

GEORGE C. MARSHALL FOUNDATION

TAPE #3: THE CHINESE CIPHER  
ELIZABETH SMITH FRIEDMAN INTERVIEWS  
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This is a recorded interview with Mrs. Elizebeth Smith Friedman at the George C. Marshall Foundation in Lexington, Virginia on June 5, 1974 in which Mrs. Friedman discusses various types of codes and ciphers including the Chinese cipher and her work in code breaking and deciphering messages with Marshall Research Library staff members.

ESF:

Any connection, how could it possibly have any connection with code and cipher? Well, this is not a very common thing nowadays but up until 25 years ago it was business, all business people, all over the world really, had what we called commercial codes. They were for the purpose of economy and sometimes secrecy but mostly for economy. For example, this has single words that will represent a whole sentence or phrase like EMOLO which is just a series, the group before it is EMOIL and five places away is EMPAC and EMPAC means "only 75% of invoice value of goods to be drawn under this credit." So you can see that it was a great economy. So that's simply a commercial code, but I wanted you to know what a commercial code is so when I said that this is a Chinese commercial code...you see Chinese characters can't be sent over wire or cable or radioed or anything like that, so they have to form what amounts to being a commercial code, and as you see here, these tiny Chinese characters are in squares and accompanying each one of them is four numerals which form a group, and this one Chinese character, for example, has the group 0362. Another one over here, which is a very simple looking Chinese character, has 0430 with it, and they also had letters. They had another form of Chinese code which was called Chu's code and it was in three letter groups. For example, here's the group CCY which has that Chinese character there and this...Although I knew of the existence of a Chu's code, I'd never had to use it; I'd never found it in use, but the one where the characters were represented by four numerals was enciphered.

In this case, the Gordon Lim case that I worked on that was for the Canadian government, I think in 1938, somebody from China sent a copy of a single message, no not from China. It was addressed to a Chinese man in Seattle, Washington, Lu Kim Yun, and was expressed in four letter, I mean, four numeral groups like 0106 would be one and the next group might be 1672 and so on, in that form, and I, it was a single message and we knew the contents. I mean we knew the meaning and it was my job to fit the message that went over the telegraph and was captured by the customs people in Seattle, Washington. We knew what the message meant because we knew what the shipment consisted of and what items were in the shipment and so on. That wasn't very much of a problem, but then in 1938, I received a, from the Canadian RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who had been after this Chinese millionaire Gordon Lim. For fourteen years, they had known that he'd been smuggling narcotics from China. He was a very elegant gentleman. He was a graduate of Peking University and of Oxford University, England and was a millionaire. He had an importing gem shop in Vancouver and one in Victoria. When I say gem, I mean gems, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, real ones. And always lived in this very highly cultured group of Chinese people and they're thick in the woods out there in the, around British Columbia and Victoria, the island of Victoria, but we never could get

anything on him. They never could get their hands on anything except for the narcotics, of course, which they'd sometimes seize from the people in the street. They couldn't get any excuse really to, shall we say, break into his gem shops and see what they could find.

Well, finally something happened that brought things to a head and they did get a safe open in his Vancouver shop and in the safe, which was entirely empty, not a ruby, not an emerald to be seen, there were a few sheets that looked like yellow telegraph blanks and there were about seventeen of them and they actually were messages. And they appeared in four letter groups, well no, they were in five letters, but they could be divided evenly, divided by four to get the characters, and then I worked out a diagram, a thing like this, with letter equivalents to the numbers taking them by two's like 01, 02 and then the next series would be 10, 11, 12 and so on up to 100 and that would represent these four letter characters.

Well I, my staff and I, worked out the, got the Chinese cablegrams into the letters, I don't mean the letters, I mean the numbers. There were four letters representing the numbers like 1010 was representing say by BDF, no not BD, usually consonant vowel like BE, GO or something like that. They considered it hopeless to do anything more because there wasn't enough material. There are something like fifty-two thousand characters in the Chinese language so you can imagine seventeen messages which were nine or ten groups long each one, what a gigantic hunt would have go on so my staff refused to do anything more with it. They said it isn't worth working on; there isn't enough material. We can't do anything with it. So I stuck them in the left-hand top drawer of my desk and would work away on things, and once in a while I'd get out these papers and try something else, some little idea that had come to my mind, and all I knew about Chinese and this was like a Chinese commercial dictionary.

