A view of Manhattan from above Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York (September 2014). David Rockefeller enlisted in the US Army at Fort Jay in 1942. (Nestor Rivera Jr., Wikimedia)

Banker, Philanthropist, Soldier, Spy

David Rockefeller's Experience in Army Intelligence, 1942–54

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David Rockefeller, known worldwide as the longtime head of Chase Manhattan Bank and grandson of John D. Rockefeller, had a much less well-known but personally and professionally influential involvement with US Army intelligence during World War II and beyond. After enlisting in 1942 and later becoming an officer, he served in North Africa, southern France, and Paris.

Mining the archives sheds new light on Rockefeller's wartime career, his post-war intersections with the nascent Central Intelligence Agency, and the impact on his subsequent career as a banker and philanthropist. We are also left wondering, what if Rockefeller had stuck with intelligence rather than returning to the family business?

David Rockefeller, the long-time head of Chase Manhattan Bank and munificent benefactor of numerous charitable causes died in 2017 at age 101. In his long life, he had a much lesser known but personally and professionally influential involvement with US Army intelligence (G-2) during World War II and after. He served in important theaters of the conflict at crucial times: North Africa in the months after the TORCH operation in November 1942, when the Anglo-American-French alliance was beset with factionalism, much of it emanating from Algiers, where he was stationed; southern France following the ANVIL/DRAGOON invasion in August 1944 at a time of high-level concern over the trustworthiness of the French Resistance and the course France would take after the war; and Paris in the twilight of the Third Reich amid continued infighting within France and portents of postwar conflict with the Soviet Union.[1]

In these settings, Rockefeller became privy to a great deal of secret information about political, economic, and social conditions and, as an intelligence officer, helped synthesize and analyze it for military and civilian consumers. He traveled thousands of miles throughout the Maghreb, the Levant, and continental Europe and met important figures from the worlds of espionage, business, and government. Many of those connections would prove valuable in his later career at Chase and in his involvement with various international affairs organizations and issues. Reflecting on his overall experience in US Army intelligence, Rockefeller observed:

> *I look back at the war years as an invaluable training ground and testing place for much that I would do later in my life. Among other things, I discovered the value of building contacts with well-placed individuals as a means of achieving concrete objectives. This would be the beginning of a networking process that I would follow throughout my life.*[2]

Enlistment, Basic Training, and Early Assignments

On May 1, 1942, Rockefeller enlisted in the army as a private at Fort Jay on Governors Island, New York.[a] He accepted the advice of the local corps commander not to seek an officer's commission through special recommendation to avoid the appearance of favoritism. "At first the Army was something of a shock. It was at once threatening because it was all so new and, at the same time, boring and arduous," he recalled.[3] After he finished boot camp, Rockefeller got his corporal's stripes and was assigned to the Counterintelligence Corps of the Military Intelligence Division (MID) on Governors Island. In August he was sent to Washington to train for assignment to the Middle East.

The next month, however, a colonel in the American Intelligence Command (AIC) asked for Rockefeller to be transferred to his unit, which was about to move to Miami Beach. "I confess this came as a welcome surprise. Somehow I could not see myself as an 'undercover agent' in the bars of Cairo."[4] The AIC was the MID's main field collection component in the Western Hemisphere, and the Miami Beach office was opened because of fears for the security of the Caribbean, South America, and the Panama Canal. During the next two years it expanded significantly in geographic scope and substantive responsibility, but Rockefeller's duties at the time "were not very impressive or important—serving as a messenger and standing guard duty."[5]

a. Rockefeller's four brothers served in military or civilian capacities during the war. Winthrop enlisted in the Army and barely survived a kamikaze attack on his troopship near Okinawa. Laurence parlayed his knowledge of the aircraft industry into a commission in the Navy and spent much of the war touring contractors' plants around the country, leaving the service as a lieutenant commander. John 3rd initially was a personnel official with the Red Cross and the Naval Reserve and then worked with the Office of Occupied Areas, achieving the rank of lieutenant commander. Nelson was the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs at the Department of State.

