

408 Codebreaking and Espionage

- This program is sponsored by Boeing, Rita and John Canning, Motorola Solutions, and Reed Smith.

(Theme music)

- The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

- Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* featuring noted historians Dr. Gerhard Weinberg and Dr. John Prados for a discussion of code breaking and espionage in WWII. I'm your host Jay Williams, and the following program was part of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library's Sixth Annual On War Military History Symposium, held in November 2018. Support for this program comes from our sponsors, the Boeing Company, Rita and John Canning, Reed Smith, and Motorola Solutions. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. Cryptography was used extensively during WWII with numerous code and ciphers systems fielded by the nations involved. One of the most important code breaking events of the war was the breaking of the German enigma cipher by the Allies. The German military believed that its secret codes could never be broken. However the meticulous work of code breakers based at Britain's Bletchley Park cracked the secrets of German wartime communications and played a crucial role in the final defeat of Germany. In this discussion Professors Weinberg and Prados explore the use of espionage and code breaking for both Axis and Allies. Dr. Gerhard L. Weinberg is professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, where he's served on the faculty since 1974. A German expatriate and veteran of the US Army during the post-WWII occupation of Japan, Dr. Weinberg is an internationally recognized authority on the origins and course of WWII. In 2009 Weinberg was awarded the Pritzker Military Museum and Library's Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing. Among his most notable works are *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*; *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders*; and *Germany, Hitler, and World War II*. Dr. John Prados is an author and national security analyst based in Washington D.C. He is the author of some thirty books and numerous articles on topics of current affairs, presidential studies, international security, and diplomatic intelligence and military history. He holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University in Political Science and focuses on presidential power, international relations, intelligence, and military affairs. He is a senior fellow and project director with the National Security Archive at George Washington University. Prados also heads the archives documentation projects for Vietnam. And now here are Gerhard Weinberg and John Prados at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.

(Applause)

- A major issue in intelligence is whether the start of hostilities is a surprise.

- That's right.

- And one of the more intriguing aspects is the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

- The question of whether the German invasion in Operation Barbarossa was or was not a surprise has rebounded back and forth through history almost ever since. There was actually a book some years ago that collected, I think it was 150 different sort of warning indicators, and the question was, so why were the Soviets surprised? And this is the kind of issue that drives arguments like this. Comes back to not just what intelligence was available, but also what things were potentially knowable and even more, what did national leaders believe about the intelligence they were receiving. So Stalin, what did he do with all these indicators?

- It's one of the more intriguing issues. We tend to forget that leaders act, not on what you think or what I think, but on what they think. We know today that in December of 1940 Soviet intelligence acquired a copy of the German invasion order. In February of 1941 the United States from an opponent of Hitler inside Germany got a summary of it, and President Roosevelt had Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles give that to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, who sent it back. I had in 1991 to ask General Volkogonov, who wrote that biography of Stalin, whether Stalin did not take this as a confirmation of what his own intelligence had acquired, and Volkogonov told me that Stalin tossed it in the wastebasket as a provocation. He would not believe that his dear friend Adolf Hitler, who was doing the right thing in attacking those other capitalist countries, would dream of attacking a country that was providing him, ironically, with the gasoline for his tanks, until the Germans in fact invaded.

- Winston Churchill, as part of the product of early enigma decryptions, got material on the German intent to invade the Soviet Union and made the decision, which was close to a security breach, you know, to actually let Stalin have this information, and the Brits gave the Russians the same information that the Americans had, and Stalin's response was the same as that.

- It was a surprise for the Red Army because their leadership after the purchase made sure that nobody would have an independent point of view. So, it was no surprise to the British. It was no surprise to the United States. But it was a surprise to the leader who had a copy of the German invasion order. The other issue about which there is much debate and still surprise is the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

