

# Was Herbert O. Yardley a Traitor?

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**Abstract** In 1967's *The Broken Seal: The Story of "Operation Magic" and the Pearl Harbor Disaster*, Ladislav Farago claimed that Herbert Yardley betrayed his country by selling decrypted Japanese diplomatic messages and the techniques used in their solution to agents of the Japanese Foreign Ministry for \$7,000 [8, p. 57]. For more than four decades, the evidence Farago used to back up this claim has been interpreted differently by different researchers. We examine Farago's allegation and attempt to bring together all the evidence that references it.

**Keywords** American black chamber, Herbert O. Yardley

## 1. Introduction

In 1967's *The Broken Seal: The Story of "Operation Magic" and the Pearl Harbor Disaster* [8], journalist and part-time historian Ladislav Farago claimed that in 1928 Herbert O. Yardley betrayed his country by selling decrypted Japanese diplomatic messages and the techniques used in their solution to agents of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs for \$7,000 [8, p. 57]. Farago's claims are based on an internal memorandum from the Japanese Foreign Ministry written in June 1931, just ten days after the publication of Yardley's sensational tell-all book *The American Black Chamber* [26]. In that book, Yardley explains in detail how in 1921, his Cryptographic Bureau broke the Japanese diplomatic code and used that knowledge to read telegraphic messages detailing the negotiating position of the Japanese government during the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922 and passed the information on to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, the chief American negotiator at the Conference. The revelation of this cryptanalytic coup was deeply embarrassing to the Japanese government and caused a stir that ultimately brought down the Foreign Minister.

Since the publication of Farago's book in 1967, numerous other books and articles have cited Farago's original claim as their evidence of Yardley's treason [2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 19, 23, 24]. It also seems true that at the time Farago's book was published, the intelligence establishment was incensed at the revelation and was largely convinced that Yardley had committed treason [9, 24]. The allegation has been denied by David Kahn in his biography of Herbert Yardley, *The Reader of Gentlemen's Mail: Herbert O. Yardley and the Birth of American Codebreaking* [15], and by other articles, notably a Letter to the Editor written by Louis Kruh in the journal *Cryptologia* [16]. But the allegation persists.

Where is the truth? Where are Farago's sources? Do they really incriminate Yardley? Are there any references to the alleged treason that predate the publication

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of *The American Black Chamber*? Do any of the subsequent articles that refer to Farago's allegations offer any new evidence in support of the claim? Is there a definite refutation of the charges?

In the remainder of this article, I attempt to answer the above questions and put the matter to rest once and for all. Section 2 spells out the details of the allegation, lists the parties involved in the alleged treason and attempts to bring together all the sources of the original claim in Farago's book. Section 3 provides a chronology of how the allegation has been used and referenced in the years subsequent to the publication of Farago's book. Section 4 describes this author's search for the original documents and for the "smoking gun" that will prove or disprove the allegation. Section 5 is a more detailed look at Farago's references, particularly those from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs microfilm archives [1]. Section 6 attempts to tie up the previous sections and see where the evidence leads us. Finally, we present our own conclusions.

## 2. Details of the Allegations

In chapter 5 of *The Broken Seal*, titled "Gentlemen Do Not Read Each Other's Mail," Ladislav Farago makes two separate allegations about leaks in the American intelligence community during the 1920s. The first is that in early March 1925, an unnamed employee of the War Department's cryptographic bureau approached Isaburo Yoshida, the counsel of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, and freely offered the information that the United States was maintaining a top-secret cryptanalytic bureau that was regularly breaking Japanese diplomatic codes. In fact, "there was no foreign code that could not be decrypted" and "the only possible means of protecting the [Japanese] codes [would be] to change them as frequently as possible." [8, p. 56] Yoshida promptly sent a telegram to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo, "Secret Telegram – No. 48" dated March 10, 1925 reporting his contact [29]. Farago reports that there is no evidence that the Japanese ever followed up on this information. The translation of this telegram from the JMFA microfilm collection reveals a very interesting piece of information that neither Farago, nor any other researcher has mentioned to date. The details of this revelation are in Section 5 below.

The second allegation made by Farago is that during the summer of 1928 (since revised by other researchers to the summer of 1930 [9, p. 26]) Herbert O. Yardley, then the former head of a joint War-State Department Cryptographic Bureau, approached a Japanese journalist, Koshiro Takada and asked for a meeting with the Japanese Ambassador to the United States so that he could offer him some "valuable information that would interest the Japanese embassy." [8, p. 57] Farago alleges that Yardley subsequently met with Setsuzo Sawada, a counselor in the Japanese embassy at 1661 Crescent Place<sup>1</sup> in Washington and made his proposition—he would turn over to the Japanese a large number of decrypted diplomatic cipher messages, the techniques used to break the Japanese diplomatic cipher systems and to decipher the messages, and also the details of the diplomatic cipher systems of other countries—including the United Kingdom—that his organization

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<sup>1</sup>Farago says "1661 Crescent Place, an elegant little graystone house off Connecticut Avenue" but such a house does not currently exist. The closest current building to this address is 1661 Crescent Place NW, which is a six-story apartment building between 16th and 17th Streets NW and about 5 or 6 blocks from Connecticut Avenue.

had broken. Yardley would deliver all this information to the Japanese for the sum of \$10,000.

