

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 867144By MC NARA Date 7-15-09P. G. 28COPY NO. 16June 2, 1943OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICESPLANNING GROUPDOCTRINE RE RUMORS

Mr. Taylor has submitted the attached memorandum from the MO Branch, together with a second memorandum from the Psychological Warfare Staff, for consideration of the Planning Group. In his memorandum of transmittal he stated:

"I am submitting to the Planning Group a short doctrinal paper on rumors from Mr. Knapp and a somewhat more comprehensive one worked up by members of my staff together with Mr. Knapp. I would have preferred to submit a single paper and suggested to Mr. Knapp that we turn over our material to him for final shaping but he did not feel he had enough time for this and we therefore agreed with him to submit both papers, it being felt that his short "Criteria of a Successful Rumor" might be useful to the Planning Group for hand reference in connection with rumors submitted while the longer paper, which he approves in all details, is intended rather for operators in the rumor field.

"In addition to discussing the contents of the Planning Staff paper I think it might be useful to have some discussion as to the distribution and general purpose of doctrinal papers of this type as we have several others in mind."

A. H. Onthank
Colonel, M. I.,
Secretary.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NO 867144By M NARA Date 7-15-09THE CRITERIA OF A SUCCESSFUL RUMOR

The creation of a successful propaganda rumor is more an accomplishment of art than of science. Despite this concession to the intangible character of the good rumor, the following rules are submitted as tentative criteria of the successful story. These rules are neither mutually exclusive, nor are they all of equal importance. They are intended merely as necessarily rough guide posts to be used in appraising the merit of a particular example.

The successful propaganda rumor, as we define it, is self-propelling in a high degree, retains its original content with a minimum of distortion, and conforms to strategic requirements. The following are the characteristics of the successful rumor as defined above:

1. The successful rumor is easy to remember.
 - a. It is sufficiently brief and simple to survive in memory of successive narrators.
 - b. It concerns familiar persons, places and circumstances, and incorporates suitable "local color."
 - c. It contains striking concrete detail.
 - d. It often incorporates stereotype phrase or slogan.
 - e. It contains a humorous twist when possible.
2. The successful rumor follows a stereotyped plot.
 - a. Its plot recapitulates precedents and traditions in the history and folklore of the group.
 - b. It observes the peculiar national dispositions of the group.
 - c. "It is the oldest story in the newest clothes."
3. The successful rumor is a function of the momentary interests and circumstances of the group.
 - a. It is provoked by and provides an interpretation or elaboration of some isolated current happening or event.
 - b. It serves to supply information which is needed to fill a knowledge gap.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority WFO 867144By M NARA Date 7-15-09

- c. It stands upon the shoulders and derives support from other rumors or events.
 - d. It contains some accepted or verifiable detail.
4. The successful rumor exploits the emotions and sentiments of the group.
- a. It expresses a widespread emotional disposition shared by members of the group.
 - b. It provides justification for suppressed fears, hatreds, or desires.
 - c. It serves to articulate a sentiment common to the group.
5. The successful rumor is challenging because:
- a. It purports or appears to come from inside sources and usually has the character of "forbidden" information.
 - b. It is usually incapable of direct verification.
 - c. It is neither too plausible nor too implausible.

DEFINITION

The successful rumor is a simple, brief, concrete and vivid story, purporting to come from inside sources and concerning persons and events familiar to all members of the group. Its plot is usually drawn from established traditions or precedents, but it is occasioned by the immediate interests and preoccupations of the group. It mirrors and provides justification for emotions shared by the group and at the same time serves to fill a knowledge gap. It is neither too plausible nor too implausible, and it cannot be readily verified.

SUMMARY OF SOME PRINCIPLES FOR RUMOR WORKWHAT RUMORS CAN DO:

Rumors can promote subversion and deception of enemy people and governments. The first, by creating and increasing fear, anxiety, confusion, over-confidence, distrust, and panic. The second, by forcing the release of enemy information and encouraging impotent enemy action. (P. 1)

SECRET

- 2 -

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 867144
By M NARA Date 7-15-09KIND OF INTELLIGENCE ESSENTIAL TO RUMOR WORK:

Effective rumor design requires special kinds of intelligence on Rumor Targets. (q.v.) (P. 3)

RUMOR TARGETS:

A successful rumor must take advantage of the state of mind of the people for whom it is intended. The general principles are:

1. Those people who are most eager for information about events which affect them are the best targets for rumors supplying such information. (Pp. 3-4).

