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TO : To the File

FROM : Joshua Lederberg
Professor of GeneticsSUBJECT: R. V. Jones - Chemical Warfare in World War II

Jones did not have any particular information on the intelligence that led to the Merck Report. He did mention having seen an Ultra message, quoting Hitler as having warned the Japanese ambassador not to consider the use of chemical weapons because the British had superior capabilities. This dispatch apparently has not been published as yet, and Jones had not thought it important enough to mention in his forthcoming book.

He also recalled that after the V-bombing of London that Churchill was so exercised that he seriously contemplated the use of chemical weapons in retaliation. Sir Marshal Portal persuaded him that this was unnecessary and not useful.

Jones' own organization apparently gave little or no attention to CW intelligence in the belief that there was an MI-6 section working with the Porton labs on this subject. This was probably false and as a result the matter had very little attention.

My own hypothesis: the very thinness of analytical coverage that may have resulted from this discrepancy may also be a cause of the mis-intelligence that resulted in the Merck Report and the mounting of the US - CW program.

I asked him whether he thought the raid on the Norwegian heavy water plant might not have been a tip-off to the Germans about the feasibility of a nuclear weapons program -- it had exactly that effect when I read the newspapers myself. He implied that little thought was given to that contingency; crippling German access to heavy water was operationally of greater consequence. By then they probably did have some intelligence on Allied efforts in that area -- of which I am rather skeptical. He was not aware of any indication one way or the other that the raids received any such interpretation in Germany. It might be well to reexamine Heisenberg's memoirs on this subject.

When I asked him what was the greatest failure of the scientific intelligence during WW II, he thought it was having neglected to push Charles Frank at the ALSOS mission just after the war. In consequence, the German nuclear energy data, such as they were, managed to get straight to the United States without being intercepted and copied in London. He believes that had further consequences for the organization of nuclear energy work both in Britain and in the United States, subsequently. "Going along with the Americans" was the prevailing fallacy.

Jones, R.V.

visit 11/29/77

Jones was quite vehement about the Coventry myth. He was not aware of any Ultra message on the subject before the raid. He was sure Churchill could not have received any such message, since he went to London that night typically "looking for trouble" and he would have gone through Coventry himself instead if he has prior knowledge! He gave several examples of Churchill's insistence at being at the front edge of risk during Wartime when he had such responsibilities for the lives of others. He repeated the anecdote: George VI persuading Churchill not to take part in V-E Day, "if Winston could do it, so could he, George!"

He stressed very strongly the importance that higher leaders sample the primary data as "the sharp edge", e.g., the utter unreliability of quantitative trajectory data in mine sweeping operations: only port vs starboard was useful and this was not known until one of his operation scientists actually went to sea. He quoted Newton about putting able mathematicians on a ship rather than having able seamen bring the data to land.

He also stressed the importance of having "serving officers" work together with the scientists. He almost didn't know what I meant when I asked him what the analog of the serving officer was at the level of nuclear strategy.

Despite the Coventry myth, he suggested that the situation in Crete might have borne out the basic pattern: General Freyburg was constrained from redisposing his forces even with three weeks advanced notice of the invasion. However, even with that notice, it was evident that there was very little that could be done in the circumstances.

He was quite critical of "Intrepid:" Jones never heard of him in London; he certainly had nothing to do with Bohr's escape; possibly he did have important exploits as liaison in the United States, he could not say.

He was not connected to political intelligence and therefore was not able to say very much about the disruption of information about the German underground, although he was in general agreement about the folly of the policy of unconditional surrender. He suggested that Philby should be taken at his word, especially in describing the earlier part of his career. He feels that he broke down later and the latter part of his book is much less reliable.

He agreed that it was more difficult to anticipate the development of Soviet technology because of the wider cultural gap between say himself and German scientific opposite numbers during WW II.

Katy just called: Crick worked for Jones after the War, and was much interested in biological analogues of coding, e.g., the information content of a sperm head.

JL:ek