According to Farago, Counselor Sawada called in reinforcements and Captain Kingo Inouye of the Imperial Japanese Navy, a cryptographer on loan to the Foreign Ministry, and the chief cryptographer of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Naoshi Ozeki were dispatched from Tokyo to verify Yardley's story. Farago then goes into some details about the negotiations between Yardley and the Japanese, including the amounts offered in the back and forth and the final deal in which Yardley ends up receiving \$7,000 for all his information. Farago also says that part of the deal was "the understanding that he [Yardley] would be paid more if he decided to continue to work for the Japanese." [8, p. 58] Neither Farago nor any other researcher has followed up on this part of the allegation.

Here the Yardley allegation ends, but Farago continues to make reference to Yardley and his supposed treachery later in the chapter. First he implies that Yardley may have suggested to the Japanese that they look at cipher machines to replace their codes [8, p. 59]. And again he says "Although Mr. Simpson's decision to abolish the 'black chamber' had removed a traitor from one of the most sensitive branches of the government, it had other effects as well, not all of them as fortunate." [8, p. 60]

Farago's main source for his accusations against Yardley is a memorandum found in the microfilmed archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This memorandum was written to Japanese Foreign Minister Shidehara by the chief of the Foreign Ministry's Telegraph Section, Shin Sakuma, on or about June 10, 1931 [21]. The document, in Japanese, is contained in the microfilm record of Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (JMFA) documents made by the United States Army in 1949–1951 and currently stored at the Library of Congress [1]. The memorandum refers to a telegram, *Document No. 105*, sent to the Foreign Ministry sometime in June 1930 from the Japanese ambassador in Washington that asks for assurances from Yardley that he will hand over the telegrams he promised. The memorandum also references other messages from the Japanese ambassador "reporting the receipt of copies of Japanese encrypted messages and other papers having pertinence . . ." [21, p. 3].

### 3. How the Yardley Allegation has Spread

In the more than four decades since the publication of *The Broken Seal*, Farago's accusation of treason has been repeated many times. Nearly all the repetitions in books and in the literature of cryptology reference Farago's book or the infamous *Sakuma Memorandum*.

The Farago allegations are the first public claims of Yardley's treason, but they are not the first claims in the literature. Sadeo Asada, in an appendix to his 1963 Yale Ph.D. dissertation *Japan and the United States 1915–1925* [4], makes the earliest known reference to the Sakuma memorandum and *Document No. 105* [4 p. i–v]. Asada makes the same claim as Farago and uses the Sakuma memorandum [21], as his source. He also mentions that the Yardley treason claim is not the main subject of the Sakuma memo; the reason for the memo is to explore ways of deflecting the damage that Yardley's publication of *The American Black Chamber* would cause the Japanese government and the Foreign Ministry in particular.

In 1969, Lesta VanDerWert Turchen wrote her master's thesis in History at the University of South Dakota on *Herbert Osborne Yardley and American*

*Cryptography* [23]. In it she quotes from the Sakuma memorandum and mentions Farago's detailed description of the alleged Yardley transaction [23, p. 81–82]. She also mentions David Kahn's first defense of Yardley in *The Codebreakers* [12], "However, David Kahn, author of *The Codebreakers*, curtly dismisses the Japanese charges that Yardley approached them as 'unquestionably false'" [23, p. 82].

Interestingly, this first defense that Kahn presents is rather weak. In the main text of *The Codebreakers* he says "Then it [the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs] tried to make the United States lose face by calling the solution 'a dishonor,' and sought to tar Yardley with the statement that at the time of the conference he had 'visited the Japanese embassy in Washington and stated that Japan's cipher telegrams were all deciphered and then proposed to sell the translations . . . ' – unquestionably false." [12, p. 363] Then, in an endnote Kahn states "Ladislav Fargo (sic), *The Broken Seal* (New York: Random House, 1967) 9–31, 56–58, 67–72), which came to my attention too late for use in my text, gives additional material on Yardley, but his interpretations must be viewed with extreme caution." [12, pg 1037] Note that Kahn is apparently conflating the two Farago allegations and assuming that Yardley was involved in both. Our research indicates this is probably not true as will be discussed later.

