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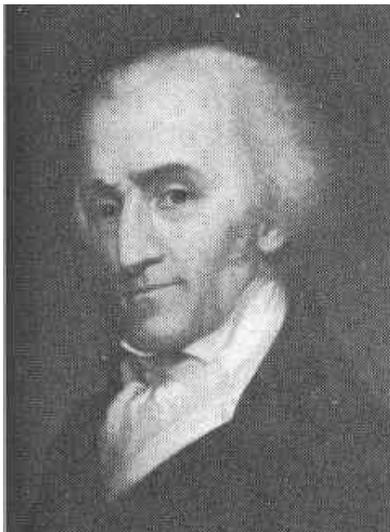


February 22

ONE GIANT VEEP FOR MANKIND

TRIVIA QUESTION: History Today has in the past provided presidential trivia with a cryptologic connection. Today, we have one about the vice-presidents: Which vice-president helped catch via codebreaking a major wartime spy:

- A. Aaron Burr (Thomas Jefferson's Vice President, 1801-1805)
- B. Elbridge Gerry (James Madison's Vice President, 1813-1814)
- C. Hannibal Hamlin (Abraham Lincoln's Vice President, 1861-1865)
- D. Garrett Hobart (William McKinley's Vice President, 1897-1899)
- E. Alben Barkley (Harry Truman's Vice President, 1949-1953)



Elbridge Gerry

The answer is B, Elbridge Gerry who helped capture Dr. Benjamin Church at the beginning of the American Revolution. When Church was unmasked in 1775, he was the chief medical officer of the Continental Army, appointed by none other than George Washington himself. Church had been a member of the Sons of Liberty and a liaison with the Continental Congress. Unfortunately, he also was a spy for British General Thomas Gage. When the British were on their famous march at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts, they were looking for military supplies stored by the

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local militia. Church was among those who had informed them that Concord contained such supplies. As is widely known, the British march was resisted by the local militia (known as “minutemen”), one of the events that triggered the American Revolution (1775-1783).

By pure chance, Washington obtained an encrypted letter in August 1775 from Church to his British handlers. Elbridge Gerry was one of three individuals (the other two being Samuel West and Elisha Porter) who decrypted it. The letter essentially provided Gage with information on American ammunition supplies, rations, recruiting, a planned Canadian invasion, artillery and troop locations and the mindset of the Continental Congress. As Church had employed a simple monoalphabetic substitution cipher, e.g., 9 = A, W= B, Gerry and his colleagues were able to solve it within a couple of days. Found guilty, Church was subsequently exiled to the West Indies in 1780 but was lost at sea en route.

Elbridge Gerry is a historic figure worth another look. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Massachusetts. Yet he was one of those individuals identified with the Conway Cabal, a group of military officers and politicians who contemplated replacing George Washington as commander of the Continental Army. He is perhaps best known though for giving us the term “gerrymandering,” i.e., the rearrangement of political districts to give a particular political party an advantage. He had endorsed this tactic as the governor of Massachusetts in 1812. Of note is that his name was pronounced “Gary” rather than “Jerry.” Gerry was Madison’s second vice president, dying in 1814 before his term was completed. His predecessor, George Clinton, had also died in office, making Madison the only president to have both of his vice presidents die in office.

To read more about Gerry and cryptology in the American Revolution, try the CCH publication *Revolutionary Secrets: Cryptology in the American Revolution* written by Jennifer Wilcox. Read this in softcopy at www.nsa.gov.

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