

Speaker: Dr. Abraham Sinkov

It's been mentioned that Mr. Friedman was a consultant with the Signal Corps. He was hired on a consultant basis and was essentially carrying on the Army's effort in both COMINT and COMSEC as an individual. He had one enlisted man working with him and one secretary. That was it. That was the whole U.S. Army effort. About 1929, Mr. Friedman got permission from the Signal Corps authorities—specifically from the Chief Signal Officer—to expand his effort with the idea of building up some additional capability in what we now call the cryptologic field. Some thought was given to the general question of where to seek people for this kind of work. At that time, the hiring of employees within the Civil Service was done from what were known as Civil Service Registers. Each register was a list of names of people who had passed special Civil Service examinations...

Well, they decided that the mathematicians list was a good place to go, but they also thought that it would be useful to add a further requirement. And they considered that it would be useful to require that the people who would be considered should also have some competence in foreign language. So the idea was to go to the register. The one they went to was the one called "Junior Mathematician".

Well, they decided they would go to that register of junior mathematicians and look at the list; select people from the list who had some language background; and then see what kind of employees could be hired from that list. Incidentally, this raised a little complication because in those days, there was a rather strict regulation within the Civil Service Commission that if any government agency wanted to hire a person from a register—no matter which one—the selection had to be made from among the top three on the register itself. And unless one of those top three was selected, very definite reasons had to be provided for the rejection of all three and for the permission to dip down any deeper into the list. Well, this was, to some extent overcome, because of the additional requirement of language which was imposed. And from that list, three names were selected after an examination of records and I guess after some correspondence. And the three people who were selected are sitting here in front of you: Rowlett and Kullback and I. We each had had some work in one foreign language in school. I had had a fair amount of work in French, Kullback had studied Spanish, and Rowlett's language was German. We were hired and brought to Washington as a [sic] expansion of this organization, which was known as the Signal Intelligence Service—the SIS. Our coming increased the size of the establishment to the grand number of six. And we were put in a specially favored position because we were brought in by Mr. Friedman and we were at once put through what amounted to a very effective training program.