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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

MAR 20 1959



Dear Mr. Chairman:

In your letter of March 19, 1959, referring to headlines in the Washington Post of that date concerning high altitude atomic tests, you asked that I advise you concerning the circumstances leading to the release of the information contained therein, when it was declassified and by whom, and the reason for the manner in which it was released. You asked also that I inform you why the Joint Committee was not notified in advance of the release.

As I informed your Committee on January 19, 1959, discussions were in progress at that time as to the advisability of declassifying those aspects of the ARGUS experiment which were primarily of scientific interest and that decision had been reached to withhold such action until the scientific group studying the results of the operation had submitted its report. This report has not yet been received by the Department of Defense; consequently, as of March 18 no action had been taken with respect to the declassification of any aspects of the ARGUS operation.

You will recall that I informed your Committee during the hearing of January 19th that the Department of Defense had reason to believe that some elements of the press were aware of the operation and its nature. At about 5:00 P. M. on March 18th the Director, Advanced Research Projects Agency, was advised by a telephone call from a representative of the New York Times that a story of the ARGUS operation would appear in the Times the following morning. The Director advised the caller that all aspects of the operation were still classified and strongly urged that no information relative thereto be published. He then informed the Deputy Secretary of

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Defense who, in turn, informed the Director, Defense Research and Engineering, under whose general supervision the operation had been conducted, as to the conversation with the New York Times.

The Director, Defense Research and Engineering, concluded that if the ARGUS story should appear, it would be in the public interest to officially confirm such aspects of the operation as could be confirmed without endangering the national security. Accordingly, he prepared a brief statement of the nature and objectives of the ARGUS experiment and, after consultation with appropriate government officials, declassified the information contained therein. The statement (a copy of which was furnished you the following morning) was formally released by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) shortly after midnight when it was definitely known that the New York Times story had already appeared in the early morning edition.

As you know, it is my responsibility to keep you informed on these matters. Failure to notify your Committee prior to the morning of March 19 rests entirely with me. Unfortunately, I left my office for Walter Reed Hospital shortly after 6:00 P. M. on March 18 without knowing that the New York Times had stated its intention to publish the story. I understand that several attempts were made to contact me prior to my return to my residence at about 10:00 P. M., but without success. As a consequence, I was unaware of the circumstances until I arrived at my office the following morning.

The situation presented by the New York Times disrupted normal procedures for dealing with matters of declassification and release for publication. I hope you will agree that those responsible for handling this case made every reasonable effort to arrive at a proper solution under the circumstances.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Herbert B. Loper

Herbert B. Loper
Assistant to the Secretary
of Defense (Atomic Energy)

Honorable Clinton P. Anderson
Chairman, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy
Congress of the United States



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