

*Sidney F. Mashbir*



and Some Lessons in Joint Intelligence

## Sidney F. Mashbir: Some Lessons in Joint Intelligence Work

Sidney F. Mashbir's interest in military intelligence dated back to 1904 when the Tucson native was a 13-year-old bugler in Company B of the Arizona National Guard.

In 1912 Lieutenant Mashbir was at an Arizona National Guard encampment at Fort Huachuca. He boarded his wife in a cabin in Garden Canyon during the period of the training. The senior instructor for his regiment was Capt. Louis J. Van Schaik, a regular army man who had been recommended for two Medals of Honor, a singular distinction at that time. During their hikes in the Huachuca Mountains, Mrs. Mashbir and Mrs. Van Schaik ran across the camp of a man they called "the crazy old German." When Van Schaik asked his wife why she thought he was crazy, she retailed the story told her by the Germans's wife. The man apparently insanely believed that the Germans were going to mount military operations against the U.S. and he was making maps of the sector. Van Schaik recognized that there was more to this than a harmless loony making maps. Upon investigation it was learned that the crazy old man was actually a 30-year-old German staff officer who had compiled a series of detailed topographical maps of the border.

Mashbir's first intelligence assignment came in 1916 when he was named Assistant Intelligence Officer of the Ajo-Yuma District. He worked for Capt. J.B. Woolnough, later a major general. His duties included mapping roads, trails and waterholes in northern Sonora. He would scout Mexican towns using his hand-picked soldiers and Papago Indian spies, reporting on the strength and equipment of Mexican garrisons. He tells us that on his first attempt to tap the private telegraph line of General Calles near Naco, his wire was discovered. A second try was successful and "messages were intercepted and decoded as fast as they went through."<sup>1</sup>

It was while serving with the First Arizona Infantry in 1916, that Mashbir was given the assignment by General Frederick Funston to undertake a reconnaissance of northern Mexico to check out reports that Japanese troops were infiltrating this area. He found evidence to support this contention, packages and cans with Japanese labels and *Kanji* characters scrawled on rocks. Little did he suppose that this unlikely contact with Japanese culture in the deserts of Arizona and Mexico would develop into a lifetime which would be preoccupied with things Japanese.

His warning that as many as 12,000 Japanese soldiers, a platoon at a time, had maneuvered along our border with Mexico was ignored by the Military Intelligence Department in Washington. His report was filed with the remark, "These papers and writings have no military significance." It would not be the last time in his 30-plus year career as a professional intelligence officer that he would be rebuffed by a U.S. Army attitude that failed to appreciate the importance of intelligence.

Because of General Funston's support, his application for a commission in the Regular Army was eventually approved, despite the Army's policy that married men not be accepted. After attending the Army Service Schools at Fort Leavenworth, he joined his regiment, the 22d Infantry, which was stationed at Governor's Island, New York. He commanded I Company and the Machine Gun Company, before being detailed for counter-espionage duty. Colonel F. D. Webster, who had known Mashbir on the border and was aware of his undercover mission, recommended him for the Counter Intelligence service that was being formed. On 10 September 1917 he was detailed as assistant to the Department Intelligence Officer at Governor's Island.

He asked his commander, Brig. Gen. Hoyle, that one officer and one enlisted man at each camp, post and station in the Eastern Department be relieved of all other duties and assigned to report directly to him for counter intelligence duties. He wrote the "Provisional Rules for Counter Espionage, Eastern Department," which would become a model for future counterintelligence manuals and survive until World War II.

It was while he was Coast Defense Intelligence Officer at Fort Hamilton that the first German spy to be apprehended in the United States, Paul Otto Kuhn, was uncovered by his investigations. Kuhn, a German artillery officer, had enlisted in the U.S. Army coastal artillery and kept records of the dead angles in coastal artillery batteries.

