POSTAL CENSORSHIP

BROCHURE FOR USE OF OVERSEAS CENSORSHIPS

(CODE SECTION)

THE WAR OFFICE,
LONDON, S.W. 1.

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FOREWORD TO THE CODE SECTION

What is Code?

Several definitions have been used to describe Code. It has been spoken of as a disguise; as a method of clothing words and sentences so that only those with special knowledge can see through the disguise; as the cloaking of information so that only the initiated can pierce the veil.

Code dates from the earliest days, and every time it appears it has acquired new forms. For man's ingenuity continues to invent new ways of hiding things from the general public and revealing them to the chosen few.

In some countries Code is made the object of special study so that, if occasion arises, it can immediately be adopted for transmitting information between one country and another without the name of the sender or the information becoming known to any unauthorized person.

And when it is a question of finding out whether a document contains Code, or whether a letter covers more than meets the eye, there is immediately begun a battle of brains.

Imagination must be met by imagination, guile must be faced by guile. All possibilities must be considered and weighed with probabilities and improbabilities. And finally, it must be decided whether the verdict shall be guilty, or not guilty; whether the document contains Code or not.

And if, in the strivings between the examiner and the sender of the letter, the latter succeeds in baffling the former, let this only make him strive the harder not to allow himself to be baffled twice.

It is in order to minimize, as far as possible, the chances of Code escaping the examiner's eye that the following pages have been written.

CODE SECTION

The first steps to be taken will be the instruction of the potential staff of first examiners on “things to look for” which may indicate that a letter under examination may contain some message other than at first appears by the context. And it is important to impress on this potential staff the responsibility which rests upon them, as first examiners, whether a letter which may be suspicious goes on its way quickly, or whether it is submitted for special testing as a result of their instruction.

If this potential staff is being instructed in classes, it is advisable that each class shall be instructed on exactly the same lines so that eventually all examiners have the same knowledge and are working on the same lines.

This brochure deals only with “visible” means (although hidden or disguised) as distinct from letters which may have some message in a secret method which requires chemical or physical treatment to reveal it.

It is a great help to examiners for them to visualize some of the methods likely to be used and therefore illustrations, if possible, on a screen or by other means should be shown to cover all the points the instructor wishes to convey. Preferably actual specimens, if available, should be shown—if not available, specimens should be made to illustrate the points.

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The National Archives' reference KV-2-2424_038.jpg

The following are suggestions for instructing such classes:—

In the first period, before it is realized how strict the Censorship attempts will be made to send messages in rather blatant forms, and therefore it is best to deal with the very obvious signs first and these include the following:—

1. Numerals arranged in groups or inverted in other ways in the letter, or groups of letters which do not make words.

Any figures unnaturally or persistently introduced into the text should be watched for.

Comment.—These will usually be:—

(a) Ordinary figure codes.
(b) Dictionary codes.
(c) Business codes.
(d) Transposed or manipulated alphabets.

Figures persistently introduced into the text are often so introduced for the purpose of drawing attention to the key of a Code when (as often occurs) it is changed from time to time.

Illustration No. 1 is an ordinary business code.

Illustration No. 2 is an alphabetical transposition.

Illustration No. 2

Copy letter introducing numerals in groups.

10783 60540 59672

1. Your letter concerning 32834 and numbered 211 of the 7th July 1915 was received on August 8th and has been forwarded.

2. We have to give you the following further instructions:—

Go to 10586 to meet the representatives of 42564 15077 and 68621 who will give you further instructions. You may then have to go on to 41139 to receive the 79805 53100 65440 but wait till you receive orders. Letters from there should be submitted to 32076 and 46789 who will 64067 55353 to 66475 78649 45583.

This is important so be careful to follow the instructions.

The groups of figures here are imaginary. This can be taken from any figure code such as business codes or privately arranged codes.

Illustration No. 3 is an ordinary symbol code.

Illustration No. 4 is a letter with shorthand symbols introduced between the longhand words.

Illustration No. 5 is a very old shorthand still capable of being used as a private system.

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My dear George

We were all so glad to receive your welcome letter and to hear—
what you are as well as can be expected in the circumstances. We
are all perfectly well although I am afraid Mother is not too well
but Mrs. Jones is against her  .

This terrible war hangs on and
never seems to end but I suppose
it will come to an end then when we
shall all meet again in a happy
family party! But when will
that be wonder?—Bay's third of
May come soon. But hope comes
soon. Hope often comes with better
come with better
news of Joe Margareth.

