

A TYPE OF CRYPT

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It had been a bad week at the CIA. Tensions were building in the Middle East, and unrest was spreading throughout the United States, particularly on college campuses. Young student terrorists were threatening to bomb government offices, and the President was considering declaring a national emergency and calling out the National Guard.

In his office in the dark recesses of the Pentagon, Major West was sifting through the coded communiques which had been received overnight. One, in particular, caught his eye. It read:

Southern Methodist University	Eastern Standard Time
Florida State University	Parental Guidance
Military Police	Early Pregnancy Test
Energy Efficiency Ratio	Fire Department
Virginia Polytechnic Institute;	OverDose
Franklin Delano Roosevelt	Profoundly Mentally Retarded,
Repondez S'il Vous Plait,	Naval Supply Depot
New Scotland Yard	Delta Upsilon
Operations Manager	National Institutes of Health
Officers' Training School	High Rate of Fire
Master of Science	Damon Runyan Memorial Fund
National Science Foundation	Special Operations Force

What could it mean? The major was perplexed. He'd learned his cryptanalysis well, but this didn't seem to be written in any of the codes with which he was familiar. He pored over the message for hours and finally came up with an interpretation:

The students at Southern Methodist University, Florida State University, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute, especially members of the Delta Upsilon fraternity and candidates for the Master of Science degree, are planning an all-out attack on Washington. Having overdosed on some chemical substance, they have become profoundly mentally retarded and need the guidance of their parents and grandparents, many of whom were admirers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They have formed a Special Operations Force, named an Operations Manager, and will exert a High Rate of Fire on the National Institutes of Health, the Naval Supply Depot, and the National Science Foundation. The attack will take place on Eastern Standard Time, and it will require the combined efforts of the Military Police, the Fire Department, and the candidates at the Officers' Training School to quell it. There may be international repercussions, and New Scotland Yard will be on standby. A reply is required.

Well, that seemed to incorporate most of the items in the message, but what was the meaning of Early Pregnancy Test? Could the whole thing be a joke? Could a virus have infected the Agency's computers? Maybe it was merely notes for a movie scenario about the life of FDR, and set at VPI, Apparently it would be rated PG...

PG, eh? Hmmm! Looking at the list again, West realized that each item had a readily recognizable initialism. He called in his civilian secretary, Ms. Doe Ball, and handed her the list. "Type this up for me," he said, "using only the capitalized initials of the words. And be sure to preserve the punctuation after some of the entries."

Now Doe, by any standards, was one gorgeous chick. Her figure was a perfect ten, her hair a honey blonde, and her eyes were limpid pools of aquamarine. But, as is so often the case, when they put this package together they left out the brains. It was only with difficulty that she had managed to graduate from Acme Business College. Typing was not her strong point; she had been hired for her other talents.

Gamely she sat down at the typewriter and placed her fingers on the keys. With a small sigh, she began to type the initialisms (although, in her ignorance, she thought of them as abbreviations) that Major West had given her. When she had finished, she rolled the paper out of the machine. Even Doe, limited in intelligence as she unquestionably was, could see that she had cracked the code. She rushed into Major West's office and, brushing provocatively against him, placed the paper in front of his eyes.

The rest, as they say, is history. An international crisis was averted, and West, although questioned closely by a Congressional subcommittee about his involvement with Ms. Ball, was able to retire with honor. As for Doe, no one knows where she's gone, but when she had her memoirs ghostwritten, she included a chapter on the incident. In its conclusion she wrote, "I don't know why that dumb old major couldn't break the code himself. The answer was right at my fingertips."

Puzzled? See Answers and Solutions.