In November, 1967, just months after the publication of *The Broken Seal*, Fred C. Woodrough, Jr., a Japanese linguist who worked for American intelligence during World War II, wrote a report for Admiral Rufus Taylor, then deputy director of central intelligence [24]. In his report, Woodrough claims that after reviewing about 40,000 pages from the Japanese Foreign Ministry microfilm collection that "Herbert O. Yardley, who subsequently published the infamous book, 'The American Black Chamber', was personally and directly involved in a transaction which he, in consideration for the payment of a sum of \$7,000, turned over to Japanese Ambassador Debuchi, in Washington, a large volume of decrypted Japanese messages in the diplomatic systems and papers describing the cryptanalytic processes which lead to their being read. The deal took place in 1930. A document concerning this transaction is attached as Attachment 1." [24, p. 4] The document that Woodrough mentions and which is included in his report is the Sakuma memorandum. The Sakuma memorandum is the only reference in Woodrough's report to the Farago allegation of Yardley's treason.

Two years later, in 1969, Kahn reiterates his belief that Farago's claim is wrong in an article in *The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, calling it "an accusation not believed by many who have analyzed the evidence." [13].

In 1981, Theodore Hannah, a writer for the NSA's publication *Cryptologic Spectrum* wrote the first extended account of Yardley's life [9]. Hannah's treatment is generally sympathetic. At the end of the article, Hannah addresses the Farago allegation. He claims that the NSA reviewed the Japanese Foreign Ministry documents "not once but several times" [9, p. 25] and concludes

NSA's investigations tend strongly to substantiate Farago's basic claim, although much of the rest of his account of the transaction either could not be confirmed or was found to be wrong. The key document is an internal Foreign Ministry memorandum saying that the Japanese paid Yardley \$7,000 for copies of deciphered Japanese messages and cryptanalytic techniques. Despite Farago's assertion, the transaction is not 'recapitulated in great detail' in the memo; there are, in fact, no details at all,

this episode being almost incidental to the subject of the memo, which was Yardley's book, *The American Black Chamber*. [9, p. 26]

This conclusion agrees with Asada's in his dissertation. However, Hannah's only reference to the "internal Foreign Ministry memorandum" and to the "strong" substantiation of Farago's "basic claim" is to the Sakuma memorandum [9, p. 28, note 67]. Hannah mentions nothing about finding *Document No. 105*, nor any other telegrams between Washington and Tokyo, nor any decrypted Japanese telegrams in the microfilm archives of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. This is, however, the first time that anyone has questioned the details of the transaction as Farago writes them.

In 1992, the newsletter *Surveillant* published a short article about the re-issue of *The American Black Chamber*, titled "Yardley Sold Secrets to Japanese" [3, p. 99]. In this article, the anonymous author repeats the Farago allegation and goes further, writing "And Japanese documents were later found which make reference to, or used techniques devised by Yardley." [3, p. 99] This statement is made without attribution or citation.

In 1994, Robin Denniston, the son of Bletchley Park Director Alistair Denniston, published part of a master's thesis as an article titled "Yardley's Diplomatic Secrets" in the journal *Cryptologia* [7]. Denniston's article is particularly harsh with respect to Yardley, making what this author believes are completely unsupported statements about Yardley's (and others) motivations. Denniston references the Farago allegation and paraphrases most of the "great details" that Farago makes. He also refers to the *Surveillant* article mentioned above, "... but the demise of the chamber in 1928 may have led to Yardley's deliberate betrayal of his methodologies to Japan, probably in 1930, the facts of which were published by Farago in 1967 but which have been corroborated only in 1992<sup>9</sup>." (this author's emphasis) [7, pg 86] Footnote number 9 in the quote states:

See The *Surveillant* 2, 4, (1992), p. 099. Commenting on the fact that he sold his papers and his research to a foreign government, the writer adds: 'this fact was once a classified aspect to Yardley that we believe, has never been discussed openly and yet appeared openly within the intelligence community in 1988, though unnoticed. Word of Yardley's lack of good judgment appeared first in an 11-page pamphlet released by the National Security Agency in 1988 titled *Pioneers in U.S. Cryptology*. The key document, an internal Japanese foreign ministry memorandum indicated that Herbert O. Yardley was paid the \$7000 in 1930 (after the closing of the Black Chamber). And Japanese documents were later found which make reference to, or used techniques devised by Yardley.' [7, p. 86]

Unfortunately, Denniston's source is wrong. Louis Kruh, in a *Letter to the Editor* in the journal *Cryptologia* in 1995 [16] demolishes the *Surveillant* article and hence Denniston's claim. Unfortunately for Denniston's claim, the last sentence in the footnote, supposedly from the *Pioneers in U.S. Cryptology* pamphlet does not appear there. According to Kruh, "...there is no publicly available evidence of even one Japanese document that makes 'reference to, or used techniques devised by, Yardley'" [16, p. 379].

Kruh also demolishes the same claim made in a 2002 book by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Cloak and Dollar: A History of American Secret Intelligence* [10].

