

RADIATION LABORATORY  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

OPERATING UNDER THE SUPERVISION  
OF THE  
NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

IN REPLY REFER TO:

31-FWL-0104

January 5, 1943

Dr. Henry Gerlach  
Department of History  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Dr. Gerlach:

I was talking the other evening with our mutual friend Lt. Odegaard, United States Navy, who in peace time was my colleague at the University of Illinois, and I raised with him the question of where I could find an historian for a purpose which I consider rather important. He suggested your name and I am taking the liberty of writing to you in this very tentative way to see whether or not you might be interested enough to explore with me further the question of whether you might be interested and free to undertake it, and whether you have the qualifications for success.

For reasons of security I have to speak a little vaguely, but the general idea is this:

A device or associated group of devices which I shall call a new weapon has been developed which has already radically altered the course of the war and is likely to alter it very radically in the future. There are many reasons, I believe, why a history of the development, adoption, production and military use of this weapon should be written and it would be far easier and better if the materials for this history were collected now while the development is still going on and while the early stages of the origin of the ideas have not been forgotten.

The outcomes of this war and of future wars are likely to be affected or even determined by technological advances and it would well repay a considerable amount of effort by perhaps several people if a noteworthy case such as the one I am referring to could be thoroughly studied and analyzed and understood, and the experience gained made available at least to the people who will have to decide about such matters, and perhaps as far as will be feasible to the public itself.

I haven't, of course, thought out the outline of the history in detail, but topics which would seem to me to deserve treatment are, principally, the various stages in the origination of the ideas and of their development; also, the ways in which the difficulties in securing support for the development of devices too secret to be explained to those who appropriate funds have been overcome; the methods which have been successful in securing adoption of the new weapons without adhering to routine test procedures which ordinarily would have taken many years; the ways in which

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and the methods and degrees of success with which civilian scientists have been brought to bear on military problems in times of war.

The history of the actual use of these weapons against the enemy, though more sensational than the above, is perhaps a story which could safely be left to ordinary military historians, though I am not sure of this.

The rate and the way in which information about new and secret military weapons eventually leaks out would make an interesting chapter in itself.

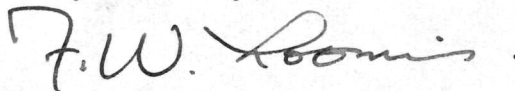
The qualifications of the man who can do this job will need to be considerable and varied. He should preferably have some familiarity with some science in order to enable him to understand the language and thought of those who are doing the development and to be able to get information from them. He should have the ability to write and, more than that, should have the imagination to see the whole problem himself and formulate the way in which it needs to be treated. Also, of course, he should have some experience with historical methods.

I should think the way to proceed would be for the man to come here and join our staff just as the scientists working on it do, and proceed to dig out his material both here and in the many other places which are working on this problem.

It is hard to foresee at this time just how and in what form the results would be published. Obviously while the war lasts they could not be published except secretly and within military circles, and also, considerable care during this time would have to be exercised to avoid offending susceptibilities. Probably publications reaching wider circles would be permissible after the war, judging by precedents from the last war. Perhaps it would never be possible to tell everything. It might be worth consideration to select an historian young enough so that he might make his knowledge and experience available and perhaps even publicize it shortly before the outbreak of the next war. I hope you do not consider this remark too pessimistic.

If the possibilities outlined in the above attract you, I should be very glad to have you write me a rather full account of yourself, and if possible, give me some samples of your writing or some references or whatever material you think might be helpful. At a later stage it might be a good idea for you to come to Cambridge for an interview at our expense.

Very sincerely,



F. W. Loomis  
Associate Director

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