- Absolutely. So, I actually wrote about this in a book called *Combined Fleet Decoded* some years ago, and the problem with Pearl Harbor analysis, if we can call it that, is—well, two problems really: one, the degree of dispute over the role of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, because a lot of sort of latter-day theorists want to believe that Roosevelt intended for the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor or schemed for the Japanese to go after Pearl Harbor to get the United States into WWII, a theme that was really first pushed by Charles Beard very shortly after the war. But that's part of it. Part of it is also the question of finding a scapegoat. The disaster of Pearl Harbor and the sense of America being wounded, very much like 9/11 for some of us who are more recent, was so enormous that there had to be someone at fault, so everyone was out looking for the person who'd made the big mistake. Now, the truth is there are mistakes all along the line, number one. Number two, that the Japanese plan was in fact secret. There was, like in the case of Barbarossa, the opportunity to collect these indicators that might have shown that the Japanese had the intention of going after Pearl Harbor, and the problem was that the indicators didn't really function well. For example the earliest sort of sign that the Japanese might have an intent to attack Pearl Harbor came from the Peruvian ambassador in Tokyo, who went to the Americans ambassador and said, "I got this from the guy who was the cook to one of these senior Japanese officials. Here it is for what it's worth." And this was something like February of 1941. Well, the Japanese high command was fighting amongst themselves in February 1941 about what they should do, and the idea of attacking Pearl Harbor was not yet on the cards in February 1941. Similarly there are mistakes that were made just in, how should we say, military SOP. One of the arguments about Pearl Harbor is whether American search planes could have found the Japanese fleet, and there's a whole backstory to that. Another one was, these new radar gizmos that we're installing in Hawaii should have detected the Japanese airplanes in flight. And one of them did, and they called down the news to the command center, and the command center guy says, "No, no, don't worry about it. It's B-17s flying in from California." I bet you don't know that the officer who was in the command center that morning and said it was just B-17s from California, by the time of

the Cuban Missile Crisis was at NORAD in charge of telling whether the Soviets had launched ICBMs on the United States.

- People also forget that the Japanese naval headquarters did not agree to Yamamoto's plan until mid-October of 1941. I have often thought it interesting for December '41 to compare Hitler and Roosevelt. The Germans had been urging the Japanese to attack, and on the 7th of December when Hitler heard of the attack he was in his headquarters in East Prussia because of the crisis on the eastern front, and it was gonna take three or four days to go through all the routines to get to Berlin, call the German parliament and give them the good news, go through the diplomacy, and so on. And the idea of waiting for war three or four days, why that Hitler just thought was crazy. So from the headquarters in East Prussia he sent a message to the head of the German navy, who had been arguing for war with the United States since October '39, "Start sinking ships of the United States and eight other countries in the western hemisphere." There is another event in the same months that people generally have forgotten. Not only did Japan, Germany, and Italy go to war with the United States, but three other European countries declared war on this country: Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Roosevelt knew that the Italians and Germans had submarines in the Atlantic and could do something to us, but what on earth did the Hungarians, Romanians, and Bulgarians want to do to the United States? And in a measure for which I know of no precedent, he instructed our state department to try to persuade those three countries to withdraw their declarations of war and remain at peace with the US as they had been. That was handled through Turkey, which was still neutral, and in its capital Ankara, were the diplomats of everybody. So for months on end, our government at Roosevelt's insistence, tried to get those three to withdraw their declarations of war. In mid-June of '42 Roosevelt gave up, sent letters to the congress, these countries absolutely insist that they've got to have a war with the United States. We have not been able to persuade them to remain at peace, so the congress will need to pass a resolution declaring a state of war exists between the US and these three countries. I think in terms of attitude towards war, these two events of December '41 give us some real clues--one leader who doesn't want to wait three or four days, perish forbid, and one who waits half a year. It's, I think, insight into leaders that's worth thinking about.

- Okay, now since you've brought Turkey and Bulgaria into the conversation, let me circle around and talk a bit about spies. The question of how valuable were spies is one that reverberates throughout all this history. And the idea that spies have a value or not often sort of rests on the question of what was contributed by the spies. In WWII we have a significant situation where there are spies on the one hand, and there is deception on the other. I just want to throw out this example because it's one of the famous spy stories of WWII, the spy Cicero who was actually the valet to the British ambassador in Ankara, in Turkey. And by several German accounts this person was one of the most valuable spies that Nazi Germany had in WWII. Okay? Cicero operates for the Germans for a period of about, well let's call it, nine or ten months, from late 1943 into the spring of 1944. And one of his intelligence products for the Germans was originals of messages that had gone from the British foreign office to Ankara, which gave German code breakers the plain text of messages that they had received, and so it helped them to decipher the British code. Another one was the codename Overlord, which as you probably know was for the invasion of Europe. Alright, so it's clear that Cicero had an impact. Now, he walked away from spying for the Germans in the spring of 1944 because he learned that the British knew that there was a German spy in the British embassy in Ankara. And how did the British know that? It turns out that the secretary, a secretary--in fact the secretary to the German case officer in the Ankara embassy who was taking care of Cicero, that secretary had previously served in