Message in shorthand in the above:—
Transport will leave Folkestone Monday Dawn. Troops now massing
at Hythe.
3. Excerpts from marks, underlining of words or figures, dots, etc., including the deliberate underlining of dates or other figures.

The usual dotted letter, if the dot is made either above or below the letter, is fairly obvious and should not escape notice but particularly look for "dotted" of the letter by pressure with some blunt instrument—such as a wooden skewer—on the ink itself so that it is not noticeable at all from the front but appears at the back of the paper in the form of a raised bump.

Comment. This includes:—
(a) marked letters which do not always make proper words when extracted but are frequently a manipulation of the alphabet.
(b) underlining of figures often used as the key to the message in the letter, etc.

Illustration No. 6 shows very finely dotted letters.

Illustration No. 7 shows marked words.

Illustration No. 8 shows duplicated letters made by altering the alignment of the typewriter. (Please notice the weakness in the use of the method in that the end of the letter is entirely free from the duplicated letters which shows that the "errors" in the typing in the first part of the letter are deliberate.)

Illustration No. 9 shows thickened words and letters which are significant.

Message in the above:—
I saw in Brighton a P. man who got away (Maloney). He knew you.
My dear Enemy,

Your letter reached me in the Camp where I have been for 2 months among all sorts of conditions of prisoners of war. They are a mixed lot and sometimes I think they behave as if so for them. There is very little chance of improvement. Our food is not too bad but I have not been well although I am not responding to treatment and am much better. There is very little exercise. Do you not hope they will give us some exercise? I hope you are having warmer weather. I hope you are active on your farm. How are you getting on? How are your sons? I hope they are getting on. Write again soon please and let me know. Yours always, Tom.

Message in the above:

Camp conditions are terrible. Very little food. Bad treatment. Much discontent. But the people have very little. If we hear is right they are feeling the shortage.

London, 22nd November 1935

My dear Williams,

Your letter of the 8th was received with great pleasure by the whole family. It is so long since we heard from you that we were expecting to hear from you before the end of the year and we were glad to hear before we left and to know that you are all well.

I think things are improving don't you? There has been a pretty good set back in business through these very troublsome times and I don't suppose we shall make up for lost time before the end of the year so far as finances are concerned.

How are things with you? We hope they are not too bad although we realise times must be difficult over there. I was very glad to hear of your boys's success in his examination and hope it is only the beginning of a very successful career. We are sure he deserves it.

We have attended to the little business you asked us about and everything is now in order and you need not worry about it any more. The firm in question will pay the amount due to us and we shall hold it for you until you say what you wish us to do with it.

Let us hear from you again soon.

Yours etc.

The message conveyed by means of the duplicated letters is:

5 transports leave Dover Tuesday.

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My dear Bert,

Thanks for your letter. Glad to know you are keeping cheerful in such conditions. However much we may hope for the future, we can only hope that before long something will help to put a stop to this dreary stuff. You know that the poor horse died you? The shops to move in next week. I think everything will then be better for everyone. A change is good and we are looking forward to all beyond words and tried all will be well. Your Mother came along to see home last week and we hope she will come again as we thoroughly enjoyed her visit. You remember there don’t you? She got married the other day to everyone surprised and we hope you are more to see. Shall be seeing a lot of her we expect. What a change that will be for us all but you know Mother always likes her so things may be easier now. Print you long to come home? There’ll seem to bring and there will always be a good welcome awaiting you. You know what she don’t you? If I can manage it I shall be sending you another parcel next week and I hope that will help you on for a few weeks. I am expecting news of Sociology shortly and will let you know about her next time I write.

Well the letter I must now close this second I hope to write again soon.

Wish up, to see, everything and to all right.

Yours etc,

William

Message in the above:-

Battleship Terenaire returned to port badly damaged. All sworn to secrecy.

4. Pinpricks, Scratches or Indentations.

Particularly look for indentations on either or both sides of an upright letter.

Note that if a pinprick is made through the ink of the letter it is only visible by holding the paper to the light. This is the best method as a pinhole either above or below a letter may be seen when reading the letter in the ordinary way.

Comment—This is similar to No. 5. Sometimes a pinprick in the vicinity of a figure in the date, or in the body of the letter, is sufficient to give the key to the message in the letter.

Indentations may be semaphore signs.

Illustration No. 10 shows semaphore signs made in this manner.
5. Freehand drawings of all kinds.

