

UBoat 234

At first, the men on the submarine thought it was trick. The radio message from the German High Command told them the war was over; they were to surrender to the nearest Allied authorities.

The U-234, 294 feet long and 22,000 tons fully loaded, was one of the titans of the German undersea fleet; it had surfaced briefly somewhere in the mid Atlantic at this pivotal moment in its history -- May 10, 1945 -- to receive radio messages and find out what was happening in the European war.

No trick: The war in Europe was over

The mystery of U-234 and its cargo had just begun, however. The boat was en route to Japan on a secret mission, carrying enough uranium to make two atomic bombs. She would end her journey at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard instead.

The radio message was so stark, so shocking, Lt. Johann Heinrich Fehler, captain of U-234, wasn't about to take it on face value. He would have to test it out, make sure it was authentic, before deciding what his response would be.

The message, issued under the auspices of Admiral Karl Dönitz, former German U-boat chief elevated to supreme commander after the death of Adolf Hitler, praised all U-boat crews for "fighting like lions" for more than six years and then informed them that the enemy's material superiority had driven Germany to defeat.

"We proudly remember our fallen comrades," Dönitz consoled. "Long live Germany!" He ordered surrender.

U-234 immediately submerged. "They are trying to trick us," Fehler speculated, "they" being the enemy -- Britain, Canada, the United States.

Fehler knew all about tricks. As an officer aboard the German raider Atlantis, he'd become familiar with the ship's somewhat infamous means of surface deception. The Atlantis would disguise itself as a friendly ship and lure enemy ships to within range of its camouflaged guns before opening fire. The Atlantis had thus bagged 22 Allied ships before it was sunk by the British cruiser, Devonshire; in November 1941.

U-234 sent out a message of its own to a nearby U-boat, in a special code that only captains could send and decipher.

"We have received a very funny message," Fehler radioed. "Have we surrendered? Is it true?"

The reply convinced him the message was no trick. His orders were to surface, to hoist a black flag on U-234's periscope, and to report his position to the Allies.

Not Yet

Fehler was a German officer which meant when he gave orders everybody snapped to But, for whatever reasons, the man who had earned the nickname "Dynamite" for his job of scuttling captured vessels decided to exercise some democracy that day.

Uranium Oxide

He asked for opinions from some of his colleagues in the converted minelayer whose cargo contained enough uranium oxide to blow up two American cities -- 1,235 pounds of it, possibly destined for a Japanese atomic bomb program. But it is likely that nobody knew about the cargo except Fehler. The officers and crew therefore were not thinking of uranium when they replied. "We have enough food to last us for years," remarked the boyish second officer, Lt. Karl Ernst Pfaff. "I think we should go to the South Sea and find a deserted island with beautiful girls."

It had momentarily slipped Pfaff's mind that he was engaged to Fehler's sister-in-law. Fehler laughed. "That is wishful thinking," he told the 22-year-old Berliner who would never be his brother-in-law.

A pattern of responses emerged, the younger men tending to share Pfaff's compulsion to run from it all while the older ones just wanted to go home to their families and forget the war.

Geography was a major factor in that U-234's position lay at the convergence of four Allied zones established for U-boat surrenders. Fehler could have surrendered to the enemy port of his choice. Britain, Gibraltar, Canada or the United States; or he could have attempted to return to Germany.

The latter would have been risky, Fehler knew, because the Russians -- no admirers of Hitlerite fighting men -- had been expanding naval operations in German waters. Neither he nor anybody on board wished to become a Soviet prisoner.

Picked U.S.

Fehler surmised that if they surrendered to Canada or Great Britain, they would be taken prisoner, first in Canada, then England and

eventually France and it could be many years before the men returned to their homes.

Fehler perceived Americans as "not war faring people, not very military." At worst, he predicted they could be paraded through the streets, showcased so to speak as proof that real, live U boat crew members had been captured , and then sent home.

Fehler decided to turn U-234 into the gentle Americans. But he had to make sure the Canadians didn't get to him first.

U-234 radioed authorities in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that it was headed northwest, toward Halifax, at 8 knots (8 nautical miles an hour). In reality, U-234 was barreling across the Atlantic at 16 knots on a more or less southwest course, to the port of Newport News, Va.

