

Office of Censorship

Box 161

Item

PSP: Subject: Office of
Censorship
B. Price folder
1-42

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 30, 1942.

MEMORANDUM FOR

CAPTAIN McCREA:

Will you give this to me when
we have the next Pacific War Council
meeting?

F.D.R.

Copy of report from the Office of Censorship,
U.S.A., O.A. Publications, marked "Confidential",
Records No. CH3756, in re letter from Chester A.
Bloom, National Press Club, Washington, D. C.,
X to J.W. Dafoe, Esq., Winnipeg Free Press Co.,
Winnipeg, Man., which was dated 7/29/42. Mr.
Bloom, Washington correspondent for a number of
Canadian papers, submits to one of the editors
an account of a lengthy talk with a friend, evidently
a member of the Pacific War Counsel, who is not
averse to relating confidential information to
Mr. Bloom, who relates the information to Mr. Dafoe.
A number of the highly confidential items are
listed.

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personal*

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DIRECTOR OF CENSORSHIP
WASHINGTON

August 28, 1942.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Elmer Davis and I have discussed your memorandum of August 24 and are in complete accord on all points. He is writing you regarding points 1 and 3.

As to point 2, I have the agreement of the press services that they will refrain from carrying round-up stories on military aviation accidents and will try to confine the lesser accidents to regional publication. It would not seem wise to go further on the repressive side; these accidents become known to some part of the public and if notice of them disappeared from the newspapers rumors of all kinds would result and the country would be really worried as to how much was being suppressed. On the affirmative side OWI will explore the possibility of seeking wider publicity for the fact that the percentage of accidents is not great and that no special blame attaches to them.

The problem mentioned in point 4(a) is in course of solution. On May 21 last the Office of Censorship proposed and the State, War, and Navy Departments approved an understanding which recognized that press dispatches cannot be censored effectively at the point of receipt but must be controlled at the source; and that the armed services would undertake to establish such control wherever American forces are stationed. I believe some such machinery has been set up by the Army in Australia and by the Navy in New Zealand but I have recently called the attention of the Secretary of the Navy and the Under Secretary of War to the fact that this machinery is not functioning effectively.

As to 4(b): The Code of Wartime Practices for the American Press, administered by the Office of Censorship, requests that interviews with service men or civilians from combat zones be submitted for censorship before publication. This request is being observed generally and in nearly every case publications of this kind are reviewed in advance either by Army or Navy Public Relations officers. We have not undertaken to suppress, however, interviews given by ranking officials of Allied Governments. It is my judgment and that of Mr. Davis that such a procedure would have international repercussions and result in more harm than good.

If this explanation is in any way unsatisfactory I know you will say so.

By Price

Byron Price,
Director.

DECLASSIFIED

E. O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D) or (E)

tel. con. FPA, 12/17/75

By: STR

Date 12/29/75

OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

WASHINGTON

*File
Confidential*

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

August 28, 1942

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

As instructed in your memorandum of August 24 I have conferred with Byron Price, and we are in complete agreement on all the points raised. Part of the agreement was that I should answer on points 1 and 3 and he on points 2 and 4, as being more in our respective fields.

1. The ship sinkings as reported by press associations here are only those officially announced, which as I understand it is confined to cases of survivors. This gives the Germans very limited information as they probably know that the sinkings have amounted to more than that but they do not know how much more. It seems to me accordingly that this gives the enemy no information of value, and any further restriction on publication of sinkings here would, I believe, have a very bad effect on public morale since it would mean suppression of news which is otherwise known to many people.

3. This Office will give such moral support as it can to the withholding of military information whenever that is done for reasons of security, as is the case in a recent instance. We have also endeavored unofficially to do our best to dispel public apprehension about the Aleutians and to make it clear that the Navy is actually giving out as much information as it has. In the case of the Solomons, comparison with Dieppe is of course absurd and the difficulties of communication are very considerable. I do believe, however, that the time is approaching when the Navy could afford to give out some color stories, if not of the night naval action at least of the land operations.