Jeffreys-Jones repeats the Farago allegation—using Farago [10, p. 110]—references the same anonymously-written *Surveillant* article, makes the same claim as does Denniston above, and references Denniston's *Cryptologia* article.<sup>2</sup> Kruh uses the same argument to refute this claim, adding “In a copy of the NSA pamphlet in my possession, the closing sentence is ‘Thus Herbert O. Yardley remains the most controversial figure in American Cryptology. But his contributions also remain a vital part of our cryptologic heritage’” [17].

In 2004, David Kahn published the first complete and detailed biography of Herbert O. Yardley, *The Reader of Gentlemen's Mail* [15]. Oddly, Kahn does not directly address the Farago allegation in the body of the text, but saves his comments for a note at the end of the book. In this note, Kahn attempts to put the Farago allegation to rest once and for all. In part,

*But though at my request two Japanese scholars – Ikuhito Hata, a World War II historian who translated an abridged The Codebreakers into Japanese, and Sadeo Asada, a specialist in Japanese naval policy whose Yale University dissertation dealt in large part with the Washington naval conference – have independently searched for telegram 105, both report that it does not exist in the files, though a listing summarizes it as “cryptographic leak.” Hata wrote in a letter of 14 May 2000 to Dr. Edward Drea that the “telegram itself cannot be found.” Asada examined the 600-plus-page Yardley file in the Foreign Ministry archives but said, in a letter of 27 June 1998, that “it contains no world-shaking new discoveries,” deals mainly with “the Foreign Ministry’s reaction to Yardley’s book,” and includes no materials prior to 1 June 1931, the book’s publication date. In a letter of 10 July 1998, he wrote, “The fact that I could not find the dispatch No. 105 or pre-June 1931 telegraphs on the Yardley incident in the Foreign Ministry archives can mean that they were destroyed, given the very delicate nature of the subject. My conclusion is that Japanese archives do not substantiate the story of Yardley’s betrayal, although the Japanese Foreign Ministry leaders believed in it for one reason or another.” (emphasis added) Moreover, the files contain no internal memoranda about the proposal (Is it a trick? If it is legitimate, should the decrypts be bought? How much should we pay?), no payment vouchers, and – most significantly – no documents from Yardley. These would have existed if the deal had gone through. The charge of betrayal rests upon a post-American Black Chamber allegation for which great motivation but no evidence exists. Consequently, I believe that Yardley never sold any documents to the Japanese and that the story was fabricated to denigrate him and save Japanese face. Woodrough says that this hypothesis is “super-intricate” and “outsmarting itself,” but whatever he means, I think that it is simple, coherent, and reasonable. I do not know whether the summary listing was contemporary and without this knowledge cannot agree that it supports the accusation. [15, p. 273]*

Kahn clearly believes a new search that did not find *Document No. 105* nor any other telegrams or decrypted messages in the Japanese archives related to Farago's alle-

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<sup>2</sup>Denniston was Jeffrey's-Jones' masters student.

gation lends credence to the idea that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the days after the publication of *The American Black Chamber*, was attempting damage control by trying to tar Yardley with the worst accusation possible—treason. His reviewers are divided, however.

In a generally very positive 2004 review of *The Reader of Gentlemen's Mail* [11], Thomas Johnson calls Kahn's placement of the Yardley defense in an endnote "curious", and continues, referring to the Sakuma memorandum, "The memorandum was written only a few days after Yardley's book appeared in print and was, evidently, intended to lessen the sting of the book. But, kept in a file that no one would have expected to become public, it is hard to discount it as a fabrication. The memorandum must be considered authentic." [11] But Johnson backs away from putting the Sakuma memorandum in its broader context, which is damage control within the Japanese government. If the Foreign Ministry was attempting to mitigate criticism about the *American Black Chamber's* revelations it was probably much more concerned with the Japanese Diet and the militarists within the Japanese government than with opinion overseas. The Sakuma memorandum can easily be seen as an attempt to manipulate opinion within the Diet and the Japanese administration in order to mitigate damage to the Foreign Ministry and the Foreign Minister. Also in the microfilmed Japanese archives is another memorandum written by Sakuma and titled *Answers to Hypothetical Questions from the Diet about Yardley's book 'The American Black Chamber'*. This memorandum is dated July 28, 1931, and clearly shows that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was consumed with defending itself against the stories in Yardley's book all through the summer of 1931 [22].

