

EXTRACT FROM: R.I.P. No. 98, Copy 1 (Original), dated 5 April 1943,
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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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(SC)A7-1/QM The Bobbs-Merrill Co.

Serial 0304620

March 28, 1942

My dear Mr. Secretary:

Receipt of your letter FE 894.727/48
of March 19, 1942, regarding authorization
for publication of the book entitled,
"The American Black Chamber," is acknowledged.

The Navy Department has consistent-
ly maintained the attitude that every effort
should be made to conceal from general
knowledge the results of our cryptanalytical
operations.

It is considered that republishing
such a book as "The American Black Chamber"
would only serve to stir up curiosity re-
garding present activities and thereby
work contrary to our security aims.

Sincerely yours,

James Forrestal

Acting

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2. The Friedman Publicity.

Widespread interest in the romantic stories of beautiful female spies, secret codes and ciphers which Yardley had told caused editors from this time on to become keenly conscious of the news value of such stories. Consequently, when in 1934 magazine and newspaper accounts broke concerning Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Friedman, a Coast Guard cryptanalyst, a number of similar incidents followed:

1. March, 1934 (American Magazine, Vol. 117:47)

Publication of Mrs. Friedman's picture with a caption which indicated her connection with the Coast Guard as a cryptanalyst, and also told of her husband's profession.

2. April 23, 1934 (Washington Post)

An article on Mrs. Friedman discussed her comments on the famous Bacon cipher. It went on to mention her Coast Guard activities in cryptanalysis, and spoke of her husband who performed work of a similar nature with the Army Signal Corps.

3. May 25, 1934 (Radio Broadcast)

Mrs. Friedman was interviewed on the radio at 2:00 p.m. and discussed her duties as head of the Cryptanalytical Bureau in the Coast Guard. She was identified as the wife of Major William Friedman, Chief of the Signal Corps Intelligence Service in the War Department, who was in charge of military codes and communications.

4. May 26, 1934. (Washington Post)

A news item gave the details of the above broadcast.

5. June 3, 1934 (Washington Post)

Mrs. Friedman's picture was displayed in the Sunday edition with a caption explaining her cryptanalytical duties.

6. June 30, 1934 (Seattle Daily Times)

An article emphasizing that Mrs. Friedman was woman cryptanalyst. "Mrs. Friedman was her husband's assistant during the World War and helped decode secret military ciphers."

7. July 22, 1934 (Washington Sunday Star)

The picture of Mrs. Friedman illustrated an article in which the details of the famous "I'm Alone" case were given. This was one of the boot-legging cases which were solved by deciphering the codes of the smugglers.

Some of these stories reached the public because Mrs. Friedman had to testify in court as to the method by which evidence was obtained. Naturally, she had to divulge certain secret details, which were then no longer secret. This is one of the reasons why the use of police agencies in cryptanalysis is dangerous. Conviction of a criminal demands proof, and though giving testimony concerning success in a certain instance may obtain conviction, it will also jeopardize the source for future reference. To publicize a deciphering success in military or diplomatic work is to dry up the source of information for a long time.

From 1934 to 1937 the Friedmans remained unmolested in seclusion, but in 1937 another series of accounts describing their work began:

8. January 4, 1937 (Sunday Star)

This sensational article described Major Friedman's solution of a code which had been sent by Hindus, who were arranging a mutiny in India. He had to testify in the trial which ended April 23, 1928, when one of the conspirators, Ram Chandra, was shot by another, Ram Singh. However, the background material of this article told of the activities of Colonel George Fabyan, who had lent the services of the 20 staff members of his Riverbank Laboratory at Geneva, Illinois to the government during 1916 and 1917. In 1918 they were brought to Washington with all their data and records, and Major Friedman disclosed that he had been one of this group.

9. June 5, 1937 (Washington Star)

An article and picture of Mrs. Friedman identified her as a cryptanalyst and as wife of the Chief of Signal Intelligence Service of the Army.

10. August, 1937 (American Legion Magazine)

An article "Codes-Fact and Fallacy" described in detail some of the activities of Mr. and Mrs. Friedman.

11. September, 1937 (Reader's Digest)

This magazine, which reaches millions of readers throughout the world, reprinted the American Legion Magazine article.

12. Circa September 1, 1937 (Washington Evening Star)

A reader inquired as to the activities of Colonel W. Friedman, and he was informed that he was a cryptanalyst.

13. September 12, 1937 (Syndicated News Article)

This article, which was furnished to many newspapers, stressed the secrecy of Mr. Friedman's work.

"Visitors are barred from the rooms in the squat munitions building where the work is actually done. And the size of Friedman's staff is kept secret."

14. October 7, 1937 (Washington Evening Star)

A reader asked the name of a woman cryptanalytical expert, and the reply was "Mrs. Friedman." There was also an article about her in Modern Mechanics about this time.

15. February 9, 1938 (Washington Post)

A picture of Mrs. Friedman and a news item, which told of her part in the conviction of five Vancouver Chinese on the charge of smuggling opium, were published. She had been loaned to the Canadian government for this purpose.

16. February 10, 1938 (Washington Herald)

A picture of Mrs. Friedman, and a long article on the Chinese dope smuggling ring were featured.

17. February 15, 1938 (Look Magazine)

A picture of Mrs. Friedman, and a caption describing her work were published.

18. February 21, 1938 (Washington Post)

Mrs. Friedman was mentioned in Alice Hughes' column as a cryptanalyst.

19. November 23, 1939 (Washington Times-Herald)

In an article on "Queer Federal Jobs" by Jerry Klutz, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Friedman were described as cryptanalysts:

"Mr. Friedman is Chief of the Signal Intelligence Section of War's "War Plans and Training Division," and his wife Elizabeth S. is the Coast Guard's cryptanalyst.

Navy also has a cryptanalyst. And, oddly enough, it is a woman, Agnes M. Driscoll. She not only deciphers codes in foreign languages, but teaches naval officers the secrets of her profession."

20. October 3, 1941 (Washington Star)

This story told of Colonel William Friedman's interest in the Poe ciphers, and pointed out that he was Chief Signal Officer in the War Department. (Colonel Friedman has never been Chief Signal Officer-Ed.)

Undoubtedly, there were many other items similar to these published throughout the country. No informed observer in Washington could escape knowing who the principal cryptanalysts of the Army and the Coast Guard were. Publicity of this nature was particularly unfortunate in that Yardley's book had provided a perfect cover for work of this nature. It will be recalled that the former head of the United States cryptographic bureau had vented his wrath on Secretary Stimson for abolishing his unit. Ostensibly then, there was no more cryptanalysis of other nation's codes going on in Washington. But revelations of the activities of the Friedmans could lead to only one conclusion on the part of espionage agents -- decryption of other nation's codes was in progress behind the scenes.

It may be pointed out that these publicity leaks did not divulge any diplomatic secrets, but it must be remembered that incidents of this kind were certainly enough to make every potential enemy agent in Washington much more cautious about communication security. These security measures will be discussed later.