

SECRET//COMINT//SI

Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

Louis W. Tordella

(U//FOUO)

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

(U) Dr. Louis Tordella was known variously as "Dr. T," "Dr. No," and other, less flattering terms. At one point during Tordella's term as D/DIRNSA, [redacted] commented to the author that Dr. Tordella and he had received their doctorates from the same university. As a result of this brotherhood, Dr. Tordella called him "Byron," and he called Dr. Tordella "Dr. Tordella." Tordella was like that, but perhaps he had reason to be.

(U) He became the deputy director of NSA in 1958, and remained in the post more than fifteen years until his retirement in 1974. He thus became the longest serving deputy director in NSA's history. During this time, he brought NSA to the forefront in cryptologic computer and cryptographic machine design.

(U) Dr. Tordella was born in Garrett, Indiana, on 1 May 1911 and grew up in the Chicago environs. He displayed an early affinity for mathematics, and obtained bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in mathematics in the 1930s. The outbreak of World War II found him teaching mathematics at Chicago's Loyola University.

(U) He joined the navy, immediately made contacts in the service, and was brought aboard as a lieutenant junior grade in 1942. He went directly into cryptologic work for the navy's codebreaking organization, OP-20-G. He spent most of the war at OP-20-G collection stations on the West Coast, at Bainbridge Island, Washington, and Skaggs Island, California. In 1943, while serving as acting Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of operations at Bainbridge Island, he was ordered to set up a compartmented intercept project directed against Soviet naval communications. This was the first U.S. Navy collection effort against a Soviet military target.

~~(S//SI)~~ In 1944, Tordella was sent as OIC to a newly established U.S. Navy experimental site at Skaggs Island aimed at collecting [redacted] traffic. In addition to personally heading the operation, he designed a crude multiplexer, the first of its kind.

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(b)(3)-50 USC 403
(b)(3)-18 USC 793
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(U) Tordella left the navy in 1946 for a position with OP-20-G as a civilian mathematician, and in 1949 he joined the newly created Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA), an early attempt to achieve service unity in the business of cryptology. He was a key figure in devising policy for the new agency, and for its successor, the National Security Agency,

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which emerged in 1952 to replace AFSA.

(U) His career at NSA brought him to the very front rank of cryptologists. He was an early advocate of the use of computers for cryptologic work, and helped to cement a close working relationship with American industry. His grasp of computer technology and the associated engineering concepts, coupled with his understanding of cryptanalysis, was invaluable in keeping the United States ahead of the field in this critical skill. He pushed forcefully for the development of supercomputers for cryptologic applications.

(U) Tordella was also a leader in securing American communications, pushing a series of leading-edge new encoding devices to secure U.S. government communications. In another aspect of communications, he briefed President Eisenhower in 1958 on the necessity for creating the Criticomm (critical communications) system, which would provide a means for getting critical information to the White House within ten minutes. His presentation sold Eisenhower on the system, and implementation was ordered.

(U) As a senior official at NSA, Dr. Tordella played a central role in NSA's outside relationships. Close collaborators in Great Britain and the British Commonwealth built up such a trust with Tordella that many foreign intelligence officials regarded him as the linchpin in their relationship with NSA. To these collaborators and to the United States Congress and the intelligence community, Louis Tordella was NSA.

(U) Dr. Tordella received unprecedented honors over the years. On his retirement in 1974, he received both the National Security Medal and the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal. His relationship with the British was recognized in 1976 when he became an Honorary Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. In 1992 the Security Affairs Support Association, composed mainly of retired intelligence officials, gave him the William O. Baker medal for distinguished service to American intelligence.

(U) Dr. Tordella passed away on 10 January 1996.

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