

Annex 12. David Sissons to Desmond Ball, 9 September 1996

22 Savige St
Campbell
A.C.T., 2612

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Prof Desmond Ball
Strategic & Defence Studies
A.N.U.

Dear Des,

THE HARBIN TELEGRAMS

Last week I forwarded to you by Email Emma Craswell's latest report (dated 27/8/96).

In this she passed on Hatch's observations that: (i) if the Americans had intercepted these Harbin telegrams, the translations would have been in the boxes that Emma has examined; (ii) because of reception conditions, the Americans were unable to intercept much traffic from Harbin. This is as close to an expert opinion as we are likely to get. It would therefore, I think, be futile to search further for them in the U.S. National Archives

Is it worthwhile pursuing the search elsewhere?

I still think it possible that it was Mornington, Bond & Co that intercepted at least some of them. On rereading Blamey's letter to the Acting Minister of 6/1/45 I see that he described the 24/11/45 message as a 'Special Spy Report' from Harbin. SRH-254: The Japanese Intelligence System, to which Hatch refers us, at page 24 (Aegean Park edition) describes 'Harbin Special Spy Reports' as a series of reports issued by the Army General Staff. If this be so, then Mornington would not have intercepted them; for we handled only diplomatic traffic. But in a later chapter on 'The Japanese Diplomatic Intelligence System' it refers at page 95 to intelligence reports from Harbin containing information provided by a contact within the local Russian consulate-general. There are references to these latter Harbin intelligence reports from time to time in the Magic Summary (e.g. No.788 of 22/5/44 p.11; No.1032 of 21/1/45 p.9; No.1180 of 18/6/45 p.1; No.1190 of 28/6/45) that state that these telegrams were sent by the Japanese Consul-General (Yamagiwa). If any of the telegrams to which Blamey refers were from Yamagiwa, then it is possible that Mornington intercepted them.

But if Bond and his colleagues had solved these particular messages, would one not expect them to be still rooted in their memory? I raised this point in a recent letter to Prof (then Cpl) Ian Smith:

If they had passed through our hands, then these are telegrams that, one would have thought, everyone in the Section would remember (like the identification of 'Bengal Tiger', and other spies in India from time to time, which passed by word of mouth immediately through both rooms and caused great excitement). But no-one has any

recollection at all of these three Harbin telegrams. Des Ball visited Ron in Melbourne and Vai Parbery at Malua Bay and I wrote to Mavis Tilley, Mary Stewart and Midge Hattan; but, though each was frank and helpful, it rang no bells.

But perhaps I'm wrong in thinking that the significance of these telegrams would have been obvious to Jac or Mavis when they translated them, and to Archer when he analysed them. To any of us, the only useful deduction that would emerge from them might have been that some clerk in our Soviet ally's Harbin consulate was in the pay of the Japanese. And this was perhaps hardly exciting enough for one to want to share it with one's mates at the adjacent tables or with the ladies in the next room. Any of us would probably have assumed that the Soviet military attaché at Canberra was on the circulation list of the AMF Weekly Intelligence Summary. It was the boys in MI(b) that would have known that he was not, and would have been able to draw the deduction that there must be a Soviet mole at work in Canberra.

So my conclusion is that these telegrams probably passed through our hands but created no great stir amongst us.

One of my colleagues of those days, Mary Stewart, has reminded me that we logged in a register every intercepted message that Mornington sent us. She writes (28/9/95):

Prof Trendall usually brought the work in himself for Reba to log and later give a T (translation) number to. The log, known as the Koran, was a large brown hard-backed book which was meticulously kept by Reba (or her deputy), with all details of the traffic and translation titles, and a card-index of the subject matter.

Even if it is true that DSD have reduced their wartime records to 1 metre of shelf space (and I find this hard to believe), I can't believe that they destroyed our Koran. So I think that we should immediately apply for its production under Archives Act §40. With the Koran we should be able to tell in an instant whether it was we that intercepted the telegrams in question.

Shall I E-mail to Emma Craswell asking her to submit her final bill; or have you further tasks for her?

Yours sincerely,



(D.C.S.Sissons)