Japanese Passengers

The depressed atmosphere inside the black-flag-flying U-boat was disrupted by an incident involving two passengers, Imperial Japanese Navy Lieutenant Commander Hideo Tomonaga, a leading Japanese submarine designer, and Lieutenant Commander Genzo Shoji, an aircraft expert, who had come along to study German weaponry.(Whether they also knew of the atomic cargo remains one of the unsolved mysteries of U-234.)

Fehler explained to the Japanese that he had to surrender because he had to obey his high command just as they would have to follow theirs.

They returned to their bunks where they took Luminol, a very powerful barbiturate, lay down and pulled the curtains and we knew they were killing themselves, and that was their right. They took more than 36 hours to die. Then we buried them at sea, as we would do for any one of our own.

Ulrich Kessler

The passenger list also included German Luftwaffe Lieutenant General Ulrich Kessler, former commander of special bombing and attack wings based in Norway. Submarine officers may not have become familiar with him on the trip as he and they had little in common.

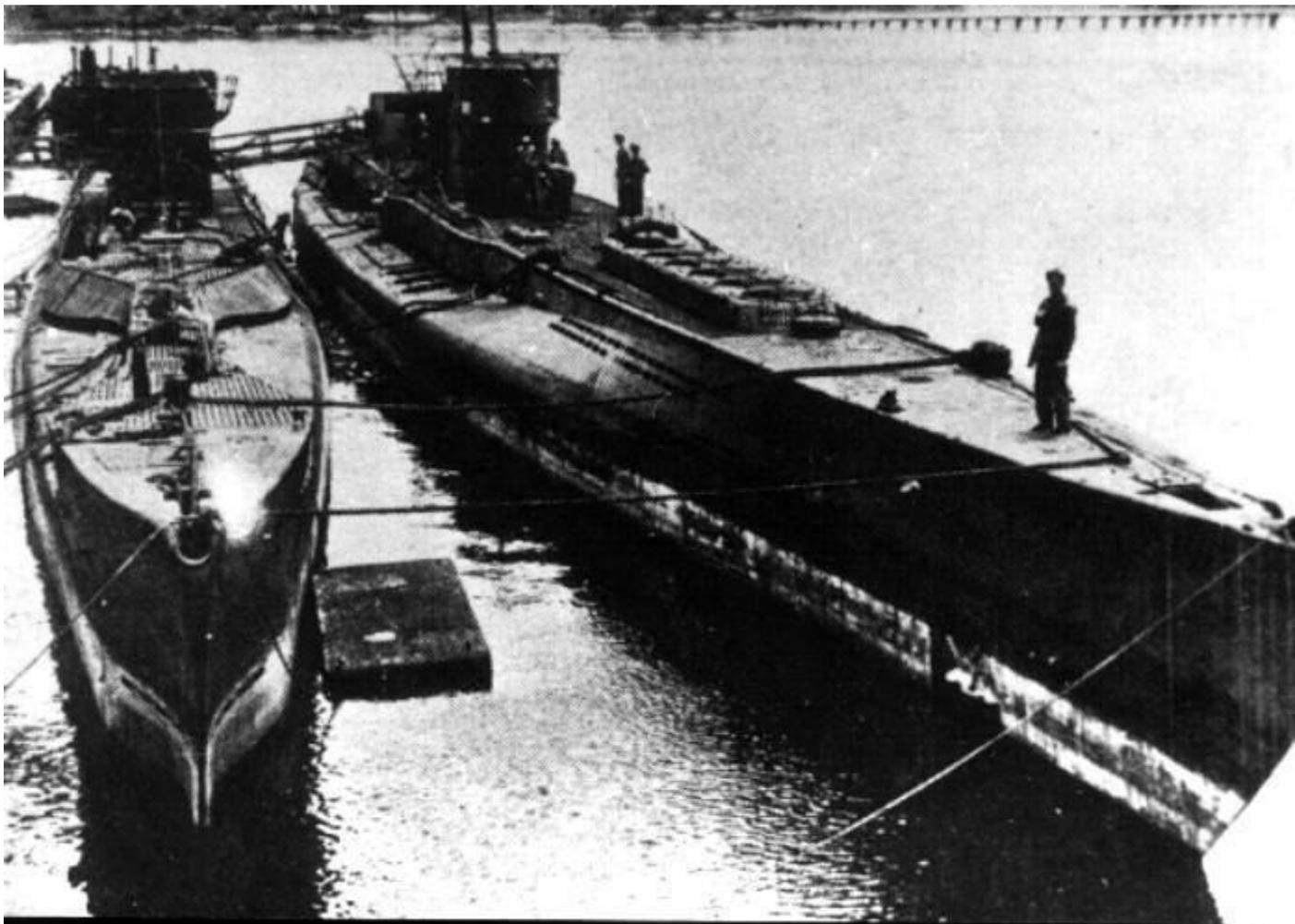
Kessler, with a monocle over one eye and a perpetual air of arrogance, passed his time reading books and, upon arrival in Portsmouth, would surrender with a smart salute to the highest-ranking U.S. officer on hand. He later bragged to reporters that he'd learned how to accept defeat in style after World War I and expected he might have to do so even a third time.

