

SECRET//COMINT//X1

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

### (U) Minnie Kenny: Champion with a Red Carnation

(U) Minnie Kenny's professional and personal life have epitomized talent, motivation, perseverance and, perhaps more importantly, caring. Her climb from a GS-4 to the ranks of the Senior Executive Service allowed her to make the Agency a better place for all of us to work. Despite bureaucratic opposition, she created the Red Carnation Award, the Agency's premier peer honor. Minnie's last assignment as the director of NSA's Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEO) was an appropriate finale to a career dedicated to nurturing and mentoring others.

(U) Minnie Kenny grew up in a “melting pot” neighborhood in Philadelphia amongst 10 brothers and sisters. There, following in an older sister's footsteps, she attended the Philadelphia High School for Girls, a choice that would ultimately affect her career. To enrich her personal education, she read...and read. Minnie explained her early love for books in an interview late in her career. Not only did she frequent the many local libraries, but she and her siblings would pull a wagon around to reclaim discarded books until they accumulated a “wealth of reading materials.” The books they were unable to read at the time, they saved. One of her early contacts with a foreign language was with Latin in high school, beginning decades of her fascination with and affinity for languages.

(U) During her high school days, Minnie had held temporary government jobs, including working at the post office during the Christmas rush. After graduation, she was recruited for a more permanent position as a GS-2 coding clerk for the Commerce Department's Census Bureau. This was, she later recalled, her “introduction to mono-alphabetic substitution.”

(U) In 1951 the government was closing its Philadelphia office, so Minnie transferred to Washington, DC. She quickly saw that her future with Commerce was less than promising, so she crossed over to the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) at Arlington Hall Station when the opportunity arose that same year. It was here that Minnie was selected to work “upstairs” in the Office of Operations at a time when, in Minnie's words, “most blacks were assigned to the basement” to work as tabulators or keypunch machine operators. Her interviewer/detailer at Arlington Hall (also a graduate of Philadelphia High School for Girls) had recognized Minnie's high school class ring and sent her “upstairs.”<sup>1</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ Minnie Kenny began her storied adventures in cryptology as a GS-4 communications clerk. Her early forays into cryptanalysis and language-about the time she

was a GS-9--

(b) (1)  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

(U) Despite Minnie's talents as both a cryptanalyst and linguist, she thought herself to be a cryptanalyst first. She would later say, "cryptanalysis provided me the catalyst for learning the language" to further her understanding of the application of both disciplines, and to enable her to recognize and read plain text.

(U) As her career progressed, Minnie served as staff language advisor to the director, NSA/CSS, and, concurrently, as chief of the Language and Linguistics Division. She chaired the Language Career Panel, the DDO Language Advisory Committee, and the External Language Training Selection Board. In her words, she became known as "Mama Language," a name that stuck.

(U) One of Minnie Kenny's lasting achievements for NSA's linguists occurred in the early 1980s when she prepared testimony for Admiral Inman to present to Congress in an attempt to amend the National Security Agency Act of 1959 to improve the plight of Agency linguists. As a result, the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1982 empowered DIRNSA to cooperate more closely with academic institutions to "foster language research and to provide training for military, cryptologic resources, [and] to establish cryptologic linguist reserves," among other authorities. The Foreign Language Incentive Program (FLIP) was also included in the amendment.

(U) Shortly after this success, in 1981 Admiral Inman sent Minnie and Bob Prestel, who would become the deputy director in 1990, to the National Cryptologic School (NCS) to reinvigorate a demoralized workforce. Minnie was the deputy assistant director for training with direct responsibility for day-to-day operations of the NCS. Following this assignment, she became the assistant director for administration. She held many other management and senior executive-level positions during her Agency tenure.

(U) As noted earlier, her last position was as NSA's director of the EEO Office into 1993. Even in her final years at NSA, Minnie still enjoyed jousting. Admiral McConnell, DIRNSA at that time, had subordinated the EEO Office to the Services Directorate in an effort to reduce the number of his direct reports. Minnie convinced McConnell to rethink his decision and to re-elevate the EEO Office to his staff to demonstrate the real and symbolic importance of EEO in the workplace.

(U) Minnie Kenny's personal and professional life brimmed with achievement. She represented the Department of Defense on the Congressional Task Force on Women, Minorities, and the Handicapped in Science and Technology. She was also the Agency's

delegate to the Ad Hoc Language Task Force of the *National Foreign Intelligence Board*.

(U) In 1985 Minnie Kenny wanted to create a special award to enable employees to recognize individuals who led by example, and who possessed the traits of honesty, empowering, nurturing, and mentoring. She called this the Red Carnation Award. This was not to be more recognition for technical expertise or intelligence successes, but more for the intangibles of leadership. The NSA hierarchy of the mid-1980s balked, but despite the resistance, Minnie Kenny established the Red Carnation Award anyway. In June 2000 Minnie received the award herself. Her nomination came from all the previous awardees.

(U) To attract gifted minorities to NSA, Minnie Kenny worked with Congressman Stokes' (D-OH) office in 1987 to sponsor legislation to create the Undergraduate Training Program (UTP). The UTP facilitates the recruitment of talented minority high school students to train in Agency disciplines. In preparation for their careers in the intelligence community, the students receive an undergraduate scholarship for four years at an accredited college of their choice. They also receive a yearly salary and a full-time job at NSA after graduation. They repay the debt by working for NSA after college graduation for at least one and one-half times the length of their studies. It is not only NSA that has benefited from Minnie's collaboration with Congressman Stokes. Both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency adopted similar recruitment programs.

(U) Minnie is the recipient of many prestigious work, community, and academic honors. In 1980 she was awarded the Meritorious Civilian Service Award, and in 1984, the Exceptional Civilian Service Award, the Agency's highest civilian honor. She was singled out by both Presidents Reagan and Bush for the Meritorious Executive Award, and by the DCI for the Intelligence Community's Distinguished Service Award. She received the President's Citation from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore; the Don Quixote Award from the National Hispanic University; and a Doctorate in Humane Letters from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

(U) Minnie was president and the 1977 Woman of the Year of the Patuxent Business and Professional Women's Club. She was a member of the Howard County Human Rights Commission, and the two-term legislation chairman of the Maryland Federation of Business and Professional and Executive Women, the League of Women Voters, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Women's Equity Action League.

(U) In an interesting sidebar to her personal life, Minnie has been married to Bill Kenny, who was lead tenor of the legendary Ink Spots from 1936 to 1945, when he embarked on a solo career. The quartet is still active today.

(U) Minnie Kenny retired in 1993 with 43 years of federal service.

<sup>1</sup> (U) See Jeannette Williams' excellent monograph *The Invisible Cryptologists: African-Americans, WWII to 1956* for more on Minnie Kenny and African-Americans at NSA.

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