

The black chamber



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The paper "The Black Chamber Organization" is a perfect example of an essay on history. The military cipher bureau of the United States was converted into a civilian organization (Richelson, 1995). The main aim of the organization was to attack the cipher messages of other countries that were intercepted by the US. The organization came into existence by the efforts of Herbert Yardley who used to work as a telegraph operator and code clerk. This organization was also known as The Black Chamber as was founded immediately after World War I. The organization was jointly funded by the Department of State and the US Army. The organization is also known as MI-8, the first cryptanalytic organization of the United States. However, the organization was disbanded in the year 1929 when the State Department pulled out (National Security Agency, 2009). Some Works of MI-8

Under Herbert, the organization and the team of cryptanalysts were able to decipher more than 24 foreign diplomatic cipher systems (National Security Agency, 2009). The organization was able to intercept 64 messages in one code that was being transmitted to Mexico from Nauen (Richelson, 1995). This message was very essential for the US Army as the message illustrated a Japanese plan to provide the Mexicans with arms and ammunition and also the machinery needed to manufacture the weapons (Richelson, 1995).

Another message that was decoded by the Cipher Bureau was being transmitted by a Nauen station to Mexico. The intent of the message was to demand from the German minister in Mexico to get ten million pesetas as an amount to make Mexico neutral during the war (Richelson, 1995). By 1920, the organization solved about 26 Spanish systems. Some of the solutions were advanced by intercepting the messages and code material which was supplied by Britain.

Description of Organization

MI-8 came into existence through the efforts of Herbert O. Yardley in 1917 which included only two civilians as employees and a second lieutenant (Richelson, 1995). Soon, the staff increased to 25 and the team started to attack the codes from many foreign countries. The organization achieved the purpose for which it was founded, to intercept and decode the messages ciphered by other nations. It helped in the conviction of Lothar Witzke as a suspect of the Black Tom Explosion (Richelson, 1995). This organization was America's most secret and intelligent service provider to the state. In the past, the US did not keep any codes and ciphers formally. The only codes and ciphers recorded were by the Armed Forces branch before the WWI. Other nations such as France and Britain also aided The Black Chamber in code-breaking when the team was unable to deconstruct the ciphers. Yardley estimated the operations of the Black Chamber would cost US\$ 100,000 each year. These estimates were found to be more than the War Department had available in secret funds. A need of cryptanalytic bureau was strongly felt by the new Intelligence director Churchill. The Military Intelligence agreed to pay \$ 60,000 with the remaining \$ 40,000 being sponsored by the State Department.

Purpose of the Black Chamber

When Yardley was in Paris, he attempted to create better relationships with the French code breakers. The code bureau of the American Commission was also being managed by Yardley and his small team from the hotel rooms in France. The organization used to serve the purpose of encrypting the

American delegation's messages and to decrypt the messages of their allies. The stronger the encryption is, the harder it will be by the other cryptographers to break the code. Each nation, in that era, tried to uncover the objectives and intent of the other nations, therefore, the skills of deciphering were in great demand.

Another objective of forming a formal organization for intercepting, deciphering and recording the message of other nations, was to bring the USA on an equal footing with the European powers. The European countries like Britain and France were excellent at code-breaking. For this purpose, a permanent organization for the objective of peace was approved by Churchill in 1919 (Richelson, 1995). Spain was one of the main targets of the MI-8 other than Germany. Germany was the major target of the organization's deciphering skills and maybe the only reason for forming the secret agency. Spain had pro-Germany motives and the country could serve the purpose of intermediary for Germany.

Overview of the Black Chamber

Through the 1920s, from its birth, the Black Chamber focused briefly on the cipher and code systems of numerous European nations. These nations included Austria, Denmark, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Italy and Greece (Richelson, 1995). Most of the instances of this activity involved only filing accidentally intercepted messages.