But, displaying another, more practical side, Kessler admitted during interrogation that he had intended all along to get off the sub at Argentina -- not an unbelievable story in light of the fact that many top-ranking Germans already had fled to that South American country.

Whether Kessler knew of the atomic cargo remains a mystery today. Researchers find it more likely Kessler, knowing the war was about to be lost, had boarded the sub as a means of escape.

The discrepancy between Fehler's reported and actual course was soon recognized by U.S. authorities who dispatched two destroyers to intercept U-234, wherever it was.

One evening as it plowed the seas south of Newfoundland Banks, U-234 spotted a huge searchlight on the horizon. The destroyer Sutton approached and asked U-234 to identify itself. Crew members of the Sutton boarded and took charge, redirecting it to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard where three other U-boats, U-805, U-873 and U-1228, had surrendered within the last few days.



U 873 Type IXD-2 and U 234 Type XB in dock at Portsmouth NH 1945

News of the surrender of the giant sub with its high-ranking Luftwaffe passengers turned the surrender into a major news event. Reporters swarmed over the Navy Yard and went to sea in a small boat for an earlier view of the prize.

But the big story -- the more than half a ton of uranium oxide on board -- was promptly covered up.

The United States military, in collaboration with worried officials of the top-secret Manhattan Project, had its own atomic program that would culminate in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August.

Even after the war ended, documents reporting the uranium cargo on U-234 remained classified for the duration of the Cold War as America guarded all its atomic secrets from the new enemy: The Soviet Union.

Researcher Fascinated

Velma Hunt is a retired Penn State University environmental health professor who has spent years researching health issues as they pertain to uranium and tracking uranium shipments during the 1940s. She is fascinated with the U-234.

Hunt says finding out the truth about the sub's cargo was complicated by looting by drunken American sailors who not only carried away souvenirs but also managed to lose documents that might have provided crucial details about the origins and intended destination of the uranium.

"Captain Fehler," Hunt said, "while complaining about the looting, mentioned he was all the more indignant about it, considering all he had had to do was pull a lever and every mine shaft would have emptied its contents into the ocean." That would have included the uranium, Hunt said.

Hunt said the U-234 and the Sutton may have gone into two ports between the surrender and the arrival at Portsmouth Navy Yard, once in Newfoundland when an American sailor mistakenly shot in the buttocks had to be evacuated for post-surgical treatment, and once again at Casco Bay. The unscheduled landings presented a problem for American intelligence personnel, who worried that some cargo might have been off-loaded in the two ports.

The 41 crew members, six officers and nine passengers had been transferred to a Coast Guard vessel at sea. Fehler's arrival was something less than ceremonious.

Raised Ruckus

Portsmouth radio station WHEB reporter Charlie Gray watched them come ashore at the Navy Yard on May 19 and later reported that Captain Fehler raised a ruckus when he was forced to sit with his men and keep his arms folded.

"He compared the tactics of U.S. Naval personnel to that of gangsters," Gray reported, whereupon an American officer retorted, "That's just what YOU are."

Gray described the crew as looking well-fed but wearing the most nondescript uniforms he'd ever seen on a German sub crew. All were dirty, he said, and each carried a small leather bag, canteen, and blankets.

The men of U-234 joined the officers and crews of the three subs that preceded them, as prisoners in the custody of the U.S. Navy. While at the Charles Street Jail in Boston, where they were being held while in transit to more permanent quarters, the commander of the U-boat U-873 slashed his wrists and was taken to a hospital where he died.

U-234 officers were taken to Washington, D.C. for interrogation. Second Officer Pfaff -- he who would rather have been on a South Sea island -- was taken to what he believed to be a topsecret Navy installation in Virginia and into a room in which the cargo unloaded from U-234 was being stored.

