

(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) Two-Gun Milt

(U) In his memoirs, New York Times journalist Harrison Salisbury recalled an unusual incident during the controversy over his newspaper's publication of the "Pentagon Papers." The "Pentagon Papers" was an unvarnished history of the Vietnam War prepared by the Department of Defense and contained a great deal of information that was secret or otherwise not released to the public. Some U.S. newspapers obtained a copy and began to publish excerpts, the Times among them. The Nixon administration sought an injunction against the newspapers in court.

(U) While the case was before the court, the White House arranged to send a representative to discuss with the editor of the Times the inadvisability of such publication. Since much of the material in question was cryptologic, an NSA official was chosen to be the administration's representative. Reluctantly, officials at the Times agreed and arranged a meeting in a private room at the New York Bar Association building. The Times personnel referred to the NSA official as the "Top Spook."

(U) The Top Spook arrived, with a bodyguard, and met the senior official of the Times. The newspaperman recalled (incorrectly) that both the bodyguard and Top Spook carried two guns, and it was his belief the bodyguard had orders to shoot his companion should there be a kidnapping attempt.

(U) In the meeting, the Top Spook assured the Times official that his mission was apolitical and not related to a cover-up of alleged misdeeds. However, the Top Spook asked that certain sections might very well expose U.S. intelligence capabilities, which were important to maintain as secret, and which might otherwise "disabuse foreign governments [about] the security of their communications." The Times official asked whether publication would endanger U.S. codes (one of the public controversies), to which the Top Spook replied, "Hell, no."

(U) Years later, while writing the Pentagon Papers section of his autobiography, Harrison Salisbury asked the Times official involved to check his original notes and see if the Top Spook's name were available. It was. The Top Spook was "Milton Zaslow, Deputy Director, Office of Production of the National Security Agency."

(U) Mr. Milton Zaslow was born in 1921 in New York City and graduated from the

College of the City of New York in 1942, with majors in history and economics. After studying Asian languages at New York University, he enlisted in the army in 1943. After training, Zaslow was assigned to the Pacific Joint Intelligence Center. He served with the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions in the Tinian operation and with XXIV Corps during the Okinawa invasion as a combat intelligence officer. At war's end, he was one of the first Americans to enter Japan as part of a Navy technical intelligence mission, just two weeks after the A-bombs were dropped.

(U//~~FOUO~~) At the end of World War II, Captain Zaslow returned to the U.S. and got an assignment to the Army Security Agency, one of NSA's predecessors, as a linguist who knew both Chinese and Japanese. He converted to civilian status in 1946 and joined the Armed Forces Security Agency when it was formed in 1949.

(U//~~FOUO~~) In 1950 Zaslow, along with several other Chinese linguists, developed information from public access communications in the People's Republic of China that revealed the movement of a large force of Chinese troops to the Korean-Manchurian border. This was a strong indication that the PRC intended to intervene in the Korean War.

(U//~~FOUO~~) From 1961 through 1963, Mr. Zaslow was deputy chief, then chief, NSA Pacific. Upon his return, he became chief of the organization responsible for China, followed by assignment, in 1965, as deputy chief, B Group. Three years later he became chief, B. After some staff assignments, he assumed the reins of A Group in 1973, making Milton Zaslow one of only two persons to lead both the Far East and Soviet groups at NSA.

(U//~~FOUO~~) Zaslow also was chief of the group reporting on Vietnam during the war. He proudly notes that his group predicted every enemy offensive during the war and "never predicted one that did not occur."

(U//~~FOUO~~) His staff assignments were the highest. In 1969 the DIRNSA, Admiral Noel Gayler, assigned him as the first NSA/CSS representative at the Pentagon. He continued his service as deputy assistant director for production (predecessor of the Signals Intelligence Directorate) from 1970 to 1973. Mr. Zaslow was the Special U.S. Liaison Officer, London, from 1975 through 1978. He completed his career at NSA as deputy director for telecommunications and computer services (DDT) in 1980.

(U) Among the many awards Mr. Zaslow earned during his career were the NSA Exceptional Civilian Service Award in 1971, the DoD Distinguished Civilian Service Award in 1971 (the highest honor for civilians given by the DoD), and the Director of Central Intelligence's National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal in 1980.

(U) Mr. Zaslow continues to serve as an unpaid consultant to the Center for Cryptologic

History and plays a key role in the National Cryptologic Museum Foundation.

(U) But it is as “Top Spook” that Milton Zaslow is known outside NSA.

(U//~~FOUO~~) Zaslow reviewed Harrison Salisbury's autobiography and challenges several key facts in the “Top Spook” episode. He undertook the mission to New York to protect some COMINT successes that might be undermined if the Pentagon Papers were published in full. During his conversations with the Times official, Zaslow proposed several different methods that would allow him (as an expert on Vietnam and on communications intelligence) to inspect the papers and advise the Times on ways to “sanitize” them. However, the newspaper official was not responsive to any of these proposals.

(U//~~FOUO~~) And the two guns? Zaslow's companion was a courier, not a bodyguard. Zaslow had gone to New York under the misunderstanding that there was a possibility the Times might give him copies of the “Pentagon Papers” to take back to Washington for review. Since the government still considered those papers classified and since regulations of the time required that classified material be carried by an armed courier, Zaslow's companion was packing. But, as Milt recalled, the courier “had one, and I had none.” (And, it should be emphasized, the courier absolutely had no orders to shoot Zaslow in the event of a kidnapping attempt).

(U) However, it seems that the credo expressed by the newspaper editor in the film “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence” may still apply -- “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” Good stories don't always make good history. The legend of Two-Gun Milt persists.

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