2. People with fears, hopes, and hostilities stemming from their involvement in the war are affected most by rumors that feed on those feelings. (Pp. 3-4)

PROPERTIES OF A RUMOR THAT MAKE IT SPREAD:

In addition to the above principles a successful rumor will embody one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Plausibility. Plausibility may be obtained by one or more of the following: Concreteness, unverifiability, authoritativeness, and credibility. (P. 6)

2. Simplicity. A good rumor characteristically presents one central, uncomplex idea. (P. 7)

3. Suitability to Task. "Slogan" rumors which summarize already accepted opinions, can be short and uncomplicated by qualifications and complexities of plot. Rumors suggesting new attitudes should be embedded in an interesting narrative allowing room for development of details and some complexity of plot. (P. 7)

4. Vividness. Rumors which make clear-cut mental pictures with strong emotional content are likely to be most effective. (P. 8)

SECRET

5. Suggestiveness. Frequently rumors which merely hint or suggest something instead of stating it are particularly adapted to spreading fear and doubt. (P. 8)

MAKING THE RUMOR FIT THE CHANNEL:

Different channels of rumor initiation and dissemination frequently require different forms and contents for the rumor. Thus the channel which it is planned to use (undercover agents, black radio, enemy mail, diplomatic media, etc.) should always be kept in mind when designing the rumor. (P. 9)

PLANNING RUMOR WORK:

Planned lines of action against the enemy should include strategic themes for rumors.

To implement rumor suggestions stemming directly from these themes one or more of the following techniques can be used: Different rumors revealing the same "information"; planting the same rumor in different places; designing them so as to appear of independent origin; integrating them with black and white media. (P. 10)

PRINCIPLES FOR RUMOR WORK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

WHAT RUMORS CAN DO

SUBVERSION

1. Exploit and increase fear and anxiety among those who have begun to lose confidence in military success.

EXAMPLE: In this class fall rumors such as those dealing with fearsome secret weapons which the Germans spread so effectively throughout France just prior to the Battle of Flanders. Similarly, we might spread stories in Germany describing the horrible psychic and physical effects which the Allied blitz had on the Afrika Korps in Tunisia.

2. To exploit temporary over-confidence which will lead to disillusionment.

EXAMPLE: In the early hours of the Polish invasion, Germans captured the Polish radio stations. Posing as Polish announcers, they spread enthusiastic and highly optimistic reports of successful Polish resistance to German forces. When the truth became known later, the shock to Polish morale was terrific.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority WFO 867144By M NARA Date 7-15-09

3. Foster suspicion and hostility between persons or groups who might otherwise cooperate.

EXAMPLE: In late 1939 and 1940, one of the most potent rumors current in France was to the effect that England will fight to the last Frenchman; similarly, we spread rumors among Bulgarian troops that instead of being used for Balkan defense, they are to be sacrificed at the spearhead of a new Nazi drive into Russia.

4. Create distrust in news sources.

EXAMPLE: The successful manipulation of this type of rumor by the enemy is illustrated by the Bahnhof bombing incident early in the war. The Germans spread the rumor that the British, in a raid on Berlin, had severely damaged the Bahnhof. Eagerly, the BBC picked this story up and broadcast it. The Germans were then able to discredit British reportage by demonstrating that the Bahnhof was completely undamaged.

5. Lead civilian populations to precipitate financial, food and other crises through their own panicky reactions to rumors.

EXAMPLE: In 1917 the rumor was successfully spread in Germany that the German government was going to confiscate all livestock. Farmers slaughtered tremendous numbers of cows and sheep. As a result, in 1918 the German Army ran short of meat. Similarly, we might cause Italians to refuse to deal in paper money by spreading the rumor that local Fascist officials are operating a counterfeit lire ring; or precipitate runs on banks with a story that the gold backing for deposits has been removed to Germany.

6. Create confusion and nervous bewilderment as to our intentions and plans by the dissemination of a welter of contradictory reports.

EXAMPLE: In this category fall all the "war of nerves" rumors now circulating in Europe which suggest that our invasion will come in Norway, or perhaps Brittany, or Greece, or Italy, etc.

DECEPTION:

N.B. The accomplishment of these objectives requires close collaboration with military planning.

1. Cause enemy people to raise questions which will require actions by their governments (information services) that will reveal enemy plans or conditions.