Somewhere in the middle is Emil Levine's 2005 review of *The Reader of Gentlemen's Mail* [18]. In it, Levine, a former USN intelligence officer, describes the Farago allegation, mentions the Woodrough memorandum [24], and the Kruh article [16], and then goes on "This reviewer was a member of a composite military cryptologic reserve unit at the National Security Agency when the Farago book was published. At the weekly meeting of the unit, a researcher (name long forgotten) presented his research, concluding that Farago was wrong and Yardley had not sold secrets, based on his inability to find the material cited by Farago" [18]. Then, presumably to be even-handed, Levine continues "Compounding the issue is an undated 23-page monograph, *Pioneers in U.S. Cryptology* published by the NSA Center for Cryptologic History, which states, 'Independent investigations indicate that although much of Farago's description of the transaction was undocumented or wrong (e.g., the date) the basic claim was true.' The questionable Japanese Foreign Ministry memorandum is then cited! It is for the reader to decide this issue" [18]. Levine is referring to the Sakuma memorandum. The next sentence in *Pioneers in U.S. Cryptology*, (published in 1988) not included in his review, is the one to which he refers, "The key document, an internal Japanese Foreign Ministry memorandum, indicated that Yardley was paid the stated amount in 1930 (after the closing of the Black Chamber)" [2]. So once again, everything comes full circle to the Sakuma memorandum.

Finally, a 2006 review in *American Historical Review* by Louis Sadler comes down (almost) squarely on Kahn's side. "Kahn also dissects the accusation made by historian Ladislav Farago that Yardley secretly approached the Japanese Embassy in Washington and for \$7,000 sold information that the Black Chamber had been reading their codes. He concludes that it never happened and he is probably correct" [20, p. 501].

#### 4. The Search

The common thread in all the articles and books mentioned to this point is the presence of the Sakuma memorandum in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs microfilm record and the absence of any other documentary evidence cited by Farago. In an attempt to find what Louis Kruh has called “the smoking gun” I followed two paths. First I obtained microfilm Reels UD-29 and UD-30 of the Archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs [1], and engaged a translator to examine the 387 frames therein so that we could match the documents on the microfilm with the references in *The Broken Seal*.

Second, I visited the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD, where the Woodrough report and a hardcopy translation of the Sakuma memorandum are held in Record Group 457, SRH-038 *A Selection of Papers Pertaining to Herbert O. Yardley* [28].

I visited the Research Library at the National Cryptologic Museum which houses many of David Kahn’s papers and also holds oral histories of many of the participants in the early days of modern American cryptology.

I also went to the Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Library which houses the papers of John Matthews Manly, and the Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University where the Farago papers are held. I was looking for any evidence to either support or refute the Farago allegation. In particular, I was looking for any of the missing documents referred to in *The Broken Seal*.

#### 5. Farago’s References

In *Broken Seal*, Farago mentions the following telegrams and memoranda from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (JMFA) microfilm records held at the Library of Congress [1]. All these references are in *The Broken Seal*, Reference Notes, Chapters 5 and 6, pages 394–397.

The *Sakuma Memorandum* dated June 10, 1931 [21]. This memo is also in the National Archives records in hard copy. This is the only memo that Farago says he has a copy of in *Broken Seal* [8, p. 394]. Farago says he has a microfilm copy of this memo. See also Woodrough’s report from the National Archives [24]. The Sakuma memorandum is in frames 157–174 in the JMFA collection.

A second memo on Foreign Ministry Chief Cryptographer Naoshi Ozeki’s exploratory trip to Europe to find a cipher machine [8, p. 59–60] subsequent to the publication of *The American Black Chamber* is another Sakuma memo dated August 6, 1931 [8, p. 395]. There are two memos related to this topic at frames 291–297 in the JMFA microfilm collection.

The War Department employee’s contact with the Japanese Embassy in Washington in 1925 is detailed in *Secret Telegram – No. 48* dated March 10, 1925 [8, p. 394]. These are frames 72 and 73 in the JMFA microfilm collection. This is the only document in the collection with the correct date for this allegation, and the title of the telegram and the author matches the details presented by Farago in *Broken Seal*. As mentioned earlier, this telegram was sent by the counselor to the Japanese Embassy Isaboru Yoshida to the Foreign Ministry after the contact with the War Department employee. Figure 1 is an image of the first frame of the telegram. The translated text is



