

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//SI~~

(U)Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U)James Pryde

(U) During the 1940s operational areas in the Signal Security Agency and later the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) consistently followed the military model of organization: all black functional units were normally formed within larger white organizations. However, signs of change began to appear around 1950, when several African-Americans managed to transfer out of AFSA-213, the all-black traffic processing unit.

(U) One of the individuals who made this move was James Pryde. In his late teenage years, Mr. Pryde joined the Army Air Corps and became an aviation cadet. In September of 1944 he entered aviation school, but, as he recalled in an interview, he "had an accident with an airplane and washed out." Mr. Pryde then became a radio operator with the 477th Bomb Group of WWII's famous Tuskegee Airmen.

(U) After he left the military in 1946, Mr. Pryde returned to college and majored in elementary education. He joined AFSA in 1950 and was assigned to AFSA-213 as a communications clerk and then to the mailroom. At some point it was learned that he could read automatic morse tapes, and he was transferred to a signals analysis section. In an interview in 1998, Mr. Pryde described how he "was sent to a single room [by] myself and would get about ten tapes a day to read through and transcribe."

(U) In another interview, Mr. Pryde recalled much about the social tenor of the period when he began working at AFSA and later at NSA. He remembered, for example, segregation in the AFSA cafeteria and being required to sit "in the back of the bus" on the ride from Washington, DC, to Arlington Hall Station. He also remembered restaurants and other facilities in Laurel, Maryland, that would not serve him because of his race. A positive aspect of that situation was that, as a result of the new federal nondiscrimination orders, such establishments were placed "off limits" to all military personnel:

(b)(1)
(b)(3)-50 USC 403
(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

~~(TS//SI)~~ From the simple beginnings of his cryptologic experience, Mr. Pryde went on to a brilliant career in [redacted] Soviet communications intelligence and telemetry intelligence. In the mid-1950s, he became involved in analysis of COMINT from

(U) Later Mr. Pryde became a telemetry analyst, a responsibility which eventually led to

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his being tapped as director of the Defense Special Missile and Astronautics Center (DEFSMAC). He served in that position from 1978 to 1980, around which time he was named a member of the intelligence community's Guided Missile Astronautics Intelligence Committee. From May to December 1980 he was assigned as NSA's representative to the Department of Defense (NCRDEF). Mr. Pryde's final post at NSA was as assistant deputy director of administration from January to December 1981.

(U) In 1971 Mr. Pryde received the Meritorious Civilian Service Award from DIRNSA, Admiral Gayler. His honor came in recognition of two years in which he was detailed to the staff of the assistant secretary of defense. In that position, Mr. Pryde was responsible for making recommendations concerning the allocation of billions of dollars for national defense programs. Ten years later, in February 1981, he was presented with the Exceptional Civilian Service Award for his performance while serving as NCRDEF.

[(U)] For more information on the African-American experience at NSA and its predecessors, see The Invisible Cryptologists: African-Americans, WWII to 1956.)

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