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# DAILY ENTERPRISE



## (U) HISTORY TODAY - 13 August 2015 - Pearl Harbor & Robert Christopher

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(U) When Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan in December 1941, Robert Christopher was a freshman at Yale University. He had decided to study Japanese at his father's suggestion. Christopher's father, a machine-gunner in World War I, had suggested that his son learn Japanese because intelligence would be a safer occupation in the coming war.

(U) In 1942, Christopher was drafted by the army and recruited by Arlington Hall, the Army's cryptologic headquarters. He attended Arlington Hall's language school, run by the scholar Edwin O. Reischauer.

(U) Christopher pointed out that, "We learned archaic Japanese rather than what the Japanese were currently speaking because military messages were written in this classic Japanese. Our instruction was excellent, but we only had a few months' training before we were thrust into operations."



(U) In 1944, Lieutenant Christopher went to Central Bureau in Brisbane (CBB). CBB was an Allied combined cryptologic unit, composed primarily of Americans and Australians, which provided support to military operations in the Southwest Pacific theater (Australia northward.)

(U) Throughout the war, General Douglas MacArthur wanted Central Bureau, his signals intelligence organization, to be near his headquarters. Therefore, when MacArthur moved to Manila in March 1945, personnel from Central Bureau began moving to San Miguel Luzon in the Philippines. Christopher was part of the contingent that came to San Miguel in the spring of 1945.

(U) After considerable work on decrypts of military messages, in August 1945 Christopher confronted an unusual challenge in a particular message: "We knew this message had to be important because it was broadcast in the clear. As the senior linguist at San Miguel, Luzon, I worked on this message myself. It presented some interesting problems. The message contained words that I [had] never [seen] before. For instance, [I encountered] the word "Chin." Eventually I found the right dictionary and discovered that "Chin" stood for "I." The only person allowed to use this particular expression was the emperor of Japan. I was translating Emperor Hirohito's 15 August message telling the troops to surrender.

(U) "It [was] the most memorable message that I ever translated. What a thrill!"

(U) Robert Christopher is on the right end of the first row in the photograph of some officers and enlisted from CBB. Fourth from the left is Hugh Erskine, then a senior linguist, later a senior official at NSA. Third from the right is Clarence Yamagata, a nisei who was one of the senior linguists at CBB.

(U) August 15 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese decision to surrender and bring an end to World War II. What today's generation owes those who sacrificed to bring about the downfall of Nazi

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Germany and imperial Japan is incalculable. Whatever our opinion about today's world, anything less than victory in WWII would have meant a world vastly different than it is, and, almost certainly, a world much worse than we can imagine.

(U) The *History Today* staff wishes to express its thanks and its great respect for those who served in the war.

(U) Discuss historical topics with interesting folks. Visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

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