

► *Are they fortified? The question looms big over the western Pacific.*

JAPAN'S MANDATE ISLANDS

BY LINTON WELLS

WITH the involvement of Holland in the European war almost certain, Japan has raised the issue of future control over the Netherlands East Indies. Japan has made it clear that she "will not tolerate interference by any third power" and will not be swerved from her "present policy," described officially as "Japan's expansion to the south." In the light of these declarations and the fact that Japan wants and needs the oil, tin, rubber and other resources of the Dutch East Indies, the question being asked by all Pacific Ocean powers, including the United States, is: *Has Japan fortified her mandate islands*, which at one point are separated from the Dutch possessions by less than 300 miles of water?

In February, Secretary of State Cordell Hull sent Tokyo a sharp reminder that an accounting of its stewardship over the Pacific mandate islands was long overdue. Several weeks later, Washington received a copy of Japan's 1938 report to the League of Nations'

Permanent Mandates Commission, but the report told precisely nothing about what the world wanted to know. In contrast to the 1937 report, which said categorically that the mandate islands were not being fortified, that of 1938 ignored the subject completely.

In 1914, Japan took from the Germans 623 Micronesian islands having an area of 829 square miles and scattered over 3,000,000 square miles of the western Pacific north of the equator. They comprise the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline groups, including Yap but excluding Guam, and, according to Nippon's latest report, have a population of 70,141 Japanese, 50,868 natives of Malay origin, and 119 foreigners, chiefly Spanish missionaries plus a few Chinese and Germans. There are also 700-odd islets. Phosphorous ores, vegetable oil products, a little sugar and dried fish are about all Japan gets out of the lot — except, of course, bases for military operations.

Japan's occupancy of these Pacific islands was confirmed in 1919,

when the Treaty of Versailles assigned to the various Allied powers mandates for the administration of the German colonies. In accepting the mandate, Japan gave assurances that she would not establish naval, military, or air bases within the territory or fortify it otherwise. There was also an implied agreement to keep the islands open to the commerce of all nations and permit visitors to look them over unhindered. The mandate system was set up on a sort of honor basis. Each power agreed to submit annual reports of its guardianship, but no machinery was established to check these reports.

At the Washington Conference in 1921, Japan signed a treaty with the United States and promised to give us a duplicate copy of her annual report to the League of Nations commission which supervises mandates. Japan withdrew from the League on March 27, 1935, and when Mr. Hull sent his recent reminder her last mandate report to it — and us — was for 1937. Now she has brought us up to 1938, but much has probably happened since then.

Back in 1920, rumors already were afloat that Japan was fortifying her mandate islands, and I wangled qualified permission from the Japanese naval ministry to visit

them. That was before the islands were closed to visitors except a few sympathetic, presumably myopic foreigners. I went from Manila to Guam, then took a trading schooner to a series of gemlike islands which form the western section of the Carolines.

The largest of the Carolines is Yap, whose status then was in dispute. The United States was objecting to its being mandated to Japan, because the island was an important relay point in the trans-Pacific cable system connecting Guam with China and the Dutch East Indies, and it was feared that world communications might be affected if it became an integral part of the Japanese Empire. The question was settled at Washington in 1921, when Japan promised that we should have free access to Yap and the cable at all times. With the development of radio, Yap ceased to be as important a communications point as it had been. The cable line connecting it with Guam still terminates in the office of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company on Guam, but inquiry reveals that it has been dead for years.

When I was there, Yap was populated by some 7000 friendly people of Malay origin and about 100 Japanese connected with the

military or cable or both. The Nipponese treated me courteously, but on Yap and elsewhere among the mandated islands I was always chaperoned by a so-called "guide." However, I managed to get a pretty good look at Yap, and found no evidence of fortifications except demolished, outmoded German forts. Later I went to Ponape, Korrör Island, Truk, and Kusaie. Development work was in progress everywhere, both ashore and in the harbors. I left the Carolines and went to the Marshalls, which are little more than atolls steaming under the equatorial sun. There, on Jaluit, I found less Japanese activity (perhaps because of the torrid climate), but just as much secrecy. Proceeding northward to Japan, I stopped at Saipan, in the Marianas, where considerable engineering enterprise was being displayed.

Throughout this visit I saw nothing at which I could point an accusing finger and say positively: There is a fort or a naval or air base under construction. However, a transition from civil to military use manifestly was possible as consequence of the improvements. Actually, Truk, where an extensive coral reef forms a natural breakwater, is an ideal naval and air base as it stands.