When the war was over, Mashbir found himself teaching Military Science and Tactics at Syracuse University. According to Mashbir, it was "the first educational institution in the country to give a Bachelor of Arts degree for majoring in Military Science and Tactics." It was at Syracuse that he conceived of studying the Japanese language and culture. He asked the War Department in August 1919 if he could embark on this course of study, stating that it was his intention "to apply for a detail to Japan for the purpose of learning the language and devoting as many years of my life [to it] as the War Department may see fit."<sup>2</sup>

He set sail for Tokyo in August 1920. When he arrived he reported for duty to Col. Charles Burnett, the military attache. He began his four-year tour in Japan "with its thousands of hours of study, and preparation for later experiences in the Intelligence field." He became convinced during the time spent there, that war between the United States and Japan was inevitable.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1922, Mashbir set off on an important intelligence mission to Vladivostok where he sought to obtain documentation of Japanese aggression from the Siberian puppet regime there. While in Vladivostok, he linked up with Marine Captain James F. Moriarty, holder of the Silver Star Medal with five oak leaf clusters. Moriarty was the intelligence officer aboard the *USS Albany* which was tied up in the port. Upon his return to Japan, he made a comprehensive report to the ambassador who found it incredible.

While in Tokyo, Mashbir sought the company of other intelligence professionals in the Navy, there being so few Army colleagues. One of these was Navy Captain Ellis M. Zacharias with whom Mashbir began a lifelong friendship and collaboration. Zacharias saw Mashbir as his "counterpart in the Army, where officers with an interest in intelligence could be counted on the fingers of one hand. His accomplishments wherever he has been allowed to function have been unsurpassed."<sup>4</sup>

In July 1922, at Zacharias' request, Mashbir worked day and night to produce a plan to get information out of Japan in time of war. They called it the M-Plan for Mashbir. It would become an obsessive force in Mashbir's life. According to Zacharias, its beauty lay in its simplicity. "It listed the points at which the Japanese grapevine could be tapped, and, more important than that, it outlined the system whereby the information thus obtained could be transmitted out of Japan. It involved the organization of a few strategic personalities who were expected not to be affected by the emergency for which the plan was prepared. It described in great detail the means of communications which could be placed at the disposal of these agents. The imaginations which he manifested was evident on every page."<sup>5</sup>

Zacharias was highly complimentary of Mashbir's professional qualifications and recognized the problems he would have in getting his work recognized by less imaginative superiors. He wrote: "This memorandum [the M-plan] demonstrated his keen knowledge of Ja-

pan and his long and fruitful preoccupation with intelligence. He was an expert in both; but, perhaps because of his outstanding qualifications, he was hampered in his own activities by the barbed jealousies within his own circle. He was an Army officer, responsible to the Military Attache in Tokyo. The fact that he was now working for the Naval Attache did not promise to enhance his standing with his superior.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to establish a network of foreign businessmen in Japan who could be turned into an intelligence net in time of war, it would be necessary for Mashbir to leave the Army and become himself a businessman in Tokyo. His superior, Colonel Burnett, suggested that he resign his commission in order to put his plan in effect and felt that he could be reinstated when his work was done. So Mashbir resigned in 1923 to pursue business interests. The earthquake of September 1923 bankrupted him and when he sought reinstatement, he made a startling discovery.

...Everything had moved along with precision and the orders had already been cut to reinstate me and send me to Tokyo, when suddenly it was discovered that the reinstatement clause of the law under which I had resigned was no longer valid! ...I had resigned in good faith in 1923 under the law as printed, and yet, due to an opinion of the Judge Advocate General which nullified it, an opinion which had been rendered five full months before I submitted my resignation, although neither Colonel Burnett, who had urged me to resign, nor I was aware of it, nor could have been because even three years after that, in 1926, the law was still being reprinted without this decision included, I found myself confronted with the devastating and heart-shattering reality that my military career was at an end!<sup>7</sup>

So the intelligence officer who had sought to finance an intelligence network in Japan, found himself in the middle 1920s selling refrigerators. He returned to the United States in 1926.