I had to check how to, well, as I said, my staff had worked out the alphabets that converted the letters into numbers and I argued to myself that the Chinese have a very set mind and a very traditional and very, what you might say, formal about everything they say; it's all done in such a fixed pattern. And I decided that they were, since they were commercial message that the Chinese would use expressions like in ending the message "please reply," something as common as that, or "send money at once" or "rush order," or something as simple as that. So starting from the ends of the messages, so I lined the messages all up starting from the ends and made these assumptions and lo and behold I got into the thing, but I could only go so far with the Chinese itself because all I knew what to do with Chinese was to separate the character into radical and subsidiary strokes. There is always a radical in the Chinese character and the subsidiary strokes may be as high as fourteen to seventeen and you have to break that down into the subsidiary strokes and the main character and I could look it up in a Chinese dictionary, and I finally I said, well I'm sure I've scratched the surface but I need a Chinese interpreter and the Library of Congress sent me, the customs service got the Library of Congress to send me, a young woman named Dr. Julia Chin who had been in this country for her graduate degrees and was going back to China to teach but she spoke only Mandarin and we knew these messages were in Cantonese, Chinese. But she, like most well educated Chinese, could make out dialects,

the various Chinese dialects, so she was of enough help that we got a slight break into the messages and I sent word to Vancouver that I felt that I had the thing really cracked but that I needed a Cantonese interpreter.

So at 12:30, and this has nothing to do with technical part of the story but I'll never forget it because Vancouver telephoned me long distance and the call came in at 12:30 at noon and they wanted me to be in Washington, in Vancouver on Monday morning at nine o'clock and there it was 12:30, the banks all closed at twelve and I had no way of getting the money from Canada. I couldn't use U.S. government, what do they call those things, vouchers, because I would be working for the Canadian government not the U.S. government, so all in all what to do, and I can still remember that day very, very vividly. I had the girls and one young man in my office doing all sorts of telephoning and everything. Garfinkle's, bless their darling hearts, finally cashed a check, a personal check for five hundred dollars for me and I knew that...and the young man in my office was finding out about planes. Well, there were only two planes in those days which I could take out of Washington to get to Vancouver by Monday morning and they were United Airlines and there was one at four thirty and one at ten o'clock at night. Well, I was downtown by the old Willard hotel, the office was, and our house was out in Chevy Chase. I had to get out to Chevy Chase. I decided I had to make that four thirty plane. Something told me I had to make that four thirty plane, and I had to get out to Chevy Chase and give the orders to the housekeeper, and make all the plans for the place to run while I was gone, and see about my young daughter and son and get to the airport at four thirty and it was then one o'clock by that time. But it all worked out. Everybody cooperated beautifully and it all worked out. And I got on that plane and I arrived in Vancouver at four o'clock on Sunday and was met by an RCMP officer and he told me what it was all about, and that the trial was to begin on Monday morning.

Well, I was picked up and taken to the RCMP headquarters where I met Henri Leong, L-E-O-N-G, who had been their Chinese interpreter for some seventeen or eighteen years and he knew, he knew, I've forgotten how many dialects, some staggering number, such as twelve or thirteen something like that, different dialects in Chinese. So we got all these messages out and they were very, very damning. They would have convicted anybody because they named the narcotics, the amounts, and when it was to be shipped from Shanghai and all sorts of details, every one of which were damning evidence against the Chinese, and Gordon Lim and five confederates whom we'd call pushers now were on trial. Great, elegant Gordon Lim himself was there in the courtroom as a common, ordinary prisoner. Well, the trial was won and they were all convicted but of course the case was appealed.

Well this code, you know, well people see this and what's...see this in the collection and would say well, what is this for? Well here, here it is, showing the Chinese characters with the, it was the numbers that, no they used a letter, a common single alphabet, no a biliteral, a combination of two letters together that would make two pairs of letters to represent each Chinese code group of four numbers, but it's one of the things, the reason I suggested telling you this story is that people pick this book out of the exhibits to be shown and say what in the world does that got to

do with this? Then it shows that you can encipher, put into cipher or code, even such an unusual language as Chinese. It's not unusual from the historical standpoint but it's unusual of course in the family of languages.

