

The Navy Department documents on the two microfilmed rolls, all prepared in December 1937 and January 1938 under the direction of Rear Admiral A. B. Cook, then chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, were technical memos, some of which were not secret and may even have been placed at the time in the Bureau of Standards library (Chambers obviously had no way of knowing this when his source delivered the material). A few of the memos could hardly have interested any foreign power. One, for example, provided instructions on the proper method of painting fire-extinguishers. But other documents on the two rolls concerned new technical data on aircraft fuel systems, parachutes, radio transmitters, fuel pressure settings, carburetors, inertia starters, and other major elements in current American aircraft equipment. Although the Navy Department memos were unclassified, and were distributed to the Bureau of Standards, where Chambers's contact obtained them, such up-to-date military information was sought by the Russians, and neither Chambers nor Carpenter—who dealt (according to Chambers) with Pigman—had the scientific background to evaluate the data's importance. Apparently Pigman (or someone else) fobbed off unclassified material on Chambers more successfully than Vincent Reno, who recalled once having given "Carl" a standard manual on Army ordnance, in which the latter expressed little interest.²⁷

Ward Pigman later said he had never passed documents to Chambers, did not even know the man, and did not participate in any form of espionage. He admitted having known David Carpenter (as "David Zimmerman") during the mid-Thirties, when Pigman belonged to a radical union of government employees in Washington, D.C., called the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists and Technicians, but could not say a decade later if Zimmerman had been a union official "or just what his connection was." Pigman admitted to the FBI that he "may have seen Zimmerman on one or two occasions from 1936 until Pigman went to Europe in the summer of 1938, but he recalls no instance." Although Pigman insisted that they had never met, he told Alger Hiss's lawyer after a Grand Jury appearance in December 1948 that Chambers "apparently described the inside of [his] house."

But Pigman's involvement in the spy ring remains unproved, and there was no independent confirmation for Chambers's claim that Pigman had provided documents for the two rolls of Navy Department microfilm.²⁸

Alger Hiss's Handwritten Notes

Most of the materials that Chambers saved as "life preservers" were confidential State Department documents he said he received from Alger Hiss. According to Chambers, Hiss had provided the spy ring with many more