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New Government Data NOV 24 1975

Unusual Plan in Rosenberg

Washington

In 1953, while convicted atom spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were fighting legal battles to avoid the electric chair, a top White House aide was watching a novel plan to pry from them a confession of guilt.

"Cracking the Rosenbergs is not a 'third-degree' problem, but a psychiatric problem," presidential assistant Charles D. Jackson thought.

It would be a good idea, he suggested, to have a "really skillful Jewish psychiatrist . . . attempt to insinuate himself into their confidence . . ."

If the Rosenbergs seemed cooperative with the psychiatrist, Jackson went on, "a stay of execution for another 30 or 60 days could be arranged while the work progressed."

Jackson, who was President Eisenhower's administrative assistant, sketched out his plan in a memo to Attorney General Herbert Brownell.

He assured Brownell that pity for convicted spies wasn't his motive. "I am sure you understand that my interest is not in saving the Rosenbergs," Jackson wrote. "They deserve to fry a hundred times for what they have done to this country. But — if they can be cracked, what they can tell us may save the lives of hundreds of Americans later."

The incident is one of thousands of inside-the-government scenes from the last agonizing days of the Rosenberg case that emerged from Justice Department files made public in recent weeks.

About 20,000 pages of documents in the U.S. Attorney's office here have been released as a result of a suit in District of Columbia federal court by the Rosenbergs' sons, Robert and Michael Meeropol, who hope to demonstrate their parents' innocence.

They portray a government anxious to minimize bad publicity abroad, determined to see the executions carried out, and, most of all, hopeful of a last-minute confession from the Rosenbergs.

The Rosenbergs had been convicted in April, 1951, of conspiring to steal atomic bomb secrets for the Soviet Union. A series of appeals and stays of sentencing following until, on June 19, 1953, the couple was electrocuted at New York's Sing Sing Prison.

The files do not tell whether anything ever was done about Jackson's plan for calling a Jewish psychiatrist, but they show that Attorney General Brownell considered it seriously enough to ask the advice of FBI

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The Supersecret Spy Case Data

New York

David Greenglass, the star witness in the historic Rosenberg atomic spy case, says he gave Julius Rosenberg data that the government considered so secret that it could not be mentioned in the trial, according to newly released prosecution documents.

In a memorandum about a Feb. 8, 1951, pretrial conference, Myles J. Lane, then chief assistant U.S. attorney here, wrote that the then Atomic Energy Commission "and its scientists felt that this was a very dangerous bit of information and, if possible, that it should not be used at the trial."

The memorandum said this involved "a description together with sketches of experiment for the reduction of the amount of the uranium and plutonium used to detonate the bomb."

In a Feb. 14, 1951, pretrial memorandum, Irving H. Saypol, then U.S. attorney, reported that Greenglass had asserted he disclosed such experiments to Rosenberg in September, 1945. Greenglass at that time was an Army machinist foreman at the Los Alamos, N.M., atomic bomb project.

The Atomic Energy Commissioners, led by Gordon Dean, its chairman, did permit use at the trial of evidence by Greenglass describing a 1945 atomic bomb, sketches of a lens mold involving the principle of implosion and a description of the project with names of scientists who worked there in 1945 and of "employees who might be potential Russian espionage agents."

At a March 9, 1951, pretrial conference, however, the commissioners were said to have described the plutonium-reduction experiment as "the most sensitive technology disclosed by Greenglass," but "willing to even let that go in if Mr. Saypol feels it is necessary."

It eventually appears to have been kept out.

New York Times

Case

Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Hoover was opposed, fearing that if the scheme leaked out it would cause widespread pro-Communist propaganda. "This propaganda would probably take the line that the government was attempting to coerce the Rosenbergs into making false confessions," he wrote.

Four days before the Rosenberg executions, a rumor swept the government that its star witness was recanting. David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg's brother and the chief witness against her, was then serving his term in the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa.

A report from the Rosenberg's lawyer pictured Greenglass as having "begun to shout in his cell that the Rosenbergs were innocent . . . and that he was being held incommunicado to prevent the story of his confession from leaking out," according to a memo from Robert L. Stern, then the acting solicitor general.

Stern called the director of the Bureau of Prisons who checked out the report, called it untrue, and reported back that Greenglass was, in fact, "acting normal."

Nearly ten weeks after the executions at Sing Sing, the government was to receive another bit of reassurance from an unexpected source — Tessie Greenglass, the mother of David Greenglass and Ethel Rosenberg.

The FBI went to interview Mrs. Greenglass on August 27, according to a memo in the files just released. The memo reports that on that date she told FBI agent John Harrington "that she did not attend the funeral of her daughter and son-in-law, and that she believed that her daughter, Ethel Rosenberg, was guilty and a soldier of Stalin."

Washington Post