EXAMPLE: As an extreme case, assume that we wish to know whether the 31st Division is on the Russian front. We spread the story throughout Bavaria that the 31st Division has been annihilated at Novorossisk. The 31st, we know from the German Order of Battle, was recruited largely in Bavaria. This rumor achieves wide-enough currency in Bavaria so that hundreds of civilians with men in the 31st Division demand from the government confirmation or denial. To satisfy the clamor, the government states that the 31st is not even fighting on that front.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 867144By MC NARA Date 7-15-09

2. Timed with military action, reveal false information about our plans which will result in diversionary or impotent action by the enemy.

EXAMPLE: Let the story "lead" out that, the 95th Brigade in northern England is being fitted with cold-weather clothing, ostensibly for a large-scale stab at objectives in Norway. The enemy moves troops from Denmark to cover this stab. The 203rd Brigade then strikes at Jutland.

COUNTER-RUMOR:

1. To nullify effective rumors initiated by the enemy.

EXAMPLE: German atrocity stories stress the brutal treatment which Germans may expect at Russian hands. We spread the rumor that large numbers of the Germans taken at Stalingrad are so well-treated that they have begged the Russians not to send them back to Germany in prisoner-of-war exchanges.

N.B. By and large, unless most subtly handled, counter-rumors may emphasize and increase the effectiveness of the rumor to be countered.

KIND OF INTELLIGENCE ESSENTIAL TO RUMOR WORK

1. From the principle that effective rumors supply "information" eagerly sought for by vulnerable groups or classes of people, the following kinds of intelligence are essential to good rumor design:

a. Intelligence on what kinds of information they are eager for.

b. With respect to (a), intelligence on what they actually know and what they lack.

2. From the principle that effective rumors capitalize on the fears, hopes, and hostilities of people, the following kinds of **intelligence** are essential to good rumor design:

a. Intelligence on their current fears, hopes, and hostilities relating to their war effort.

b. Research revealing their customary and traditional ways of expressing their anxieties, hopes, and aggressions, especially in conditions of national crisis.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority UNO 867144By M NARA Date 7-15-09RUMOR TARGETSAND THE TAILORING OF RUMORS FOR THEM

1. Groups or classes of people that have become fearful and anxious about their personal wellbeing. Focus on "information" that confirms the pessimistic expectations of the group involved. Extreme rumors designed to produce open panic should be timed with military action.

EXAMPLE: The people of southern Italy and Sicily are extremely jittery at the moment about the possibility of our invasion force crossing the Mediterranean from Tunisia. Thus in this area we spread a rumor that large numbers of invasion barges are being concentrated at a point opposite Trapani.

Note on "Magic" rumors: In the special circumstances when a group or class of enemy people begin to show signs of seeing no course but disaster, focus on alleged events in which personages or "signs" from their religion or folklore present forebodings or prophesies of defeat, or of hope after defeat.

EXAMPLE: In southern Italy, Sardinia and Corsica, the "Evil Eye" superstition has long been strong among the largely illiterate, primitive people. Thus we spread the story that all the woes of the southern Mediterranean peoples date from the meeting of Hitler and Mussolini in 1934, at which time Hitler fixed the Duce with his Evil Eye. The result of this curse, we continue, was the Ethiopian failure, reverses in Spain, the current bombing of Italian cities, etc.

2. Groups or classes of people that have become unrealistically over-confident or hopeful. Focus on "information" which supports their hopes, which is consistent with information available to them, but which will ultimately produce disillusionment.

EXAMPLE: We know that the Italian people are thoroughly sick of the poor-quality food substitutes they have had to accept for the past four or five years. They might be kindly disposed toward us if they had grounds for believing we were coming with food as well as guns and planes. They are also generally aware that a Food Conference is in progress in the U.S. Thus we spread the rumor that the delegates at the Food Conference are unanimously in favor of feeding Italy abundantly in return for a quick capitulation. When this story has achieved fairly wide currency and hopes have been raised, we follow with the story that although the Italian King and Cabinet favor our generous food proposition, Mussolini and two or three top Fascists have blocked it. Thus we create hopes for the purpose of dashing them.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NO 867144
By M NARA Date 7-15-09

3. Groups of classes of people that are suspicious of or hate other groups of leaders. Focus on "information" that justifies and increases hostility.

EXAMPLE: The animosity between the Rumanians and Hungarians is a matter of record. Most Rumanians and Hungarians know that Antonescu has recently conferred with Hitler. Thus we tailor a rumor for the Hungarian Army that Antonescu's consultation resulted in an agreement whereby Rumanian troops will be reserved for defense of the Balkans, while Hungarian divisions will be sent to the Russian front.