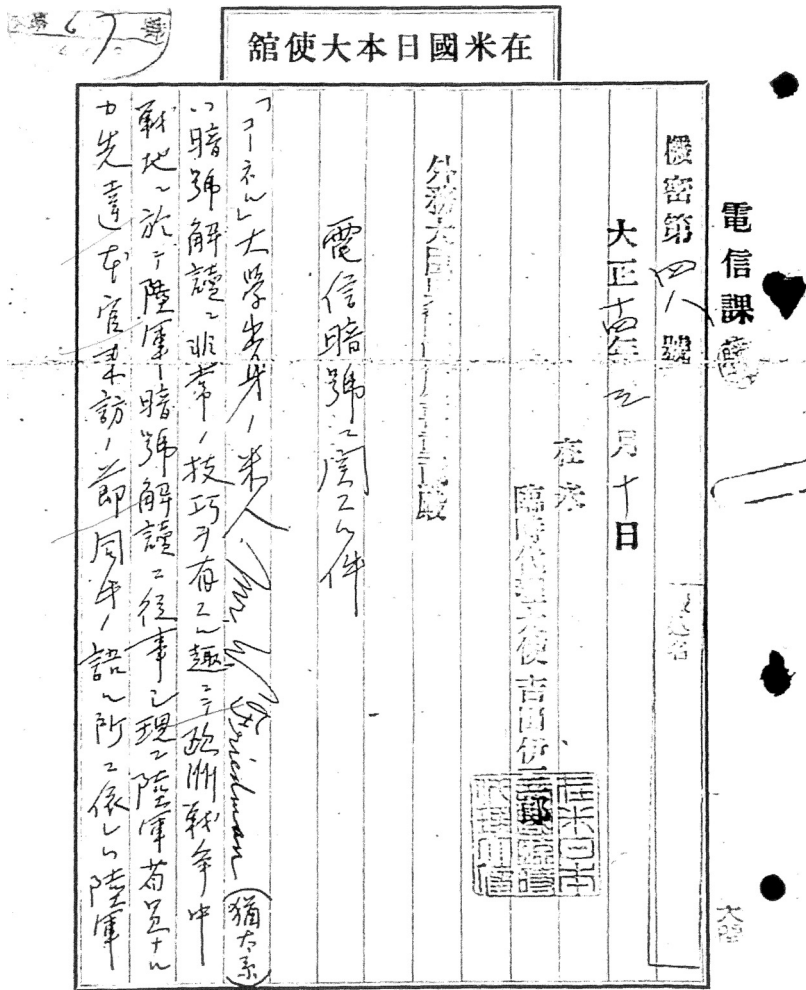


Figure 1. First page of the March 10, 1925 Telegram #48. Note “Mr. W. Friedman” in the text.

**Telegram Section**  
**Confidential #48**

*Date: March 10th, 1925*  
*From: Isaburo Yoshida, Acting Ambassador to the US*  
*To: Kijuro Shidehara, Minister of Foreign Affairs*  
*Re: Telegram Codes*

Mr. W. Friedman, an American, from Cornell University seems very skilled in breaking codes; for he was engaged in breaking codes at the war in Europe (i.e., WWI), and he is now working for the US Army. When he came to see me recently, he mentioned that the US Army had no difficulty breaking codes. In order to prevent this, we have no choice but change codes very frequently. I am sending this note for your information [29].

This telegram, if anything, is more of a blockbuster than the Yardley allegation. Here, for what this author believes is the first time, is a report that William Friedman was in contact with the Japanese while he was a War Department employee during the 1920s. What are we to make of this? Friedman was certainly in Washington during the 1920s. He was actively working for the War Department, and had been the War Department's Chief Cryptanalyst since late 1921 [6, p. 87]. He certainly knew of Yardley's bureau and its work. What could he have been doing talking to Japanese diplomats? Why is his name hand-written—in English—in the text of a Japanese Foreign Ministry telegram? Why is he apparently boasting to Yoshida that the United States can break Japanese diplomatic codes? None of these questions have been addressed to date. Yardley is not mentioned in this telegram.

The involvement of the Japanese foreign correspondent Koshiro Takada in the Yardley affair is attributed to two different memos dated November 26, 1939 and March 5, 1940. In the Notes at the end of his book, Farago actually makes two references to documents with identical dates. On page 394 he says "Foreign Correspondent Takada's participation is described in documents dated Nov. 26, 1939, and Mar. 5, 1940" [8, p. 394]. Documents with the details of Takada's involvement with Yardley as related by Farago do not appear in any frames in the JMFA microfilm collection.

But, two pages later Farago states, "Yardley's mission to China was reported on Nov. 26, 1939, in a dispatch to the N.Y. Herald Tribune ("Herbert Yardley is now in Chungking, working for the Chiang Kai-shek government under a pseudonym"); and on Mar. 5, 1940, in a dispatch from Hong Kong to the Tokyo paper *Nichi-Nichi*, which says Yardley had gone to China with 'the blessings of the State Department'" [8, p. 396]. These two news dispatches appear in frames 386 and 387 of the JFMA microfilm collection and both are signed – Takada [1, p. 386–387]. Both dispatches come from the New York Bureau of the Tokyo *Nichi-Nichi* newspaper; Takada was a *Nichi-Nichi* correspondent based in New York. The first dispatch, dated November 26, 1939 reports the rumor that Yardley is in China working for the Kuomintang. The second dispatch, from March 5th 1940 confirms the first. The first dispatch contains a paragraph apparently inserted by the editor of the newspaper that does talk about meetings between Takada and Yardley.

