

R. Woodrow Harrison, Sr.

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TALMADGE L. NARRON
(1925-1976)

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WILLIAM H. HOLDFORD
I. JOE IVEY
THOMAS J. RHODES
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JONATHAN M. VANDEN BOSCH
C. DAVID WILLIAMS, JR.

November 28, 2006

wharrison@narronholdford.com

Mr. John N. Hackney, Jr.
1120 Watson Drive
Wilson, NC 27893

RE: World War II History Project

Dear John:

You had asked me at one point to see if I could find anything in writing about what my father did during World War II. Since his job during the war was classified and remained classified until the time of his death, it is next to impossible to find anything in writing about him specifically during that time. I am enclosing herein; however, a copy of his bio he did in 1962 in which he listed his war time service as a research analyst with the U.S. Department of Defense. There is also a Wilson Daily Times newspaper article from 1952 which also mentions my father's previous position with the U.S. Department of Defense. I have enclosed a copy of the "Remembrances of Venona" which was released in 2001 about a speech made at CIA Headquarters in July 1995. This is a pretty good synopsis of what the Venona project was and the last paragraph on the second page refers to "Arlington Hall assembled teams of gifted linguists and cryptographers of the highest intellectual caliber to work against the German and Japanese codes and subsequently on the Venona project." The next sentence mentions Meredith Gardner who was my father's immediate superior on the project during the early 1940's.

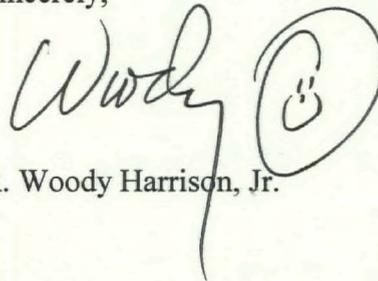
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Forest College in Old Wake Forest in the 1930's and really never returned to Wilson after the war. We settled in McLean, Virginia for a while and he later moved around in the northern Virginia area until his death in Vienna, Virginia. He and my mother, Kate Lamm Harrison (later Baker) separated and divorced in 1953 and she and I returned to Wilson at that time.

I know this doesn't fit with all the dramatic wartime stories you have in your history book, but Daddy's time during the war was very much spent in service to the country and it's probably appropriate to have some recognition for the people of Wilson who served in positions like his with the predecessors of the CIA and the NSA. Thank you again to you and Betty and the others who are putting together this most interesting project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Woody" followed by a large, stylized circular flourish containing the initials "RH".

R. Woody Harrison, Jr.

RWHjr/sbw
Enclosures
Cc: Mrs. Betty McCain

R. WOODROW HARRISON

Biographic Summary

Birth: 1916 Wilson, North Carolina Nationality: American

Education: B.A. degree from Wake Forest College, Winston Salem, North Carolina (1937) majoring in French and Science.
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Family

Status: Married; three sons.

March 1962

Native Of Wilson Heads Translators At Tenth Interamerican Conference

Below is a translation of an article about R. Woodrow Harrison, a native of Wilson, which appeared in a Caracas, Venezuela newspaper, February 13. A photograph of Mr. Harrison appeared with the article.

"Twenty seven translators will work for two months in Caracas in the Department of Translating and Interpreting of the Tenth Interamerican Conference. There, the 27 translators and 12 typists will not have a moment of rest during the period of the conference, as the delegates will require all documents in their various languages.

"There will be four official languages in the tenth conference: English, Spanish, French, Portuguese.

"On Monday the department will begin to work with the assistance of Venezuelan personnel.

"R. Woodrow Harrison, previously with the United States Department of Defense, has been with the Pan American Union for one year as chief of the Translating and Interpreting section.

"Mr. Harrison is a former student of Romance and Slavic languages at Wake Forest college in North Carolina, at Columbia University in New York and the University of North Carolina.

"In the department—he stated—there will be 27 translators and reviewers, and 12 typists.

In addition, there will be 23 interpreters; eight for the benefit of the English speaking delegates, eight for the French, eight for the Portuguese, and four for the Spanish.

"On February 21—Mr. Harrison told reporters—interpreters and translators will begin to arrive in Caracas from the Pan American Union.

"Mr. Harrison, a pleasant American, capable of translating from several languages into English as a result of his Romance and Slavic studies, and previously an official of the United States Department of Defense for 10 years, smiled when the reporter inquired as to the volume of work to be done. 'We have only begun'—he said—'and the more difficult part has not yet come.'

"Mr. Harrison intends to assume only a general responsibility for the translation work and to remain optimistic."

Both Mr. Harrison and his wife are natives of Wilson and now reside in McLean, Va., about 12 miles from Mr. Harrison's office in the Pan American Union in Washington, D. C. They have an 11-year-old son, Wood, Jr. Mrs. Harrison is the former Kate Lamm, daughter of Mrs. W. T. Lamm and the late Mr. Lamm of Wilson, and Mr. Harrison is the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Harrison, also of Wilson.



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VENONA

Note: The following are the remarks made by Mr. William P. Crowell, Deputy Director of NSA when the declassification of the VENONA project was announced at CIA Headquarters on 11 July 1995. Mr. Crowell retired from NSA on 12 September 1997.