4. Groups or classes of people that lead monotonous lives which favor the use of fantasy.

EXAMPLE: In this class fall the inmates of prisons, concentration camps and army garrisons, factory workers compelled to work at dull tasks 14-16 hours daily, armies of occupation, etc. These groups, whose humdrum existences make it difficult for them to weigh and evaluate "news" searchingly, are especially susceptible to fantastic rumors of all sorts. They will believe and transmit stories that better-balanced persons will reject as implausible.

Thus among Rumanian factory workers compelled to do an intensely monotonous job we might spread a story that Hitler has decided that this factory is no longer needed and that the workers will shortly be permitted to return to their homes. Although on the face of it absurd, this story might well gain acceptance in the appropriate group. When it becomes clear later on that the story was unfounded, the workers would suffer a severe letdown in morale and efficiency, which was our original intention.

5. Special groups that lack information either as a result of especially vigorous censorship or discredited propaganda or illiteracy.

EXAMPLE: Germany and Italy, all reports indicate, are extremely receptive to well-formulated rumors because of the reputation their Propaganda Ministries have gained for suppressing, or sugar-coating bad news or news unfavorable to the regime. Likewise, populations in lands which for many years were kept well-informed by their own free press and radio, and then were abruptly blacked out from authentic news by Occupation, are dependent on rumor to fill the gaps in their understanding of happenings within their own country and outside. Sardinia is an example of a field where rumor has become an important media of news transmission because of the population's high degree of illiteracy and because of their relatively isolated position.

Over-all general principle:

a. Those people who are most eager for information about events which affect them are the best targets for rumors which supply the desired "information".

b. People with fears, hopes, and hostilities stemming from their involvement in the war are affected most by rumors that feed on these feelings.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority WFO 867144By MS NARA Date 7-15-09PROPERTIES OF A RUMOR THAT MAKE IT SPREAD

A good rumor is one which will spread widely in a form close to the original containing the basic message. The qualities of a rumor which give it this mobility appear to defy complete analysis at the moment. Probably the main factor determining success or failure is the degree to which a rumor is "tailored" to the state of mind of the audience. In addition, successful rumors seem to embody most of the following qualities:

1. Plausibility. Plausibility may be obtained by one or more of the following:

a. Making the rumor concrete and, so far as possible, specific in terms of familiar persons, places, and round numbers.

EXAMPLE: Poor Technique: People in areas that may be invaded are sewing American flags inside their coats.

Better Technique: 36 arrests were made in Sicily by Fascist authorities when they discovered that Sicilians were sewing crude American flags inside their coats.

b. Tying the rumor to known factor expectations.

EXAMPLE: Poor Technique: Among Near Eastern Moslems, who are familiar with Hitler's anti-Semitism, spread the story that Hitler is going to seek Allied sympathy by resettling all European Jews in Palestine.

Better Technique: Tunisian Arabs know that some of their numbers were blown up by crossing German minefields. Among Arab populations we spread the following story: Not knowing the exact location of their own minefields, German panzer troops retreating from Bizerte drove scores of Arabs ahead of them to touch off the explosive charges.

c. Designing the rumor so that it consists in part of familiar, accepted information, and in part of "new information" which, though false, is unverifiable.

EXAMPLE: It is now widely known in Germany that the big RAF raid of May 24 did terrific damage to Dortmund. It is further known that Dortmund is an industrial center. We spread a story in Germany that the Dortmund raid knocked out completely one of only two plants in all Germany which manufacture electrodes indispensable to processing artillery steel. The vital part of this rumor is unverifiable, because even if it were true German authorities would suppress it. But it fits in with what Germans in, say, Bavaria know about industrial Dortmund and the recent raid.

It is known to German troops that there are now millions of foreign workers in Germany. They also know that pregnancy

SECRET

is a ground for exemption from labor service at home. So we spread the false story that their wives are dodging labor mobilization by bedding down with good-looking Belgians and Dutchmen and becoming pregnant. Troops far-removed from home, perhaps at the front, are in no position to check the unconfirmed portion of the story. And the elements of it which they know to be true (labor mobilization, foreign workers, pregnancy as a basis for exemption) tend to support the false element.

d. When relevant, making the rumor appear as an "inside story" which has leaked from an authoritative source.

EXAMPLE: Let us assume we wish to spread the idea that Hitler and von Rundstedt have quarreled.

Poor Technique: von Rundstedt and Hitler recently had a bitter quarrel when Rundstedt told the Fuhrer that German divisions for the defense of France are second-rate.