Later, in 1942, Rockefeller applied for Officers Candidate School (OCS) and was accepted into the January 1943 class at the Engineers OCS School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The school had a reputation as one of the system's toughest, and he found it much more demanding than basic training. He wrote to his father, John D. Rockefeller Jr., shortly after classes began (spelling as in the original):

> *Life here continues to be rather rigorous. Our hours are long and our schedule is crowded. Discipline is rigid and enforced to the letter. This is all different from the life to which I have been accustomed ever since I have been in the army. On the other hand, the instruction is exceedingly well organized and the instructors are competent. The subjects, which are largely new to me, are for the most part interesting. The following are a few examples of the subject matter we are studying: Military Organisation, Explosives and Demolitions, Rigging, Camouflage etc. We ordinarily have about 10 hours of classes a day plus exercises that are always coming up.*[6]

At the end of the course, the students had to complete a 20-mile march carrying an M-1 rifle and an 80-pound field pack. "That night we pitched, and then immediately dismantled, pup tents in the deep snow and straggled back to camp at 5 a.m. only to

David Rockefeller at a Glance

Early Life and Education

Born June 12, 1915, in New York City

Harvard, B.S. in economics, 1936; post-graduate study there and London School of Economics; University of Chicago, Ph.D. in economics, 1940

Public Service

Secretary to New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, 1940–41

Assistant regional director of US Office of Defense, Health and Welfare Service, 1941–42

US Army intelligence, active duty, 1942–45; reserves, 1946–54

Business

Chase National and Chase Manhattan Bank: assistant manager, assistant cashier, second vice president, vice president, 1946-49; supervisor of Latin American operations, 1950–52; senior vice president for New York area, 1952–55; executive vice president, 1955–57; vice chairman of Board of Directors, 1957–61; president, 1961–69; chairman of the board and chief executive officer, 1969–81; retired, 1981

Business Group for Latin America: co-founder, 1963 (later called Council of the Americas)

International Executive Service Corps: chairman, 1964–68

Member of numerous international business advisory councils

International Affairs

Center for Inter-American Relations: chairman, 1965 (later called Americas Society)

Council on Foreign Relations: chairman, 1970–85

Trilateral Commission: cofounder, 1973

Civic Activities

Morningside Heights, Inc.: president, 1947–57; chairman, 1957–65

Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association: chairman, 1958–75

New York City Partnership: chairman, 1979–88

Philanthropy

Rockefeller Brothers Fund: co-founder, 1940

Rockefeller Family Fund: co-founder, 1967

Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research: trustee, 1940–50; chairman of Board of Trustees, 1950–75

Museum of Modern Art: chairman of the board, 1958, 1962–72, 1987–93■

be awakened two hours later for calisthenics."[7] After two months of this regimen, Rockefeller received a commission as a second lieutenant, was discharged from the Engineers OCS, took some leave, and in April 1943 headed for his next post, the Military Intelligence Training Center (MITC) at Camp Ritchie, Maryland.

Learning the Tradecraft

Army intelligence, or G-2, that Rockefeller was now part of had not been a premier component of the service before the war and had improved only marginally by 1943. Generals Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley both remarked in their memoirs about G-2's serious shortcomings when the war began. In his first years as chief of staff, George Marshall recognized those problems but was too preoccupied with other military affairs to devote much time to them. His shakeup of what he considered the army's antiquated and inefficient staff system in March 1942 did not help the intelligence process. The new arrangement delineated the specific responsibilities of G-2's components—the administrative, intelligence, counterintelligence, operations, and plans branches—but did not benefit intelligence in the larger bureaucratic scheme. G-2 was further split into the MID and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). The MID formulated policies and plans and coordinated army intelligence activities with other US and Allied intelligence services but had no direct role in field operations. The MIS collected, analyzed, and disseminated military intelligence; screened mail, press releases, and other material for sensitive information; and, in conjunction with British analysts, exploited captured German documents and assessed enemy strength and capabilities. This separation soon proved unworkable, as designating MID's responsibilities as "policy" and MIS's as "operations" was artificial. The head of G-2, Gen. George Strong, effectively ignored the separation for two years.[8]

