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CODIB-D-33/2
26 June 1959

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
COMMITTEE ON DOCUMENTATION

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director/Plans

SUBJECT : Project WALNUT

REFERENCES : a. CODIB-D-26
b. Memorandum from Chairman, Committee on Documentation for Deputy Director/Plans, dated 26 March 1959
c. Memorandum from Deputy Director/Plans for AD/CR, dated 31 March 1959

1. Forwarded for your information, and such action as you deem advisable, are the findings of the USIB Committee on Documentation regarding the compatibility implications of Project WALNUT (CODIB-D-33/2, dated 26 June 1959).

2. The Committee appreciates your cooperation in having made possible this exploratory exercise which is the first attempt to ascertain the prospective impact on the intelligence community of an automated information system.

Paul A. Borel
Chairman

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cc: CIA Project Review Committee

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The Compatibility Implications of Project Walnut

Background

1. The USIB Committee on Documentation (CODIB) on 3 June 1959, conducted a review of CIA's Project WALNUT, a project sponsored by the clandestine Services to develop a [] document retrieval system. This review constituted the first exercise of its kind in the intelligence community.

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2. The basis for the review was a CODIB policy paper (CODIB-D-26) adopted on 5 May 1959 (CODIB-M-12), which stated that the Committee proposed henceforth to examine the effects on other community information systems of certain categories of innovation in any given system. The areas specified concerned carriers of information (e.g. documents), their editorial features, and the indexing language employed in their control. The purpose of such reviews was to be the identification of possible sources of friction in the interaction of systems, under the general heading of compatibility. Questions of feasibility relating to the probable success of a project in solving its own problems were excluded from the Committee's formal consideration as generally beyond the scope of the compatibility policy statement. While the Committee is prepared to address itself to questions of feasibility, including cost considerations,

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this is done only on request of the sponsoring agency, and would in any event have required much more time and effort than was possible to devote in the present case. The conclusions of each Committee review were stated to be advisory in character and to be aimed in particular towards the publicizing of systems development in the community.

3. Representatives of the Clandestine Services and of the participating corporation, IBM, presented a one-day briefing on the system to some eighty community representatives on 15 May. At the Committee's meeting of 3 June all CODIB member agencies were called on in turn to testify on what compatibility issues WALNUT might raise with respect to their own

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systems.

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Cooperation

4. The contributions of the Clandestine Services and IBM personnel to the Committee were both competent and cooperative. Although WALNUT possesses many sensitive aspects, the Committee was able to proceed essentially free of denials by the Clandestine Services of desired information. The Committee took strong exception to the decision of the IBM Corporation not to divulge proprietary information concerning the WALNUT computer. No information was, for example, divulged regarding WALNUT's binary coding, positions of information, number of letters in identifying tags.

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