

Intelligence in Public Media

Loyalty First: The Life and Times of Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief Intelligence Officer

David A. Foy (Casemate, 2023), 288 pages, photographs, maps, appendices, bibliography, index etc

Reviewed by Stephen C. Mercado

America is the land of opportunity, where ambitious men and women have come in search of opportunity and success. Charles Andrew Willoughby, a German immigrant of multiple names and unclear origin, joined the US Army as a private before World War I and rose to the rank of major general before the end of World War II. Gen. Douglas MacArthur made Willoughby his chief military intelligence officer (G-2) in Manila the month before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and invaded the Philippines in December 1941.

Willoughby served his mentor as G-2 throughout the Pacific Campaign, at MacArthur's headquarters in occupied Japan, and in the Korean War. At the side of the "American Caesar" for his highs and lows over the course of 10 years, Willoughby came under criticism for his "Prussian" mannerisms and alleged practice of producing intelligence to suit his superior's wishes rather than playing it straight. For students of intelligence and readers of military history, such a man's life deserves a telling. David Foy's *Loyalty First* is the first to do so.

Foy earned a doctoral degree in Modern European History before embarking on a career as a military analyst. Late in his career he served as the Intelligence Community historian in CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence. Author of *For You the War is Over: American Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Stein & Day, 1984), Foy has also reviewed numerous books, for the most part intelligence histories of Europe and the Soviet Union in World War II and the Cold War, including for this journal.

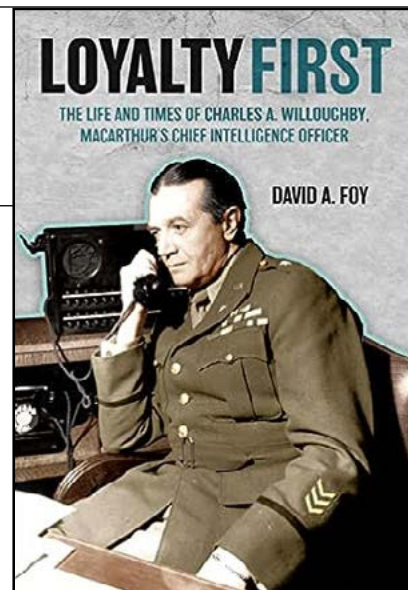
The author presents Willoughby's life from start to finish. Born in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1892, supposedly of a German father and an American mother, Willoughby came to the United States in 1910 and joined the army. Later, as MacArthur's G-2 and a member of his "Bataan Gang" in the years of war, occupation, and war again, Willoughby worked to build organizations to provide his superior with intelligence while keeping the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA, and other organizations out of MacArthur's area of operation or, at a minimum, under his control. Willoughby followed MacArthur's forced exit from the military in 1951 by retiring several months later.

He then spent much of his time until his death in Florida in 1972 seeking to stay relevant as an intelligence veteran and defending his legacy and that of MacArthur against their critics.

Foy brings to readers a great deal of information on Willoughby as an intelligence officer. From the author we learn that Willoughby, the first chief editor of the Army journal *Military Review*, published overseas information in its pages by enlisting foreign students at the Command and General Staff School in Fort Leavenworth to produce summaries of articles from various languages in foreign publications. Elsewhere, he initiated the Military Dictionary Project that created valuable military reference works for officers and soldiers in World War II. In Australia, he commanded thousands of Japanese-American linguists who translated captured Japanese military documents in the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service (ATIS). In occupied Japan, he directed intelligence and counterintelligence activities in Japan and elsewhere in Asia. In Korea, he failed to call the war's outbreak and was far too late in warning MacArthur about the Chinese forces crossing the Yalu River into Korea.

We also learn a few things about Willoughby the man. Working early in his career as a military attache in several Latin American countries, in 1923 he met and married Juana Manuela Rodriguez, born in Puerto Rico. Together they had a daughter, Olga. In 1951, he wed again, marrying Marie Antoinette Pratt, daughter of a Japanese mother and a British lawyer who had taken Japanese citizenship. Her sister married MacArthur's political adviser, William J. Sebald. In their sunset years the two sisters moved with their husbands to Naples, Florida, and lived as neighbors.

One problem with this book is that Foy often stumbles in telling a story that takes place largely in Asia,



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which is far from his area of expertise. In one passage, for example, he describes the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, as “a combat veteran of the Chinese Civil War,” when in fact he had led Korean fighters under Chinese command against the Japanese in Manchuria. *Loyalty First* repeatedly fumbles Chinese, Japanese, and Korean names as well as the systems for transcribing them. Foy refers to Gen. Yamashita Tomoyuki, famous for taking the British bastion at Singapore early in the war, as Yamashita Tomoyuki and as Tomoyuki Yamashita.^a Foy compounds the error by referring to him at one point as the “Tiger of Malaysia,” a reference to his victorious Singapore campaign; Yamashita was the “Tiger of Malaya” and Malaysia came into existence only in 1963.

Other errors and omissions are simply hard to understand. He relates the ATIS coup in translating the *Japanese Army's Register of Officers*, disseminated as ATIS Publication No. 2, *Alphabetical List of Japanese Army Officers*, but mistakenly writes that ATIS disseminated it in May 1944; the document cover shows its release in May 1943. Foy states Willoughby's first wife died in 1940. Readily available genealogy records show she died in 1976. Her death certificate listed her as a widow, which raises the possibility that Willoughby had never divorced her before marrying a second time. Foy writes that Willoughby and his first wife had one child, their daughter Olga; in reality Willoughby was her second husband, she had had a son and a daughter with her first spouse, and Willoughby for a time had recognized her first two children as his stepchildren.

The book also suffers from the author's penchant for secondary sources over primary ones. For a biography of Charles Willoughby, we read very few words actually spoken or written by the man. The book's bibliography contains none of his many books and articles. The same is true for those who knew him. Col. Sidney Mashbir, who managed ATIS under Willoughby in Australia and briefly in Occupied Japan, expressed some harsh views about his former boss in his “Oral Reminiscences” interview with D. Clayton James, on file at the MacArthur Archives, where Foy did much of the research for the book. The interview, Mashbir's autobiography, and his magazine articles are missing from *Loyalty First*. The most glaring omission, however, is Willoughby's own account of his years in Tokyo, which he dictated in Florida shortly before his death to a former South Korean intelligence officer who had worked under him in Japan and during the Korean War. The resultant book appeared in Japanese in Tokyo soon after Willoughby's death.^b

Finally, Foy condemns Willoughby for errors in intelligence and for putting loyalty to MacArthur above his duty to produce honest intelligence assessments, but what are we to make of his charges? It would have been helpful if the author had contrasted Willoughby with other G-2 officers of that time who had better batting averages and the courage to produce intelligence that contradicted the ambitions of their superiors.

Loyalty First ends by suggesting Willoughby's life and career offer valuable lessons on “speaking truth to power” and other important requirements of intelligence officers. In that Foy is quite right.



The reviewer: Stephen C. Mercado is a retired Open Source Enterprise officer and a frequent contributor to *Studies*.

a. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean names in this review appear in traditional order, family name preceding given name.

b. C.A. Willoughby as told to Chong Yong, [*The Unknown Occupation of Japan: The Willoughby Memoir*] (Bancho Shobo, 1973). Chong also produced a biographic work with one of Willoughby's principal subordinates in occupied Japan, Lt. Col. James Canon, who led the notorious counterintelligence unit known as the Canon Agency until it was disbanded in 1952. [*Testimony from the Canon Agency*] (Bancho Shobo, 1973).