Comment.—These must be examined for the introduction of writing in trees, etc., or Morse or other signs in the lines of the drawing.

Illustration No. 11 shows a fashion plate in which a system of Morse (not the usual dot and dash) has been introduced into the embroidery, etc., of the dresses.

Illustration No. 11

Note: The image contains illustrations of women in different attire.

Message.—(In figures 1, 2 and 3).

Heavy reinforcements for the enemy expected hourly.

(In signature in French shorthand)—

Before Arras.

6. Unusual or little-used forms of shorthand.

All shorthand letters must, of course, be read.

Comment.—See former note (p. 5) regarding someone who knows shorthand systems. There are many more systems than people think, and a collection of text books of different systems in all languages is useful as anyone knowing shorthand can easily learn sufficient of another system to read it.

See illustration No. 5 (p. 8).

7. Accounts or sums in various forms.

These may take the form of children's sums, or accounts of expenditure on any particular subject, or household accounts.

Comment.—These are often figure Codes. The totals can usually be disregarded as they are frequently used as "blinds".

Illustration No. 12 shows a figure Code put into the form of children's sums.

Illustration No. 12

Message in the above—

Ten troop trains left here today. West.

The method is to use the ordinary set of dominos to represent (in some pre-arranged order) the letters of the alphabet. This is the simplest form. Many variations are possible.

Key—

Dominos 0 7 0 2 0 5 0 4 0 5 0 6 1 2 1 5 1 4 1 5 1 6

Alphabet Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O

Dominos 2 2 2 2 2 4 2 5 2 6 2 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 4 4 4 5 4 6 5 5 5 6

Alphabet N A B C D E F G H I J K L M

the 0/6 can be used as a "blind".

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8. Manuscript music.

Comment.—This must be tested to see that it is genuine music and not a symbol code, using the musical notes as symbols.

9. Marked string (used sometimes to tie small packages enclosed in letters) hand embroidery or coloured beads enclosed in a letter.

Comment.—String marked (or knotted) at irregular intervals is probably a code based on a piece of card divided vertically into spaces to represent each letter of the alphabet around which the string is wound and marked line by line to spell out the message. To read it the piece of string has to be fitted to a piece of card the same size. Look for any accidental crease in the string which may give the width of the card! Failing that it would have to be worked out by measurements.

Hand embroidery may contain Morse in the stitches.

Coloured beads can be used for a “Colour” code.

Illustration No. 13 shows the string method.

Illustration No. 13

The morse letters had to be transposed 11 positions forward.

The message in German when translated read:—

Oil has arrived, everything is ready.

Gustav available for the appointed day.

12. Unintelligible letters.

Sometimes these are only made to look difficult by the introduction of an unnecessary syllable into every word which has the effect of making it look like an extremely uncommon language! Such for instance as the introduction of ERG into the word “hostile air craft”. This would become “hergesteige ergaer cregcat”.

Sometimes they are letters written in three or four parts (the first word from the letter on the first part, the second word on the second part and so on) and sent to different intermediaries so that each part in itself does not make sense, and it can only be read when all the parts are received by the several intermediaries and put together.

Illustration No. 15 shows 4 parts of such a letter.

Illustration No. 16 shows a sample of the unnecessary syllable introduced into words.

Illustration No. 15

1. We the and enquiries no story transports leave

week stated in We confirm or our closely am be

Things difficult if delay you reason.

2. have port have suggested confirmation you are

within but to about will this wire men watched

afraid caught are for there in will
been you made there of mention due the four be a try and you are and some very getting us is sending understand.

To mentioned the is the no to next are leaving fortnight to write. All being I may soon very and any reports the.

The message sent in the above 4 parts when put together reads as follows:—

We have been to the port you mentioned and have made the enquiries suggested. There is no confirmation of the story you mention. No transports are due to leave within the next week and four are stated to be leaving in about a fortnight. We will try to confirm this and write or wire you. All our men are being closely watched and I am afraid some may be caught very soon. Things are getting very difficult for us and if there is any delay in sending reports you will understand the reason.

Illustration No. 16

Message in the above. (After taking out the unnecessary ERG syllable and allowing for bad spelling):—

You will have to guess because the M.O. can talk the lingo as good as me but I will take a chance on this. There was a hostile aircraft flew over here the other day and the guns were working overtime but they missed every shot. He did not drop any bombs.

13. Chess problems, bridge problems, acrostics, etc.

Comment.—All these must be verified. If they are not genuine chess problems the possibility must be borne in mind of the chess board being an agreed size to fit a map of any particular locality and the position of the pieces conveying information regarding the actual positions covered by the different Chessmen.