Consistent with G-2's overall dysfunctionality was the fact that before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the US military had no central facility for training personnel in intelligence collection and evaluation, and the sudden US entry into the war found it with few military intelligence specialists and no formal way to train new ones. After some internecine bureaucratic back-and-forth, the MITC was established. Camp Ritchie, originally intended as a tent camp for the National Guard, had several permanent buildings that could be quickly converted into a year-round facility. Secretary of War Henry Stimson officially activated the post in June 1942, and the first experimental classes began in late July. At first they were limited to interrogation techniques, language skills, and some aerial photo interpretation. They soon expanded to include terrain study, signal communications, counterintelligence, enemy order of battle, and use of Allied and Axis small arms.[9]

Rockefeller described the curriculum this way:

> *The two-month course at Ritchie trained officers for intelligence work with combat infantry units. The focus of our training was the battlefield: we studied the order of battle and combat tactics of both Allied and enemy forces, learned map-reading skills and reconnaissance procedures, and mastered techniques for the interrogation of prisoners of war. Each of us chosen for the course had been selected because we had special talents, such as language skills and familiarity with foreign cultures, that would be useful in the European Theater of Operations, our groups' ultimate destination.*[10]

For four months, Rockefeller lived comfortably off-post with his family in a house in the Appalachian foothills of Pennsylvania. He thought some of the instruction repetitious and the quality not as good as at Fort Belvoir, but "[it was] certainly a relief to be an officer … free of many of the little restrictions and rules which used to be a source of annoyance as an enlisted man." In early June, he and some classmates went on an eight-day field exercise designed to make them use their

classroom knowledge in simulated battlefield conditions. "Aside from lack of sleep, it was quite pleasant," he told his father.[11] After graduating in June and going on furlough, Rockefeller returned to the MITC for three months as an instructor in the French section, teaching classes about French army organization using his language skill.

Assignment: North Africa

In late August 1943, Rockefeller opened sealed orders assigning him to the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency (JICA) of the War Department and directing him to report immediately to Washington. While at the just-dedicated Pentagon for the next month, he learned that he would be attached to JICA's element at General Dwight Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers. "My fluency in French, knowledge of the prewar European situation, and time as an instructor at Camp Ritchie seemed to qualify me as a French 'expert'—or so the War Department believed."[12]

Rockefeller was now serving in a new intelligence element created to address another deficiency in G-2. In North Africa, the need for a joint intelligence collection entity arose quickly after the TORCH invasion in November 1942[a] because battlefield commanders did not pass along information or pursue leads that they could not readily apply to combat. To the consternation of US military attachés, unit commanders rarely tried to learn anything about political and economic conditions in the theater and focused on enemy troop and ship movements, orders of battle, logistics, and related tactical concerns. Hardly any intelligence useful for training or strategic planning left the area.

A tentative solution to this inadequacy was reached in January 1943, only two months after TORCH, when the MID and Eisenhower decided to form a separate intelligence collection service under joint MID and Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) control. Known as the JICA (Algiers), it was responsible for acquiring and evaluating information other than that immediately pertinent to combat. JICA (Algiers) expanded in May 1943 to include all of North Africa and was renamed JICANA.[13, b]

Rockefeller spent a month at the Pentagon taking courses given by the MID's Orientation and Instruction Branch. In theory, all MID personnel scheduled for overseas tours had to receive at least 30 days of intensive instruction before their departures. The prescribed course usually included these subjects:

- War Department organization
- Detailed familiarization with the provisions of the "Standing Instructions for Military Attachés," the "standing Instructions for the Military Intelligence Service," (MIS) and the "Basic Intelligence Directives"
- Review of all intelligence field manuals such as "Combat Intelligence," "Observation," "Examination of Enemy Personnel, Expatriates, Documents, and Material," "Military Maps," "Role of Aerial Photography," and "Counterintelligence"
- The history of military intelligence activities since World War I
- A geographic survey of the country or region of assignment
- Safeguarding military information

a. TORCH began on November 8, 1942, when the United States and Britain launched the largest amphibious invasion in history up to then: 120 ships carried 107,000 soldiers who landed at three sites along the coasts of Algeria and Morocco. Within nine days, the Allies swept the German and French collaborator forces from most of North Africa while suffering fewer than 1,800 killed in action.

b. A second similar unit, JICAME, was established in April 1943 to cover the Middle East. A third element for China, India, and Burma, known as JICACIB, started operations the following August. A separate one for China was spun off from it in April 1945, when that country was designated its own theater.