Pfaff was ordered to oversee the opening of a metal container. The reluctant welder with the cutting torch pleaded with Pfaff not to let him die because he had a family. The military watchdogs stood back, out of harm's way.

"He begged me not to let both of us get blown up," Pfaff said, I'and I assured him that I too did not want to die young. Why would these boxes be booby trapped? They were on their way to our ally (Japan). Why would we want to blow them up?"

When they saw that it was safe, the military came out of hiding. Pfaff said he was then asked to open the boxes -- little cigar-box shaped boxes, he recalled -- that contained the uranium oxide.

A "tall, skinny fellow" wearing an "Eillot Ness" hat -- that is, a hat fashionable in the 1930s and 40s -- appeared. The only civilian in the room, he went about supervising the opening of the boxes. Who is that? Pfaff asked. Oppenheimer, somebody said.

"I had no earthly idea who Oppenheimer was," Pfaff said. But later, when the war finally ended, Pfaff, in a detention center in Louisiana, read news reports about atomic physicist J. Robert' Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos laboratory where the design and building of the first atomic bomb took place.

"I didn't know for sure that it was Oppenheimer in there," Pfaff said. "I had to take this man's word."

Japan's A-Bomb

Robert K Wilcox is an historian who has written about World War II, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War.

In 1985 Wilcox wrote a book, *Japan's Secret War -- Japan's Race Against Time To Build Its : Own Atomic Bomb*, that said the listing of 560 kilograms of uranium oxide for the "Jap Army" on U-234's manifest had elicited such concern with the War Department that it was kept from the public and subsequently became a classified document.

The cargo was not officially revealed. But even if it had been, few Americans would have understood its significance.

This was three months before the United States would drop the world's first two atomic bombs, unlocking the secrets of atomic fission to an incredulous world.

Wilcox cited the story of the U-234 as evidence that the Japanese may have been close to developing their own atom bomb and would not have hesitated to use it.

As the recent public hand wringing over the Smithsonian's Enola Gay exhibit attests, the issue of whether the U.S. was morally justified in its atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continues to generate controversy. Wilcox's publisher is reissuing his book in time for the 50th anniversary of those bombings this summer.

The *Harper's Magazine* article of October 1946 makes clear that Germany had developed the making of fuses to a level unknown elsewhere in the world. Some fuse designs had never even been thought of by the Americans.

The suggested fuse to detonate the plutonium bomb was the Exploding Bridge Wire device provided to Professor Alvarez by a German infra-red and electronics specialist travelling as a passenger aboard U-234 from Kiel to Tokyo which surrendered to the US Navy at sea in mid-May 1945.

There was no weapons-grade U-235 material aboard U-234 which could have been used to fission a Uranium bomb.

It would appear from the US Unloading Manifest, a dockyard Memorandum and a couple of cablegrams from New Portsmouth naval base that there were ten cases each of 56 kilos of "uranium oxide" on the submarine. This material was contained in gold lined cylinders and was said to be dangerous if opened. It is clear that this was not weapons-grade U-235.

There were also eighty small containers described as "U-powder" aboard U-234. This might have been natural uranium processed in a non-critical sub-reactor to a stage where there was sufficient radioactive activity present to warrant a lead container.

The United States produced all its own weapons-grade fissionable material. There was more U-235 in store than can be explained after the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. Most probably the surplus resulted from the Hiroshima bomb being detonated by the Exploding Bridge Wire, which would have made the U-235 bomb much more economic in fissionable material.

Lt. Karl Ernst Pfaff was held in prisoner of war centers in Louisiana and Arkansas until early 1946 when he returned to Germany and married a girl from Heidelberg, not Fehler's sister-in-law.

"I had taken a liking to this country and to the American style," Pfaff said, and he immediately began planning his strategy: to return.

He found his way to Montreal in 1951, and lived there 19 years, working for the Caterpillar Company. He lived in Memphis, Tenn., for another 19 years, and retired to Bellingham, Wash., four years ago.

"The war was a different part of my Life," Pfaff said in an interview last week, "something people don't understand. When the war was over and we had lost it, I had to do something and start another part of my life. I disappeared from the surface. Nobody, except my close friend Fehler, knew where I was."

