DOCID: 4229014

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Interview of Mrs E.S. Friedman, 29 Jan 1976, Washington DC by R. Louis Benson

The purpose of this interview was to obtain information concerning the communications intelligence efforts of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1939-45 for the historical study, A History of U.S. Communications Intelligence Organization, Policy and Coordination During World War Two.

All information which follows the general subject headings is from Mrs. Friedman. The interviewer's comments and elaboration are in the footnotes. Mrs. Friedman provided some information that she indicated should be held in confidence and not included in histories or articles. This information is underlined in red.

Background of USCG Comint (1924-39)[1]:

During this period Mrs Friedman was a consultant to the USCG on cryptanalysis (c/a) (C/A). She was not a Civil Service employee and did much of the C/A work at her residence in Washington. The work, until 1933, consisted of solving many rumrunner codes and ciphers. There was an elaborate operation on both coasts and the Gulf of Mexico to bring illegal liquor into the U.S. The bootleggers employed code and cipher systems in their wireless communications, which went ship to shore and ship to ship. Their systems were generally solved. The USCG had extensive intercept operations, exact details unrecalled.

After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Mrs Friedman used her C/A skills to assist the Coast Guard in dealing with other types of smugglers' communications.

During the later 1920s or in about 1930, Mrs Friedman selected from the Civil Service list three young college graduates who had majored in math or physics for employment by the USCG in C/A positions. They were:

Vernon Cooley (NSA-retired, Washington DC, 931-8717)
Robert E. Gordon (deceased)
Hyman Hurwitz (current address unknown)

Mrs Friedman trained these people as well as a Coast Guard officer (name unrecalled) in C/A. At a later date, a USCG regular officer, Lt. L.T. Jones was trained in C/A by the Army.

USCG Comint 1939-41 (Neutrality Period)

During this period Mrs Friedman became a fulltime employee of the USCG and headed their early efforts against German covert communications between Western Hemisphere and Germany. The others in her unit were Cooley, Gordon and Hurwitz.

DOCID: 4229014

At an unknown date, perhaps not til after Pearl Harbor, Lt Jones (later Commander Jones) headed the operation. This operation began when USCG radiomen accidentally began intercepting suspicious international radio traffic, soon shown to be clandestine. The intercepted messages were cryptananyzed by Mrs Friedman and her associates and given to Captain Farley, head of USCG communications, or Lt Jones for appropriate dissemination. The latter was probably to the Army, Navy, FBI. She was not involved in the dissemination or agreements between the services. She was not involved in intercept operations but knew where the sites were. She can only recall that there were sites in Florida, Maine and Long Island; also possibly at New Orleans. Although she was not responsible for liaison activities she recalls the following inter-service items:

a. She personally trained, in a 1-2 month intensive program in C/A, W.G.B. Blackburn of the FBI.[2]

b. She designed the first cryptographic systems for the newly formed Coordinator of Information (COI), soon to be renamed the OSS. In this regard she worked with Captain Jimmy Roosevelt, who she considered to be an important force in the early COI. She also met Wild Bill Donovan, the founder of OSS.[3]

In the pre-war period she cannot specifically recall the USCG Comint relationship with the British. If not before Pearl Harbor, there was significant British-USCG contact soon after.[4]

USCG Merged into Navy

The entire USCG became part of the Navy in 1941 (pre-Pearl Harbor). Her C/A operations informally began to merge with the Navy's OP-20-G. This became official in March 1942. The USCG C/A operation moved to Nebraska Avenue during 1943, occupying the second floor of a wooden temporary building.

USCG Comint 1942-45

Though now a part of OP-20-G, the entire USCG Comint effort remained in the hands of USCG civilian and service personnel. Their mission throughout the war was to intercept and process into English plaintext German clandestine communications. The C/A unit was headed by Commander L.T. Jones, though Lt Polio, a regular USCG officer, may have headed it at some time when Jones was at sea. The unit broke almost all German clandestine code and cipher systems. Most were easily broken. The German traffic being exploited was mainly

DOCID: 4229014

between Latin America and Germany, sometimes via New York where the FBI secretly ran a German station.

The greatest single USCG C/A effort was against a 4 letter group system that took 1-1½ years to break. When the break was made there was much celebration in the unit. The system broken was an Enigma system.[5] She does not recall the British reaction to this success.

Throughout the war Mrs Friedman considered herself to be just one of the workers, as she did not head the unit. At its peak the unit consisted of:

Commander Jones
Mrs Friedman
Cooley
Gordon
Hurwitz
some 3 USCG reserve junior officers
USCG/Navy enlisted women in machine/clerical support

A total of less than 20.

Mrs Friedman does not recall any special name for the unit other than that it was part of OP-20-G.[6] She does not recall details of the intercept operation.

The unit was probably even more secret than other Comint organizations because it dealt with counterespionage and double agent operations. Therefore, records may be lacking, although she recalls that at the end of the war the National Archives inquired as to the size of the unit's record holdings. She does not know if records went to the N.A.

