



SECRETS & SPIES

RESEARCH DOSSIER

MOE BERG

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Morris “Moe” Berg was born to a Jewish family in Harlem, New York on March 2, 1902. His mother and father, Bernard Berg and Rose Tashker were Russian-Jewish Immigrants that moved to New York in pursuit of new careers. By the time they married and had children, they were higher up the corporate ladder and had enough money to support Morris and his older siblings. Samuel, his eldest brother, went to college to become a medical doctor while his sister, Ethel went to college and pursued a career in education. He began playing baseball at 7 for the Roseville Methodist church team.

Morris went to Barringer High School where he graduated at the tender age of sixteen. Since he was Jewish, he always felt like an outsider since his classmates were Catholic or Christian. Berg never renounced who he was and chose to embrace his Jewish heritage and take pride in it (Warfare History Network). While in high school, he also played as an All-City third baseman. Morris went on to study at New York University and later transferred to Princeton in 1919. At Princeton, he studied seven languages, Latin, Greek, Spanish, Italian, German, and Sanskrit. He played both baseball and basketball. During his freshman year at Princeton, he played first base, and sophomore year he played shortstop. He was never a good hitter or a fast runner, but he always had a great arm (Moe Berg). Berg’s classmates, most of whom were Protestant and

wealthy, openly ostracized him and other members of the Jewish community that attended the school, which gave Morris distasteful feelings towards Princeton.

After college, the New York Giants and Brooklyn Robins both wanted to sign Jewish players to appeal to the Jewish community in New York. In 1923, he signed to the Robins for \$5000. In his years in the league, he played for Brooklyn Robins, Chicago White Sox, Cleveland Indians, Washington Senators, and the Boston Red Sox. In 1932, he traveled to Japan to teach baseball at a couple of university conferences, where he put to use his proficiency in Japanese. He went to Japan again two years later with some MLB all-stars like Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. He was proficient in Japanese and managed to talk his way into one of the tallest buildings in Tokyo. After climbing to the rooftop alone, he used a movie camera to film shipyards of the capital city. Supposedly, the US used this footage to plan bombings in Tokyo during World War II. In 1939, he retired from MLB and started coaching for a little while from 1940-1941 (Moe Berg).

In his time in the MLB, he went overseas and picked up a habit of reading several newspapers a day, a habit which he continued until he died. Because of this he was extremely well read and informed on all current events, and his knowledge of 7 languages was of course invaluable to him as an OSS operative. As a player in the MLB, he had the athletic training necessary for any OSS mission (Berger).

He was recruited into the OSS in 1943. The Office of the Strategic Services — or the OSS — was originally the Office of the Coordination of Information, abbreviated to the COI. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed William J. Donovan to organize and lead in COI in 1941.

Donovan would continue to be in charge of the COI, even when it became the OSS in 1942 (National Archives, 2018). The first assignment given to him at the OSS was to spy on the German atomic bomb program, codenamed Project Larson in an ongoing operation called ALSOS. He was to travel overseas to interview a few of Italy's top physicists to see what they knew about the German atomic bomb program. They were Edoardo Amaldi and Gian Carlo Wick, but what they told him was that the German atomic bomb program wouldn't be ready for another decade, or even longer. He decided to pry some more information from other Italian scientists, though he found basically nothing.

The OSS called him back in with little to no information on the German atomic bomb project, and in December of 1944, he was ordered to travel overseas once again to Zurich, Switzerland in order to attend a conference from German physicist Werner Heisenberg. The mission was that if Heisenberg said, mentioned, breathed, or gave the slightest bodily motion that Germany was working on the atomic bomb, he was to shoot the man in the head, even in the lecture hall. He was in the lecture hall until the event was over. He left the lecture hall with nothing to go with, but the Swiss host of the event: OSS source Paul Scherrer, gave him an invitation for a dinner with Heisenberg a few days later. Through eavesdropping on Heisenberg's conversations, he found that there was no mention of the German atomic bomb project. He returned to the US and resigned from the OSS, which had been renamed the Strategic Services Unit at the time, on April 25, 1945 (Berger). Moe Berg started to coach again for the MLB, but in 1952, the CIA hired him to check up on the Soviet atomic bomb program, though this mission followed the pattern of other endeavors that he embarked on; he did not find anything (Berger).



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