

ON THE BOOKSHELF

“OSS Operation Black Mail: One Woman’s Covert War Against The Imperial Japanese Army”

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Naval Institute Press

Here’s another great true story for Women’s History Month. Elizabeth “Betty” McIntosh spend 18 months with the OSS in the most thrilling adventure of her life, leading a Black Propaganda offensive against the Imperial Japanese soldier. Her mission was to demoralize the average Japanese soldier into deserting or surrendering, and they could seldom be sure that their work was effective or not. The former journalist had a real knack for deception!

Betty was the Acting Director of the OSS MO (Morale Operations) Branch for the entire theater of China-Burma-India-Indochina. She and others in her group believed that the individual Japanese soldier and sailor were not samurai warriors, but ordinary men called to suffer greatly for their country. To that end, they believed these military men were also husbands, fathers, sons; they were not willing to throw away their lives on a futile, losing cause.

To that end, Betty oversaw (and often wrote) thousands of pamphlets and radio scripts; generated “fiendishly clever” rumors; and printed a variety of faked Japanese, Burmese and Chinese newspapers. Starting in 1944, as the war was gradually being lost by the Japanese, the OSS MO targeted the individuals who could be persuaded to surrender.

While Japanese warriors on Iwo Jima and the other islands leading to Japan fought fiercely and to the last man, in the China-Burma-India Theater they were more pragmatic. Japanese soldiers not only surrendered willingly and peacefully, they eagerly began to help the Allies, considering their own military leaders had lied to them about the war from the beginning. For those in the C-B-I Theater that war had been going on over a decade, supplies were scarce, and starvation and misery had become their norm.

The MO was constantly running in supply issues, and territorial issues. The colonial powers (i.e. Great Britain, France, and Holland) were extremely reluctant to allow any of their territories to be liberated. When the people of these nations wanted to be free, Americans were encouraging. That angered the colonizers, and they were not as cooperative with their American Allies, who depended on them for supplies that took forever to get from the USA.

Nonetheless, Betty and the other OSS agents soldiered on, despite the giant bugs, the heat, the snakes etc. Their war was a quiet one, but just as vital. When the war was won, President Truman initially planned to disband the Office of Strategic Services, but soon realized that we needed the data-gathering even more in a Cold War setting. Some of the OSS people stayed on in the new organization, the CIA; some of them had friends among communists (which made them suspect); some of them married and retired (like Paul and Julia Child; yes, the renowned chef.) They all helped save the world, and we are in their debt.