



JAPAN'S ***GOLDEN*** ***SUBMARINE***

ONE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR'S MOST ASTOUNDING VOYAGES
WOULD END IN DISASTER FOR THE AXIS

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Imperial Japanese Navy submarine *I-52* splashed into her native element on 18 December 1943. Even before she slid down the ramp into Kure's harbor, she had been earmarked for a specific and audacious mission of sobering implications. The chances of the mission being successful were marginal from the beginning. Japan's submarine force was suffering a 50% loss rate as the Pacific War turned inexorably against the eastern Axis. *I-52*'s skipper, Commander Kameo Uno and his 100-man crew knew the odds and like all Imperial sailors were more than ready to accept them. Yet they could not know the percentages facing them were even worse than they realized.

They were ignorant of the fact that the Allies had broken German and Japanese radio codes, and part of the transmissions the Americans were reading informed them of *I-52*'s launching and supposedly top-secret mission. In

early March 1944, as the new sub was completing her sea trials, codebreakers in Pearl Harbor intercepted and deciphered a dispatch the Bureau of Military Affairs in Tokyo sent to the Japanese embassy in Berlin, informing the ambassador that *I-52* was leaving Kure. On 21 March, she docked in Singapore and commenced taking on a massive load of strategic cargo before steaming for Europe on 23 April. As the heavily-laden sub passed south of Madagascar on 11 May, US Navy Intelligence identified her by her code-name of *Momi* (fir tree.) This was not a new name.

Momi had been the name of *I-34*, which went down in battle off the Strait of Malacca on 13 November 1943. Resurrecting the lost boat's name was a deliberate tactic to make it seem as if *I-52* was taking up where *I-34* had failed. At 357 feet in length and 2500 tons, the new *Momi* was a massive submersible and when Uno gazed down from his 40-foot conning tower, he must have felt her gigantic proportions had to be indicative of

Otherworldly view of the discovery of the *I-52* showing the ship's anti-aircraft guns still pointing skyward.

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