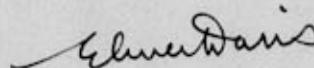
In most issues of this sort we must face some degree of choice between the risk of possibly giving some information to the enemy and the conceivably more serious risk of letting



Page 2

the American people believe that information of real importance is being withheld from them. In the case of genuine considerations of military security I believe we can count on almost universal popular support, provided they realize that it actually is a question of security, but there will come occasions as in the OWI statement of August 8 when it seems that the imperative necessity of informing the American people as to the general situation should outweigh the risk that some moral encouragement might incidentally be given to the enemy. This country I believe is willing to do whatever may be necessary to win the war, but the people will put out their fullest effort only if they are convinced that they are being kept accurately informed as to the general situation. I don't believe we are very much of a sieve and it seems to me that there are greater dangers inherent in excessive secrecy.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elmer Davis". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name below.

Elmer Davis
Director

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THE OFFICE OF CENSORSHIP
WASHINGTON

BYRON PRICE
DIRECTOR

August 26, 1942.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The President,
The White House.

My dear Mr. President:

This will acknowledge receipt of your memorandum of August 24 addressed to Elmer Davis and me. Mr. Davis and I are arranging to discuss these subjects and report to you in the immediate future.

Sincerely yours,

Byron Price

Byron Price.

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personal*

August 25, 1942.

MEMORANDUM FOR

HON. ELMER DAVIS -
HON. BYRON PRICE

Yesterday's and today's papers carried certain stories which I think should be given careful consideration.

1. In the Baltimore Sun this morning I read an AP dispatch giving the total of sinkings of allied ships for the week of August 16th to 22nd, and in the next column the number of ships sunk since Pearl Harbor -- 439 all told. As you know, the British are still very much upset by our publishing ship sinking figures. It is a mere handout to the Germans free of charge. It is still my thought that we should allow publication of news where the sinking is seen from our coast or where survivors come into a port in a lifeboat -- in other words, where it makes a big local story. But I cannot see the point of letting the newspapers continue to print the totals of all sinkings week by week or over any given period of time.

2. In the Washington Post this morning the three column head on Page #1 reads "11 DIE AS NAVY PLANE CRASHES AT DAHLGREN AFTER LIGHTNING FLASH -- 15 ARMY MEN LOST IN FIVE CRACK-UPS; TWO BOMBERS, TWO OTHER SHIPS DOWN". The sum total from training and non-war area accidents is beginning to get the country worried. Nine out of ten of these accidents cannot be helped. They are, of course, known locally but I think we are heading for trouble if we continue the present policy. Remember that the proportion of these accidents is not out of line if we take into consideration the total number of Army and Navy planes which are in the air in this country at all times.

3. I note that Edwin James and Constantine Brown both have stories complaining of the lack of information from the combat areas. Their examples do not make sense because in each case there is, as you and I know, a valid military reason for withholding further information. In some cases it is actually true that we have no further information, as in the case of the Aleutian Islands.

4. Finally, I come to the matter of official stories by officials of other Governments. For example, The Australian Prime Minister wants to be taken into our confidence in relation to operations in the Southwest Pacific which are not in MacArthur's area. If we give him this information he will almost inevitably tell his Cabinet -- the Cabinet will tell their friends -- and the public in Australia will have it in twenty-four hours and the Japs will have it an hour or two later.

In the same way Walter Nash gave out an interview the same general line on Saturday. I am most careful in meetings of the Pacific War Council not to disclose confidential information to New Zealand, Australia, the British Islands, China or the Philippines. If I did they would immediately report to their Prime Ministers and Governments. Again, it is reasonably certain that the Japs would get it in about twenty-four hours. This last question does not involve either of you except in this respect; I wish you to study

(a) Censorship of newspaper stories coming into this country from Australia and New Zealand especially.

(b) To study the possibility of censorship over interviews given in this country by people representing our Allies or traveling Americans of all kinds, including newspaper men, who have returned here from theatres of action.

In other words, I wish you would consider the setting up and an explanation for it to the Press and to the public. The fact remains that the United States and the United Nations as a whole constitute a sieve which is, of course, greatly welcomed by the Axis Powers.