

'Seaman Z,' the anonymous sailor whose recollections of tracking...

By ROBERT McNEILL

WASHINGTON -- 'Seaman Z,' the anonymous sailor whose recollections of tracking the Japanese ships that attacked Pearl Harbor set off a furor among historians, is Robert D. Ogg, a retired businessman from Kentfield, Calif.

His identity was disclosed Wednesday after the National Security Agency released to the naval historian's office the text of an interview with Ogg last May.

Ogg's story was included in a Doubleday book by historian John Toland, 'Infamy: Pearl Harbor and its Aftermath.' He asked Toland for anonymity but his name was made public when the interview was declassified by the NSA.

Although disagreeing with some of the details presented by Toland, Ogg stuck to his story that:

- Working under Lt. Ellsworth Hosner at San Francisco's 12 Naval District headquarters, he used radio signals intercepted by commercial cable companies to plot the eastward course of ships in the North Pacific that turned out to be the Japanese fleet that attacked Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941, plunging the United States into World War II.

- He was told by Capt. Richard McCullough, the 12th District chief of intelligence, that he had relayed the information to the White House; that McCullough was a friend of President Franklin Roosevelt and when he could not communicate with the president personally, he spoke to presidential aide Harry Hopkins.

- His method of plotting the course of the ships was sound and the information provided by the commercial cable companies was judged to be reliable.

- Despite Japanese claims to the contrary, the Japanese ships broke radio silence as they steamed through the stormy north Pacific.

Ogg's story largely contributed to Toland's theme that Roosevelt knew of the impending attack but believed the Hawaiian bastion to be so strong that it could defend itself without prior warning; and that a surprise attack would overcome U.S. pacifism and justify American entry into the war against Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy.

The book fired up controversy among historians, many of whom disputed Toland's conclusions and questioned the authenticity of his evidence, including Seaman Z's story.

Ogg told his interviewer, retired Cmdr. I.G. Newman, a consultant to the Naval Security Group in Washington, that he and Hosner tracked the Japanese fleet from Dec. 2 to Dec. 6. But it was not until the latter part of that period that they came to believe that Pearl Harbor was the target.

'Did your anticipation include the possibility of attack on Pearl Harbor, an attack on the West Coast of the United States, Alaska?' Newman asked.

'No. I don't think we ever considered anything but Pearl Harbor,' Ogg replied.

But he added, 'I don't think we had any anticipation that any real damage could occur from it.'

When news of the attack reached him at 12th District headquarters Sunday morning, Ogg said he telephoned Hosner at home and told him: 'Al, it's happened.'

The three-day interview was conducted in cross-examination style at Ogg's home May 4-6. The transcript, approved by Ogg Aug. 23, runs about 16,000 words.