

# The Bobby Pin Incident

---



• *By Beryl Kent*

THE WOMAN's touch has been responsible for more epoch-making events than the encyclopedias would have us believe. In fact, if history were written according to this fact, it would be more exciting reading than high-voltage fiction.

For example, if you or your children ever read about the way the ex-Japanese Navy was distributed after World War II, you probably won't find my bobby pin mentioned. But that bobby pin, on July 17, 1947, launched thirty-two Japanese ships for America's allies.

It wasn't an extraordinary bobby pin. At that time you could buy a big package, containing about fifty, for a dime. But whatever the cost, that bobby pin was worth its weight in gold to four major nations and me on that hot July day.

By the time summer burst upon Tokyo in '47, I had been a news-writer there for slightly better than two years. My job was covering highlights of the American occupation in Japan for world press release. When the bobby pin slipped into history, I was covering a series of conferences to demilitarize com-

pletely the defunct Japanese Navy.

As you undoubtedly will recall, one of the great peacetime objectives of the Allied occupation was to render the Japanese Navy, once the fourth largest in the world, completely inoperable for further military purposes. This objective was gradually being realized and thus far in the peace-plan more than one hundred submarines and thirty combat vessels had been sent down to Davy Jones' locker.

The small craft and cargo-type auxiliaries which had civilian utility were given to the Imperial Japanese Government for constructive uses.

It was the remaining ships — minor warships, destroyer escorts, mine sweepers and miscellaneous — which were earmarked for division among the claimant nations. There were more than two hundred of these and they were to be distributed only after their official release from mine sweeping and other needed missions.

That was the naval background for that hot, humid day of July 17, when my bobby pin served its international duty. In the conference I

was covering, the men had assembled to distribute thirty-two warships among the United States, Great Britain, China, and Russia.

EACH NATION had sent its top-ranking naval leaders and without exception they were distinguished men who did credit to the honor. Never had I seen such spotless white uniforms, so many shining medals and healthy seamen. Since each official delegate was permitted two attachés and there were about six or seven reporters present, there were nearly twenty men in the room.

We were all seated around a long shiny table. I was the only woman present but, in all honesty, no one noticed me. That is, until the bobby pin brought me into the limelight. And I surely was lucky to have that one bobby pin with me.

Traveling in those days in Tokyo was done exclusively by jeep. And after steering my Army-allotted jeep in and out of the Japanese pedestrians and brakeless bicylists as I drove through the narrow cobbled streets, I had precious few bobby pins left. As a matter of fact, I was reduced to *one* that afternoon and my hair kept straggling down so much that my neck felt haunted.

But I didn't have time nor inclination to think about my hair that day. The breakup of a navy, even though it comes about from the happy transition from war to peace, is serious business.

In accordance with prior decisions

made at the previous conferences, the ships slated for the day's distribution were to be allotted through drawings. Four capsules, each containing a lot number covering eight ships, had been placed in a white sailor hat. Then each delegate was to reach in and pluck out one.

Chance decided the order in which the delegates picked their capsules. They drew for that; little numbered pieces of paper out of a hat. The Russian chose number one, and he stood up to pick the first capsule.

We all watched in patient silence as he attempted to pry the number loose from the transparent cylinder. He seemed to be fumbling with it in much the same nervous manner as I fingered my hair. But his thick fingers could not penetrate the slim capsule.

Instinctively I withdrew a bobby pin (my last, my only) and mumbled, "Take it." He did, with a polite "Spasisba" (Thank you). A very restrained, polite titter went round the table. Then, each delegate in turn accepted and used the bobby pin before it was returned to me. I repinned my hair with it.

The reporters present sent cables back to their syndicates and papers announcing that a "woman's bobby pin had helped launch thirty-two ships." It made headline news all over the world and in Tokyo everyone wanted to see the bobby pin.

Now, would you find this true episode recorded in any of the history books?

# *b-r-e-a-k-i-n-g*

## THE COMMUNIST SPELL

By J. EDGAR HOOVER

*Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice*

IN AMERICA TODAY, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people, once duped by Communism, who have since broken with the Party. This article has been written in a sincere effort to reach them and enlist their help in wiping out the Soviet conspiracy which threatens our country.

With a few exceptions, most of the former Communists have remained silent. Here are some of the reasons: First of all, the individual may be fearful — either of revenge from the Communists or criticism by loyal Americans.

Then, in many cases, he may still be striving to break the bonds which have enslaved his mind. When one has believed that the course he wholeheartedly followed in the past was the right one, he cannot change everything overnight. The awakening may be slow and painful.

And, even when his eyes are fully

open to the truth, he may feel that he cannot break silence. He may feel that he owes a duty to those persons whom he recruited or encouraged to join the Party. He may feel that his motives in joining the Party were good, that he never willfully violated any law but rather was pursuing a course which he then considered noble. He cannot morally bring himself to the point of furnishing incriminating information about those former associates with whom he shared beliefs. Here he faces the test — the emotional struggle between his duty or sympathy to former associates, and his duty to his country, humanity, and his God. What should he do?

The question is a moral one. Each ex-Communist must decide for himself where his duty lies. We of the FBI have known and talked with many who were going through this painful process of decision. Once his eyes are open, the ex-Communist

*Reprinted from This Week Magazine by permission.*