- Technique and practice in codes and ciphers
- Finance regulations
- Functions of the ONI
- Principles of economic and psychological warfare
- Special instruction, with a regional emphasis, on enemy ground and air forces
- Basic photography
- Language instruction suited to individual needs
- Health precautions, clothing and equipment
- German order of battle[14]

Rockefeller also received booklets from the Army Information and Education division that gave tips about how to get along in strange lands. North Africa would be the first place where the United States would be on exhibit as a liberating force, so the Army was anxious that soldiers be on their best behavior. The booklet on North Africa offered GIs helpful advice, such as never smoke or spit in front of a mosque.[15]

The JICANA office where Rockefeller worked for 16 months had about 10 officers and 30 enlisted men drawn from all the US military intelligence services. Its primary job was to serve as a clearing house and dissemination point for information those services collected for dispatch to Washington and London. Rockefeller found the work frustrating, as he had envisioned being involved in a much more active collection operation that would utilize his specialized training.

After a few weeks of tedium, he got permission from his commanding officer (CO) to try creating a source network to provide intelligence on political activities and economic conditions in the region. Using his fluent French and letters of introduction to some influential people known through family connections—notably Standard Oil of New Jersey's general manager in North Africa, Henri Chevalier, and the senior Canadian representative in North Africa, General George Vanier—within a few months he developed a large and well-placed set of informants among the community of *colons* (Algerians of French descent) and members of the Allied diplomatic community and the French Committee on National Liberation (FCNL), jointly headed by two rival generals, Henri Giraud and Charles de Gaulle. Rockefeller's CO was impressed enough that he was allowed to make numerous forays totaling 10,000 miles through Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia as well as a two-week trip to Cairo and Istanbul to broaden his contacts with French intelligence officials.

While in Algiers, Rockefeller functioned essentially as a one-man collector and analyst of mostly political, but occasionally economic, intelligence. He wrote many reports about the power struggle between Giraud and de Gaulle, unrest among the Arabs and Berbers in the Maghreb, purges of Vichyites, conflicts among French intelligence services, activities of the local government, North African and French press coverage, French armed forces organization, and plans for the liberation of France.

He used a variety of official and private materials, OSS and British intelligence research, contacts with French officers and administrators, and interviews with local businessmen to compile his reports. He later said the most valuable sources he developed were in the FCNL command itself: the aides-de-camp of the two feuding generals. Their information and his own observations enabled him to watch de Gaulle gradually outmaneuver his opponent. By April 1944 their struggle ended, and Giraud was sent into internal exile.

Behind the Lines in Southwestern France

After a trip to Washington, DC, as a courier in July 1944, Rockefeller returned to Algiers just before the Allied invasion of southern France in August.[a]

a. Codenamed first ANVIL and then DRAGOON, the operation—intended as a complement to the Normandy invasion just over two months earlier—involved US and French forces landing in the Rhone River delta area on the morning of August 15, 1944.

He was by then a first lieutenant and would soon be promoted to captain. Algiers was now a backwater, as JICANA had moved some of its operations to Naples to be closer to the battle lines, so he put in for a transfer. In early October, he received orders attaching him temporarily to the Seventh Army's T Force. T Force—T for target—was the name given to one of the special units in every European-based army group or large army that accompanied the advance columns and were responsible for seizing and holding sites where valuable political, economic, and technical information might be found, such as factories, laboratories, government and military offices, and residences, until specialists could analyze the documents, equipment, and other captured materials.

Rockefeller's assignment with T Force was very different. His CO, who had been the deputy commander of JICA Algiers when he first arrived, had been impressed with his work there and wanted him to go off on another solo collection mission, this time behind Allied lines in the large area west of the Rhone and south of the Loire Rivers. The invasion forces had bypassed those areas in their rapid pursuit of the Germans, and little reliable intelligence about the area was available. Rockefeller recalled the key requirements this way:

> *There were reports of German SS units operating in this area, and other accounts that the French Communist resistance controlled vast portions of the countryside and would launch an insurrection when the time was right. Along the border with Spain, units of the Spanish Republican Army were known to be still active. As resistance groups evened old scores by purging collaborators with drumhead courts-martial and summary executions, there was a danger that the situation might degenerate into civil war. Colonel Pumpelly* [his CO] *ordered me to assess the political situation, the state of the economy, and the degree to which foreign forces or indigenous radical groups posed a threat to Allied forces or the authority of the new French government in extreme southwestern France. Although Pumpelly gave me a general idea of my mission, he left it to me to make my own way.*[16]

As on his travels around North Africa, Rockefeller had the assistance of an enlisted man—in this case, a Navy yeoman—as they set off, in uniform, from Luneville on a six-week-long reconnaissance of Lyon, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Montpellier, Bairritz, Limoges, Nimes, and other cities and surrounding areas during November-December 1944. He met the new commissioners of the Republic whom de Gaulle had appointed and had no difficulty getting them to talk about the political and economic situation in their jurisdictions. "It was a glorious trip through some of the most beautiful country in Europe…. In many of the places we visited, we were the first Americans anyone had seen since 1940." In mid-December, Rockefeller and his Navy aide returned to T Force headquarters in Luneville and then to Paris, where he dictated reports that were sent to Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ) and Washington.

> *I found nothing to substantiate the reports of subversive elements roaming the countryside, but there was great political and economic uncertainty, as well an anxiety about the progress of the war. With winter fast approaching and food and fuel supplies low, I suggested the situation could deteriorate quickly if supplies were not sent in from the outside.*[17]

In retrospect, Rockefeller's mission might raise some questions: Why was it necessary? Why did the army not know more about conditions in southern France, given the extensive contacts it and the OSS had with the Resistance, either through their own efforts or by working with the British military and intelligence? Could the army have wanted to finally establish an independent intelligence presence in the region after relying for so

By nightfall, 880 vessels had put ashore 94,000 soldiers and 11,000 vehicles. German defenses broke quickly, and the Allied force suffered fewer than 200 casualties.

long on other organizations? An officer, a sailor, and two vehicles were not much of a presence, but a low-key, unobtrusive deployment might have been what the situation called for. Direct American dealings with the French in the southern region up to October 1944 had mostly been with either covert OSS operatives engaged in espionage and paramilitary actions or with the ANVIL/DRAGOON invasion force. The Army had little opportunity to develop a discreet yet overt presence in the south that would glean information and open contacts unrelated to organizing the underground. Given his experience in building an intelligence network in North Africa, Rockefeller would appear to have been a good choice for that sort of mission.

Reassignment to Paris

In mid-December 1944, Rockefeller received orders to return to Algiers with no long-term assignment. He had requested a transfer from AFHQ to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force in France but had not gotten approval yet. While between postings, he had to run an international errand: his JICANA CO, now in Naples, wanted the Navy yeoman, vehicles, and equipment that Rockefeller had left with T Force in France returned to him in Italy. Along the way, Rockefeller visited the Rhine front and then made the delivery in Naples. The day before he arrived, JICA received orders that he had been appointed assistant military attaché in Paris. On March 6, 1945, he arrived in the French capital to begin his last assignment in the army.

Rockefeller had expressed interest in an attaché posting, even though they were considered unappealing and had low prestige in US military intelligence circles. Eisenhower in his memoir described the attachés as mostly "estimable, socially acceptable gentlemen; [but] few knew the essentials of intelligence work." The underlying problem, according to a former CIA historian, was that "Attachés were on temporary detail from their branch or service and returned when their tour ended. Most talented and ambitious officers sought combat command positions, promising greater chances of promotion, and considered noncombat assignments, like intelligence, obstacles to advancement." As in other aspects of G-2's work, Chief of Staff Marshall at no time addressed the poor condition of the Military Attaché Section.[18]

In keeping with that pattern of assignment, the incoming military attaché was Gen. Ralph Smith, a combat officer who had served in France during World War I and recently in the Pacific Theater but who had little intelligence experience. "[M]y responsibilities as an AMA were not clearly defined," Rockefeller recalled. "When I told him what I had done in North Africa and southwestern France, he suggested that I set up a similar political and economic intelligence unit, reporting directly to him…. I built the intelligence operation around my contacts with members of de Gaulle's government."[19] In addition, he did work similar to that at JICANA: reviewing intelligence data, interviewing people in the Allied armies and French government and business, scanning telegrams, correspondence, official publications, and the press, and synthesizing this material into reports.