Bulgaria. She was the daughter of a German foreign office official, and she as the daughter of a foreign office official had spent much of her life from, like, preteen years to early adulthood living in Cleveland where her father was the German console. So all her friends were American, all her connections were American, she wanted to be American, but she was a German national. And when the war began, the family is recalled to Germany, and she would have been a nurse or something like that except her father is able to get her this posting in the German foreign office. And in the German foreign office she becomes an OSS source, so she's reporting from Bulgaria to the Americans, then she gets posted to Ankara, where she is working for the guy who is the case officer of Cicero. Okay? So she reports that through her channels, and that's how the British apparently first learn of the penetration. Now, I was very impressed with that until I looked at the cables that Allen Dulles, who was the OSS chief of station in Bern, Switzerland, the cables that Dulles sent to Washington during the war. Alright? It turns out that the very first message that the German ambassador in Ankara sent back to Berlin--Franz von Papen was the ambassador--the very first message that he sent back to Berlin about the recruitment of Cicero revealed--we're talking Dulles now within OSS channels--Dulles had Papen's report of recruiting Cicero from the first minute it started in the fall of 1943. So, that raises the question of deception. That stuff that Cicero was reporting all through his activity as a German agent, was that British stuff fed to the Germans, or was it legitimate intelligence gathering? So this question of deception is hugely important in the Overlord invasion.

- Yes, and suddenly a major aspect of the relation of intelligence to Overlord, since you mentioned that, was that the British either turned or executed every German spy in the United Kingdom. Those who turned played a critical role in the deception operation for Normandy. That deception operation consisted of two parts. One was a fake army group in southeast England that was going to invade the Calais area. And to make sure that the Germans kind of got to hear about it, not only were they sending messages from these turned German spies working for the Allies, but the commander of the army group was to be George Patton, and the British and Americans were sure he would shoot off his mouth often enough that the Germans would learn and believe that he would command that army group.

- Now, while you're talking about the army group, let me just throw this in. Here's a place where bureaucratic politics plays a role in intelligence. Over on the German side the intelligence apparatus that is analyzing these reports was called Foreign Armies West, was a component of the German army, and they were aware that Hitler did not believe in the intelligence that they were feeding him, so they were having trouble getting Hitler to focus on the size of the threat in the west. So these reports of the fake army group gave them an opportunity to try and snow Hitler with information about how big and how bad and how mean was the threat.

- Yes, and in regard to the code issue in all this, there is an aspect that is also generally ignored. The overwhelming majority of those actually working on the codes were women. And Arlington Hall and navy annex where the Americans were breaking Japanese, primarily, but also German codes, the overwhelming majority of the people working there were women, including the ones who deciphered the Japanese message on the basis of which Yamamoto who commanded the Pearl Harbor attack was killed. In Bletchley Park in England where the Brits were developing further the Polish break into the German enigma machine, you had a very, very high proportion of women as well. What I have always found sort of intriguing is that Soviet intelligence included many agents who worked for the Soviet Union in England and in, especially in England but to some extent in this country, both when Germany and the Soviet Union were allied and after Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Which side you were on is regards Germany

made no difference to spies high up in British intelligence like Blunt and the Cambridge Five and all kinds of others. I've always thought that that was a kind of intriguing aspect of this.

- Well, while you're on that let me say this.

- Sure.

- There really is a problem in this whole history, and the problem revolves around the attitude of the west towards communism and the Soviet Union and the evolution of international relations through the 1930s. In the middle of the 1930s you have the Spanish Civil War, and republican Spain versus national Spain, each side of which was adopted by one of the sides in this history. The Soviets adopt the republic, and the nationalists are supported by the fascists, Hitler and Mussolini. Well, the question for British, young British idealists, young American idealists looking out at the world in the 1930s is really the question, for them I'm talking about now--and this raises the issue of morality of spying, morality of espionage--is really the question of, are the democracies confronting communism? And are the democracies confronting fascism? And in the case of the Ring of Five and British spies and to some degree with the American spies for the Soviets, really I think the place where they started is, we have got to confront fascism, and its only the Soviets that are doing it.

- Yes, but of course when the Soviets decided that they wanted the fascists to fight the capitalists and are providing them with the means to do so, these people continued to spy for the Soviet Union during the period when Stalin and Hitler are great good friends. Another--

- Except that raises the moral issue even higher.

- Yes.

- That moment. I mean, the French socialist party and the French communist party, the Italian communists, too--the Hitler/Soviet pact suddenly undermines their fundamental beliefs in the confrontation between the West and the East.