So, now what else was I going to say about this? Well, the case was appealed, of course. I spent a month up in Vancouver when I was first there and the first trial was held and then I went back when the appeals case was heard about a month later but the men, all of them, he and the five pushers, all went to jail and after that I've forgot, after everything was all over with and they'd lost the appeals case, I forgot all about following it up, but I'm sure they did serve their sentences because they were taken right from the courthouse in the trial right to prison to start it off, but the only thing that I could think of that's comparable to this in connection with codes and ciphers is this used to be very common in American business, using commercial codes, and the purpose, of course, was economy because you could use long sentences but have them represented by three or four or five letters or numbers and that kind of thing and...so I thought of myself many, many times I've been in museums in other places and come across an item which would puzzle me greatly, what in the world is that here for, so I thought maybe the staff would like to know what in case particularly those who deal with this kind of thing. Now was there any lesson in what I mentioned this morning that I wanted to bring up?

Man:

I don't think so, no.

Man:

Would you tell us what was your position at that time?

ESF:

Well I was the, there was only one office which dealt in getting at the secrets of the people who were the hunted, the pursued, by the six law enforcement agencies of the treasury department. See there is Coast Guard which did all the radio work, picked up all the messages out of the air for smugglers, the Coast Guard, the Custom Service, they get everybody whether they are smuggling or not when they come in but they do of course run into a lot of people who are smuggling. Custom Service, they turn up a lot of that. And what are the other? Let's see...Customs, Coast Guard, Internal Revenue, and I can't remember there are...but it's been so long now that I don't remember the other agencies but there were at that time six law enforcement agencies in the treasury department and my office was the only one of its kind. In other words, we served the whole treasury department, although it was located within the Coast Guard because...It was located in the Coast Guard because the messages came automatically from the radio operators who were intercepting the messages in the air, so that was where, in the days of rum smuggling, of course, there were hundreds of messages daily and we were, we deciphered all the extraordinary and the unusual things that came in from time to time in

respects. The customs people had captured a girl who had come in on one of the vessels, on one of the pacific vessels, had come in at Los Angeles as simply a passenger and it was found that on this ship was a shipment to some American firm, Chinese in origin at least if not at that time in a Chinese name. There were thousands, and thousands, and thousands of pairs of house slippers and the inside, inner soles, hid the narcotics underneath. That's one of the things I remember.

Man:

Mrs. Friedman, I'm afraid I got here a little late, but on the Canadian smuggling situation you mentioned a minute ago, has that ever been in an article or published anywhere?

ESF:

Well it's been referred to a lot. It's called the Gordon Lim case and it's quite well known for anybody who's studying say law enforcement of that period, of those decades, but I don't think its ever been written up as a story and published as such.

Man:

Was that pretty much the book that was used at that time, the Chinese—?

ESF:

Well that's one of them, there were two Chinese codes. Actually it is a commercial dictionary. And there are two. This one is...shows both forms. The Chinese character has numbers representing it and also has letters. The groups of letters are three and the numbers are four digits.

Man:

What would they send over the wire then?

ESF:

Well, for example, a message that would be sent by Gordon Lim to his confederate, a confederate in Shanghai would be sent so many...

Man:

But would they send letters or numerals over the wire? You said they couldn't use Chinese characters.

ESF:

Well, yes, yes, yes they went by commercial telegraph or radio. Not much radio in those days. It was normal telegraph. The messages actually looked like our Western union yellow cable sheets. There was something I thought of a second ago, but I've forgotten...which has slipped my mind now.

Man:

So what you're saying anyone could go into the bookstore and buy one of those?

ESF:

No, they're not easy find, not easy to get.

Man:

You said it was almost a commercial dictionary?

