



Tales from the Lost Days:  
John Prados in New York.

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*John discovered Jamaican Blue Mountain, the most expensive coffee you could get without a prescription, because of a guy in VVAW (Vietnam Vets Against the War) who worked at McNulty's tea and coffee shop (above) on Christopher Street.*

John like to have a cup with a bud. He liked the best—Jamaican Blue Mountain. You get a decidedly more energized buzz... We were near neighbors on the Upper West Side: John on 99th and I (KZ) on 95th off of CPW. Sometimes I would stop off at his place on my way home with an oversize can of Foster's Lager (25 oz).

*Cuban-Chinese too.*

I was meeting with book editors about a project of mine. OSG intended to publish in book format to get into more book stores. (They were to have a slipcase and the maps and counters should be bound in a spiral-bound book. But the pricing wasn't there.) Anyway I was having dinner with one of these editors. Before the food even came out, he said, "What I'm really looking for is a book on the CIA's exaggerations on the Soviet Missile threat."

Astounded, I said, "I know just such a book," and I went and called Prados from the "booth" in the foyer. (This was 1979.) I insisted John get his ass down there on the double.

"But I'm cooking a burger and I'm really hungry right now." I had difficulty persuading him to turn off the flame and meet us on West 44th St., but he did get there after we ate. He probably ate the burger too.

This book launched John into a select group. It was recommended reading at the CIA, and ignited John's speaking gigs. Eventually he became a go-to expert for *Democracy Now* on CIA operations.

We both moved out of NYC just before Thanksgiving of 1979. John moved to Capitol Hill (later Dupont Circle). I was living in the countryside north of Baltimore. My stuff hadn't even arrived, but we two uprooted New Yorkers decided to have T-Day at a fancy restaurant way out on a country road. We spent 90 minutes driving around in my old green 1968 Volvo; we were both bummed.

For many years after that I lived on the west side of Baltimore, near a 2,000 acre nature preserve, but to reach my middle-class neighborhood you had to skirt some really hardscrabble locales. John was driving his light blue 1984 Mercury convertible (that he kept

garaged even when it stopped running). He got lost and had to stop and call me to come rescue him, and after that never drove to visit me. Would only come to B-more by train...

**A**s a game designer, I would call him when I got stuck on a design problem. He had a way of just knowing what he wanted and how to lay it all out in nice straight lines. Not that his games and books were perfect but they expressed a vision and a personality. He rarely asked for my advice; except on Napoleon.

### Luddite John

John never carried a cell phone. I admire that commitment as a Luddite myself. First email I received from him was in April 2002 (sending condolences about my cat, Mr. Simon). He only shared Ellen's email, and continued to tap away joyfully on his typewriters until the last repair shop closed up. He always had a few banged-up typewriters in the shop.

Those Smith Coronas are still in the house...

**P**rados wrote three books on the Pacific Theater in WWII, and brought out the Japanese perspective more and more. I shared John's fascination for the subject. When I decided to research Japanese aircraft losses at Guadalcanal on a plane-by-plane basis, John shared estimates from after the war, and explained the limitations of Japanese military institutions that American codebreakers exploited.

*Storm Over Leyte* is John's 2016 study of June '44 through the invasion of the Philippines. It starts with FDR's visit to Hawaii, to confer with MacArthur over goals following the Marianas (MacArthur gets his way.) In Japan, there is a change over from Tojo's regime to a negotiation-minded clique starting to think about cutting their losses. With the fall of the Marianas, Tokyo was now within range of B-29s. A Japanese officer, Toshikazu Ohmae, keeps popping up at the critical moments, and now appears among the new realistic faction. They decide to stake 70% of their remaining military power in opposing the



Rabaul, New Britain, 1942

next operation, so that they then would have a stronger hand in negotiations.

As told in Prados's other book, *Combined Fleet Decoded*, Ohmae was the one who unwittingly gave the Americans the J-25 code, and was also in the 8th Fleet flagship at the Battle of Savo on August 8th, 1942. This guy somehow knows what's going on, and where to be.

The ability to intercept and decode Japanese communications outweighed all the battleships you could build. By the middle of the war, every move was known by US Command. Not in real time, but getting faster. The U.S. had thousands of people working on intercepts, and Japan operated at a critical handicap, never lucky, always losing. They didn't have our code. The Solomons campaign was the last of the level playing field, and on August 8th, Eighth Fleet reached the transports, but instead of sinking them turned back. That was a fatal chance in history, a main-turning, catastrophe. So this Ohmae was not very effective it seems; no one is learning from experience. No one asks "I wonder if they're reading our codes." You keep waiting for that to happen, but finally in March '44, only Hasegawa Kiichi was trying to bring it up with the top brass when he was killed.

The original Japanese war-plan was supposed to bring a negotiated settlement (on Japanese terms) by 1943, before the US Industrial production pace kicked in. The original planners knew they couldn't win a war of attrition... Then, under Tojo, it became impossible to advocate for negotiation at all. So they finally forced him out on June 18th and he spent his last years gardening.