In the early 1960's, shortly after joining NSA, I was one of a small but fortunate group of agency employees invited to a meeting with Frank Rowlett, one of the eminent NSA cryptologists who had been so successful during World War II. For over an hour Frank told us stories about the successful exploitation of codes and ciphers during the war. He spoke about how those successes had helped U.S. military leaders and the forces under their command win crucial battles and make strategic choices. But, he was very careful to avoid claiming that cryptography had won any battles. That distinction---between providing information that can make a difference---and using information to make a difference is still an important one and certainly applies to the results that were achieved in the successful breaking of the codes and ciphers known as VENONA.

Twelve years later I was assigned as a manager in an NSA division that included the VENONA project. In a very short time I came to appreciate that VENONA was an absolutely fascinating story of the personal determination and dedication of a small group of cryptanalysts. It was, in addition, a brilliantly intellectual cryptanalysis effort. Lastly, VENONA was a model of outstanding interagency cooperation.

I also realized it was a story of considerable historical moment and that someday, when the need and responsibility to protect the sources and methods involved was diminished, it would be made public. That time has now come and today we give the first of the over 2200 VENONA translations to historians to judge. But, as we make this release, I think it is most appropriate that we recognize the extraordinary people who did the work.

The story of the efforts to attack Soviet KGB and GRU

traffic began in February 1943 when a young woman, Miss Gene Grabeel, was assigned to organize, characterize, and analyze thousands of encrypted Soviet diplomatic messages. Through nearly a decade following, a number of analysts, by dint of their dogged determination, slowly made headway against a family of extremely sophisticated, double-encrypted cryptographic systems. They painstakingly extracted information, a word or two at a time, from one of the most challenging systems that had ever been exploited.

The first and most significant breakthroughs against the VENONA cryptosystems were made without even the most rudimentary computers or other sophisticated tools which we are accustomed to using today.

While the Soviet traffic that was ultimately read under the VENONA project spanned the years 1942-46, efforts to exploit it continued for decades. This was due to the agonizingly slow and difficult process in which sometimes only one or two words at a time were wrenched grudgingly from the code. Each new recovery came with the elation akin to finding a pearl in an oyster. But each recovery also led to renewed work as each message had to be reviewed to see if that code group was present and, if it was, then the enlarged context was checked and scrutinized to see if it provided clues to other unrecovered code groups. Similarly, as counterintelligence information based on the decrypts was passed to the FBI and the FBI investigated the leads, new information was developed which sometimes enabled new breaks into the code. Then the process would begin all over again.

People continued to work on VENONA so long as the possibility remained that counterintelligence information might be developed that could possibly reveal new agents or espionage activities that might still be active. When it was no longer reasonable to expect that those named in 1942-45 might still be alive or active in an espionage role, then ongoing efforts to continue to break the VENONA cryptosystems was terminated.

From the early days of WWII, Arlington Hall assembled teams of gifted linguists and cryptographers of the highest intellectual caliber to work against the German and Japanese codes and subsequently on the VENONA project. These were linguists like the brilliant and dedicated bookbreaker, Meredith Gardner who came with outstanding credentials in six or seven languages and who made some of the first, really vital breakthroughs against the VENONA systems -- like 1st LT

Ferdinand Coudert who came with a BA and an MA from Harvard in Slavic studies, a law degree from Columbia University, and a working knowledge of French, German, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, and Japanese -- and like CAPT William B.S. Smith, a contemporary of Coudert's from Harvard who knew French and Breton and who had been an editor at the prestigious Columbia University Press. It included cryptographers like Genevieve Feinstein, Gene Grabeel, Cecil Phillips, and Dr. Richard Leibler, just to name a few. They and their colleagues brought a fearsome intellectual firepower to bear on various aspects of the VENONA puzzle with astounding, but hard won success.

As I mentioned, VENONA also was characterized by unprecedented interagency cooperation. First and foremost was the cooperation between the intelligence and law enforcement communities. This cooperation began with Wes Reynolds, the FBI liaison to Arlington Hall, and is typified by the close, cooperative efforts of Bob Lamphere who became the FBI's direct link to VENONA. There is no clearer example of synergism in the early days than these cooperative relationships. VENONA also included cooperation with HUMINT collectors and international intelligence partners in prosecuting counterintelligence leads.

A word about the VENONA cryptosystems---they should have been impossible to read. They consisted of a code book in which letters, words, and phrases were equated to numbers. So a code clerk would take a plain text message and encode the message using numbers from the codebook. This would have presented a significant challenge itself depending on how long the code book was used. However, the messages were further modified, in other words double-encrypted, by use of a one time pad. The use of a one time pad effectively randomizes the code and renders it unreadable. The key to the VENONA success was that mistakes were made in the construction and use of the one time pads---a fact that was discovered only through brute force and analysis of the message traffic.

Once sufficient breakthroughs had occurred, it became clear that the Soviet diplomatic traffic was encrypted in several similar systems and that it included KGB and GRU espionage traffic in addition to diplomatic and trade messages. Gradually a picture of a massive Soviet espionage effort began to emerge from the work of the VENONA team.

In deciding to declassify and release the VENONA translations, we gave the utmost consideration to the

appropriate protection of individuals' privacy rights. It is not our desire or our responsibility to further interpret the VENONA translations---they will speak for themselves and the historians will help us understand and put them in context. But today, it is also our privilege to recognize the efforts and sacrifices of the VENONA team members publicly for the first time. Seldom do intelligence officers get the chance to talk about successes. The VENONA project is one of the best, and I am proud to have had a small part in telling the story.

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