The facts and conclusions in Rockefeller's reports are consistent with later scholarly sources and help outline the contours of life in post-liberation France. For example:

- Resistance groups tried with little success to influence the post-liberation political parties. The Communists were especially disgruntled and began moving toward declared opposition to de Gaulle's government.
- French soldiers increasingly bemoaned their declining stature and loss of purchasing power and were very critical of the Provisional Government, although de Gaulle's prestige remained high.
- The main reception and screening centers in Paris for returning French prisoners and deportees were overcrowded and had inadequate security. Enemy

agents could easily enter the country through the disorderly centers. The returnees generally were in good shape. Those liberated from Russia complained of mistreatment; those in Hungarian, Belgian, British, and American hands said they were well cared for. Political deportees were full of hate and vengeance. Nearly all lauded de Gaulle and hoped for substantial change in France.

France's competing intelligence services received extra scrutiny from Army intelligence throughout the war, including while Rockefeller was stationed in Paris. He wrote more reports about the French Army's Deuxième Bureau (analogous to the US Army G-2), the Gaullist Direction Générale des Etudes et Recherches (General Directorate of Studies and Research, or DGER), and the remnants of Giraud's intelligence apparatus from North Africa than any other topic.

The services' diverse ideologies, agendas, and allegiances continually provided fodder for his reports. They provide on-the-scene accounts, drawn largely from interviews with French participants and supplemented with information from US and British sources. "While we developed most of our information through our own network of informants, a good part of it came as a result of the dinners that we hosted for high-ranking French officials in General Smith's residence. A well-stocked wine cellar and a fine table proved to be a wonderful inducement to revealing conversation."[20]

Rockefeller later lamented an embarrassing "rookie mistake" he made when collecting information on the French services:

> *Somewhat naively I sent out a questionnaire to US military commands asking for all material on French intelligence. Not surprisingly, Colonel Passy* [the nom de guerre of André DeWavrin, head of the DGER] *learned about my inquiries. Although everyone did it, it wasn't comme il faut* [proper] *to be caught spying on one's allies. Within days, Colonel Passy summoned me to his office. He seemed in a good mood and ushered me to a seat with a friendly wave of his hand. We chatted amiably, then he said, "Captain Rockefeller, we have come to understand that there is information you would like to have about our services." He looked at me and raised his eyebrows as if to say, "Isn't that so?" I nodded. I could tell he was clearly enjoying my agony. "But my dear captain," he continued, "really, all this is readily available to you if you will just ask us for it. Please tell me what you would like, and we will be glad to provide the information." I thanked him for his offer and left as quickly as possible.*[21a]

One of Rockefeller's major accomplishments while serving in Paris was developing a coding and filing system to organize the scores of documents that came into the attaché's office each week. He described the system in great detail in a paper titled "The Intelligence Library at the Paris Military Attaché Office" that he prepared for the Command and General Staff School after the war. By using several codes and cross-reference annotations written on cards along with a very brief summary of each report, the system enabled analysts to quickly locate all the material on any subject, which would otherwise have been difficult because reports often covered several topics. Analysts also could familiarize themselves with all intelligence traffic that came through the office without having to look at every document. Rockefeller developed the system after consulting with other intelligence agencies in Paris. He compared it most closely to

a. Rockefeller also reported on developments in Southeast Asia. France's colonies were a growing source of tension with the United States, which since 1943 had taken a special interest in decolonizing the region. "Unquestionably the question of Indo-China is one of the sorest points in the minds of French officials in Paris at the present time," he wrote. The purpose of his report was to inform military personnel in the European Theater about events half a world away that they probably would have been unfamiliar with. (See Endnote 1.)

the one the OSS's Research and Analysis Branch used.[a]

As he did when in North Africa, Rockefeller traveled frequently while stationed in France. Various trips took him to regions around Paris, Munich, Dachau, Marseilles, Brussels, and Prague (where he helped the military attaché establish his office). In September 1945, at the behest of General Smith, he visited some of the G-2 units in Germany and Austria. Documentation about the trip does not spell out what its purpose was, but most likely he was sent to help sort out the confused state of US intelligence there during the early days of the occupation. The United States had no organized effort to collect and analyze intelligence for its representatives to the Allied Control Council that oversaw the occupation. Instead, teams from a dozen military and civilian agencies worked at cross purposes chasing the same information. The reports Rockefeller presumably prepared are not available, and the confusion in US intelligence operations in Germany and Austria had not been resolved when he left the army.

