

Serial: 00044

20 Feb. 52

~~TOP SECRET - Security Information~~~~TOP SECRET~~MEMORANDUM FOR MR. GRANT HANSON:

SUBJECT: Brief History of U. S. COMINT Activities

1. Herewith as requested is a very condensed history of the Communications Intelligence (COMINT) activities of the U. S.

2. It is advisable that I call your attention to the following:

a. This history has no standing as an official document, although I believe the information it contains is authentic.

b. If the story about the Navy's COMINT organization and activities appears rather meager in comparison with that about the Army's, please bear in mind (1) that there is, so far as I have been able to ascertain, no official Navy history of that organization or of its activities, so that I could consult no official documents or documented sources; and that (2) the activities and results of the Navy's COMINT organization and operations were kept highly secret even within the Navy and were a more or less completely closed book to the Army until about 1937, so that my personal knowledge of or very occasional contacts with them hardly afford a good basis for writing authentic history. The only document I was able to find was an informal and unofficial, very brief history, prepared in draft form by Capt. L. F. Safford, USN, who was Chief of the Navy's COMINT organization from 6 May 1936 until 14 February 1942. Capt. Safford wrote his draft history in November 1943, but carried the story only up to 7 December 1941.

c. If I had been given more time, this history might be shorter, or at least it would be more complete, for it would be strange if a few facts pertinent to the history were not omitted as a result of the pressure under which it was written.

3. One such omission now noted is that dealing with the activities of the cryptanalytic unit of the U. S. Coast Guard during the days of the "mable experiment." In 1925 the Coast Guard established a small unit in Washington, headed by Mrs. Friedman and consisting of about half dozen persons, to solve radio traffic of the rum-runners operating in U. S. Coastal waters. The Coast Guard built up an excellent intercept service for this purpose. The intercept service and the cryptanalytic unit con-

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~~TOP SECRET~~~~TOP SECRET~~Memo. for Mr. Grant Manson - Subj: Brief History of U. S. COMINT Activities

tinued to operate even after 1933, working on the traffic of other illicit operations, chiefly those of narcotics smugglers. Shortly after Pearl Harbor the Coast Guard became an integral part of the Navy and its cryptanalytic unit was moved to the Navy Communications Annex (Nebraska Avenue). This unit was kept intact and worked upon clandestine traffic, largely that of German secret agents sent to or from the Western Hemisphere. Soon after V-J Day, this unit did not go back to the Coast Guard but was demobilized. Currently, the Coast Guard conducts no cryptanalytic activities, the Navy having assumed responsibility for such as might be requested by the Coast Guard. I do not believe that any such requests have been made to date.

4. I hope this history, poor as it is, will be useful to you and accept full responsibility for any errors and omissions, all of which are, of course, unintentional.

WILLIAM F. FRIEDMAN
Consultant

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