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U.S. knew of Japanese-American spies

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A substantial number of Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast during World War II were spies for the Japanese government, according to secret Japanese diplomatic codes of the period.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry's own cables appear to contradict findings of a federal commission which reported Feb. 24 that there was "no military reason" for confining some 117,000 Japanese-Americans in isolated camps from 1942 to 1945.

The secret coded messages were declassified by the United States in 1978 but have attracted little attention in the news media. They are available in eight bound volumes titled, "The 'Magic' Background of Pearl Harbor," and were published by the U.S. Department of Defense. "Magic" was the code name used by the U.S. Navy in its project to crack the Japanese diplomatic code, which was accomplished in 1939 or early 1940.

The Japanese, unaware that the Allies were reading their messages, sent numerous cables to and from Tokyo to Japanese offices in U.S. cities as well as to the Nazi government in Berlin.

The cables show that the Japanese had espionage agents planted in the U.S. Army, in defense industries on the West Coast and in a variety of sensitive industries vital to the war effort.

"We shall maintain connection with our second generations who are at

present in the (U.S.) Army, to keep us informed of various developments in the Army," read a cable from the Japanese Foreign Minister in Tokyo to the Japanese consulate in Los Angeles.

The cable, dated May 9, 1941, added: "We also have connections with our second generations working in airplane plants for intelligence purposes.

"With regard to airplane manufacturing plants and military estab-

lishments in other parts, we plan to establish very close relations with various organizations and in strict secrecy have them keep these military establishments under close surveillance.

"Through such means, we hope to be able to obtain accurate and detailed intelligence reports. We have already established contacts with absolutely reliable Japanese in the San Pedro and San Diego area, who will keep a close watch on all shipments of airplanes and other war materials, and report the amounts and destinations of such shipments."

A cable from Tokyo to Washington, sent on June 9, 1941, — six months before Pearl Harbor — states:

"We are securing intelligences concerning the concentration of warships within the Bremerton Naval Yard, information with regard to mercantile shipping and airplane manufacture, movements of military forces, as well as that which concerns troop maneuvers. For the future we have made arrangements to collect intelligences from sec-

ond generation Japanese draftees on matters dealing with the troops, as well as troop speech and behavior. . . ."

"The 'Magic' Background" report states:

"As early as Dec. 10, 1940, the cooperation of Japanese bank officials in America was sought by Tokyo, and American authorities knew that a widespread Japanese espionage organization was operating in the United States for at least a year before the war."

The Japanese spy network was so thorough that the foreign ministry in Tokyo asked for and received from its diplomatic representatives in the

United States a list of all first- and second-generation Japanese-Americans as well as Japanese citizens residing in American cities including New York, Washington, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Portland, Vancouver (Wash.) and New Orleans, as well as in Canada and Mexico.

Tokyo also warned its Japanese officials in the United States that if this country learned of the espionage activities "our people in the United States will be subjected to considerable persecution, and the utmost caution must be exercised. . . ."

The report apparently was ignored by The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which after a three-year study of the relocation of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast during World War II stated that the internment was carried out because of racial injustice, war hysteria and the failure of political leadership under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Roosevelt signed an executive order in February 1942 directing that resident Japanese aliens and American citizens of Japanese descent be interned in 13 detention camps scattered among Western states. The action has precipitated a great deal of criticism.

"All this was done," the commission report stated, "despite the fact that not a single documented act of espionage, sabotage or fifth-column activity was committed by an American citizen of Japanese ancestry or by a resident Japanese alien on the West Coast."