Mustering Out and Reserve Duty

By October 1945, Rockefeller had reached the requisite point quota for being discharged, and he was relieved of his assignment on the 6th. Before he left the country, the French Government awarded him the Legion of Honor. He got to Washington on the 16th, spent a few days of duty with G-2 at the Pentagon, and then was processed at a separation center at Fort Dix, New Jersey. His formal separation from the Army came on December 18, ending 44 months and two weeks on active duty. On December 31, a letter of commendation arrived from General Smith. He praised Rockefeller's "loyalty and efficient services … enthusiasm, initiative, tact, and creative intelligence."[22]

Rockefeller joined the Army Reserves in 1946 and during the next three years was affiliated with different units that would be mobilized in a state of emergency to quickly train newly commissioned and enlisted G-2 personnel in all important aspects of military intelligence. After the Korean War started in June 1950, he asked to be placed on active reserve status and arranged to have his tour in that capacity with CIA. He had already had some dealings with the agency by then. In January 1950 he attended a conference with CIA about intelligence in Latin America. The record does not indicate what that involved; possibly he reported on events and personalities connected with his work and travels in the region for the Chase Bank, which he had joined in 1946. In September and October of that year, his former boss at the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services in 1940–42, Anna Rosenberg, had a few conversations with Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Walter Bedell Smith about personnel needs at the CIA.

These talks resulted in Smith making a "flattering and tempting proposal" to Rockefeller that entailed a "generous recognition of my situation": the DCI wanted Rockefeller to be his executive assistant. Rockefeller wrote back that he was not sure he had the administrative experience the job required, but he did not turn down the offer outright and went to Washington in November 1950 to discuss it with Smith. It would not have been unreasonable at this point in his professional life for him to consider leaving banking and getting back into intelligence work. Although he had done well so far at Chase—he was a vice president overseeing Chase's Latin American operations—the prospect of being the aide-de-camp to the head of all US intelligence services had obvious appeal. Nothing came of it, however.[b] Instead, Rockefeller arranged to have himself detailed to CIA if he were called up on active duty. On paper he would remain with G-2.

a. While in Paris, Rockefeller maintained a small file of contacts and acquaintances that he made. The huge card files that Rockefeller had at Chase Manhattan Bank and at his personal office at Rockefeller Center can be traced to this relatively tiny compilation.

b. No available materials discuss why Rockefeller did not accept the DCI's offer. It might have been withdrawn; others might have persuaded Rockefeller to stay at Chase; or, most likely, he decided on his own that he wanted to remain in banking.

The intensifying military situation in Korea prompted another shuffling in the Reserve ranks, and Rockefeller was assigned to another New York-based unit, where he served as its plans and policy officer. Because a major usually filled that position, he applied for a promotion when the opportunity arose in summer 1951 and received the higher rank that October.

Throughout this period, Rockefeller attended training classes on military and political subjects, with emphasis on the Soviet Union and its satellites, and had some unidentified involvement with "a government agency in Washington which works closely with the Department of the Army"—presumably CIA, though in what capacity is not known. He twice went on active duty with the CIA for training in 1952 and 1953. In January 1954, Rockefeller resigned from the Reserves, citing his duties as a senior vice president at Chase and growing associational and civic responsibilities that made it hard to attend training and go on required activity duty each summer. He could have transferred to the Retired Reserves, but he chose to leave the military completely and received an honorable discharge in February 1954.

Impact and a Path Not Taken

The work of a military intelligence officer and the opportunities that Rockefeller's specific positions afforded him seemed ideal for someone of his education, intellect, personality, and outlook. Not many World War II veterans could claim to have found duties so well suited to them. He had achieved a substantial amount academically and professionally by virtue of his status as a Rockefeller and through his own initiative even before he entered the US Army, but his service with G-2 enabled him to move well beyond his prior level of accomplishment.

