

Approved for Release by NSA on 08-22-2013, FOIA Case # 73491



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(U) History Today - 26 July 2013

Run Date: 07/26/2013

(U) The Center for Cryptologic History is the occasional focal point for cryptologic-related questions from outside the Agency. One recent query involved dozens of century-old postcards posted from Ft. Myers, Virginia, to Berryville, Virginia in 1916. Among the lines of plain text on the cards were several of cipher text composed using unknown symbols.

(U) Historians at CCH immediately identified the mystery lines as the Freemason Cipher, also known as the Pig Pen Cipher.

(U) Freemasons reportedly used this system to secure their communications from one lodge to another in the 17th and 18th centuries. This cipher substitutes simple geometric fragments for letters of the alphabet and has been popularly used for centuries to provide a modicum of privacy from the casual observer.

(U) To further confound a less-than-determined adversary, the Freemason Cipher can be used employing any of numerous variants and super-encipherment techniques. These enhancements were frequently used by Civil War prisoners of war in letters written to family and friends.

(U) In the case of the hastily composed postcards, the Freemason Cipher was the choice of two young lovers, William and Kitty. The author, more likely than not, lived in a crowded quarters and wished to keep his private thoughts from his companions and from the prying eyes of postal employees.

(U) In a happy postscript, the two were married a year later and enjoyed more than five decades of connubial bliss. The Center for Cryptologic History forwarded the solution as well as the Freemason Cipher variant key to William and Kitty's descendants so that they could access their treasure trove of family history.

(U) Try your hand at decrypting the two examples of William's tender words to Kitty by using the following key

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G
H
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J
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O
P
Q
R
S
T
U
V
W
X
Y
Z

A	C	E
G	I	K
M	O	Q

B	D	F
H	J	L
N	P	R

S
U W
Y

T
V X
Z

4