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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

CENSORSHIP AT FORTHCOMING OPERATION

Note by the Secretary

The attached report by the Director of Security is circulated by request of the General Manager for consideration by the Commission during the week of November 2, 1953.

ROY B. SNAPP

Secretary

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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

CENSORSHIP AT FORTHCOMING OPERATION

Report by the Director of Security

THE PROBLEM

1. To consider whether censorship of personal communications shall be required at forthcoming operations at the Pacific Proving Grounds.

SUMMARY

2. During the testing operations conducted at the Pacific Proving Grounds in the fall of 1952 a number of "eye-witness accounts" appeared in the press throughout the country indicating that an atomic weapon test of considerable magnitude had occurred. Considerable criticism of the Atomic Energy Commission and of Joint Task Force 132 appeared in the press as a result of these disclosures with specific criticism being made that personal mail should have been censored. The security plan for Operation Ivy, following a pattern established at the preceding Pacific Proving Grounds tests, contained a provision that there was to be no censorship of personal mail. Personnel of the Task Force, however, were cautioned to exercise self-censorship.

3. A personal mail censorship program for the forthcoming operation could serve to delay the communication of classified information concerning the tests for a limited time. Censorship, on the other hand, cannot of itself safeguard information concerning

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the test activities following the return of Task Force personnel from the Proving Grounds. Censorship, in addition, would not prevent the press from speculating on activities of the Task Force at the Proving Grounds. To be completely effective a mail censorship program would have to be supplemented with voluntary press censorship which could be established only with great difficulty if it could be established at all.

4. There has been no censorship of personal mail for personnel of the Department of Defense since the end of hostilities in World War II even for troops on front line duty in Korea. This emphasizes the possibility that a personal mail censorship program could raise serious morale problems.

5. It is believed that benefits derived from a mail censorship program can be attained from an intensified security education program. The Commander, Joint Task Force Seven in a letter dated March 24, 1953, to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, a copy of which was circulated as AEC 597/12, noted the many problems involved in a mail censorship program and recommended that ". . . The policy of self-censorship of personal mail be continued without recourse to official censorship backed up by intensified security indoctrination and security education and examination programs." The Commander of Joint Task Force Seven has since forwarded to the Division of Security his proposed security regulations which require individual instruction and examination of each member of the Task Force by unit commanders to assure that such personnel have specific understanding of their security responsibilities and are specifically instructed as to what information may be included in personal correspondence.

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6. If it is determined that censorship should be required such a program could be established under authority of the Armed Forces censorship regulations.

STAFF JUDGMENTS

7. The Division of Military Application, the Division of Information Services, and the Office of the General Counsel concur in the recommendation of this report.

RECOMMENDATION

8. That the Atomic Energy Commission:

a. Approve a policy of no censorship of personal communications at forthcoming operations at the Pacific Proving Grounds;

b. Note that an intensified security education program, designed to assure that all personnel are fully informed as to what may and may not be communicated concerning the test activities, will be in operation;

c. Note that the Commander, Joint Task Force Seven will be informed of this action by means of a letter such as that in Appendix "B", with a copy to the MLC; and

d. Note that the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy will be advised of this action by appropriate letter.

LIST OF ENCLOSURES

APPENDIX "A"

Background and Discussion

APPENDIX "B"

Draft letter to the Commander,
Joint Task Force Seven

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APPENDIX "A"

BACKGROUND

1. In the fall of 1952 a number of "eye-witness accounts" which appeared in the press throughout the country indicated that an atomic weapon test of considerable magnitude had occurred. Some of the letters purported to give a description of the effects of the test. In the wake of these "eye-witness accounts" considerable criticism of the Atomic Energy Commission and of Joint Task Force 132 appeared in the press. There was specific criticism of the fact that postal censorship of personal mail had not been established for personnel assigned to the Task Force at Eniwetok Atoll.

2. A digest of editorials appearing in the press following the outbreak of the letter-writing, which was prepared by the Director of Information Services and circulated as AEC 612/2, indicated that of twenty such editorials reviewed, fourteen took a position that was critical of the security maintained, assuming the letters to be breaches of security, and implied that the Atomic Energy Commission was responsible.