Other than growing substantially larger, G-2 did not change much during Rockefeller's time in it, but he had. Although he had already visited many countries and possessed an internationalist perspective, Rockefeller gained the kind of intense, direct exposure to foreign cultures and institutions that perhaps only war can give. The knowledge and intellectual skills he acquired in college and graduate school were sharpened to a fine edge as he researched and analyzed the complex political dynamics of North Africa and Western Europe. He had many chances to develop the interpersonal skills that would become one of his trademarks as a financial statesman at Chase.

Contrary to the popular notion that he had long been groomed to take over the "family" bank, Rockefeller left the army without having committed himself to a life in finance. He wrote in his memoir that accepting the offer from his uncle Winthrop Aldrich, Chase's chairman of the board, to work there "was not an easy decision because I still had a strong interest in working for government or in the not-for-profit sector."[23] And, as noted, DCI Smith in 1950 had put a good job prospect before him.

It is interesting to speculate how different Rockefeller and the world would be if he had said yes. Would Chase have emerged as the global money power it became under his leadership? Would it have followed the same lending practices toward the Global South that contributed to the persistent debt crisis? At CIA, would Rockefeller have supported the use of the agency as a Cold War paramilitary weapon or instead advocated concentration on its core missions of collection and analysis, with which he had experience? Might he have moved from CIA into a second-tier policymaking position and become one of the "Wise Men" of US diplomacy like John McCloy, Averell Harriman, and Dean Acheson? Or might have he risen higher and become secretary of state or treasury (Richard Nixon twice offered him the latter), or a high-profile ambassador?

The life of someone of Rockefeller's prominence is fraught with such unrealized alternatives. Suffice it to say that his service with US Army intelligence during World War II positioned him well to choose among them and gave him some foundational experiences that benefited him in the career he chose.■

Endnotes

1. This study draws heavily on four sources of information: David Rockefeller Military File in David Rockefeller Personal Papers, Memoirs Project Files, Room 5600, Rockefeller Center, NY; David Rockefeller-John D. Rockefeller Jr. Correspondence File, in David Rockefeller Personal Papers, same location; David Rockefeller, *Memoirs* (Random House, 2002), chap. 9; and David Robarge, "David Rockefeller and Army Intelligence During World War II," May 1, 1989, unpublished manuscript in author's possession. (The author worked for Rockefeller as a research assistant during 1984–89 while the latter was preparing his memoir.) The Military File includes "Itinerary of David Rockefeller During World War II"—a detailed chronology of his whereabouts during 1942–45—Rockefeller's intelligence reports filed from North Africa and France, and all other service-related documentation cited in the author's manuscript. The Correspondence File contains all personal correspondence cited in the manuscript and this article. The manuscript contains extensive citations from the Military and Correspondence Files as well as detailed background and context for Rockefeller's activities drawn from dozens of secondary sources and official histories. Only direct quotes from items in the Files will be cited below.
2. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 122.
3. Ibid., 106.
4. Ibid., 108.
5. Ibid., 108.
6. Rockefeller to John D. Rockefeller Jr., January 24, 1943.
7. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 109.
8. David Robarge, *The Soldier-Statesman in the Secret World: George C. Marshall and Intelligence in War and Peace* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2023), 13, 16.
9. Col. Bruce Bidwell, "History of the Military Intelligence Division, Department of the Army General Staff, Part V: 1941-1945," unpublished manuscript, US Army Office of the Chief of Military History, II:20-26, V:38, IX:1-7, 17-23.
10. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 109.
11. Rockefeller to John D. Rockefeller Jr., April 17 and June 14, 1943.
12. *Memoirs*, 110.
13. Bidwell, V:10; US War Department General Staff, Military Intelligence Division, "A History of the Military Intelligence Division, December 12, 1941 to February 9, 1945," unpublished manuscript, 1946.
14. Bidwell, IX:9-10.
15. Lee Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (Scribner's Sons, 1987), 121.
16. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 116–17.
17. Ibid., 118.
18. Robarge, 9, 19.
19. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 119.
20. Ibid., 120.
21. Ibid., 119.
22. Smith to Rockefeller, December 31, 1945.
23. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 123. ■