- And of course we have to keep in mind that because someone works in intelligence, does not guarantee that they are exceptionally intelligent.

(Laughter)

- There were in WWII some leaders in intelligence who were very, very poor. And the two I would suggest who were, without knowing it, competing for being the stupidest intelligence officer of the war, was on the German side General Gehlen, who in the spring of '42 takes over the eastern German army's intelligence and is invariably fooled by the Russians and is then after the war picked up by the western Allies and runs a Cold War intelligence operation for which he largely recruits Soviet moles or people whose criminal backgrounds makes them subject to blackmail to become Soviet moles. In the Pacific war you have probably at least, whether he could beat Gehlen I don't know, but he could beat any other American or British, and that's General Willoughby, who was the intelligence officer from the very beginning of General MacArthur, and who invariably in spite of very good raw material, particularly from breaking into Japanese codes, invariably underestimated the Japanese forces and after the end of the war followed unconsciously Gehlen's example in the Cold War of recruiting Soviet moles into American intelligence. I've always been of the opinion that the only time in WWII that General Marshall asked either Eisenhower in Europe or Nimitz and MacArthur in the Pacific, "Are you sure this is the right thing to do?" is in the summer of '45 when he checks with MacArthur before Olympic, the first invasion of the Japanese home island. And MacArthur, who had never received such a question before, before any of his earlier invasions, sent back a very careful, thoughtful response. And I am convinced that the reason Marshall did this was because he knew that once again Willoughby would provide and was providing MacArthur with erroneous summaries of what was originally

accurate intelligence on the Japanese forces in Kyushu, the island to be invaded, which were larger than the planned American invasion army, the same thing that had earlier happened in Biak when the American force was saved only by the invasion of Saipan in Nimitz's theater. But as I said, being in intelligence does not guarantee intelligence.

- Let me actually offer an example that comes--circles back to Pearl Harbor. There is a famous decrypt from the Japanese diplomatic code, actually the councilor code, called the Bomb Plot message, and this message was to the effect that Japanese spies in Oahu and Pearl Harbor area should report on more or less the daily comings and goings of the American Pacific fleet and its set of criteria for what ought to be reported. Well, a lot of people say that if this bomb plot message had been shipped to the authorities in Pearl Harbor, that that would have tipped off the American fleet command that there was a real threat to Pearl Harbor, and they could have taken precautions. But the guy who was the chief of naval communications at that time, and naval communications is where the American code breakers were situated at that time, said, "Don't transmit this message. This is just a routine thing, and Pearl Harbor doesn't need to know." That was not a smart idea.

- Well, these sorts of things happen. What I think the other side of all this is, that the Germans had sympathizers in large numbers in this country. But the spies they sent were generally hopeless incompetents and were relatively quickly discovered and arrested. And what I think is important is that again, just as Stalin acted on the basis of his preposterous notions, Hitler did, too. The United States was a weak country with a variety of inferior peoples, and one cannot understand his decision to launch the last major offensive that he could send against not the Brits, who had had hard knocks in the war, not the Russians who had had hard knocks in the war, but against the Americans, what we refer to as the Battle of the Bulge. Ironically the other side of this was that our own leaders on the spot did not pay enough attention to the intelligence that they were in fact getting on German radio silence in various places, the accumulation of reserves, and so on. But the idea that a major victory over the Americans on the western front would collapse the American home front and drive this country out of the war is preposterous, it seems to me.

- Absolutely. But you also are bringing us back to this issue of deception. What the Germans did before the Battle of the Bulge, which is actually very similar to what the Japanese did before Pearl Harbor, was to give the Allies--oh, and what we did before the Normandy invasion, too--give the Allies something to believe in that's different from what we actually intend to do. So, the Germans set us up before the Battle of the Bulge to believe that they were going to collect reserves in order to react to an American offensive, to the Allied offensive into the North German plain and have a massive maneuver that they could employ to blunt our attacks. And they deliberately reduced the level of their forces on the front to gather the strength that they would use for this offensive, making us further believe in the weakness of the German army as we came up into the Battle of the Bulge timeframe.

