

# THE ORIGINS OF NSA



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**Herbert O. Yardley**

Although "code making and breaking" are ancient practices, modern cryptologic communications intelligence activities in the United States date from the World War I period and radio communications technology. In 1917 and 1918 the U.S. Army created, within the Military Intelligence Division, the Cipher Bureau (MI-8) under Herbert O. Yardley. MID assisted the radio intelligence units in the American Expeditionary Forces and in 1918 created the Radio Intelligence Service for operations along the Mexican border. The Navy had established a modest effort, but it was absorbed, by mutual agreement in 1918, into Yardley's postwar civilian "Black Chamber."

The Army (and State Department) continued to support Yardley until the termination of his "Black Chamber" in 1929. Army continuity was assumed, however, in the small Signal Intelligence Service of the Army Signal Corps under the direction of William F. Friedman. The Navy's cryptanalytic function reappeared formally in 1924 in the "Research Desk" under Commander Laurance F. Safford in the Code and Signal Section, OP-20-G, within the Office of Naval Communications. While emphasis was on the security of U.S. military communications (COMSEC), both organizations developed radio intercept, radio direction finding, and processing capabilities prior to World War II; they achieved particular successes against Japanese diplomatic communications. Exploitation successes of their respective counterpart



**Laurance F. Safford**



### **William F. Friedman**

service communications had to await the shift of resources until after hostilities commenced. However, wartime successes by the United States and Britain proved the value of COMINT to military and political leaders, and, as a result, both service organizations expanded greatly in terms of manpower resources and equipment.

In the latter stages of the war, the services created a coordinating body to facilitate COMINT cooperation, the Army-Navy Communications Intelligence Board (ANCIB) with a subordinate coordinating committee (ANCICC). These became the instruments for negotiating joint postwar arrangements. In late 1945, with the addition of the Department of State to its membership, ANCIB became the State-Army-Navy Communications Intelligence Board (STANCIB). STANCIB evolved in 1946 into the United States Communications Intelligence Board (USCIB), which added the FBI as a member.

With the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, Congress reinforced the direction in which the intelligence community was moving – toward increased centralization – and built the framework for a modern national security structure. Among other things, the Act established the National Security Council (NSC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). CIA became a member of USCIB, which received a new charter as the highest national COMINT authority in the form of an NSC Intelligence Directive, NSCID No. 9, dated 1 July 1948.

As the Air Force sought to expand its cryptologic organization, Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal contemplated cutting defense expenditures. One solution was a unified cryptologic agency. He appointed a special board under Rear Admiral Earl E. Stone, Director of Naval Communications, to formulate a plan for merging all military COMINT and COMSEC activities and resources into a single agency. Only the Army favored the Stone Board's recommendations for merger at this time, and the plan was shelved.

In 1949, a new Secretary of Defense, Louis A. Johnson, also seeking ways to economize, reviewed the Stone Board's report and began to take steps for its implementation. After much discussion among the services regarding the concept of merger, on 20 May 1949 Secretary Johnson ordered the issuance of JCS Directive 2010. This directive established the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA), which had as its mission the conduct of communications intelligence and communications security activities within the National Military Establishment. AFSA thus had the actual responsibility for running COMINT and COMSEC operations, excluding only those that were delegated individually to the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The JCS directive also established an advisory council within the AFSA structure. Known for a time as the Armed Forces Communications Intelligence Advisory Council (AFCIAC), it later was renamed Armed Forces Security Agency Council (AFSAC). The organization became the mechanism through which AFSA reported to the JCS.



**Earl E. Stone**

On 15 July 1949 RADM Stone became AFSA's first director, appointed by the JCS. By January 1950 the Army and Navy cryptologic organizations had transferred enough civilian and military personnel, as well as equipment, so that AFSA could operate. AFSA did not, however, have its own facilities.

Admiral Stone was succeeded in 1951 by Army Major General Ralph J. Canine. By this time, various difficulties in defining powers and areas of jurisdiction were painfully obvious. Further, both directors experienced grave difficulties in obtaining the Advisory Council's approval of proposed courses of action because of AFSAC's policy requiring unanimous decisions. Finally, the potentialities of expanding technical COMINT capabilities of the late 1940s could not always be realized. During the Korean War the quality of strategic intelligence derived from COMINT fell below that which had been provided in World War II. Consumers were disappointed and increasingly critical. By late 1951, AFSA had clashed with the service cryptologic agencies, with consumers, with CIA, and with the State Department, although not all at one time nor with all on one issue. Despite the intentions, AFSA had in fact become a fourth military cryptologic agency.

On 13 December 1951 President Truman ordered a searching analysis to be conducted by a special committee to be named by the Secretaries of State and Defense, aided by the Director of Central Intelligence. Chaired by George Brownell, an eminent New York lawyer, the Brownell Committee surveyed the situation and in June recommended that a unified COMINT agency receive greater powers commensurate with clearly defined responsibilities. It also advised that the agency be freed of the crippling line of subordination through AFSAC to the JCS and, instead, be directly subordinate to the Secretary of Defense, acting with the Secretary of State on behalf of the NSC. It further proposed that the unified agency be controlled in policy matters by a reconstituted USCIB, under the chairmanship of the Director of Central Intelligence, in which the representation of military and nonmilitary intelligence interests would be evenly balanced.

In October 1952 the President and National Security Council adopted most of the Brownell Committee's recommendations and issued a revised version of NSCID No. 9 on 24 October 1952.

A mingling of military and nonmilitary interests was expressed in the word "national." The production of COMINT was declared to be a national responsibility. In place of an *Armed Forces Security Agency*, the U.S. government was to have a *National Security Agency*, an organization with the same resources plus a new charter. The AFSA Council, while not specifically abolished, thus had the agency pulled out from under it. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were no longer in the chain-of-command. The Director, NSA, reported to the Secretary of Defense through a unit in the latter's office that dealt with sensitive operations. The Secretary himself was declared to be executive agent of the government for COMINT and

subordinate to a special committee for the NSC, of which he and the Secretary of State were the two members and the Director of Central Intelligence was an advisor.

The Secretary of Defense was instructed to delegate his COMINT responsibilities to the Director, NSA, and to entrust to him operational and technical control of *all* U.S. military COMINT collection and production resources. The Director, NSA, was ordered to bring about the most effective, unified application of all U.S. resources for producing national COMINT to meet requirements approved by USCIB. In addition, the DIRNSA was ordered to assume the COMSEC responsibilities previously assigned to AFSA.

Promulgation of NSCID No. 9 brought about a greater participation by civilian members (CIA and State) of the community in the COMINT process. At the same time it was recognition of the necessity for more centralized technical operations.

On 4 November 1952, Major General Ralph J. Canine, USA, became the first Director, NSA. In 1957 NSA consolidated its headquarters operations at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland.



**Ralph J. Canine**

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