

C O P Y

6/15/42

MEMORANDUM

For Mr. Hoover
from W. D. Mitchell

1. The files refer to a "Code of Wartime Practices for the American Press" and the Tribune claims that this only prohibited publication about enemy vessels "in or near American waters."

I would like a full copy of this code as in force June 7th.

Also a copy of any amendments to it made since June 7th, especially any relating to publication of information about enemy vessels.

2. I would like also a copy of any Executive Order setting up the agency which issues the code for the Press.

3. The Tribune claims it was called to account by the Code authority for the publication of June 7, and the Code authority conceded the code did not prohibit the publication of June 7 because the enemy was not then "in or near American waters."

Please obtain from the Code authority the full story of this with copies of any communications between the Tribune and the Code authority and accounts of oral exchanges on the subject and the names of the Code authority who handled the matter, dates, etc.

4. The statute prohibits disclosure of national defense information to any one "not entitled to receive it." Obviously it will be contended that the disclosure to the public was not prohibited, and therefore consented to by the Code of Wartime Practices. It occurs to me that the Code had no special application to war correspondents accompanying the armed forces, and that special restrictions were applied to them as a condition to being allowed in the fighting area. This is suggested by Johnston's statement to the Admirals on June 8 (see Par. 6, Admiral Wilkinson's memo to FBI of June 13) as follows:

"6. He had, in carrying out his job, written a number of articles with relation to the cruise and particularly the Coral Sea Battle and had, in fact, remained in San Diego from Tuesday night until Thursday morning to assure completion of these articles and the transmission of them to the naval authorities for clearance, as he understood his instructions and agreement."

Again, as reported in Paragraph 7 (?) of Wilkinson's memo, Johnston said he had told his Managing Editor, when giving him the Midway story at 1:00 a.m., Sunday morning, that he (Johnston) assumed that the story would have to be cleared with the Navy. Johnston also said he was surprised at 4:00 a.m. to see the story in the paper.

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I suggest the facts about any special instructions to or agreements with Johnston about clearing his story be investigated. It may be the Navy has general regulations applicable to Press men allowed to accompany armed forces. It may have given Johnston or the Tribune special instructions in writing or orally.

Please ascertain all the facts, including information as to who, if anyone, gave him or his paper special instructions, requiring him to clear his stories with the Navy. I would also like to know with whom he did clear his Coral Sea stories in San Diego, and whether his Coral Sea stories published since June 7, and continuing up to date, have been cleared with the Navy.

If you cannot get all of this information from the Navy, you may have to go to Johnston himself and ask him who gave him the instructions about clearing stories with the Navy to which he referred in his interview June 8.

I would like this information as soon as possible, so place it on the preferred list.

I consider the point about special instructions to clear with the Navy before publication, to be very vital. Because of the ambiguity of the Code of Wartime Press Practices, the case may fail, unless there is definite proof of special instructions from the Navy.

5. Another vital point is to complete the investigation of what occurred on the Barnett and interview every officer involved and try and learn if possible how the contents of the Nimitz dispatch was disclosed to Johnston.

Also, whether the Nimitz dispatch, of which I have not seen a complete copy, contained anything like (the) word "secret" or anything else which made it a confidential document.

Johnston's stories about how he got the contents of the Nimitz message have been conflicting. Anything establishing that no officer intentionally made a copy available to him would be useful. Assuming a copy was left around where Johnston found it (as he claims) the officers aboard should be closely examined about that if it has not been already done.

June 15, 1942

M E M O R A N D U M

RE: NEWSPAPER STORY CARRIED IN
CHICAGO TRIBUNE AND OTHER
PAPERS CONCERNING MIDWAY
BATTLE -- JUNE 7, 1942.

There appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Washington Times Herald, New York Daily News and San Francisco Chronicle on June 7, 1942, detailed data of a secret naval dispatch concerning the make-up of the Japanese fleet proceeding towards Midway. Copies of the articles appearing in each of these papers are attached.

Although the article bore a Washington date line it has been established that this article emanated from the offices of the Chicago Tribune, Chicago, Illinois. It has been determined that the author of the article was reporter Stanley Johnston of the Chicago Tribune who had been aboard the USS LEXINGTON which was sunk in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Upon instructions from the Attorney General, an investigation was initiated by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation on June 12, 1942.

Trip of Reporter Stanley Johnston With the United States Fleet .

X The Secretary of the Navy advised Admiral Nimitz by naval dispatch that authorization was granted to allow Stanley Johnston, an accredited representative of the Chicago Tribune, to take passage in ships of the Pacific fleet for the purpose of obtaining news material to be published after censorship by the Commander in Chief of the Pacific fleet. In accordance with this authority, Admiral Nimitz on April 14, 1942, granted Johnston permission to take passage on the USS LEXINGTON. Johnston boarded the USS LEXINGTON at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on April 15, 1942, with credentials from Admiral Nimitz and had free run of that ship at all times until it was sunk during the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Johnston was later on the USS MINNEAPOLIS, USS ASTORIA and USS BARNETT. He arrived at San Diego, California, on the last named ship on June 2, 1942. Upon communicating with his paper he was instructed to proceed to Chicago immediately by air, which he did. The article in question appeared in the Chicago Tribune and the other three above mentioned newspapers on June 7, 1942.

There is quoted hereafter a comparison of the secret naval dispatch number 311221, sent in secret code from the headquarters of Admiral Nimitz at Honolulu to the Task Forces of the Pacific Fleet and to Navy Headquarters, Washington, D. C., on May 31, 1942, and the article appearing in the Chicago Tribune, Washington Times Herald, New York Daily News and the San Francisco Chronicle on June 7, 1942:

"SECRET

"ACTUAL DISPATCH AS DECODED
IN HQTRS OF COMINCH, NAVY DEPT.