- It simply has to be recognized that in a worldwide conflict, issues of code breaking and espionage were of local and specific significance for understanding specific events as they occurred. There was one important difference in the sides' handling of these things. On the Allied side generally speaking there was argument. Officers would accept what they were told to do, but they would argue from time to time beforehand on the basis of what information they had. This was very much more rare on the German side, and it did not exist on the Japanese side. And there is what I think a striking illustrative example of this, at the time when Yamamoto was still pushing for the substitution of his Pearl Harbor plan for the battle plan of the Japanese navy in September of '41 he has the last paper exercise in his headquarters. And in that paper exercise, among the aircraft carriers

sunk in Pearl Harbor is the Yorktown. There is not a Japanese officer in the room who has the moral courage to say, "But your Excellency, how can we sink the Yorktown in Pearl Harbor when we know that it's in the Atlantic?" Not one. They all had physical courage. They would fight for their emperor, they would die for their emperor, but what was lacking was a willingness to question. It's true that in '42 the Yorktown is moved to the Pacific. It's damaged in the Battle of Coral Sea, and after Midway it is torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, but my point is that the Japanese knew that it's in the Atlantic.

- Let me make another point, too. A major difference, I think, between the sides is that, on the Allies side with the exception of the Soviets who did not do this, there was a deliberate move to institutionalize the analysis of intelligence. Both the office of strategic services and the British through their joint intelligence committee actually created an apparatus to take the result of all this information that's coming in and sort of put it together and think about what it meant. The obvier on the German side never had that capability. The Italian intelligence had nothing like that either, nor did the Soviets, but both the Americans and the British institutionalized this analytical capability, and I think that gave them an extra level, an extra layer of effectiveness in terms of their intelligence work.

(Applause)

- So, on the point that you ended with about the analytical capability, it would seem to me that all sides would have such a tremendous volume of information, that developing analytical capabilities would in a way be the greatest challenge. And, is that true? I mean, in retrospect we can identify particular pieces of information and wonder how they reacted to it, but weren't they always just flooded with information?

- I would say, and I have in fact argued, that there was a flood of information. I call them --I talk about pillars of intelligence--that's the spying, the code breaking, the overhead reconnaissance, and the exploitation of captured materials like documents or pieces of equipment--as providing the sort of closest thing to real-time knowledge as imaginable in WWII, so the implication of the flood of information is right there. And yes, I think you're right that it's a great challenge to be able to sort of deal with this tsunami as it is happening. But the act of establishing a structure to actually put this together had to character of preparing you to deal with that situation. Another example: both the Americans and the British formed committees to combine intelligence experts with military and naval operational people to analyze claims of sinkings of enemy ships. And claims of aircraft destroyed in order to better serve their own intelligence analysts with accurate assessments of what in fact was the damage to the enemy. And the Italians and Germans again had nothing like that. When the Japanese aircraft carrier Taiho was sunk at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, there was an inquest within the Japanese command about how and why had this ship perished, and there was no intelligence input. So yes, you're right in the general sense, and I think again you'd have to score this as an Allied advantage.

- I'm curious about the Japanese theater. After the Japanese water codes and army codes were broken in 1943 were there any physical assets or spies in the Pacific theater that could augment or confirm the codes and the information that was being derived from them?

- I would say the subjects of espionage, the subject of espionage, works out very differently in the Pacific than it does in Europe. I mean, we were talking about Cicero a little while ago. You have these dedicated sort of agents. You also had resistance movements in Europe, and those resistance movements were another fountain of information for the military commands. In the Pacific you have only resistance movements, you know. There were few people in the Philippines for example who actually acted as spies for the Allies, but in truth because their means of communication

had to go through the resistance, actually there isn't a real sort of espionage overlay. This is true until almost the end of the war. And the early part of 1945, the OSS finally gets agent assets into place in Indochina, Thailand, and Burma. And that's only for the first time. And MacArthur of course had forbidden the OSS from operating in his theater of the war, so you had no OSS there. MacArthur had something that was called the Independent Allied Bureau, if I remember that right, which did the same kind of work as OSS, but their assignment was to work with resistance groups. So, you don't have espionage as a check on the code breakers. What you have instead is the output of prisoner interrogation and captured documents and technical intelligence products that then served to confirm or deny what we think we got in the message traffic.

(Applause)

- Thank you to Dr. Gerhard Weinberg and Dr. John Prados for this fascinating discussion, and thank you to the Boeing Company, Rita and John Canning, Reed Smith, and Motorola Solutions for sponsoring this program. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

- Visit the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. Explore original exhibits on military history or be a part of a live studio audience. Watch other episodes of *Pritzker Military Presents*. Find out What's On at PritzkerMilitary.org.

(Theme music)

- *Pritzker Military Presents* is made possible by members of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library and its sponsors. The views and opinions expressed in this program are not necessarily those of the Museum and Library.

(Theme music)

- The preceding program was produced by the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.