ESF:

Used by the Chinese, of course, and if it was used by Americans it would only be by people who were dealing in some commercial manner with firms or persons in Chinese...Oh, one of the interesting things about this story to me is how the RCMP learned their method of transporting this. They used, what Gordon Lim's plan was to have a confederate who would be a merchantman, sailor of some kind, man who goes to sea on a crew of a ship, and this man in Shanghai would for Gordon Lim buy whatever was ordered in the way of narcotics and then this Chinese confederate on the ship when nobody else was around would saw the stanchions between two decks, between two given decks. He would saw the stanchion through so that it would open up as a hollow, as a big, round hollow pipe you see, would be filled with these packs, these tiny, little packages. They looked like tiny, little bales of cotton. They were wrapped in burlap the actual nar...an ounce of this or that narcotic was in the, like, little bale of cotton, and then he took a strong rope, bigger than my big finger, and would tie these little, teeny packages about a foot apart, tie that rope around these little tiny packages about a foot apart, would stuff it into that hollow stanchion, put the stanchion back into the ship so that the ship was whole again and ship it and when the ship got to, say a mile from shore around Seattle, Washington, a confederate from onshore who would be in Seattle as Gordon Lim's man there, would swim out to the vessel and the crew member would throw the end of this rope to him and the swimmer put the rope in his mouth, the end of the rope in his mouth, and swam back under water trailing that rope behind him with these little packages of narcotics and the way they discovered the method, the way the RCMP discovered the method was that he shipped...Well, let me say this, interrupt with this, they used the Empress Liners, they used one crewmember on each Empress Liner, and one crewmember on each Blue Funnel Line Freight vessel. And then something happened on one occasion and the narcotics were not delivered because when a Blue

Funnel Line freighter was loaded in Vancouver and left, when she backed out, she scooped up this rope with her, whatever you call it, rudder, does a rudder go backwards? I don't know whether that's something that goes backwards and forwards. I'm not an authority on boats but at any rate. They'd found that a rope with the little bales of narcotics tied to it was there in the harbor and was scraped up when the anchor was pulled up and that was the first giveaway to the RCMP as to how the stuff was being transported here and that was a very common method. They had other ship lines on which they planted crewmembers too because this Lu Kim Yun message, the single one, which was the first Chinese message I'd ever done which had been a couple, two or three, years before that was also in the same type of thing. Lu Kim Yun was the man on this side who received the narcotics from the Chinese and so on, but that was always so interesting to me seeing that, imagining that swimmer swimming underwater for one mile and dragging that rope behind him

Woman:

So this importer was not really a gem importer at all?

ESF:

He did import gems, oh yes.

[tape paused]

Went from a cable address from Beli---, Honduras to New York City and that was very unusual and I knew that they had no connection whatsoever with any of the situation around Texas or New Orleans and I gave the group of messages to the chief inspector in the Custom Service in Washington when I got back and said these messages have nothing to do with any of the cases that are in progress now and I don't know what they are but they definitely do not belong in any American operation that is known at the present time. So Canada went on fighting the...asking the president for the 250,000 dollars for the destruction of the vessel and the final hearing was in 1934. Of course, that went on from '28 to '34, six years, and I testified before the justices and Dan Hogan, one of the supposed American owners of the rum running vessel was in prison on some other charges already, and he was brought there in handcuffs in a very mean mood and the captain of the *I'm Alone*, who was not guilty of anything except that he went down with his ship, just didn't drown and was killed, was the, he was, you know, put through a lot of embarrassing circumstance because this was considered a rum carrying vessel and he was in a really mean mood. And so I was told afterwards, I noticed there was always a customs agent by my side all during that trial in the justice department and it went on for days. They had a very famous Canadian lawyer handling the case for the ship's owners, the Canadian government, you know in a very beautiful paneled room like this, no ordinary courtroom, I assure you, and the men all wore long tails, Prince Albert's, you know, and striped trousers, all that, and but I noticed that there was always one of the custom agent was sitting beside me. Somebody would always greet me as I came to the courtroom. One or another, not always the same person, was sitting by me,



but afterwards I was told that I was being guarded, that both Dan Hogan one of the American owners and this former Master of the *I'm Alone* were there in a very, very, well of course Dan Hogan was a prisoner, he couldn't of very well gotten at me, but the other man could and he was a very, very mean person because he couldn't get a job after that. You know that's what he complained about. He was a perfect innocent. He knew nothing about this; he simply was the captain of the vessel. And he's right, it's probably true but he must have known. How could he help knowing, being down there in Belize and seeing the liquor being loaded? Seeing it being it unloaded? But he didn't know, I think he was really honest in saying that he didn't know that was the purpose of the vessel, bought for, and taken there but as far as I know that's the only occasion I ever had, know of, where I was in any danger. I was telling Nina about Sadie Bevilacqua, oh dear, well I can't take your time

Woman:

Well, tell us about Sadie.

