

Rear Admiral Ellis Zacharias

In the early 1950s, until his untimely death in Springfield, June 27, 1961, Adm. Ellis Zacharias (Ret'd) and his wife Claire, joined the summer colony in Springfield. They purchased the cottage built by Kirk Heath on the pine and hemlock covered point near the Adams/Nulsen boathouse on Lake Kolelemook. The house is now owned by Stephen and Daphene Klein. The Zacharias' loved their "get away home" in Springfield. In their Christmas letter of 1953, he tells of arriving in New Hampshire by train in late June. The first thing they did after arriving in Springfield was to jump into Lake Kolelemook!

Ellis Zacharias was born in Jacksonville, Florida, 1 January 1890. He graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD in 1912. During WWI, he served as a line officer aboard the USS Pittsburgh.

In 1920, Admiral Zacharias became interested in intelligence as a young officer, when given a three year assignment to go to Japan as a language student. He learned to speak Japanese and became familiar with the Japanese people and their culture. He also began to realize that they were very interested in him and what he was doing. Toward the end of his tour of duty, he happened to be on a pier in Yokohama, 1 September 1923 when an earthquake destroyed the city and surrounding areas. It was quite a harrowing experience. He helped with the rescue efforts before leaving the area.

When he arrived back in Washington, the powers that be would have been better served if they had paid more attention to the report he made of his observations and how the Japanese were reacting to the Naval Conference that limited their sea power in the 1920s. He wanted to do more with intelligence, but was assigned as navigator on the "Rochester" in the Panama Canal Zone. Although he was not assigned to intelligence, he became very interested in the number of Japanese, especially barbers in the Canal Zone area. They were obviously spying on the Americans and using the shops as "drops" for information.

Probably the best event that happened to Zacharias in Panama was to meet and eventually marry Claire Miller. Claire was a pioneer and veteran in American aviation. During World War I, she went to Washington and took a job in the photographic section of the US Air Signal Corps, which soon became the US Air Service. She did photo interpretation, analyzing photos taken from the air to determine ground targets. She worked with important names in aviation such as Billy Mitchell. Claire was interested in the Panama Canal because it was viewed as the world's most vital target by possible attacking aircraft. The couple had two sons, Ellis Jr. and Jerry.

The United States was behind England and the European countries in intelligence gathering. During World War 1, we had relied especially on the British. The US had some catching up to do.

Back in Washington in 1926, Zacharias was given a top secret assignment. He would be learning cryptanalysis about the same time that Capt. Isorokoe Yamamoto was a Japanese naval attaché in Washington, DC. (He would later be Commander-in-chief of Japan's combined fleet and instrumental in Japan's role in the war.) Zacharias became one of Yamamoto's poker partners and learned about Yamamoto's personality, etc from these gatherings which would give insight into his intelligence work.

The next assignments for Zacharias found him back in the Pacific, China and Japan where he continued gathering intelligence. Even when he was given other assignments as commander of destroyers or battleships, he continued his intelligence studies. From the beginning, he was one of the few who understood the importance of gathering intelligence.

After an absence of almost three years spent at sea and at the Naval War College, Newport, Capt Zacharias was glad to become head of the Far Eastern Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Not only was intelligence necessary in the mid 1930s, but the counter intelligence, prevented the enemy from finding out about us. Since the 1920s, Zacharias had met and often socialized with Japanese who would become leaders in Japan. He often knew their way of thinking, and could find out their plans.

By November 1940, he was sent to Hawaii to command the heavy cruiser Salt Lake City. Through his knowledge of the Japanese, he was able to tell people such as Adm. Kimmel, Commander in Chief in Hawaii, how he thought the Japanese would begin a war with the US. It would begin with an air attack, on a weekend, without a declaration of war. They would launch planes from carriers so that they would be as far away as possible protecting their ships. (It is too bad that people, such as Adm. Kimmel, did not listen.) He also believed that when a third envoy came to Washington, DC, to join the other two envoys, the war would begin. This also came true. His cruiser, Salt Lake City was not in Pearl Harbor on 7 December, 1941 when the attack occurred.

The Salt Lake City took part in the US first major successful offensive against the Gilbert and Marshall Islands in 1942 under the vanguard of Adm. Halsey. It was at this time that Zacharias began planning missions. This later became a regular routine. The Salt Lake City was one of the cruisers escorting Lieut. Gen James Doolittle on his bombing raid on Tokyo. This was the first active co-operation between the Navy and the Army Air Force.

During the summer of 1942, he was ordered to report to Washington, DC. for duty as Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence. He would be there one year. While there Zacharias attempted to accelerate "the transformation of intelligence into a valuable tool for the commanders in the field." There had been no coordination of intelligence and there were many inexperienced personnel. Therefore, he began a training program that coordinated intelligence and logistics where it was needed. Also begun was an all

out secret psychological warfare campaign against the German navy and eventually was used on the Japanese. This was done by the use of radio broadcasts.

September 1943, found Zacharias back in command of a battleship, the "New Mexico." His ship was part of a major combatant unit at Tarawa and the conquest of the Marshall Islands.

After a brief assignment in the 11th Naval District, Zacharias was transferred to Washington, DC. in 1945, as President Roosevelt, returning from Yalta, spoke before a joint session of Congress about the Yalta Conference. President Roosevelt soon went to Warm Springs, GA, for a much needed rest where he died in April 1945. Admiral Zacharias had plans for using psychological warfare on the Japanese who were all but defeated. What seemed to be holding up the surrender was the misconception that the leaders in both countries involved had over the meaning of unconditional surrender and how unconditional surrender originally came about.

Admiral Zacharias prepared a series of radio broadcasts to the Japanese people that helped to soften up and convince those Japanese who wanted the war to end, that they should surrender. He actually had broken their resistance BEFORE the atom bombing of Hiroshima, which he knew nothing about before hand.

Ellis Zacharias became Rear Admiral and head of Naval Intelligence until he was forced to retire after a heart attack in 1946. He retired with 34 years of service. He went on to write Secret Missions which was made into a radio series, and Behind Closed Doors, which was made into a TV series. He was kept busy with speaking tours around the country, returning to Lake Kolelemook whenever he could.

According to the Arlington National Cemetery website, Admiral Zacharias was buried in Arlington Cemetery 3 July 1961, and Claire joined him in 1992.

Patsy Heath Caswell

References: There was so much more that could be said about Admiral Zacharias' role in World War 11, I would suggest reading Behind Closed Doors, and Secret Missions. They are out of print, but I got a dog-eared paperback copy of Secret Missions through Barnes and Noble old books. Behind Closed Doors is available at the Libbie A. Cass Library. There was information on the Arlington National Cemetery website, and also used was the Zacharias Christmas Letter sent in 1959 to friends and neighbors.