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Sensitive Release

THE
By Evert Clark



ONE of Uncle Sam's most hyper-secret offices, the National Security Agency, sent *The News* a press release yesterday. That in itself is news, but there's more.

It was a routine release about the retirement of Russian-born William F. Friedman, 64, one of the world's top code makers and breakers.

Ordinarily it would have received routine treatment. But a handwritten note on one corner said: "Make no additions."

"If you don't mind," the man who brought in the release said, "we'd like to ask that you confine anything you write to what is in this release."

An assistant editor asked him why.

"It's just that if you looked in your files you might find other things about Mr. Friedman," the man said. "We'd like to ask that you please not use them."

"It's a question of national security," the man said, and he walked out of the office.

I was sent to the paper's file of clippings, etc., immediately to see what we might have printed in the past that could come so hush-hush so suddenly.

Nothing was coming apparently of no consequence. Only nothing.

Security men believe that security is never won when it seems to be.

I found a public information man whose name is elusive even in the way of the phone book, and asked him why all this dagger.

"Our security division has checked all the material in the press release," the information man said. "They might not want anything more printed that would be considered of a classified nature."

"What makes you think newspapers would have anything of a classified nature?" I asked.

"Some of them seem to," he said. "What additional material you want to use should be cleared thru our security division."

He said that possibly we could add something of a personal nature without clearing it but "anything that might be of a classified nature" would have to be cleared.

Without hithering to tell him how preposterous that was, I asked for the name of someone in security.

The security division man said he had not asked the public information office to make any kind of request to newspapers.

But he said he thought he knew why the "make no additions" notation was added to the release.

"We don't want any more publicity than is necessary," he said.

It was suggested to him that passing out press releases bearing cryptic notations and accompanied by ridiculous requests made in the holy name of security was hardly the way to hold down a newspaper's curiosity.

He agreed, but said it was done "for security, of course."

How so?

"We're a sensitive agency," he said. Then he got to the point. He guessed that the security division must have cleared the release and then asked the public information office not to add anything further to it.

Somehow, that request got passed along to the papers. If the security office had had its way, he said, there probably would have been no press release at all.

"We shy away from publicity as much as we can," he said.

At Mr. Friedman's retirement ceremonies yesterday, Central Intelligence Director Allen W. Dulles presented him with the National Security Medal on behalf of the President.

That is a very high honor. I assume it means, among other things, that Mr. Friedman never sent out a press release marked "Make no additions."