ESF:

Well, you won't read this in any books which will be forthcoming about my husband so, and I am not writing any about myself so I might as well tell you. What did I mention now? Oh, Sadie Bevilacqua, I was called to Galveston, Texas, again on a Friday, and I had to be there on a Monday morning and I could only, there weren't any planes down there in those days, way back in those days, and I had to go by train. I went by train to Houston and then I had to get to Galveston and I didn't get there quite at nine o'clock but I guess it was about ten when I got there and a man named Malcolm McCorkville, the state's assistant district attorney which was prosecuting the case against about six or seven of the about the most disreputable looking men you would ever want to see. You know they just looked like somebody out of the ghetto were being tried for a very extensive operation of rum running in that area and they'd all been caught on land with their stolen contraband and here was this trial. Well, they had used in getting the liquor, in buying the liquor, and getting it loaded and getting it unloaded and fixing up meeting places between the larger boats that stayed out at sea three miles or more and smaller boats that came in, the way the stuff was carried in burlap bags and by this method and that method and another method and all that and they really looked like smugglers, like people who were out to break the law, and proud of it, and so after I got to the courtroom that morning and Malcolm McCorkville took me in, I was sitting on a back row and the judge was just going through the calling of the cases, or the clerk was calling off the cases that were on the docket, you see, for that day and a certain case was called and I saw stand up down front a very, very buxom, very highly colored, I mean complexioned, woman, young woman, very black hair and very buxom and high color and she stood up before Judge Hutchinson and one of the most cultured judges we've had anywhere ever in the United States. She stood up and moved this wad of gum from one side to the other and said "I am, your honor" so he said something about "very well, sit down." And then I don't know whether they had to hear anymore, he had to hear anymore on a

list of cases, or whether they went right to that one, but at any rate, the time came eventually I was called to give testimony on the messages sent between these people at sea and those on shore in the smuggling operation and I went through my testimony and the jury didn't seem to me as they were chosen, didn't seem to me like very well educated people. They looked like, well the ordinary sort of bum or near bum around town, not very cultivated or well educated, so I was careful to use the very, very simplest terms I could, get 'em down to the kindergarten level practically so that they would understand what these messages... The messages were, once they were deciphered, were as plain as day: send me so many cases of this and so many cases of that and what price he would be paid for this and that kind of thing. They were very, very explicit messages and of course I was attacked and this was just made up it didn't really exist and so on. Well, I struggled of course. On one occasion, on some case, I remember I called for a blackboard and got it and demonstrated the simple message that was going through. I don't remember that I did that in that particular case or not, but at any rate, I used just one syllable words wherever I could for that poor jury. Well, then in rebuttal, the judge said to Sadie Bevilacqua, "Well, your witness," and so I thought "well here is where I have some fun" so I trotted, walked out, all the polysyllabic words in the lexicon of codes and ciphers and used language and sentences just to kind of bowl her over and she's staggered to her feet after a few moments, shifting that gum from one side to the other, "But your honor, I object!" and Judge Hutchinson leaned forward and pounded his gavel and he said " You asked for this explanation. Now you listen to it." "Go on," he said to me. Well Sadie was a totally uneducated girl, and I think it's still true to this day in Texas law that the law qualifying people to be lawyers is non-existing. They have a board of bar examiners, and if you please those old grey-bearded bar examiners with your cute remarks or whatever they may be, you get by if you've never read a page of law or never had one day of practice, you can get a license to practice in Texas.

Woman:

They don't have a bar exam or something you have to take?

ESF:

No that's the exam. You go before this board of bar examiners. It may have changed now, I wouldn't swear to it, in the last five years but it's about five years ago that I inquired and found that the situation is still the same in Texas so all you wives of husbands at Washington and Lee Law School don't apply for licenses to practice in Texas.

