

EAVESDROPPING ON THE

by GORDON CHARLES

During the early stages of World War II, had I not been sitting at a typewriter and listening with headphones to the distant crackle of Japanese radio messages, two of my grandchildren might never have been born, years later.

As a radio intercept operator for the 115th Signal Radio Intelligence Company, stationed in San Francisco, California, my wartime work was of the highest secrecy. The Japanese did not know their radio transmissions were highly overpowered, allowing their traffic to be heard from the West Coast of the United States.

Although the messages were in Japanese and code numbers, we were still able to mark the enemy's troop locations on a huge map of the Pacific Theater. Frequencies were different for the Japanese operators but we were able to link them up eventually, and we put everything we heard into writing. Our results then went to Washington, DC,

Staff Sergeant Ed Kalohn (standing at far right) and fellow mechanics were stationed at the Dinjan forward fighter base in the Assam Valley in northern India. Back in the United States, T-5 (Corporal) Gordon Charles was at the Presidio of San Francisco (below) listening in on Japanese plans.



Ed Kalohn



FUTURE

where the code was broken and the intelligence used against our foes.

One night in early 1944 when radio traffic was rather quiet, I began to scan the frequencies and was surprised to find a very clear signal, one we had never heard. I started copying my find, while another operator searched for and found the other end of the distant communications.

These transmissions went on for a solid week, and when they ended, we still did not know what we had. Military intelligence in Washington, DC, however, discovered that our messages contained the complete Japanese battle

plans to invade eastern India near the Plains of Imphal. Unknown to us, this was part of a broad Japanese counter-attack to relieve pressure on their forces that were under attack by U.S. and British units in nearby Burma. The Allies stationed at Imphal consisted mostly of British army soldiers and some U.S. airmen. The weak Allied contingent was no match for the oncoming Japanese. However, forewarned by our radio intercepts, Allied forces

in the region set up a defense and rushed reinforcements to Imphal. They completely defeated the Japanese, who were stunned to meet a well-prepared defense, saving India and many lives among our armed forces.

Such intelligence findings were, of course, strictly protected and we were prohibited from discussing them with anyone else. Just two years ago,

**Charles's 115th
Signal Radio
Intelligence
Company shoulder
insignia**



Gordon Charles



Ed Kalohn

Ed Kalohn

though, I found how this all related to my own family while talking to Edward Kalohn of Pontiac. His son, August Edward Kalohn, married my daughter, Ruthann, and they have two children, Christopher and Laura.

More than fifty years after their service, the two soldiers discovered how they planted the seed for their family tree during World War II. Charles's daughter, Ruthann, married Ed's son, Edward Jr. The couple is shown between their children, Laura and Christopher in this recent photo.

It was then I learned that Ed had been in the armed forces with the Army Air Corps' 59th Service Squadron in India, stationed near Imphal. The land around Imphal, he said, was ideal for setting up an effective ambush when word came of an impending Japanese invasion. History reveals that it all worked out in our favor, although our foes never did figure out what went wrong. Shortly after the botched invasion attempt, the 115th received a special citation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The citation didn't reveal what it was for, but we all knew.

Ed Kalohn and I agreed that it was pure luck how things worked out that way because it was likely that he would have been killed in a surprise invasion. Instead, he returned safely, married and had two children, as well as two grandchildren we both share. mh



A syndicated outdoor writer living in the Traverse City area, GORDON CHARLES has written for a number of Michigan newspapers and magazines and has authored five books. Pontiac resident ED KALOHN retired from the tool and die section of the General Motors research facility in Warren.



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