Mrs Friedman does not recall any official wartime contact with the FBI. However, she would not know about all liaison matters as Jones was responsible for that function. She recalls these matters about interservice contact during the war:

a. <u>The British</u>:[7] She met William Stephenson, head of British Security Coordination (BSC), New York on one occasion--at an official social function in Washington. She did not learn the importance of Stephenson's position until later. Stephenson's name was mentioned with the utmost respect, even awe, in intelligence circles. She often encountered two of Stephenson's officers: Colonel Stratton and Captain Kenneth Maidment. Stratton, a famous astronomer, was a regular visitor to the USCG unit where he exchanged machine solutions and discussed other Comint matters related to the Comint problem.[8] She can no longer recall Maidment's role. Captain Hastings, a retired Royal Navy officer, was the main British Comint representative in Washington.[9] She believes that he was an official of GC&CS. Hastings dealt with Mr Friedman before and during

DOCID: 4229014

the war, but he may not have dealt with her on official business. Captain and Mrs Hastings were close personal friends of the Friedmans and the Friedmans stayed with them during a visit to England in the mid 1950s.

b. The FCC: Lt Commander Webster, an experienced USCG communications officer was an official with the FCC. The FCC was cognizant of USCG operations through him. She does not specifically recall dealing with George Sterling, head of the Radio Intelligence Division.

c. U.S. Army: Mrs Friedman recalled dealing with Major Schukraft of SIS who was assisting the OSS with their communications.

Opinion of USCG Comint Production 1942-45

Mrs Friedman was not that impressed with the importance of the clandestine problem or at least the nature of the intelligence material. She believed that the C/A and cryptographic talents of the unit could have been better used on more important projects. She believed the problem was worked to the point of overkill. However, in retrospect she has recognized the importance to the U.S. of Latin America and tha dangers that were posed by German agents. An example of intelligence available to U.S. foreign policy planners thru Comint--Eva Peron was identified as a Nazi agent. She believes that Commander Jones had too narrow a view of USCG Comint operations and that his outlook was influenced by excessive concern as to what was best for him professionally. She and Jones frequently debated the proper mission of the unit.

Miscellaneous Opinions

OP-20-G: Captain Safford had some administrative skills but none other. After Pearl Harbor he was replaced as head of the organization and placed in a non-job where he sat at his desk complaining about mistreatment.[10] Captain Wenger was throughout the war the brains of OP-20-G. Mrs Friedman likens his role in the Navy to that of her husband in the Army. Wenger was a quiet, gentle person. Captain Earl Stone, who headed 20-G thru much of the war was a nice person. Joseph and Jack Redman were skilled communicators with a proper appreciation of Comint. She was also professionally associated with Commander Kramer and Lt Parke, who were skilled in their areas of specialization.

Mr Friedman: never discussed his secret duties with her. He was excessively burdened by security considerations, a major cause of his nervous breakdown in

DOCID: 4229014

1941. He had to give up his Lieutenant Colonelcy in the reserves because of Major General Olmstead, the Chief Signal Officer who replaced Major General Joseph Mauborgne.[11] She regarded Olmstead as very stupid.

J. Edgar Hoover: Mrs Friedman understands that J. Edgar Hoover had a very high opinion of her husband although she does not know the nature of their official association. She recalled a Hoover story that her husband told her-- during the war years Hoover lunched at Harvey's restaurant in Washington where he had a regular table. A bottle of wine was always placed on his table before his arrival. It was Hoover's custom to take his wine bottle around the restaurant pouring a glass for persons he saw there who he knew and liked or who he wanted to know. Mr. Friedman was a recipient of the ceremonial glass.

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1. This period was not discussed in detail as it was not the objective of the interview. Mrs Friedman probably has many recollections of this era.

2. Blackburn was the first chief of the FBI's cryptanalysis branch, established in Jan 1940. More information is contained in Benson's historical study.

3. Jimmy Roosevelt was authorized to receive USCG Comint for COI beginning in Aug 1941. See Benson's history.

4. There was probable USCG-British Comint contact prior to Pearl Harbor. There definitely were established contacts in Jun 1942 that had existed for an unspecified period. See Benson's article in Spectrum, 1976.

5. In fact the British were very concerned about how the USCG would disseminate the intelligence derived from their success with Enigma. The USCG C/A success is technically detailed in History of Coast Guard Unit 387, a Top Secret Codeword document filed in the NSA Cryptologic Collection. Mrs Friedman recalled that at the end of the war Commander Jones was writing a study. This was probably the aforementioned history.

6. In 1944 the unit was called OP-20-GU. Earlier designations of this unit have not been determined.

7. Some details of the British-USCG Comint rdlationship are contained in documents filed in the E51 collections.

8. Stratton was also involved in liaison with the FCC's Radio Intelligence Division (RID). George Sterling, wartime head of RID, was interviewed during 1975 and provided the same description of Stratton as Mrs Friedman-- he looked like Santa Claus and had the habit of appearing unexpectedly.

DOCID: 4229014

9. Mrs Friedman said that one of the most vivid recollections of her life concerns Captain Hastings. On the afternoon of 7 Dec 1941, soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor was announced, Captain Hastings came to the Friedman's house in Washington. He sat down and proceeded to "laugh and laugh" about the Pearl Harbor attack. Mrs Friedman was shocked and offended and never understood his behavior on this occasion. Apparently Hastings found the surprise element of the attack amusing. Nevertheless their friendship continued.

10. Mrs Friedman said that she cannot forgive Captain Safford for claiming to have made certain cryptographic inventions which were in fact solely accomplished by her husband, or at least not in anyway with the assistance of Safford.

11. The role of Olmstead in this matter should be checked. He did not become Chief Signal Officer until Aug 1941 and Friedman may have given up his commission before then. Mrs. Friedman expressed some confusion in this area and may have meant to identify some other Signal Corps officer as the culprit.