

History's Who's Who: Harry Kidder

Harry Kidder was an enlisted radioman and an amateur radio enthusiast in the early 1920s when



then Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Charles Hughes asked U.S. Pacific Fleet commanders to start monitoring the airwaves for Japanese naval communications. Chief Radioman (CRM) Kidder did just that — he taught himself the Japanese Kata Kana writing system and the Japanese use of Morse code and began providing the information to his commanders.

“On-the-Roof-Gang” class of 1934-35. Chief Radioman Harry Kidder is in the middle of the back row.

In the late 1920s, the Navy set up a school on the roof of the Main Navy Building in Washington, D.C. to teach Japanese intercept to select radiomen. Recognized for his outstanding skill in the new field of radio intelligence (RI), CRM Kidder was selected to become the first instructor for this school. Chief Kidder developed and refined the curriculum for the new training, and instructed the first three classes, which ran between 1928 and 1930. Kidder returned after sea duty to teach classes 11, 12, and 13. In all, Kidder instructed six classes for a total of 38 Navy students, the most of any of the Navy RI instructors. The Navy and Marine graduates of this training eventually became known as the “On-The-Roof Gang.”

In between stints as an “On-The-Roof Gang” instructor, Chief Kidder returned to the fleet to help establish and modernize Station HYPO on Hawaii. Chief Kidder was seen as the patriarch of the radio intelligence family and became affectionately known among the “On-The-Roof Gang” as “Pappy.”