Better Technique: The wife of an officer on General von Rundstedt's Staff reports that Hitler and von Rundstedt recently had a bitter quarrel when Rundstedt charged that German divisions for the defense of France are second-rate.

e. Not exaggerating the facts in terms of contrasts or magnitudes beyond the bounds of credibility.

EXAMPLE: Poor Technique: One American soldier using a bazooka destroyed 12 enemy tanks in Tunisia with one shot.

Better Technique: One American soldier using a bazooka knocked out one Mark VI tank completely and crippled another with a single shot.

2. SIMPLICITY. This means using only one central idea or core and keeping it uncomplex and thus memorable, regardless of the embellishments added for the sake of authenticity, plausibility or other reasons.

EXAMPLE: Poor Technique: The chief German Army medical officer in Italy is carrying on an affair with Ciano's wife, and yet he has the nerve to issue an order stating that all Italian women in towns where German troops are garrisoned must be examined for venereal disease once a month in order to associate with members of the Wehrmacht.

Better Technique: The chief medical officer of the German Army has ordered that all Italian women must be examined once a month for venereal disease.

3. SUITABILITY TO TASK. The design of a rumor is largely determined by the job it has to do. For example, the slogan-type rumor ("England will fight to the last Frenchman") is especially adapted to summarizing opinions or attitudes which are already widely accepted.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority WVO 867144
By M NARA Date 7-15-09

Narrative-type rumors, on the other hand, aim at introducing "information which will create or shape new attitudes". In this category are the elaborately detailed and embellished stories such as the one which "proves" that Hitler was mortally ill. Slogan-type rumors will gain acceptance only when the ground has been prepared for them by narrative-type rumors or by other forms of propaganda.

4. VIVIDNESS. Regardless of length or type, rumors which make clearcut mental pictures with strong emotional content are likely to be most effective.

EXAMPLE: Poor Technique: We spread rumor among German troops at the front that their wives at home are complaining because they are lonesome. (The German soldier may regret this, but it will not disturb him inordinately.)

Better Technique: We spread the rumor among German troops that because their wives are lonesome they are bedding down with foreign workmen. (To a German soldier who relies on fidelity and moral support from the home front, this is emotionally a strong, upsetting blow.)

5. SUGGESTIVENESS. Whereas extreme concreteness helps to give a rumor plausibility the very opposite quality sometimes gives great effectiveness to rumors. The type of rumor which merely hints or suggests something instead of stating it seems particularly adapted to spreading fear and doubt.

EXAMPLE: Hitler has had periodic visits recently from Dr. Hans Gluck. Dr. Gluck was decorated last year by the Munich Academy of Science for distinguished research in psychiatry.

German authorities in eastern Slovakia have requisitioned from Berlin 500 3-foot coffins.

MAKING THE RUMOR FIT THE CHANNEL

The form and content of a rumor, when possible, should be tailor-made for the channel through which it is to be initiated. These channels include:

1. Undercover agents.
2. Black radio or press, including false documents.
3. Enemy mail.
4. Compromised enemy communication media.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority WNO 867144
By Ms NARA Date 7-15-09

5. The media of international business, religious, professional, and other such organizations.
6. Diplomatic media.
7. Plants in neutral open propaganda media.
8. Plants in allied open propaganda media.

The importance of designing rumors for dissemination through outlets peculiarly adapted to them may be illustrated in the following way. Assume that our only channel for rumor-spreading in a particular area is through diplomatic representatives of various countries stationed there. Considering the outlet, it would obviously be futile to attempt to spread the rumor that a child of an Italian woman who had been seduced by a German officer was marked with a swastika stigmata at birth. The rumor would be written off as fantastic drivel at once by the first diplomat to whom it was told. It becomes clear then that for dissemination through diplomatic circles we must plan and design rumors of a high order of plausibility in terms of the group's background, education, information, degree of sophistication, etc. It is likely, for example, that the sort of rumor that would spread most widely through such circles would be clever epigrams or witticisms dealing with current personalities or events.

RUMORS SHOULD BE PLANNED

1. Rumors should be expressly designed to implement planned lines of action against the enemy.
 - a. Lines of action in plans should include strategic themes for rumors.
 - b. Rumor suggestions should stem directly from these.
2. To implement effectively a given planned line of action, one or more of the following techniques may be used.
 - a. Design different rumors that reveal the same "information".
 - b. Plant such rumors in different suitable places.
 - c. Design them so as to appear as of independent origin.
 - d. Integrate them with black and white media.

SECRET