3. The Security plan for Operation IVY following a pattern established at the preceding Pacific Proving Ground Tests in 1948 and 1951, specifically contained a provision that there was to be no censorship of personal mail; rather, all personnel were urged to practice voluntary censorship. The public information plan for Operation IVY, as approved by the Commission, indicated that only a brief announcement of the conclusion of the test activities would be made following the completion of the tests. The Commission in establishing the public information

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plan for Operation IVY was acting in accordance with the recommendation of the National Security Council which recommended a low pressure public information program concerning all aspects of the fall 1952 Eniwetok tests.

DISCUSSION

4. Personal mail censorship program would provide some "insulation" against the "I was there" problem which was reflected in several of the "eye-witness accounts" appearing in the press following Operation IVY and would allow supervisory personnel of the Task Force an opportunity to assure that all personnel were completely aware of what information concerning the Task Force Operations could be disclosed on an unclassified basis.

5. Censorship on the other hand, no matter how vigorously applied, cannot of itself, safeguard information concerning the tests following the return of Task Force personnel from the Proving Ground. Classified information in the possession of personnel returning from Eniwetok could be compromised if Task Force personnel were not diligent in observing the security instructions since the security program in the end rests in the personal discretion of the individuals to whom the information has been entrusted. Indiscretions on the part of the returning personnel could defeat a censorship program. In addition, censorship would not, of course, prevent the press from speculating on activities of the Task Force at the Proving Ground since the magnitude of the tests, i.e., movement of ships and personnel, tend to identify reasonably well the operational phase. In this connection the Commission announced on April 2, 1953, that to accommodate the rapidly expanding program of developing and testing new and improved nuclear weapons, the Pacific Proving

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Ground in the Marshall Islands is being enlarged to include Bikini Atoll and that construction of technical facilities at Bikini Atoll was to begin shortly.

6. It is observed that there has been no censorship of personal mail for personnel of the Department of Defense since the end of hostilities in World War II, even for troops on front line duty in Korea.

7. Many task force personnel are returned to stateside prior to the completion of the tests. These persons, in addition to Joint Task Force personnel stationed in the United States, have significant information concerning the testing operations, and would not be subject to mail censorship. Personnel of either group might either deliberately, or through inadvertence, disclose classified information in their possession concerning the testing program. In view of this possibility and to prevent the public disclosure of test information it would appear essential to establish voluntary press censorship of information concerning the test activities to supplement mail censorship. The question of whether an arrangement could be established in which the press would voluntarily agree to withhold publication of information concerning the testing program pending official Commission clearance has not been pursued. However, it is the opinion of personnel of the Division of Information Services that a voluntary press censorship program could be established only with great difficulty, if one could be established at all.

8. Any type of personal mail censorship is objectionable to personnel affected. In support of this observation Division of Military Application points out that scientific personnel

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from the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory with whom the censorship program has been informally discussed have indicated that as far as is known none of the "letter-writers" at the IVY Operation were employed by the Commission or its contractors and that personnel of the Commission and its contractors are entrusted with equally sensitive information at the laboratories in the United States without their personal communications being subjected to censorship. Additionally, these scientific personnel have specifically commented that "it is becoming very difficult to obtain scientific workers for test activities. Without these workers in good supply, one can only expect a substantial delay in the nuclear weapons program. Many workers are away from their families for six months of the year and they are becoming restive. Every effort should be made to minimize irritations which tend to drive workers out of the program."

9. It is believed that benefits derived from a mail censorship program can be attained from an intensified security education program. As observed previously, censorship of personal communications was not in effect at Operation SANDSTONE in 1948 or Operation GREENHOUSE in 1951. All personnel involved in these operations were instructed to practice self-censorship and were given specific instructions in the matter of what could be related in personal communications. We are not aware of any violations at these tests similar to the letter-writing incidents at Operation IVY. It appears that during Operation IVY the regulations of the commander of the Task Force, while adequate, were not implemented by the Task Groups in a manner which would insure that all personnel were aware of their specific security responsibilities. In some instances, however, the

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letter-writers specifically requested the recipients to avoid mentioning the fact that they had received the communications -- a point which would indicate that some of the violations were made deliberately in disregard of existing security instructions.

