

Pumpkin Papers' New

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Washington

I have a new scrap of evidence to contribute to the renewed controversy over the Hiss case. But first I would like to explain how I came across it.

On March 28, The Washington Star reprinted Professor Allen Weinstein's attack on Alger Hiss in The New York Review of Books in which Weinstein accused Hiss of lying about his relations with Whitaker Chambers.

Alongside the Weinstein article, it printed the text of Hiss's reply, and a photostat of a document to which Hiss tried to call public attention. That document has been overlooked, though it represents a tantalizing loose thread. Firmly pulled, it might unravel the melodramatic web woven a quarter century ago around the notorious pumpkin papers.

The pumpkin papers, as everyone knows, were the centerpiece and symbol of the postwar witch hunt. They turned up a masterly bit of choreography one dark December night in 1948. Chambers, an ex-Communist, led House Un-American Activities Committee investigators across his Mar-

ylanid farm to a hollow pumpkin. From it he extracted five rolls of microfilm.

These were said to contain copies of secret State War and Navy Department documents. Chambers claimed he had obtained them as a Soviet espionage agent.

This was a bombshell of the famous Hiss case. Chambers had accused Hiss, a State Department official, before the committee of having been a member of the Communist "apparatus" in Washington. Hiss denied it and filed a \$75,000 slander suit against Chambers.

Chambers produced documents he claimed had been turned over to him by Hiss. He did so first at a pre-trial deposition hearing in Baltimore and then, more dramatically, two weeks later from the pumpkin.

Richard M. Nixon, then a leading member of the committee, hailed the microfilms, with a hyperbole to which the whole country was to grow familiar, as "conclusive proof the the greatest treason conspiracy in this nation's history."

It now appears that there were surprises of quite another sort to be found on two of those five rolls of microfilm had they been made available at the time.

Hiss says that no one had ever had a chance to examine three of the five microfilms until "the Gov-

NAVY DEPARTMENT
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TECHNICAL ORDER NO. 2-38.

PORTABLE CARBON DIOXIDE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS - PAINTING OF.

Reference: (a) BuAer Technical Order 37-37 dated 18 September, 1937 "Carbon Dioxide Equipment, Instructions for Handling and Use."

1. Inasmuch as it is the policy of the Navy Department to paint all portable carbon dioxide fire extinguishers red, it is directed that the paragraph captioned "Identification" on page two of reference (a) be changed to read as follows:

"Identification - All cylinders containing carbon dioxide regardless of size, except those used for portable fire extinguishers, shall be painted aluminum color. Portable carbon dioxide fire extinguishers shall be painted red. Special markings indicating the type of siphon tube installed as required by reference (c) shall be replaced if cylinders are repainted."

A. B. COOK,
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.,
Chief of Bureau.

One of the 'secret' documents involved in the Hiss case

ernment turned them over to me last summer, under the Freedom of Information Act."

One roll was blank and the other two were almost illegible. But Hiss said recently, "I've now obtained copies of the original documents" photographed on the two rolls, on which some markings were visible. According to a Hiss lawyer, he went back to the FBI and the agency was able from these markings to identify the original documents. Copies were then obtained

from the Navy under the Freedom of Information Act.

If what Hiss said is true — and I have in part verified it — then the pumpkin-papers affair had distinct elements of stage-managed fraud.

Hiss said that three of the five microfilms were never produced at his trial for perjury. He said that it now turns out that one of these was blank and that all of the documents on the other two were technical memos of little consequence. All

Surprises

were written in December, 1937, and January, 1938, by Rear Admiral A. B. Cook, then head of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics.

The document reproduced by The Star says only that while carbon dioxide fire extinguishers had uniformly been painted aluminum color, in the future portable fire extinguishers were to be painted red.

Hiss said that one of the newly released 15,376 pages of FBI files on his case that he has received from the Justice Department throws new light on these supposedly sensitive Navy Department documents. Hiss said it "shows that the FBI knew before I went on trial" that these documents were available at the time on the open shelves at the Bureau of Standards library to any member of the public.

I think these new revelations are too important to be lost sight of, and deserve full investigation. I took the first and obvious steps the day after I saw the photostat in The Star. I phoned the press office of the Bureau of Standards.

I read to William E. Small, the information chief, the text of the memo by Admiral Cook, and gave him the number on that memorandum and the number of an earlier order it was amending. I asked him if, with those numbers, he could find out for me whether these memos were then available to the public on the open shelves of the Bureau of Standards library.

Small returned my call within a few hours. He said that the records showed both documents had been catalogued into the library at the time they were first issued by Admiral Cook and that access to them was unrestricted. As to whether they were available on open shelves, he would say only that "nobody remembers just how they were displayed."

The Bureau of Standards information chief explained that copies of such technical memoranda were and are commonly sent to the bureau's library from military and civilian departments alike for the guidance of technicians and contractors.

I then phoned the Navy and later the Justice Department. The Navy confirmed that it had supplied the documents to Hiss's lawyers and that all were unclassified memos by Admiral Cook. But I was not able to get the Justice Department to confirm or deny Hiss's assertion that a newly disclosed FBI document shows the FBI knew even before Hiss went to trial what was on those two microfilms. The claim that secret Navy Department documents were on them now turns out a quarter-century later to be false.

Why, then, were the pumpkin papers paddled out with such flim-flam? Had the contents been made public then, it would have put the laugh on Nixon and the Un-American Activities Committee.