

Japs Getting Cocky Again, Says Taxicab Driver in S. F.

—By HENRY McLEMORE—

SAN FRANCISCO, Wednesday, Feb. 18.—I paid a visit to Japantown today.

It wasn't a long trip. For 45 cents in a taxi, whose meter really has its heart in its work, one can go from the heart of San Francisco to a district where the almond eye and the yellow skin are as predominant as they are in Tokyo.

A really good saboteur, or a hustling fifth-columnist, could cover the distance from Japantown to San Francisco's important naval and military bases in practically no time at all.

I went to Japantown because I wanted to see for myself how the sons and daughters of Nippon had reacted to the war. I didn't go in kimono or zori disguise, but purely as a newspaper man wearing a slightly worn two-pants suit, and with a few questions to ask.

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FOR the better part of three hours I wandered about the district near Post and Buchanan Streets, where some 7,000 Japanese have their homes and shops, dry goods stores and markets, sports goods houses specializing in fishing tackle, doctors, dentists and optometrists, hotels, suki yaki restaurants and churches.

The Japanese were very nice to me. Yessir, very nice. They didn't seem to resent at all an American walking in their midst. The youngsters skating and frolicking on the sidewalks cheerfully avoided knocking me down. Their elders looked up from their newspapers to nod a bland good day.

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IN talking to one of them, I found what may be a partial answer to their contentment. San Francisco has just received 37 first-class, up-to-the-minute air raid sirens; horns so powerful that every one is sure to be warned of the approach of a Japanese bomber.

The Japanese settlement is delighted with this precaution. They didn't think the old sirens were adequate. During an early blackout, Togo Something-or-the-other told me, his neighborhood was unaware of the approach of danger.

Oh yes, the Japanese have their air-raid wardens, their air-raid shelters and their blackout curtains. They are perfectly drilled in what to do in case bombs come from the enemy whose blood runs in their veins.

Silly damn set-up, huh?

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I STOPPED in at the First Evangelical and Reformed Church, where the Reverend T. Kaneko was in charge, and the basement was filled with happy, well-fed Japanese children playing table tennis and basketball.

Reverend Kaneko and the co-minister of the church, the American Rev. Carl Nugent, did not believe that the Japanese on the California coast would cause any trouble. They pointed out that San Francisco's Japanese population had volunteered to retire to a community farm and do experimental work on plants, such as rubber, that the United States may need before this war is over.

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MY last call was on the taxicab driver whose stand is in the center of Japantown. I wanted to know what he had noticed.

"They're getting cocky again, pal," he said. "When the war broke out, they tried to act as if they weren't Japanese. Talked English on the streets. Kinda turned their eyes when they passed. Tried to get friendly by over-tipping when I took 'em downtown.

"Now, they're just the way they used to be. They give you the full once-over, and the Japanese once-over has a sneer in it. They oughta chase 'em all to the hills."

There is what I found in Japantown.