Fehler acquired an international reputation for clearing waterways such as the Suez Canal of sunken ships. His career as a ship's captain endured, and he ran a supply ship for Kuwait at one time and a hospital ship to Saigon at another.

Pfaff and Fehler lost contact until 1991 when they met for the last time at a U-234 reunion in southern Germany. Fehler died a year ago.

U-234's reunions, like the reunions of all World War II veterans' groups, are attended by fewer people as the years go by. In 1985, there were 60 crew and wives; in 1991, 40.

This September Pfaff will be the highest officer attending the reunion of U-234

"There aren't many of us left Pfaff, now 72, observed, and excused himself to go out and rake the lawn as he had promised his wife he would.

The story, that the crew of U 234 or myself have been badly treated when coming into U.S. captivity, is not true. My interrogating officer, Lt. Cmdr. Alvares (probably not his real name) has always been correct, even when sometimes, to press some knowledge out of me and to threaten me in a rather primitive way

But, in the very night, when the crew of U 234 had been locked up in the Boston county jail, on her way from Portsmouth (Mass) to Camp "Fort G. Meade", the crew of another German Submarine was herded into this jail and locked up on the same floor of the same wing of this jail. A solid brickwall separated the two crews only.

The captain of this other boat was Kapitänleutnant Steinhoff. He was locked up in the same cell on the other side of the brickwall corresponding to my own cell. During this only in Boston-county-jail sleep was impossible for me. From the neighborhood I heard continuous shouting, moaning and sound of beating I could not understand anything. But the noise kept me awake until the early morning hours. When this other crew was herded downstairs the next morning I noticed some uproar in front of the cell opposite to my own. But I could not make out any reason for it. It was only two or three weeks later, when I met the ships doctor of the other submarine, a certain Marinestabsarzt Dr. Brehme, who told me that he had tried to save Steinhoff who had slashed his wrist and had lost a large amount of blood. It took several hours until infusion liquid was delivered and that in a large city like Boston. So Steinhoff died although he easily could have been saved.

The story of the two Japanese Officers on board of "U 234" is also incorrect. When wireless information had been received by U 234 about the German surrender and the order directly to the submarines operating at sea to surrender to exactly specified allied ports, I informed the two Japanese about the situation. And I gave them my word that I would try my best not let them fall into allied hands, but to try to put them ashore somewhere in neutral territory, as Spain, Portugal, Canary Islands or somewhere else. Apparently they did not trust my word or they thought this ~~idea~~ idea not feasible. Anyway, at night, while "U-234" was steaming with high speed in very bad weather against heavy seas, they swallowed large amounts of "Luminal". When they were discovered on the next morning nothing could be done for them any-more. We kept their bodies on board for 20 hours until daybreak the next morning. I had them sewed up in canvas hammocks and they were given over board in the proper seamans way with prayers and covered by Japanese flags. This happened three or four days before the surrender of U 234 to the U.S. Destroyer "Sutton". The bodies have not been put into the bilge of our starboard diesel engine. We had to carry the bodies to the engine as there we had sufficient space to sew them up in their canvas coffins.

I hope, that the above clears all pending questions

Kind regards,

Fehler
Fehler

Sorry, for my impossible typing.
My typing is a complete wreck
and I would n't find another one today

Fate of Uranium and its Origins Remain a Mystery

Uranium taken by U.S. authorities from a German U-boat at the Portsmouth Naval Yard in 1945 could have been used in later U.S. atomic test blasts in Nevada and the Bikini atoll in the Pacific, according to one authority on the case.

Retired Penn State University environmental health professor Vilma Hunt who assisted in the investigation of the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear disaster, is writing a book exploring uranium trade routes of the 1940s.

She says she does not rule out the possibility that the uranium wound up in one of the bombs that landed on Nagasaki or Hiroshima but doubts that could have happened because of the time that would have been required to move the material through the very complex atomic manufacturing process.

Her attempts over the years to find out what happened to U-234's nuclear cargo led to no definitive answers.

"If it did not get into the August bombs it was certainly used in the subsequent bombs," Hunt said in an interview. "There is no question that it was used and put into subsequent devices that we continued to use for testing, possibly at the Bikini Atoll or in Nevada."

Hunt's interest in U-234 was piqued by a number of still unanswered questions in addition to the mystery of the missing uranium:

How did the uranium on U-234 escape the uranium investigative activity of U.S. Gen. Leslie Groves' "Alsos" teams which probed uranium movements in Europe and Asia during World War II?