Enclosed in letters or peculiarly arranged or mutilated (i.e., the teeth of the stamp cut or the stamp perforated in some peculiar way) or arranged in colours or numerical values.

Comment.—The cutting of the teeth or otherwise marking them may be used for any of the various known stamp codes, for the introduction of Morse, etc.

* * * * * *

When it becomes known that the Censorship is making the sending of messages difficult, the less obvious kinds will be attempted.

The discovery of these is much more difficult but it will help the examiners to bear in mind the following possible methods:—

15. Secondary meanings.

These are generally references to current affairs hidden under general phraseology which, however, will be reasonably clear to an examiner possessing a general knowledge of current events. By this method attempts are generally made to convey prohibited news such as the location or extent of damage by air raids, etc.

Comment.—Illustration No. 17 is a rather crude sample. First there are references to the writer’s “queer writing” which immediately arouses suspicion. Then there are certain words with marks against them. The letter conveys several pieces of news by this method, and by secondary meanings.

(See next page)
The National Archives' reference KV-2-2424_046.jpg

Illustration No. 17

Suggestion that letter contain hidden message.

- our troops holding their own
- many troops landed in Greece
- Romania in
- Overrun by Huns
- food wonderfully dear
- boys gone from homes
- married men up to 41 years
- pushing on to Fatherland
- keep pressure going hard

means said by Zeppos on Scarborough brought down

means Germany asks for peace terms.

The method is partly secondary meanings and partly the use of every third word commencing at a word which has a slight mark in front of it. There is a mistake in the "married men" and the "keep pressure" sentences, but the meaning seems to be clear.

Illustration No. 18

There has only been 1 letter from you all this very long time, I fear many will not arrive at all. Well, I trust that you are both well and happy, and all right, and that you have not been out here as long as we have. I wish I could have seen you both, but I think it will be impossible. I am glad to hear from you again, and I hope you will write soon.

Illustration No. 19

21

Methods where certain words or letters at given distances or certain distances from one another are significant.

The rest of the letter is filled in to make sense. Frequently the words do not read very naturally and there is a sense that they are "dragged in." The significant words or letters themselves may appear slightly different from the rest of the letter as they will have been written first and the remainder filled in afterwards, causing them to appear darker than the rest, or even lighter if they have been written first and bleached before the rest is filled in. There is also frequently bad spacing as it is far from easy to fill in the remainder of the letter and make it natural as regards spacing.

Comment—Illustration No. 18 shows significant letters at regular intervals (and incidentally the misspacing mentioned above).

Illustration No. 19 shows the system of using every eighth word. Notice the insistence on the figure 8 in the text of the letter.

Illustration No. 20 shows a method where the initial letter of each line read downwards and then the last letter of each line also read downwards are significant.

(See next page)
Message in the above:—

Today five troop trains, many machine guns and ten large guns passed through Bruges on way to West front.

Dear Tim,—

Congratulations on the 8th anniversary of your landing May 1st. How do our old Buffaloes feel to-day?

Hope you are quite well. Am not very well. I hope to receive a letter soon. The next trip is expected to come on. I shall write next week. I sent you a very little note away the last winter. There was a little post from the Americas. I have received more than forty letters, amongst my father at once and a lot more letters. I have the money and always. It is necessary to keep the word in mind. With all love from your friend.

Message in the above:—

I receive twelve paper pounds a month. Owing to the increased cost of necessary foodstuff this is not sufficient to enable us to live, etc. (The rest of the message was in the continuation of the letter but it is not necessary to reproduce it all here. The above is sufficient to illustrate the method.)
Illustration No. 21

I often hear this, 9 July 1942

Often hear this, 9 July 1942. Last week’setter may not go through as executed regulations, so are not out of question. Two other officers have joined us in the same room making a party of four. Our two (with you and [conciliation]) and two old residents of the camp are very good fellows. We are busy making ourselves privy with and as comfortable as possible. Nothing except for practice passes is out of the question. But only a few of the other prisoners when they’re out of capture are most interesting and telling — you ask for Standard Order Books. Well, may think I have forgotten my word if you read my letter right. I am sure you will see it from this point of view. If you want my keys at home he must and then and tell me when you have got them.

