

COLONEL ABRAHAM SINKOV **US Army, Retired (Deceased)**



In August 1907, Abraham Sinkov, one of the Army's pioneering cryptanalysts, was born in Philadelphia. Educated as a Mathematician, Sinkov joined the Army's new Signal Intelligence Service (SIS) in April 1930 as one of the first four junior analysts. William Friedman (HoF 1988), the legendary SIS chief, personally selected Sinkov and the others and oversaw their training in cryptology. By the mid-1930s, Friedman and his small team were able to make important headway in breaking the Japanese diplomatic codes. In the ensuing years, Sinkov would, however, prove more than just a talented code-breaker—he was an able leader and administrator in the field.

In July 1936, Sinkov established Monitoring Station #4 in Panama, the Army's first permanent intercept site outside the continental United States. Initially, Sinkov's collection team gathered Japanese diplomatic traffic to and from Central America. To support the local Army commanders, however, Sinkov switched to collecting traffic from the Latin

American countries and achieved success against several Mexican and Colombian ciphers and made progress against Brazilian codes. With valuable field experience under his belt, Sinkov returned to Washington and began attacking Italian diplomatic codes. In February 1941, Sinkov headed the Army delegation to England, which helped lay the groundwork for the successful Anglo-American cryptologic cooperation of World War II.

In June 1942, seven months after the US entered World War II, now-MAJ Sinkov took command of the 837th Signal Intelligence Service in Melbourne, Australia. The 837th was the American component of the Central Bureau, the code-breaking organization for GEN Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theater. Officially the Central Bureau's director was MG Spencer Akin, MacArthur's Chief Signal Officer, but he left the day-to-day operations to Sinkov. Sinkov's leadership, organizational abilities, and practical experience helped forge a cohesive SIGINT organization from a divergent assortment of American and Australian intercept, analytical and support units and personnel.

During its first year, the Central Bureau faced grueling work as it struggled to unravel Japanese codes and ciphers. Yet, the labors gave Sinkov and his analysts valuable experience and valuable expertise for the future. In March 1943, SGT Joseph Richard

(HoF 1993) discovered some patterns and changes in the Water Transport Code, which the Japanese used to encrypt traffic on their troop movement throughout the Pacific. While Richard scrutinized the code, Sinkov coordinated with the Signal Intelligence Service at Arlington Hall. The result was a dramatic breakthrough. By mid-1943, the Central Bureau was reading traffic that laid out the Japanese troops and reinforcement shipments, an invaluable tool for MacArthur's operations.

In early 1944, Sinkov and his analysts received a huge windfall when an Australian patrol discovered the entire set of codebooks from a Japanese division and immediately forwarded them to the Central Bureau. Exploiting the information, the bureau could now read the main Japanese Army codes. Inevitably, this capability provided enormous advantages for American operations in New Guinea and the Philippines. Under Sinkov's direction, the Central Bureau had become a first-rate cryptologic organization.

Sinkov ended the war as the Chief Cryptanalytic Officer for US Army Forces in the Far East. After the war, he served with the SIS successor organizations—the Army Security Agency and later the Armed Forces Security Agency—ending finally with the National Security Agency (NSA). At NSA, he served as deputy director of production before retiring in 1962.

COL Sinkov was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1987 as one of the original six Distinguished Members of the MI Corps. He passed away on 19 January 1998.

(Note: This biography was written by Mr. Michael E. Bigelow, Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) Command Historian, and published in the August 2008 issue of INSCOM Insight.)



The SIS about 1935: Seated, Mrs. Louise Newkirk Nelson; Standing, Left to Right: Mr. H. F. Bearce, Dr. Solomon Kullback, Captain Harrod G. Miller, USA, Mr. William F. Friedman, Dr. A. Sinkov, Lt. L. T. Jones, USCG, and Mr. Frank



COL Sinkov was called to Active Duty in 1941 and served in the Signal Corps as a Cryptographer. As a Colonel (right), he commanded the Central Bureau and was directly responsible for the solving of the Japanese Red Code.



The original Distinguished Members of the MI Corps pose for a group photo with MG Julius Parker and CSM Robert Retter during activation ceremonies in 1987. Abraham Sinkov stands on the far right.