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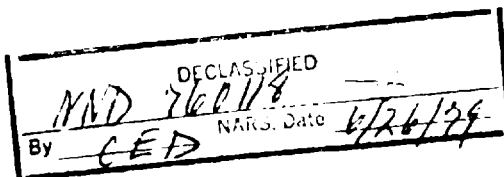
February 28, 1942.

Lieut. Commander R. H. Thayer, USNR,  
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations,  
Navy Department,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Commander Thayer:

Thank you for your letter of February twenty-sixth (Serial No. 0529916) concerning Dr. A. H. Compton. Continuance of Dr. Compton in his present capacity, but not in connection with the direct military problems being carried on in the National Defense Research Committee, is entirely satisfactory to me. He is, as we both know, a great scientist, undoubtedly devoted to his country and thoroughly loyal. On the other hand, I do agree with you that he is somewhat lacking in discretion, and while I feel that he is using proper care at the present time, we have recently cautioned him in this regard and I feel that his continuance needs to be under conditions where both Dr. Conant and I will pay due attention to the matter for this reason. In our telephone conversation which preceded your letter I think I brought out this point of view, but I think you will be glad to have it in a letter. In addition, I might outline here the special status of the work on which Dr. Compton is engaged with many others, for it is an unusual circumstance and warrants special treatment.

Most of the work of OSRD, as you know, is on military devices where it is necessary to give the scientists who are at work a considerable military background in order that they may function adequately. Before thus passing on military information furnished to us by the armed services we use great care. However, there is one very large problem on which these conditions do not hold. Its nature is known to you, since Dr. Gunn, of the Naval Research Laboratory, was



a member of the committee initially set up by the President to follow up the matter, and he remains in contact with that committee, I believe, at the present time as a Consultant. It involves a scientific development aimed at producing a new military device. However, in its development it is not necessary at any time to pass on military information, since the whole matter is self-contained and entirely new. Accordingly, in handling the personnel on this subject the matter has been placed in a special category. I have used due care and at every point have consulted the armed services, but I have not felt that the same situation applied as in the case where I was handling military information placed in my charge by the armed services. Moreover, on this particular subject, as far as its scientific background is concerned, there are many individuals in this country having rather complete knowledge as a result of their study of physics, and these are by no means all under control. Hence there has been an experience in the past which is not desirable, for the subject has been discussed not only among physicists rather widely, but also in popular articles. They continue to appear in the press even now. Under these circumstances, when we take a man into work on such a matter we give him in some cases no new information whatever. When we do take him into the organization, however, we do so with caution, and we place him under oath and impress upon him his responsibilities. In many cases, therefore, I feel it is highly desirable to take a man in in case of doubt rather than to leave him entirely without control, and I have followed this policy in several cases. It is exceedingly necessary that the progress being made on this subject and the special techniques developed be handled with great care. I feel that the best way to accomplish this is to place the principal scientists involved as much under control as is possible with the present organization. In fact, I am inclined to believe that should the subject become at all imminent in the sense of promising practical results within a reasonable interval it would be well to take in and put under thorough control practically every physicist in the country having background knowledge of the subject, but the time for this has certainly not arrived.

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I trust that you will pardon the long letter, but I felt that it would be well to have on record with the Navy the point of view I am taking on this subject, as it is a somewhat special and borderland matter. As far as Dr. A. H. Compton is concerned, I feel sure that we will be able to guide him so that he will be properly discreet, and I am sure he is loyal.

Very truly yours,

V. Bush,  
Director.