

Bombs On Dutch Harbour

Strategically and offensively, the two raids of Japanese planes on Dutch Harbour, the United States naval base in Alaska, do not appear to have been important, although they should be disturbing to that easy sense of North American complacency which continues to comfort itself with the thought that no enemy arm can pierce the security of this continent nor can the foe ever set his profaning foot on these shores.

Ships have been torpedoed by German U-boats well inland on the St. Lawrence River; they have been sunk, and continue to be, within sight of large American cities off the Atlantic coast. A bombing raid by Japan on the Pacific coast was therefore to be expected, even though it does bear all the earmarks of "a face-saving venture," as Washington views it.

Four bombers and fifteen fighters took part in the first raid on Wednesday morning, setting warehouses afire and causing a few casualties. A second raid occurred six hours later, but the damage is reported not to have been heavy. These enemy craft could have been borne by a plane-carrier or have come from the Kurile Islands of Japan, and they may presage heavier assaults on the Western Hemisphere; but Dutch Harbour is on the alert, as is indeed the whole coastal area of the Pacific from Alaska to the Panama Canal. Defences have also been strengthened, and there are not likely to be any repetitions of Pearl Harbour should the Japanese planes come in force, as they may, for it is often impossible to prevent a percentage of bombers from getting through to their objectives.

Japan is making the most of these raids, which tends strongly to support the general belief that Premier Tojo and his militarists were forced to do something in the way of a reprisal for the "Doolittle raid" on Tokio and other large centres. Humiliation is one pill that the Japanese find hard to take. They set prestige above all else and will go to any extremes to regain it, once they have lost it.

Yet a glance at a map shows that yesterday's incidents at Dutch Harbour were not a hard thing for Japan to have achieved. Situated on Unalaska Island, one of the Aleutian chain, the American naval base lies in an area that is well out in the border-line of the northern Pacific and the Behring Sea, off the Alaska Peninsula. It is about the closest strategic point in North America that Japan could hope to reach, and quite accessible to her long-range bombers.

The raids are not to be minimized, however, and will not be treated lightly by the people of such cities as Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. But these centres are many miles farther to the east of Dutch Harbour. As between the bombing of an isolated naval base off Alaska, and the cities of the Pacific coast, there lie difficulties which may be insurmountable for an invader as remote as Japan. Did the latter believe for a moment that she were able to get her bombers over Vancouver or San Francisco, she would no doubt have done so at the earliest moment and thus have won the reprisals she and her people smart for since the raid on Tokio. The fact that she makes a rather feeble attack on Dutch Harbour can be construed as a confession of her inability to reach British Columbia or California by air, and to that degree her gesture of offence toward North America seems at this writing to be a minor incident in the global struggle.

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