The M-Plan was to be pigeonholed and Mashbir's future in the Army jeopardized. As Zacharias tells it:

Mashbir...resigned from the Army in 1923 and after the Japanese earthquake had destroyed his organization in Japan. He had enrolled in the Military Intelligence Reserve G2 and become a lieutenant colonel. Subsequently, he engaged in some secret work for the Navy in Japan, trying to implement his M-Plan for us. He had been advised by us to keep away from our military and naval attaches to avoid arousing suspicions of the Japanese authorities. He was to exploit as far as possible his former Japanese business associates and the Pan-Pacific Union, of which he was a member. All of this aroused the suspicions of the military attache, who suggested Mashbir be investigated when he next came through Hawaii. This was done, and influenced by the military attache suspicions, Hawaii played safe and turned in a prejudicial report. A copy of this report reached me in San Diego and I recognized it as being based upon completely erroneous assumptions. Meanwhile this report had an unfavorable effect in G2; and advantage was taken of Mashbir's failure to fill in a form reporting a change of address, or something comparable, to disenroll him. Although a secret report was later made by me to the head of that organization explaining Mashbir's activities for the Navy, nothing was done to clear it up. The whole thing is an illuminating story in itself, and, as I explained to the Robert Committee, this was one of the reasons why we did not have more information on Japan before December 7, 1941.

However, with the outbreak of hostilities Mashbir was sought immediately by the Signal Corps because of his wide technical skill. He was later "borrowed" by G2 to send to Australia, an action which caused the raising of several eyebrows. But there, his executive ability and quick accomplishments brought him promotion

to full colonel by General MacArthur after only one month of reorganizing an important activity, the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, Southwest Pacific Area, of which he was given full charge. Since then he has been in the forefront of General MacArthur's intelligence activities and will be remembered in the motion picture of the preliminary surrender negotiations at Manila as the man who thumbed the Jap general along as he attempted to shake hands.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in the summer of 1927, he spent a year as a reserve officer on active duty with the G2 in Washington, during which time he updated the Order of Battle documentation on Japan.

Mashbir returned to Japan after a 11-year absence in 1937 in a second unsuccessful attempt to launch the M-Plan on behalf of the Office of Naval Intelligence and his friend Zacharias. This mission aroused suspicions among the military attaches in Tokyo and an investigation was started of Mashbir. It was a grave misunderstanding that would come so close to damaging his career irreparably. Zacharias, in a letter supporting Mashbir, gave some of the circumstances:

On frequent occasions Colonel Mashbir, because of his extensive experience in intelligence work, has been requested by various officers in Naval Intelligence to perform work of vital importance to the National Defense. Because of the nature of the work, it was deemed advisable to restrict the knowledge of such work to as few individuals as possible, even to the exclusion of credit for the work from his official records as an officer of the Military Intelligence Reserve.

Colonel Mashbir was advised on 25 February 1939, that he was disenrolled from the Military Intelligence Division Reserve for failure to report on the specified day for physical examination, which failure to report was due to absence from the city on urgent business and failure of his secretary to communicate with him. Evidence is conclusive that the actual cause of the disenrollment was due to suspicions aroused by failure to communicate to uninformed individuals the nature and the extent of the work on which he was actually engaged. A report from Honolulu, dated 24 June 1937 is believed to be the specific cause of Colonel Mashbir's disenrollment. An analysis of each paragraph of the report and a comparison with facts, all of which happen to be known to me, will indicate not only the erroneous conclusions of the operative conducting the interview, but also the anomalous position of Colonel Mashbir as a Military Intelligence Reserve Officer attempting to withhold information which an operative was endeavoring to obtain, but to which he was not entitled.

Because of the highly secret nature of Colonel Mashbir's work, it is inadvisable to incorporate it here for inclusion in a personnel file; therefore, I have made a separate report, direct to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2 (General Sherman Miles), in detail, covering this extensive and important work performed in a most commendable manner, and for which Colonel Mashbir should receive appropriate credit in the consideration of his official record. Any failure to ask for such inclusion heretofore was due to the insistence of Colonel Mashbir regarding the necessity for secrecy and that recognition of his work was a matter of minor consideration. However, the turn of events demands that the injustice occasioned by sincere efforts on his part should be corrected.<sup>9</sup>

It was not the last time these intelligence officers from the Army and Navy would work together. When Zacharias was working in the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington in the summer of 1942, he spent his evenings "in the most complete seclusion" working with Sid Mashbir drawing up plans for a new intelligence organization to fill a need of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The new organization created on paper was called the Joint Intelligence Board, and established

for the first time in our history a highest level intelligence organization fully capable of aiding the war effort with top quality intelligence.”<sup>10</sup> This plan, like the earlier M-Plan, fell victim to bureaucratic indifference in Washington. The proposed joint intelligence organization anticipated the Defense Intelligence Agency by 19 years.

