

Journalism & Communication Monographs

<http://jmo.sagepub.com/>

Commentary

Paul Martin Lester

Journalism & Communication Monographs 2014 16: 3

DOI: 10.1177/1522637913513719

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jmo.sagepub.com/content/16/1/3.citation>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication](#)

Additional services and information for *Journalism & Communication Monographs* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jmo.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jmo.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Feb 7, 2014

[What is This?](#)

Commentary

Journalism & Communication Monographs
2014, Vol 16(1) 3–6
© 2013 AEJMC
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1522637913513719
jcmo.sagepub.com



Historical research takes a special brand of scholar. You need to be focused, have tenacity, be organized almost to the point of tediousness, possess an unblinking steadfastness and a capacity to overcome a series of dead ends, among other traits. However, you also need a special ability to connect dots that no one else has—you must have a keen, sharp, and creative mind, plus luck. The “Lady” must sometimes smile on you.

Here is what the authors wrote toward the end of their monograph:

This monograph, by far the most thorough examination of this case, initially uncovered a piece of evidence unknown to other researchers that highly suggests Seligman was to blame. As prosecutor William Mitchell pointed out, two naval officers saw Seligman write a list of Japanese ships and separate them into types of vessels. Johnston presumably seen by Johnston.

The authors then found a conclusive piece of evidence to show what occurred next. The proof has existed since 1982 and yet was not cited for thirty-one years because it was not where mass media historians typically look—letters to the editor of *Proceedings*, the magazine of the U.S. Naval Institute.

It was not where mass media historians typically look . . .

Pat Washburn, an old acquaintance since overlapping our PhD studies in Ernie Pyle Hall, told me the story:

In the winter of 2011–2012, we [coauthor, Michael Sweeney] had looked at thousands of pages of material from the FBI, the Justice Department, and the Navy that we had received by using the FOI Act. Although we had conducted six interviews and had obtained material from numerous archives, we still lacked one important thing: How had [reporter] Stanley Johnston learned of the information for his story about the Battle of Midway?

We were close to the answer but could not pin it down. One day, when I had nothing else to do, I decided to get on the Internet and see what I could find about the case. I had never done this and didn't expect to find anything new. As I looked at site after site, I found nothing that I had not seen before. Then, I ran across a PBS site on which a high school history teacher from Vincennes, Indiana, wrote about how the case would make a good high school history class discussion. He suggested dividing a class into two parts—one would be the government and the other would be the *Chicago Tribune*. The government side would argue why the newspaper should be indicted under the Espionage Act for Johnston's story, and the newspaper side would argue why it should not be indicted. He followed his overview of the case with some websites that he suggested students should look at to become familiar with the case.

As I looked at the material that he suggested for his students, I kept finding material that Mike and I had already discovered. Suddenly I discovered a mention of a letter to the editor in *Proceedings*, a magazine that I had never known. I found the magazine in the Ohio University library and was stunned to find what we had been looking for: How Johnston got his information. Interestingly, it had appeared in the magazine thirty years before and no historian had ever done anything with it or apparently even knew it existed. As I have told my students, this was truly a “holy shit” moment. I literally said the words out loud in the library! We had what historians had been searching for since 1942. It was in plain sight and everyone missed it. I could not get to Mike fast enough to tell him what I had found. It was a big moment for both of us and a big payoff for a lot of hard work by both of us.

Whenever a mass media scholar—from a retired professor to a graduate student—conducts research, I would argue that historical research is or should be a part of the process. I would suggest you read this monograph carefully and appreciate the many hours that were required to produce its startling array of facts (see the following “Cast of Characters”) to tell this most interesting story concerned with the espionage act about a president, a newspaper, a reporter, and the military—a story that is certainly relevant given today’s headlines.

Paul Martin Lester
Editor-in-Chief

Cast of Characters

For the Press

Chicago Tribune

Wallace Abbey, copy editor
Doc Atkinson, front-page editor
Howard Ellis, senior attorney
Abe E. Geldhof, copy editor
John Hayes, North Shore-based reporter
Arthur Sears Henning, Washington bureau chief
Charles B. James, purchasing agent
Stanley Johnston, war correspondent
Weymouth Kirkland, attorney
J. Loy "Pat" Maloney, managing editor
Don Maxwell, city editor
Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher
Louis Rose, circulation manager
Larry Rue, London-based reporter
Sharsburg, wire editor
Wayne Thomis, reporter
Jack Thompson, rewrite editor
Walter Trohan, Washington-based reporter
Lloyd Wendt, reporter
John Wilhelm, reporter

Other Press Members

Hanson Baldwin, reporter for *The New York Times*
Bob Casey, reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*
Donald K. De Neuf, superintendent for Press Wireless operations
Louis Huot, Press Wireless European manager
Jeff Keen, reporter for the *Philadelphia Daily News*
John Lardner, columnist for *Newsweek*
Robert Mason, editor for the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*
Eleanor "Cissy" Patterson, publisher of the *Washington Times-Herald*
Joseph Medill Patterson, publisher of the *New York Daily News*
Joseph Pierson, Press Wireless president
George Seldes, *In Fact* founder
Ralph Sharp, night news editor for the *New York Daily News*
Frank Waldrop, foreign and political editor of the *Washington Times-Herald*
Walter Winchell, columnist

Other Supporters

John O. Holmes, grand jury foreman
Barbara (*nee* Beck) Wood, Johnston's wife

For the Government

Wendell Berge, assistant attorney general
 Francis Biddle, attorney general
 Jock Brebner, public relations officer at British Ministry of Information
 Donald Cook, executive assistant to Attorney General Thomas C. Clark
 Oscar Cox, assistant solicitor general
 Elmer Davis, head of the Office of War Information
 Stephen Early, White House press secretary
 J. Edgar Hoover, FBI director
 Nathaniel R. Howard, assistant director of the press division at the Office of Censorship
 Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior
 Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy
 William D. Mitchell, lead prosecutor for the Justice Department
 V. M. Molotov, Soviet Foreign Minister
 Byron Price, Director of the Office of Censorship
 Franklin D. Roosevelt, president
 James Rowe, assistant attorney general
 Henry Schweinhaut, special assistant to Francis Biddle
 Henry Stimson, Secretary of War
 James Warner, press censor at the Office of Censorship
 J. Albert Woll, U.S. attorney

For the Military

Vice Admiral Charles Cooke, Admiral King's chief of staff
 Admiral Andrew Cunningham of the British naval staff
 Lieutenant Commander (later Rear Admiral) Robert E. Dixon, scout-bomber squadron
 Lieutenant Commander Edward Eldridge, *Lexington*
 Commandant J. W. Greenslade, Twelfth Naval District
 Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations
 Rear Admiral Arthur H. McCollum, Navy staff officer
 Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, Japanese Navy
 Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz
 Lieutenant Commander Edward O'Donnell, gunnery officer, *Lexington*
 Commander W. B. Phillips, the *Barnett*
 Lieutenant Commander Joseph J. Rochefort, chief cryptographer, Pearl Harbor group
 Commander Morton T. Seligman, executive officer of the *Lexington*
 Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman, *Lexington*
 Commander B. O. Wells, Ninth District Naval Intelligence
 Rear Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, director of Naval Intelligence
 Vice Admiral Russell Willson
 Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Japanese Navy