matter pertaining to politics or military affairs to the Grand Chamberlain which makes it impossible for me to reply to questions of such a nature.

Those instructions were very strict. To give you a bit of a background: You are familiar with the incident of May 15, and later of February 26, 1936, at which time close advisors of the Emperor were attacked. The social unrest was very strong at the time. Should persons close to the Emperor involve themselves or participate in political or military affairs, it meant that it would endanger the personal lives of these men, and thereby make it impossible to serve the Throne well, and for this reason the Emperor instructed those close to him to keep out of politics and military affairs, and those in service made a determined effort to keep themselves out so that they might serve the Emperor properly and well.

The fact that three Grand Chamberlains were successively Admirals in the Navy may have given rise to the impression that the Grand Chamberlain has had something to do with politics or military affairs, but the general rule in selecting a Grand Chamberlain is, that he is not a member of the political parties or that he has not been engaged in politics, and it is out of more or less coincidence that Admirals have been appointed to this post--they were appointed purely as civilians. When I, as a retired Admiral, entered the service as Grand Chamberlain, it was with the determination that I should serve as a civilian with no Naval connections whatsoever.



Appendix A to Interrogation No. 507

27 November 1945

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Interrogation of Admr HYAKUTAKE, Grand Chamberlain during the period 1936 to August 1944.

1. Admiral HYAKUTAKE is in position to know the background of unofficial pressures and influences that swayed the EMPEROR during this period and will be interrogated on these sources. Special emphasis will be placed upon

a. The various pressure groups at work during the war seeking access to the EMPEROR.

b. The persons and factors which induced the EMPEROR to approve the war plans against the United States.

c. The reasons why the MANCHURIAN incident with Russia in 1939 was concluded and the reasons why General UMEZU was charged with maintaining peace on the Manchurian border throughout the period of war with the United States.

d. The relative influence of the Army and Navy in the National political life.

e. The background of events that led up to a consideration of seeking a method of concluding the war.