When the Signal Corps was putting together a special intelligence section, it turned to Mashbir to head up what was first called the Foreign Section and eventually the Military Intelligence Branch. He was sworn in on active duty on 24 January 1942. He found to his dismay that there was little knowledge of enemy equipment. He drew up a plan for the establishment of the Enemy Equipment Identification Service and wrote its first manual. He trained officers destined for duty in Europe in the subjects of capturing, identifying and evaluating captured equipment. He also curated the first Museum of Captured Enemy Signal Equipment.

It was at this time that the suspicions which lingered about Mashbir's 1937 mission to Japan on behalf of Naval Intelligence were cleared up with Zacharias, now Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence, interceding with Maj. Gen. G.V. Strong, the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2.

In September 1942 he got orders for MacArthur's General Headquarters where he would be in charge of a combined, joint language section. Arriving in October, he requested by name two naval officers be assigned, considering them to be the most knowledgeable in Prisoner of War interrogation and the Japanese language. Mashbir's Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) was a truly combined and joint organization composed of Australian as well as U.S. officers from all services. At the heart of the organization were eight Nisei linguists, the numbers of which would grow as the war progressed.

With four allied services to contend with, Mashbir made it his first priority to eliminate all distinctions between the allies and the services. He organized them into a unified team with a single mission. To avoid any charges of favoritism from any individual service, intelligence information collected from documents and prisoners was sent simultaneously to all headquarters. After the war, Mashbir would say of the ATIS:

Ours was one Inter-Allied, Inter-Service organization which really worked out. The meagerly staffed group of less than twenty people gradually expanded. By the eighth of September 1944, two years after its birth, it comprised seven hundred and sixty-seven people, and at the time we occupied Japan it numbered nearly four thousand, including all of the echelons which were with the combat groups, the front-line interpreters, and the various echelons at each level up to and including GHQ.

It will always be a source of pride to me that allied unit...functioned throughout the entire war without friction and without jealousy. Its personnel participated in every single combat operation in the theater. It is true, of course, that there were the normal differences of opinion which always arise in any group of men, even when they are all of the same nationality and all of the same service, but none was serious and none gave rise to any serious rupture. ...I am convinced that the success of the unit's operation was due entirely to that spirit of cooperation.<sup>11</sup>

The difficulty of his job was compounded by the fact that there was no Table of Organization and Equipment so he could not get his deserving men promoted, a problem he attacked with the support of Maj. Gen. Charles Willoughby, MacArthur's G2, but without any success until the last year of the war.

Willoughby allowed the ATIS to act independently from the GHQ level all the way down to the smallest combat unit. Mashbir was able to exercise considerable freedom in moving his forces around the

theater and was required only to send information copies to Willoughby. It was, according to Mashbir, an organization which was “an Intelligence officer’s dream come true. Not only did it comprise active tactical and strategic Intelligence, as the prisoners and documents covered all theaters, it was also a command unit which, though infinitely inferior numerically, was fully as extensive and far-flung as that of the Commander in Chief.”<sup>12</sup>

About his Nisei troops, Mashbir said, “Throughout the entire four years of the war, it was never necessary to take disciplinary action of any kind against any Nisei. Furthermore, there was never a time...that volunteers were called for that every available Nisei did not immediately come forward. For example, at the Rear Echelon we called for two men to make the parachute drop in the assault on Corregidor. Every Nisei volunteered, although not one had ever made a parachute jump before.”<sup>13</sup>

When, in July 1945, a Table of Distribution was finally approved for the ATIS, Mashbir commissioned from the ranks 150 new lieutenants and promoted 600 other enlisted men. Mashbir observed that several hundred promotions “in two days is not a thing that a bunch of soldiers will pass over lightly. But the Nisei received this news with the same dignity and reserve with which they had received bad news in the past.”<sup>14</sup>

In the Spring of 1943, Mashbir submitted a plan for the use of psywar operations against Japan. For his effort, he received a reprimand. Two years later that exact same plan was pulled from the files and put into effect by Colonel Bonnie F. Fellers, the head of the Psychological Warfare Branch in MacArthur’s headquarters.