In his book, Yardley revealed that he broke the Japanese codes in diplomatic telegrams the Japanese Government had sent to the Japanese delegation for the Washington Naval Conference. He broke codes to find out confidential information on the Japanese Navy and gave it to Hughes, the Secretary of State. Therefore, the US Government knew everything about the Japanese plans in advance. Takada, a newspaper correspondent, met Yardley several times regarding his book, but Yardley had already not been favored by the US Government. According to Takada, Yardley realized that he could not find a good job in the US, and he wanted to find a job in Japan or China. According to [person's name? unreadable . . .], since Yardley left New York for Europe about a year ago, he must have gone to China through the Mediterranean. It seems that he managed to get a job at Intelligence Service in the Chinese Army. [1, frame 386]

None of this implies that Yardley met Takada before the publication of *The American Black Chamber*, only after. So it seems that Farago is conflating two different

incidents and pointing to the same two documents for both. His details of Takada's involvement in Yardley's alleged treachery before the publication of *The American Black Chamber* appear nowhere.

"Collection of telegrams exchanged by Foreign Minister Shidehara and Ambassador Debuchi," June 2, 3, 5, July 30, August 10, November 3, 1931. [8, p. 396] In the JMFA microfilm collection there are a number of telegrams between Shidehara and Debuchi in the period between June and December 1931 when Shidehara was replaced as Japanese Foreign Minister<sup>3</sup> some with these dates.

"Draft of Answers to Hypothetical Questions in the Diet about Yardley's Black Chamber prepared by Chief of Cable Section," handwritten by Shin Sakuma July 28, 1931. [8, p. 396] in JMFA frames 1–28, 179–206, and 298–325—three nearly identical copies of the same memo.

September 18, 1931, "Circular [discussing the Yardley case, signed by Shidehara]" to most Japanese consular offices. [8, p. 397] In the JMFA collection there is nothing dated September 18, 1931, but there are three different memos in the collection related to increasing code security at Japanese consulates in JMFA frames 54–71, 232–249, and 284–290.

"Memorandum [by Sakuma for the Foreign Minister] concerning the Repercussions of the Yardley Matter," August 25, 1931. [8, p. 397] This memo seems to have been added as an appendix to the "Hypothetical Questions" memo of July 28, 1931. JMFA frames 29–53, with additional, nearly identical copies at frames 207–231 and 326–350. In the JMFA collection all three copies of this memorandum are dated May 15, 1932.

Farago also cites the transcripts of three interviews:

- a. an interview of Noboru Kojima with Ozeki, Ito, Inouye, and Kameyama;
- b. a deposition of Katsuji Kameyama, Defense Document No. 1079 (August 13, 1947)
- c. an interrogation of Major Kusuo Matsuora, chief of Cipher Section, Kwantung Army, by Captain Sokolov of the Red Army at Khabarovsk, May 18, 1946.

None of these interviews can be found in the Farago collection, or in the National Archives, Record Group 457; nor do they appear in the JMFA microfilm collection.

None of the memos or transcripts mentioned above have hard copies in the Farago collection at the Gotlieb Archival Research Center. With the exception of the first Sakuma memorandum there are no hard copies of these memoranda in the National Archives, Record Group 457.

Note that with the exception of the alleged memo about the War Department employee's contact with the Japanese embassy in Washington in 1925 (which has nothing to do with the Yardley treason allegation, even in Farago's book; it is about William Friedman), all of the documents cited by Farago date from after the

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<sup>3</sup>There are no telegrams with dates of 2 June, 3 June, or 30 July 1931 in the JMFA collection. There are telegrams between Debuchi and Shidehara with dates of 5 June (frames 96–100), 6 June (frames 74–75), 10 June (frames 101–104), 3 July (frames 76–77), 10 August (frames 78–79 and 80–81), several from the period 26 August to 22 September (frames 84–85, 115–120, 142–149, and 152), 3 November (frames 121–127), 9 November (frames 117–118), and 20 December (frames 153–154). Shidehara was replaced as Foreign Minister at the end of December, 1931.

publication of *The American Black Chamber* on June 1, 1931, some, including the erroneous Takada dispatches, as much as nine years later.

There are no detailed notes on the Japanese memoranda in the boxes I searched in the Farago collection at the Gotlieb Archival Research Center. The only mentions in the Farago papers are in boxes 6, 24, and 87, which contain the typescript and edited proofs of *The Broken Seal*. Early versions of the book do not have any reference to the alleged treason so it may have been something that Farago came upon late in his writing. In fact, it also appears as if Farago contemplated a biography of Yardley, tentatively titled "Alias Harry Osborn." There is a short book proposal in box 74 of the Farago collection, but no evidence that it was ever submitted to a publisher or that Farago followed up on it. The book proposal does not mention the alleged Yardley treason.

## 6. Where Does the Evidence Lead?

So where does the evidence lead us? Is there a smoking gun? Are we any closer to a definitive response to the Farago allegation of Yardley's treason? There are several points to make.