FROM CINCPAC INFO TO COMINCH
CINC PACIFIC FLEET ESTIMATE MIDWAY
FORCE ORGANIZATION X

STRIKING FORCE
FOUR CARRIERS
(AKAGI KAGA HIRYU SORYU)

TWO KIRISHIMAL

TWO TONE CLASS CRUISERS

12 DESTROYERS SCREEN AND PLANE GUARD X
SUPPORT FORCE

ONE UNIT VICTOR OR XRAY CAST VICTOR

2 KIRISHIMAS
4 MOGAMIS

1 ATAGO
10 DD SCREEN X

OCCUPATION FORCE

1 TAKAO
ONE DASSWLTWS MYOKOS (QUESTION)
ONE CHITOMS ONE CHIYODA
TWO DASH FOUR KAUIKAWA MARU

JOIN DASH SIX AFIRM KING
EIGHT SLANT TWELVE AFIRM PREP
TWELVE DESTROYERS X
APPROXIMATELY SIXTEEN SAIL SAIL ON RE-
CONNAISSANCE AND SCOUTING MISSION MID
PACIFIC DASH HAWAIIAN AREA."

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

THE STRIKING FORCE:
FOUR AIRCRAFT CARRIERS
THE AKAGA AND KAGA OF 26,900 TONS EACH, AND
THE HIRYU AND SORYU, OF 10,000 TONS EACH
TWO BATTLESHIPS OF THE KIRISHIMA CLASS.
29,000 TONS, with 14-INCH GUNS.
TWO CRUISERS OF THE TONE CLASS-NEW 8,500 TON
6.1 INCH GUN SHIPS.

TWELVE DESTROYERS.
SUPPORT FORCE. THE SUPPORT FORCE IS DES-
CRIBED BY THE SAME SOURCE AS COMPRISING:
ONE AIRCRAFT CARRIER OF THE RYUZYU CLASS,
7,100 TONS
TWO KIRISHIMA CLASS BATTLESHIPS.
FOUR NEW 8,500-TON CRUISERS OF THE MOGAMI
CLASS-INCLUDING THE MOGAMI, THE MIKUMA,
SUZUYA, KUMANO-WITH 15 GUNS OF 6.1-INCH
CALIBERS.
ONE LIGHT CRUISER.
TEN DESTROYERS.

OCCUPATION FORCE. THE OCCUPATION FORCE IN-
CLUDED:
FOUR CRUISERS-THE CHAKAS, MYOKO, CHITORE AND
CHODA, ALL BELIEVED OF 8,500 TONS WITH MAIN
BATTERIES OF 6-INCH GUNS.
TWO ARMORED TRANSPORTS OF THE KUNIKISMA
MARU CLASS - CONVERTED LINERS
FOUR TO SIX TROOPSHIPS
EIGHT TO 12 SUPPLY VESSELS
TWELVE DESTROYERS
TEN SUBMARINES

SECRET"

This similarity can be identified by and explained to the court by Captain Carl F. Holden of the Communications Section, United States Navy, Washington, D. C. It may be noted Captain Holden explained that the phraseology appearing at the top of the message: "FROM CINCPAC - FORCE ORGANIZATION X", when translated from the Navy code, reads as follows: "From the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, for action to all Task Force Commanders in Pacific Fleet, for information to Commander in Chief, United States Fleet". He explained that the expression appearing about half way down the message: "ONE UNIT VICTOR OR XRAY CAST VICTOR", means one aircraft carrier of regular construction or one converted aircraft carrier. He explained that the word "UNIT" is a mistake and the proper word which should have appeared in the message is "CAST". The letters "CV" are used by the Navy Department to signify a regularly constructed aircraft carrier, while the letters "XCV" are used to designate a converted aircraft carrier. The Navy code for single letters of the alphabet designates the word "CAST" for "C", "VICTOR" for "V", and "XRAY" for "X".

Further down in the dispatch is the expression: "10 DD SCREEN X". This expression indicates ten destroyers which are intended to be used as a protective screen for other vessels. The letter "X" signifies the word "STOP" in coded messages. Near the bottom of the message appears the expression: "SIX AFIRM KING". The alphabetical code of the Navy uses "AFIRM" for "A", and "KING" for "K", and the letters "AK" signify a transport. The next line of the message has the expression: "AFIRM PREP", which signifies "AP", which is used for designating supply vessels. The expression: "SIXTEEN SAIL SAIL" designates "SIXTEEN SS", which means submarines.

Captain Holden also explained that one section of the dispatch, namely that which reads: "ONE DASSWLTWS" et cetera, was garbled in the transmission and the decoding officers interpreted that section to the best of their ability.

Interview with Reporter Stanley Johnston of the Chicago Tribune by Naval Officers

Vice Admiral Russell Willson advised that reporter Stanley Johnston of the Chicago Tribune was officially on board the USS Lexington during the Coral Sea battle. He ultimately reached the United States on board the USS Barnett with other survivors from the Lexington at San Diego, California, on June 2, 1942. Johnston was authorized to sail on the LEXINGTON by the Official Naval Staff at Honolulu. He was aboard the USS Barnett on May 31, 1942, when the questioned secret message was received aboard the BARNETT. At the time he was sharing a room with Commander W. Terry and Commander M. T. Seligman, both survivors from the USS Lexington.

Vice Admiral Willson advised he interviewed reporter Stanley Johnston in his office on June 8, 1942. On this occasion there were present, in addition to himself, Rear Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, Vice Admiral F. J. Horne, Rear Admiral A. J. Hepburn, Captain Frank E. Beatty, Lieutenant Commander Paul C. Smith, and Mr. Arthur Sears Henning, Washington correspondent of the Chicago Tribune. A memorandum prepared by Rear Admiral Wilkinson follows.



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