MacArthur awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal. He considered it his diploma in intelligence after 29 years of schooling. The citation said:

Colonel Mashbir ably directed an organization providing a continuous flow of vital enemy intelligence, influencing significantly the battle strategy in the theater through the training and operation of a chain of linguistic teams and the translation of vast quantities of captured documents. He was instrumental in the preparation of a military text, “Exploitation of Japanese Documents,” which has been hailed as an outstanding contribution and accepted as a standard by all Pacific theaters. Colonel Mashbir rendered an invaluable service to the success of the War Department-sponsored Document Conference of 1944 through his wide experience in military intelligence in the Southwest Pacific Area. By virtue of his specialized knowledge of the Japanese language, meticulous attention to detail, and untiring devotion to duty, he made a real contribution to the war effort.”<sup>15</sup>

The value of the ATIS to the commander was inestimable. Mashbir said, “the constant flow of psychological, tactical, and strategic information supplied by ATIS furnished up-to-date intelligence for MacArthur at all times. That full advantage was taken of this is obvious in every operation.”<sup>16</sup>

As the war came to an end, Mashbir was making broadcasts to the Japanese people, urging them to demand of their leaders that the war be brought to an end. He organized the surrender negotiations in Manila and planned the ceremonies aboard the *USS Missouri*.

He left Japan on 8 December 1945 to serve on the management staff of the Adjutant General’s office in Washington. When he retired in October 1951, having reached the statutory age of 60, he was the executive officer for the Army AG. He spent the last few years of his career fighting for reinstatement of his Regular Army commission that had been denied to him since 1923.

Mashbir believed that intelligence officers were born, not made. “You can send a candidate for Intelligence work to every school of every service, in every army and country in the world—but if that “inner spark” that baffles definition is lacking he will always be a

dud. ...You could study Intelligence, Cryptanalysis, Photo-Interpretation, Battle Order, Terrain, and Prisoner Interrogation all your life, but you'd never be worth a damn as a real Intelligence officer if you didn't have that *Intelligence impulse*." To be an intelligence officer, Mashbir concluded, "a vivid but logical imagination is a highly important attribute. You must be able mentally to put yourself in the enemy's brain. Knowing his mission, the factors involved, and all the courses of action open to him, your knowledge of his character and psychology must be so profound as to permit you to deduce his probable intentions. From the possible courses of action open to him, you must select the thing he is most likely to do and *anticipate him!* You must be able to see the invisible, hear the inaudible, feel the intangible, taste what is tasteless, and smell what is odorless." He also found that a linguistic ability was useful.

"Either real courage or profound fatalism is an absolute prerequisite. ...It is vital to be able to retain information without letting others suspect that you have it." The intelligence officer "should be well-read and articulate. ...But most vital of all is that supreme devotion to duty which carries you doggedly, unswervingly and irresistibly along upon your mission, with all thought of family and self forgotten, and with the full knowledge that you can never hope for reward, and only rarely for acknowledgment."<sup>17</sup>

Writing in the early 1950s, Mashbir thought that an unenlightened majority still existed in both the Army and Navy that felt intelligence was not a profession in itself, a belief that he took issue with. "It is a profession," he wrote, "and the highest skill for its successful practice requires a lifetime of study and application." It was a profession that must "be kept entirely free from politics and placed in the hands of competent, farsighted and thoroughly trained men."<sup>18</sup> For the intelligence officer, the learning process never ends, Mashbir observed. "It is a job of continuing education."<sup>19</sup>

#### Notes

1. Mashbir, Sidney F., *I Was an American Spy*, Vantage Press, New York, 1953, p. 38.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
4. Zacharias, Ellis M., *Secret Missions: The Story of An Intelligence Officer*, G.P.Putnam's Sons, New York, 1946, p. 52.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
7. Mash, pp. 164-5.
8. Zacharias, pp. 291-2.
9. Mashbir, pp. 202-3.
10. Zacharias, p. 292.
11. Mashbir, p. 221.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 243-4.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 39.