

March 13, 1936

Colonel J. O. Mauborgne, S.C.,
Ninth Corps Area,
Presidio of San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Colonel:

I am very desirous of getting some information of a historical but still important nature and there is a possibility that you can help me, in view of your excellent memory and probable direct contact with the general situation.

The thus-far purely speculative question has come up as to the validity of certain claims in U.S. Patent No. 1,502,376 to DAMM, a copy of which is enclosed. The point at issue is in respect to claims 1, 2, and 3, wherein two switching commutators are juxtaposed, one being angularly displaceable with respect to the other.

As you probably are fully aware, the use of juxtaposed, rotatable switching commutators, giving a cascade effect cryptographically forms the basis of most of the really good cryptographs today. You have no doubt seen one of such devices in my office, but if not, I enclose a copy of U.S. Patent 1,633,072, Fig. 1 of which gives a very good picture of one known as the Hebern Super-Code. If the DAMM patent is valid in respect to his claims covering the cascade effect given by juxtaposing the commutators, all the others are infringements, including Hebern.

Now then, Damm's filing date is April 2, 1920. If it can be shown that the feature set forth in his claim 1 or claim 2 was embodied in at least one among the many devices submitted to the Army or Navy or the Army-Navy Patents Board during the World War, this would establish prior art in connection with juxtaposed commutators, probably antedating Damm's filing date by at least a year or two.

I think you were a member of the Army-Navy Patents Board; you were certainly in the Chief Signal Office during the time and many of these cryptographic inventions came to you. Do you remember any devices of the type described above, using juxtaposed commutators? Do you know the names of any other members of the Board who might remember? Any information you can give me will be valuable.

I would very much appreciate a prompt reply, if possible. Please return the enclosures with your reply.

I have heard that you were in the hospital recently for a minor ailment and hope you are fully recovered.

With cordial greetings, I am

Sincerely yours,

William F. Friedman.

Enclosures:

Patent Nos. 1,502,376
and 1,683,072