Woman:

How many languages did you work with?

ESF:

Well, actually you can work with a language in cipher even though you don't speak it or, well you have to read it to a certain extent, but oh I've used German, French, Spanish, Portuguese. I don't really speak any of them, of those languages. Well, once upon a time I spoke in German but I've forgotten. I don't use that anymore either.

Woman:

What would happen if you found a message that sounded like it might belong to the defense department rather than the treasury department? How did you handle situations like that?

ESF:

Well, the sections that have to do with work in those fields are all very friendly with each other in various departments. See, when my husband and I were at that Riverbank Laboratories out west of Chicago in the beginning of the war, the rich man who owned this estate had a kind of a long headed view of things, and he seemed to sense that we were getting into a war and fast, and he started us working on various things that were very useful and all. For the first eight months of World War One, we out there at Riverbank, that little group of people, did all the secret messages, deciphered or decoded all the messages for Justice, Post Office, Army, Navy, State Department and they were all very friendly. I mean, the people who had the say in those departments in Washington were all familiar and friendly to each other, and then they decided that it was too far away out there because things had to go by telegraph and be solved and be sent back by telegraph and that too much time was consumed in the transmission period. And so there was a type of bureau established in Washington.

Woman:

When was the CIA organized? Was that...

ESF:

Well, the CIA has only been called a CIA, well let's see, it was the OSS. You see, we originally had, oh what was that called? A newspaper man was the head of in World War One. Well OWI, Office of War Information was divided then into two branches, and the other branch, that was during the early part of... during World War Two, I don't know if it was the early part or later, and the other one was called OSS. And CIA is the successor to OSS. I set up their communication system for them. I've even forgotten the exact year that I did that. They're still using the same communication system. It's a system that, well it's really the only unbreakable cipher in existence and, if handled in the way the handlers are instructed to use it, it's the one indecipherable cipher in the world.

Woman:

CIA...why it's undecipherable? I know that's too technical...

ESF:

I tell you I shouldn't be too general in saying that the CIA uses, I don't know what they use for their single or group operations for a given purpose. They probably make up their own, and make up something different for each person or situation, but the overall, general, official system of the higher ups is the one indecipherable cipher. Seems odd to think this whole universe boils down to only one safe system, completely safe, system of communications.

Woman:

How that could be?

ESF:

Well, I don't want to keep you but I, it's funny how things come to you but all of a sudden, out of the blue, last night I thought to myself what, that Chinese code is up on a shelf and somebody sees that and they probably flip through it and think " what in the world is that here for?"

Woman:

To be frank, we have discussed that. Yes ma'am. We certainly have. Why is this little book included? Discussed that, yes, it's fascinating.

ESF:

Well there should be another edition, a different Chinese code here, one that my husband bought himself when he first learned that there was such a thing as a Chinese commercial code and he bought it and it was a book that had only the four numbers. See this has both the three letter groups, three letter groups, and the four figure groups but there is another one that is, that was in the collection, used to be, was the actual one that I used for that Chinese, for the Gordon Lim case, and that had only the numbers with the characters and it was a little thicker than this.

Woman:

It's probably upstairs. Where did you get this one?

ESF:

Well this was a gift to my husband, I see it says here. That's why I'm so sure of the other one because I know that I had this and it was just that my husband collected everything that was, well Chinese is cipher to most people. It might as well be cipher. And so the fact that they have to use numbers or letters because characters can't be sent over the wires or into the air. So he had a copy of that, which I used in my office because we had those two cases of Chinese being used in the messages. Well I've kept enough of your time...break up your whole day.

Woman:

Well, it's fascinating.

Woman:

Now, in your work this is sort of the way you would approach deciphering a job?

ESF:

Well you make a frequency table, and in this case we would take two digits, the four letter figure would be divided into two letter figures and then they were represented by letters in those Gordon Lim messages. The four number groups were represented by letters. The letters were telegraphed and then from those letters we had to work back to the number thing, get the letters to fit the, a regular, straight forward number chart like this running from 01 to 00 meaning 100 over here meaning, the last one, five rows down and ten rows across.

Woman:

Now this Gordon man, from his end of it, how did he develop, how did he go about developing this code that you, on your end, that you broke?