II

While all that was in 1920, I now believe firmly that the Nipponese have fortified strategic islands in the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline groups in violation of their mandate. My belief is supported by the inadequate reports which Japan has submitted, including that for 1938 ignoring the question of fortifications; by the evasive replies of Japanese representatives at Geneva when periodically questioned regarding bases and fortifications in the mandate islands; by Japan's persistent refusals to permit League investigators to inspect the islands; by its virtual quarantine of the islands against foreign visitors; by its recent refusal to permit an American ship to approach the Mariana island of Saipan, Guam's neighbor, with shipwrecked Japanese sailors who had been rescued — the American vessel was required to transfer the men to a Japanese ship far at sea; and by Japan's avowed determination to expand southward.

When Japan withdrew from the League in 1935, Geneva hinted that the mandate islands should be surrendered. Japan promptly told the League in effect that she would go to war to keep them. The threat to Holland this April evoked an

inspired press campaign in Japan, insisting that Japan is prepared to occupy and fight for the Dutch Pacific colonies in the event the Netherlands becomes involved in the war. Foreign Minister Arita followed it with his warning that no third power, including the United States, would be permitted to take over these colonies. All of which serves to confirm the belief that Japan has established air and naval bases within striking distance of the South Pacific possessions of England, France and the Netherlands. If she were not prepared to attack with more than reasonable effectiveness from points close at hand, Japan would be more careful about challenging the western powers.

Although Great Britain and France could undoubtedly defend the Dutch East Indies from their great bases at Singapore and Touraine, they are none too happy over the prospect of becoming involved in a Far Eastern war. Our Navy Department doesn't feel very happy about the matter, either. Recent warnings by Rear Admiral Joseph K. Taussig that Japan plans "the subjugation of China, the Philippines, Netherlands Indies, French-Indo China and Malaya" reflect those feelings. Congress has refused appropri-

tions to improve our naval station at Guam and the air base at Wake Island, for fear of offending the Japanese, in the absence of incontrovertible evidence that Japan has fortified her Pacific mandate islands. So far it has not been forthcoming, though few realistic observers have any doubt on the subject.

From a slightly professional question among naval and military men, the problem of the Japanese mandates may be turned at any moment into a matter of intense practical interest to the whole world. Japanese occupation of Holland's Pacific colonies could be achieved and defended only on the basis of fortified nearby islands. Such occupation, it is feared, would be only the beginning of a process of expansion. The western mandate island of Palau is only 600 miles from the southern Philippines; the Marshalls are 2000 miles west of Hawaii—a relatively short distance these days; and isolated Guam is so literally surrounded by Japanese islands (the nearest is only about forty miles away) as to be under "protective custody" of Japan already. Small wonder that so many of us who fear America's possible involvement in the war keep our eyes on the Far East even more than on Europe.

LUNACY MARCHES ON!

THE prize for upside-down thinking goes to the communist New York *Daily Worker* for a Stockholm dispatch boasting that the heroic Norwegian communists “stay at their posts” in Oslo and cooperate with the Nazi invasion, while others “flee in panic” and “abandon the workers”:

The Social-Democratic leaders, their newspaper editorial staffs, the leading organs of the trade unions and Social-Democratic Youth have left Oslo. Part of them fled in panic. . . . Up to the present time only the communists continue publishing their paper. . . . The *Ny Dag* publishes in full the manifesto the Communist Party has issued at Oslo in which it stressed the main objective of preventing Norway from becoming the battleground between the imperialist powers. The manifesto reminds the people it was England’s violation of Norwegian neutrality that has brought about the present situation. . . . Etc.

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The Moscow *Trud* hails Russia’s tender concern for peace and the sovereignty of weak neighbors:

The Soviet-Finnish peace treaty is vivid proof of the peace-loving policy of the U.S.S.R., its respect for the national independence of small nations, its desire to continue and develop normal trade relations with all countries on a basis of complete equality. . . .

By an amazing coincidence, these bright sentiments of Moscow *Trud*

are shared in New York by the *Daily Worker*:

The signing of the peace treaty between the Soviet Union and Finland is a victory of tremendous importance for the oppressed peoples in the colonies and dependencies, and especially for the Negro peoples, the Harlem section Executive Committee of the Communist Party declared:

“ . . . Negro-hating colonial slave-drivers of London, Paris and Washington reckoned without the proletarian peace policy of the Soviet Union, without the powerful might, the unmatched daring and skill of the Red Army, the international army of the working class and all toilers. This brilliant achievement in the struggle for peace will inspire the Negro masses and the downtrodden of all countries in their struggle for peace and national freedom.”

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Only the blessings of conquest by Germany match the Soviet blessings. Under the title “The Germans Brought Us Real Freedom,” the Berlin *Völkischer Beobachter* quotes the Minister of War of Nazi-dominated Slovakia:

To us the Germans brought, in any case, a much greater and much finer freedom than the French gave to Czechoslovakia. What we did not succeed in obtaining in the 20 years of alleged free conditions, we have obtained already in the one year of our real freedom. Military schools and courses have been established, so that we do not have to worry about well-trained officers’ corps.