What part of the German military establishment had the knowledge, power and administrative clout to completely refit a submarine (from minelayer to giant underwater cargo vessel) and fill it with uranium and advanced weapons technology?

The uranium would have come from the Belgian Congo, Hunt believes. But by what paths did the uranium move from there to the sub which was carrying it when it slid into the Baltic Sea on March 25, 1945?

What was the connection, if any, between the high-ranking Luftwaffe Gen.

Ulrich Kessler on board U-234, and the uranium oxide cargo? When he told U.S. interrogators he had planned all along to leave the ship in Argentina, was it also his plan to take the uranium ashore with him and use it as a bargaining chip with the Argentineans? Or was he unaware of the uranium?

Her main question was, and still is, how did U.S. authorities manage to keep the uranium a secret for so many years?

Another researcher and author, Robert K. Wilcox, believes the uranium was snapped up by the Manhattan project (the top-secret American effort that concluded in the development of the atom bomb) but hasn't a clue to its ultimate use.

The submarine, U-234, was en route to Japan with its cargo of uranium oxide -- enough, he says, to fuel two Japanese atom bomb attacks on the United States -- when it surrendered on May 19, 1945, Wilcox says. Wilcox, who has written books on a variety of military issues, believes Japan had its own secret atom bomb project and cites evidence that Japan may even have exploded a test device in northern Korea.

In his book, *Japan's Secret War*, Wilcox argues that had Germany not surrendered on May 6, ordering its ships and submarines to turn themselves in to the Allies, the first cities to be destroyed by atomic bombs could have been American. Rather than Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, which were bombed by the United States in August of that year. That is, if the Japanese had time to assemble them, he says.

In any event, Wilcox claims, the Japanese were closer to achieving the bomb than the American people knew -- or American authorities since may have wanted them to know.

Wilcox is in the process of updating his 1985 book for a reprinting in August by Marlowe & Company (New York).

The capture of U-234, one of the biggest U-boats of the Third Reich fleet, and its illustrious passengers -- German scientists and high Luftwaffe officers -- made vivid headlines, but not a word of the secret uranium leaked out, Wilcox notes.

Official papers documenting the existence of the uranium were not declassified for many years, and when Wilcox drew attention to the uranium cargo in his book, in the context of Japan's effort to build its own atomic bomb in World War II, nobody seemed to take much notice either, he said this month.

Perhaps Americans didn't find credible his reports that Japan had relocated atomic bomb production facilities to Japanese occupied North Korea in 1945, Wilcox suggests.

But now, with growing U.S. anxiety over the nuclear weapons development program in communist North Korea, Americans may be more willing to take his earlier revelations seriously, he says.

In his book Wilcox traces Japan's determined development effort from its earliest days through possible testing. Wilcox speaks of a network of Spanish spies working in North America, U-234's aborted attempt to deliver 1,235 pounds of valuable, 77 percent pure uranium oxide to Japan, and atomic research centers operating in North Korea.

Wilcox, who at 51 lives in Sherman Oaks, Calif., said in an interview this month that his book was ahead of its time. "In 1985 the country wasn't ready for the story," he said.

Japan has always been looked at as the victim of the bomb. And so a lot of people didn't like the book. To be very base about it, there is a whole liberal element that does not want Japan to look like anything but the victim. But the fact is the Japanese tried very hard to make the bomb and would have dropped it."

The main thrust of the book is the Japanese did have an atomic bomb program, Wilcox said.

The Japanese knew an atomic bomb was feasible but their problem was uranium.

In his reprinted book, Wilcox will introduce information that Japan near the very end of the war appropriated 25 million yen (about \$100 million on today's scale) to find uranium. Much of the money was spent buying up all the uranium in Shanghai and around Japanese-occupied China in factories where it had been used for years in pottery-making.

"Their program did not get going until the end of the war," Wilcox said, "when they were searching for a miracle weapon. We were getting ready to invade Japan, they knew that, and they were going to do all they could to stop it.

"They would have dropped it on us if they had been able to," Wilcox said. "U-234 was one of their last-ditch attempts to get the uranium they needed, although I don't think it would have made that much difference because they had already found it in Shanghai."

A researcher has announced findings that the American atomic bomb program credited with developing the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki, Japan to end World War Two, and which resulted in the United States emerging from the war as the most powerful nation on earth, used components developed by Nazi Germany, including enriched uranium, to fabricate the bombs.