First, Farago was sloppy in his scholarship. Many of the dates in his references are incorrect. Telegrams and memoranda that he references in *The Broken Seal* cannot be found in the JMFA microfilm collection. He combines meetings and incidents. He occasionally misspells or switches names and he makes casual references to documents without including detailed citations in the Notes section of his book. He was sloppy in other areas as well. For example, he misspelled Elizebeth Smith Friedman's first name in the text of the book, and he claimed she was Canadian when she was actually born in Indiana [8, p. 61]. He also repeatedly fails to reference claims he makes in the text, and *Broken Seal*, while it contains endnotes, does not contain a comprehensive bibliography.

Second, Farago's papers at the Gotlieb Archival Research Center do not contain hard copies of any of the memos or telegrams he references. His microfilms are copies of the same JFMA microfilms in the Library of Congress.

Next, neither the often cited *Document No. 105*, nor the documents referring to the Japanese newspaper reporter Takada, nor the telegrams Yardley allegedly sold, nor any other memos related to the transaction written *at the time of the alleged transaction* have ever been found, despite extensive and repeated searches by several researchers including this author in several different places where these documents might logically be found. This is not to say the documents do not exist at all; they may be in some classified files at the National Security Agency, the State Department or the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They have just not been found in any unclassified venue.

Aside from the motive of anger at being out of a job, where is Yardley's motivation for committing treason? Except for Yardley's own writing and letters to John Manly and William Friedman there is no real documentary evidence of what Yardley's motivations were in this time period. Yet both Farago [8, p. 56–57] and Robin Denniston [7, p. 87, 88, 96, 101] attribute anger, disappointment, disillusionment, greed, obsession, and envy to Yardley.

Yardley repeatedly [26, p. 358–366 and 25, p. 8] said he had written *The American Black Chamber* to shake up the American government and let them know that they needed to fund a cryptographic bureau, something the War Department

did indeed continue to do — although with William Friedman at the helm. In “Are We Giving Away Our State Secrets?,” Yardley says “I had hoped to bring home to my government and to the public the dangerous position that America holds by abolishing the Black Chamber and at the same time retaining antiquated codes to carry our diplomatic secrets. All Great Powers have their Black Chamber where the best cipher brains in the world puzzle out our codes” [26, p. 8]. Yardley also repeatedly tried to get a job in the American Intelligence community including when he returned from China in 1940, and in 1941, just before he returned from Canada [14]. Why would someone who had supposedly betrayed his country to the Japanese and then betrayed the Japanese try to get yet another job in the American intelligence community, knowing full well that the Japanese could reveal his secret at any time?

Finally, Farago claims that Yardley initiated contact with the Japanese through a reporter, Takada. The dates in Farago’s end notes are identical in two places, and both refer to the same two newspaper articles written by Takada about Yardley’s work for the Kuomintang government in China in 1939–1940 [27]. There is no evidence in the JFMA documents nor in any of Farago’s papers to substantiate the 1930 Takada connection.

## 7. Conclusions

Herbert O. Yardley was a complex figure in the American intelligence community. He was a good, but not great cryptanalyst. His true strengths lay in organization and management. He created and successfully ran three different cryptanalytic bureaux in three different countries. He wrote two best-selling books, many non-fiction articles, three novels, and several short stories.

He also had many flaws; he was insecure and envious of those who were in the inner circle when he was not—no matter what inner circle it was. He was a self-promoter and occasionally took credit for things he did not do. He inflated his own accomplishments almost constantly and in his fiction he is the hero he writes about and the hero he always wanted to be. He was almost certainly unfaithful to his first wife, he gambled and drank, possibly to excess. He seemed to be insensitive to other peoples’ feelings, mostly because he usually was just thinking of himself.

There does not seem to be any hard evidence that he was a traitor, however. The only evidence that every researcher since 1967 has unearthed and that clearly points to Yardley accepting money from the Japanese for his Cipher Bureau secrets is the single Sakuma memorandum in the JMFA microfilm record. This memorandum, written just 10 days after the publication of *The American Black Chamber* and taken with all the other telegrams and internal Foreign Ministry memoranda for 1931 can be attributed to an effort to control the damage that Yardley’s book does to the reputation of the Foreign Ministry and also to Foreign Minister Shidehara himself. Shidehara was the chief Japanese negotiator at the Washington Naval Conference, and so Yardley’s revelations about breaking the Japanese diplomatic code and decrypting messages revealing the Japanese negotiating position at that conference reflected directly on Shidehara. Those revelations may have indirectly lead to his replacement as Foreign Minister in December 1931.

None of the other unclassified and declassified references from Farago’s book that were used to bolster the Yardley allegation have been substantiated. Most of them have never been found. So it seems, as David Kahn puts it in *Reader of Gentlemen’s Mail*, “Yardley was a rotter, not a traitor” [15, p. 241].

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