10. The Commander, Joint Task Force Seven, in a letter dated 24 March 1953 to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, a copy of which was furnished to the Commission and circulated as AEC 597/12, noted the many problems involved in a censorship program and recommended that ". . . the policy of self-censorship of personal mail be continued without recourse to official censorship backed up by an intensified security indoctrination and security education and examination program." In this connection, representatives of the Commander, Joint Task Force Seven have submitted to the Division of Security an outline of the proposed JTF-7 security indoctrination plan. Under this plan each Task Group Commander of the Joint Task Force is responsible to assure that each individual member of his Task Group is aware of security responsibilities inherent in his assigned duties. Along with other general security guidance in this memorandum, there is included specific instructions as to what personnel of the Task Force may and may not include in personal correspondence. The instructions further require that each member of the Task Force be given an "open book" security examination in which a score of 100% is required. Each individual will be required to re-study and re-submit his examination until a score of 100% is attained. Apart from these procedures, the regulations of the Commander require that even more detailed instructions be given to individuals who in the normal course of duty will be required to handle classified matter.

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11. In the event the Commission desires to require the censorship of personal communications at the forthcoming Eniwetok tests, it could be imposed under authority of Armed Forces Censorship Regulations which have been issued by the DOD and promulgated as an official regulation for each of the Armed Forces. These regulations which specifically state that Armed Forces Censorship will not be established in time of peace unless directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense provide authority for ". . . censorship over the personal communications of those persons serving with or accompanying the Armed Forces of the United States." It is the view of the Office of General Counsel, based upon informal discussions with representatives of the Army Judge Advocate General, that Atomic Energy Commission and Atomic Energy Commission contractor personnel could be regarded as ". . . serving with or accompanying the Armed Forces of the United States . . ." so as to make the Armed Forces Censorship Regulations applicable to them if it were determined that censorship should be instituted and the President or the Secretary of Defense invoked the regulations.

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APPENDIX "B"

DRAFT LETTER TO MAJOR GENERAL P. W. CLARKSON,
COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE SEVEN

1. Since the receipt of a copy of your letter of March 24, 1953 to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, the Commission has considered the desirability of establishing a personal mail censorship program at the forthcoming test operations at the Pacific Proving Grounds.

2. After careful consideration of the many factors involved in this problem, the Commission concurs with your recommendation, made to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, that "The policy of self-censorship of personal mail be continued without recourse to official censorship, backed up by an intensified security indoctrination and security education and examination program." In reaching this decision the Commission has attached considerable importance to the effect a censorship program would have on the morale of personnel assigned to the operation, the obvious difficulties of administering a censorship program, and the fact that such a censorship program would apparently be unique in time of peace.

3. The Commission relies upon the Commander of Joint Task Force Seven to carry on a security program of such nature as to preclude a repetition of the letter writing incidents which occurred at Operation IVY. In this latter regard, we believe the close adherence by all Task Force personnel to your proposed security regulations which our Division of Security has reviewed will accomplish this objective.

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VOID

APPENDIX "B"

DRAFT LETTER TO MAJOR GENERAL P. W. CLARKSON,
COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE SEVEN

1. Since the receipt of a copy of your letter of March 24, 1953 to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, the Commission has considered the desirability of establishing a personal mail censorship program at the forthcoming test operations at the Pacific Proving Grounds.

2. After careful consideration of the many factors involved in this problem, the Commission concurs with your recommendation, made to the Chief of Staff, United States Army, that "The policy of self-censorship of personal mail be continued without recourse to official censorship, backed up by an intensified security indoctrination and security education and examination program," In reaching this decision the Commission has attached considerable importance to the effect a censorship program would have on the morale of personnel assigned to the operation, the obvious difficulties of administering a censorship program, and the fact that such a censorship program would apparently be unique in time of peace.

3. The Commission, however, is mindful of the unfavorable publicity which appeared in the press following the IVY Operation and trusts that the security education program for Operation CASTLE will be such as to preclude a repetition of the letter-writing incidents. In this latter regard, we believe that close adherence by all Task Force personnel to your proposed security regulations which our Division of Security has reviewed will accomplish this objective.

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See Correction Above

Re memo dated 11.3.53

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4. The Commission, of course, stands ready to assist you in any way possible.

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