In late March of 1945, the Indianapolis was damaged by a Kamikaze plane during the battle for Iwo Jima. In late July 1945, following repairs in California, she made a high-speed trip to Tinian Island to deliver atomic bomb components for "Little Boy", the first bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Thus completing that mission, she sailed for the Philippines. Shortly after midnight on July 30, 1945 she was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank quickly. Nearly 800 of her 1,200 crew members lost their lives.

The Japanese Submarine I-8 was a World War II Junsen Type J-3 Imperial Japanese Navy submarine, famous for completing a technology exchange mission to German-occupied France and back to Japan in 1943.

The series (I-7 and I-8), based on the KD (Kaidai) type, were the largest Japanese submarines to be completed before World War II. They participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor in patrol missions with their Yokosuka E14Y seaplanes being used in reconnaissance flights.

Mission to Germany

These missions took place under the Axis Powers' Tripartite Pact to provide for an exchange of strategic materials and manufactured goods between Germany, Italy, and Japan. Initially, cargo ships made the exchanges, but when that was no longer possible, submarines were used. Only six submarines attempted this trans-oceanic voyage during World War II: I-30 (April 1942), I-8 (June 1943), I-34 (October 1943), I-29 (November 1943), and German submarine U-511 (August 1943). Of these, I-30 was sunk by a mine, I-34 by the British submarine Taurus, and I-29 by the American submarine, Sawfish (assisted by Ultra intelligence). I-52 was the final submarine to make the attempt.

Commanded by Shinji Uchino, I-8 departed Kure harbor on 1 June 1943, together with I-10 and the submarine tender Hie Maru. Their cargo included two of the famed Type 95 oxygen-propelled torpedoes, torpedo tubes, drawings of an automatic trim system, and a new naval reconnaissance plane, the Yokosuka E14Y. A supplementary crew of 48 men, commanded by Sadatoshi Norita, was also packed into the submarine, with the objective of manning a German U-Boat submarine (U-1224, a Type IXC/40 U-boat) and bringing it back to Japan for reverse engineering.

On arriving in Singapore nine days later, I-8 also took onboard quinine, tin, and raw rubber before heading for the Japanese base at Penang.

On July 21, I-8 entered the Atlantic, where she encountered fierce storms, but was able to continue to German-occupied France.

The I-8 arriving in Brest, France. Getting closer to Europe, on August 20th, I-8 rendezvoused with German submarine U-161, commanded by Captain Albrecht Achille. Two German radio technicians were transferred onboard, as well as a FuMB 1 "Metox" 600A radar detector which was installed on the bridge of I-8. As I-8 entered the Bay of Biscay on 29 August, the Germans sent Ju-88s to provide air cover all the way to Brest, France, where she arrived two days later.

The Japanese submarine was welcomed warmly by the Germans. German news agencies announced that "now even Japanese submarines are operating in the Atlantic." Over a period of about a month, parties and visits to Paris and Berlin were organized for the crew.

Return to Japan

I-8 left Brest on October 5, with a cargo of German equipment: machine guns, bomb sights, a Daimler-Benz torpedo boat engine, naval chronometers, radars, sonar equipment, anti-aircraft gunsights, electric torpedoes, and penicillin. The submarine also transported Rear Admiral Yokoi, naval attaché to Berlin since 1940; Captain Hosoya, naval attaché to France since December 1939; three German officers; and four radar and hydrophone technicians.

In the South Atlantic, I-8 radioed its position to the Germans, but the message was intercepted by the allies, prompting an attack by anti-submarine aircraft, which failed. I-8 arrived in Singapore on 5 December, and finally returned to Kure, Japan on 21 December, after a voyage of 30,000 miles.

Later developments

In late 1944, I-8 was converted to carry Kaiten suicide torpedoes. She was lost off Okinawa on 31 March 1945, in an encounter with the American destroyers USS Morrison and USS Stockton.

1944

Japan fielded the Kaiten suicide torpedo, incorporating elements of the 24-inch, 40-knot version of the Long Lance, with a control compartment into which the pilot was locked. Range: not more than five hours, no matter what. I-class submarines carried Kaiten into battle, and a fairly large number went into action. The record is ambiguous, however. They

did succeed in sinking one American tanker and a small landing ship, perhaps also a destroyer escort, as well as damaging two transports.