

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X~~

## (U)Cryptologic Almanac 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Series

### (U)The Berlin Tunnel

#### Part I: But Did They Call Miss Utility?

(U//~~FOUO~~) Operation REGAL has been called one of the most brilliant covert operations of its time. Yet, it was compromised from the very beginning. Operation REGAL produced a stupendous amount of intercept about the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc. Yet, it brought two of America's intelligence agencies into sharp conflict. Operation REGAL called into question the definition of communications intelligence (COMINT) and who manages it. Operation REGAL was the Berlin Tunnel.

(U) In 1955, the U.S. government had a critical need for knowledge about the Communist Bloc. American troops were stationed in the border areas of divided Germany, along the line between the eastern and western zones of Europe. Berlin was divided into two cities, one the capital of East Germany, the other defended by American forces. The Soviets, too, kept large armies in Eastern Europe, and no one could say for certain what their military readiness was or what their plans might be. Senior U.S. policy makers feared the other side might be preparing an invasion of Western Europe.

(U) In 1955, the metaphor for the dividing line between the USSR and the communist nations on the one hand and the Free World on the other was an "iron curtain." In many ways, the metaphor was true. The countries of the Communist Bloc tightly controlled the dissemination of even general information, and travel within the Bloc and between the zones was restricted.

(S//SI) Moreover, the strict control wielded by the communist authorities made acquisition of information difficult, even by espionage. Satellite photography was still about a decade away

50 USC 403  
(b)(3)-18 USC 798  
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(U) COMINT was administered by the Department of Defense. Each of the military services also maintained its own COMINT organization for direct support to their forces. In 1952, President Truman had created the National Security Agency, subordinate to the secretary of defense, to centralize strategic COMINT operations. The director of NSA was

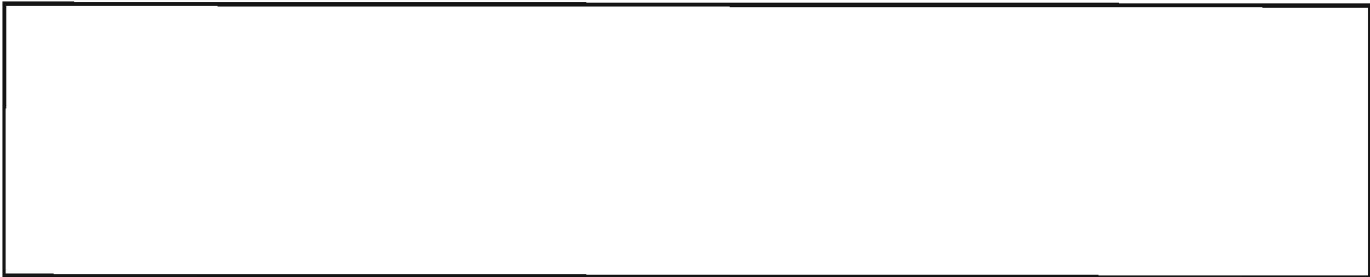
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LTG Ralph Canine, a crusty old soldier who demanded much of his people but also worked hard to obtain resources and respect for NSA from other government entities.


(U) The Central Intelligence Agency had been established in 1947 to coordinate intelligence operations and provide intelligence analysis for the executive branch. Although CIA offices had access to COMINT, many officials felt their designation as "central" meant their organization should also control it; many, veterans of World War II espionage, still resented the fact that their predecessor organization had been excluded even from access to COMINT during the war. The CIA director was Allen Dulles, whose intelligence career went back to the First World War. In addition, as brother of the secretary of state, he had unusually good political connections.

(U//~~FOUO~~) The CIA had an interest in establishing its own COMINT operations, separate from NSA's, and in 1953 hired Frank Rowlett to establish a COMINT program. Rowlett had been one of William Friedman's original cryptomathematicians, hired in 1930. During World War II, Rowlett had been chief of cryptanalysis in the Army. In the early 1950s, however, he clashed with General Canine, director of NSA, over some personnel decisions and was open to the offer from CIA.



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(S//~~SI~~) Frank Rowlett had a communications map of prewar Germany. It showed Berlin as the hub for much of Eastern Europe's landline communications, and that communications cables were buried only a foot and a half underground, making the East German capital a logical location to place a tap. Once a decision was made to proceed with tunneling in Berlin, senior officials at the CIA also decided that landline taps were not communications intelligence but a clandestine operation; thus, NSA need not be informed of it. 

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(U) Ramrodding the first phase of the operation was William Harvey, the CIA's chief in West Berlin. Harvey, a former FBI special agent whose corpulent figure and independent manners did not fit J. Edgar Hoover's image of his agents, became a legend in his own lifetime. Among his CIA colleagues, for example, he was known for  and  and firearms; he had an extensive pistol collection, brought a different one to his office every day, and would clean or load the pistol du jour during conferences. He was, however, what today would be called an "out-of-the-box thinker" and had the ability to push tough jobs

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through to completion.

(U) Once a suitable West Berlin location had been selected, Harvey and his people began work. They constructed a building with a deep basement (for the spoil), but because it had an elaborate security fence and was within sight of East German border guards and Soviet patrols, the CIA needed a cover story for it. In fact, they built two cover stories. Word was put out that the building was just another Army warehouse. At the same time, the CIA staff installed antennas for collection of electronic intelligence (ELINT) that were partially visible to the East German border guards. To the other side, the building must have looked like a bungled attempt to hide an American ELINT site.

(U) <sup>TS</sup>Tunnel construction was carried out around the clock by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Elaborate precautions were taken to shore up the shaft and avoid surface detection. By the end of February 1955, 31,000 tons of dirt had been excavated; the tunnel extended 1,476 feet. [REDACTED]

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(U) It now remained to be seen whether this complicated operation would be justified by the quantity and quality of the intercept.

(U) Unbeknownst to the Americans and British, a Soviet agent inside the SIS had been privy to the tunnel plans from the beginning.

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