With a love to B. M. (if still well) and with rest of the family telling now I received mine letter of 22 May. And cannot tell all after a week or two. Unless Bosely you have received this and that can not send a line as before. How goes the hunting? Plenty of others to be found. With your case that you should be having successful days. Turkish Ramadan fast is over. Always is at a disadvantage during this period! Lovely weather and picking (no) pit how it all from your end.

Message in the above: —- In future take care word, then first and last of each line. So on.

Secondary meaning — the references to hunting refers to the war. “Hounds” means “troops,” etc.

17. Awkward or unusual phrasing generally. This is usually some method similar to paragraph 16 above. It is often also a sign that the writer is not using his or her own language.

18. Unnaturally broken words or misspacing. Sometimes this is done with such care that it is not very noticeable but there is almost certain to occur an instance (or perhaps more than one) where the break is very noticeable and will arouse suspicion. Sometimes, if it has not been pre-arranged there is a clue in the first letter such as mention of the writer “breaking his word” or about “gaps in his correspondence.”
Dear Olive,

Enough nothing has come from any of you for more than a week (and thin only old letters). I almost wish to you to prevent (as far as I can) further gaps occurring in my correspondence.

Your letters should seem to be coming less direct and that hope they will be followed by replied, you sent me Mirth and pleasure many ages. Since the very gloomy weather of about the May, age has gone and the magnificently spring sun of latitudes has brightened us considerably, yet we still remain very anxious. The news that reaches us is none of the best. So we depart into the country to forget it. I have got three small field mice consisting of 2 a day and that release the go out twice a week from within and with butterflies. We much more profitable are vaster according to more inclination.

Message in the above: —

No Red Cross Mission has ever been near us. Our Doctor has no drugs or inst... (The continuation of the letter contained the rest of the message.)

Illustration No. 23

See below and the following 2 pages for the correct reading of this card.

First Position
Illustration No. 25—continued

SECOND POSITION

THIRD POSITION

FOURTH POSITION
19. Different formation of certain letters.

This is difficult to discover if it is well done and can only be found by comparing certain letters all through the communication to see if they are sometimes differently formed.

Comment.—This may be used to convey Morse signs particularly in the method of dotting the letter "I" or crossing out "I".

It is sometimes used to draw attention to the particular letter which is differently formed.

Illustration No. 24 shows a very careful way of doing this. Some of the letters which are capable of it) have a slightly turned back hook—like the letter "w" on the second line of the letter in the word "following" and the letter "v" in word enquiry on the next line and so on. Other letters—like round letters "a" etc.—are slightly thickened.

Illustration No. 24

Dear Frank,

Up to date I have received the following from you: your letter of 28th, also an enquiry card, and one indicating the sending of a parcel (belonging to the Netherlands). Red Cross, 3 to eggs, for all of which thanks very much. I have written you twice to Miss MacKie, once direct and once via Dutch Red Cross, am going to send the reed here. I tell you everything about this place in my first letter, which you should have got months ago. Our letters are limited to 8 a month. Your bits of news are always very much appreciated, my heart seems to have been worrying a lot at the non-arrival of letters from you. This is a most interesting camp both as regards its inmates and

The message in the above letter is —

"Away from here very shortly, idea is to get nearer. Will send result as soon as possible. Is this legible?"
20. Unnaturally emphasised up or down strokes or curved strokes at end of words.

There has been a case where these occurred at the beginning of the word but it is more generally at the end.

Comment.—These usually point to words above or below as required—not necessarily on the next line, it may be two lines above or below, or even more.

Illustration No. 25 shows this method.

The method here is to take the whole word before any word which has an unnecessary finishing “tail” as in “have” in the first line.

The message therefore starts “I mailed a letter”, etc.


Comment.—See next item (No. 22).
BIBLIOGRAPHY

As regards books on the subject of Cryptography, in most of the important Libraries and Museums there are usually many publications going back to quite early days—even as far back as 1518.

Klüber’s Kryptographie.
Fleissner’s Handbuch der Kryptographie.
Hulme’s Cryptography.
Delastelle’s Mathématiques.
Myskowski’s Cryptographie indéchiffrable.

and other similar books will give a good groundwork and articles in Encyclopaedia Britannica and other similar reference books will help.

There are modern books also on the subject but they mostly refer to these earlier books although they are well worth examining because they give more modern mathematical methods of deciphering numerical ciphers.

In modern censorship, however, the numerical ciphers are not met with so much as the more subtle methods of attempting to get information past the Censors—the writer knowing full well that every letter is examined, and that anything in the nature of a cipher would be obvious at once and certainly would not be allowed to go on even if it could not be read easily.