ESF:

Well, he certainly had a lot of brains himself, and he certainly could afford to hire anybody. As a matter of fact, I was told, it's the kind of thing you can't prove, I wouldn't be able to prove it but I was told by the RCMP that a retired British naval captain was advising the rum runners on the West Coast of what was really making their secret system of communication for them but the consolidated exporters rum running vessels operated on a code system clear around the United States starting from Vancouver, British Columbia and all the way down through the Panama Canal and way up to Nova Scotia where they loaded again there, you see. They loaded at either end and dispensed their smuggled goods all the way along as the ships went around and they had what would be equivalent to a high level government code

Woman:

That's what I'm saying. It had to be a terribly sophisticated operation. I mean, none of these are two-bit operations.

ESF:

Well, in that operation off of, going through the Gulf of Mexico, off of New Orleans, was the place where that smuggling vessel, the *I'm Alone* was sunk and when that, the case came up finally, the one that I told you, the final hearing was in the Department of Justice in Washington. The *I'm Alone* had a young American radio operator, it was the first job he ever had, they had

that on board, and in these messages that had no beginning or end or address or signature that I had weeded out of this trunk full of paper said something about “operator no good; cannot receive messages.” Well, anyway I don’t remember what else was in the message but that was there. Well, this young radio operator was just out of school and took this job in Montreal. He saw some advertisement or something, went to Montreal and got that job and then he really wasn’t good enough, you know, to encompass all those conditions that would be met between Belize and New York where the, or Montreal, where the vessel was supposed to go so and so when the operator of the *I’m Alone* put him off ship on one of the small boats that went out on the bayous down there in Louisiana to pick up the liquor from the *I’m Alone* ship. They put him ashore, one of those boats, and then the boat wouldn’t take both the liquor and him so he had to get out and wade through the swamps and he, it was such a struggle because he’d sink to almost knee depth, you know, in the swampy soil, and water-soaked soil, and he would keep dropping things, throwing things away bit by bit. He was pretty despairing; well, finally he arrived with an empty suitcase or maybe he threw the whole suitcase away, I can’t recall that and got, saved his life, anyway, his own life and got through. Well, in the contents of that suitcase, when the customs man found it, was a textbook which had been taken out of a New Jersey library, a public library, and it was through that public library that, taking that book back to that public library that the Custom Service traced that young radio operator who, of course, made a very valuable witness for the government because he was onboard and he was the one meant by the message “radio operator no good, send so-n-so” and was able to prove, oh, just every assertion really that was made about the *I’m Alone*.

Woman:

He wasn’t supposed to live through that, was he?

ESF:

No, I guess not. Well that was a case of a book being found, there are cases I suppose of several sheets of paper being a matter of life and death.

Woman:

When you were working at the rum running, your office was in Washington and you were called all over the country to go to trials?

ESF:

Yes, I didn’t go to too many trials because the cases were, really didn’t require, you know, the codes and ciphered messages to prove their guilt but I did, oh, I made several trips to New Orleans, one to Atlanta, and several to New Orleans, many of them to Galveston and Houston, Texas and one to Los Angeles, to Seattle.

Woman:

Was there a lot of dope smuggling going on at that time?

ESF:

Well, it was beginning to. The...when people who want to make money honestly or dishonestly, as long as they make it fast, began to see how easy it was to make money in smuggling liquor, they started thinking how much easier it would be to conceal narcotics, so that incident I told about those house shoes coming in from the orient filled with narcotics, there were always cases like that.

Woman:

Were people taking dope at that time? I mean, why was it...

ESF:

Well I don't think it was anything, the consumption of it was in general was anything like it is now.

Woman:

Well you sort of, you sort of think about that being a new, a new kick.

ESF:

Yes, well it's not as...

Woman:

Can you imagine that sophisticated codes and communication systems they are using now to smuggle in the amount that's being smuggled in now?

ESF:

Well they probably don't use codes and ciphers, oh unless, I can't imagine any case except maybe somebody in some out of the way place where ordinary facilities such as cable or telegram, but I imagine most of that is done by word of mouth. We can get from continent to continent so quickly these days by air that I think...

[End of tape]