



OSCAR

(The official newsletter of the Special Communications (TA) Association)

Membership of the Association is open to any person who has served in No 9 Spec Comms Regt (SR), 92 Sig Regt (SC) (AER), No 1 Spec Comms Regt (TA), 65th Sig Regt (TA), 39th (C of L) Sig Regt (SC) (TA) or 1 (RBY) Sig Sqn (SC) (V)

Issue 23 – January 2010

Oh the vicissitudes of British weather and the problems it brings with it! Hopefully the snow has gone for good now and we can look forward to the possibility of a pleasant Spring and a nice hot Summer.

Please continue to send your articles to the Editor by email: roshicks@btinternet.com or post to :Ros Hicks, 3 Ancaster Road, Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire LN12 2DH or telephone: 01507 477562.

Photos sent by post will be scanned and returned to you.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As you will see elsewhere in this issue we have fixed the 2010 AGM for 13th June at Finsbury Barracks. Those who attended two years ago will recall that the food there is very good and in considerable quantity so all should come with a good appetite. Provided people do not talk too much there will be plenty of time for reunion during the afternoon. Confirmation and details will follow.

I trust that everyone survived the snow; I was cut off for the best part of a week and kept thinking that a little global warming might be a good thing. However life was nice and peaceful!

Please accept my belated best wishes for 2010 and look forward to the reunion. **Mike Upton**

AGM 2010

The AGM will take place on **Sunday 13th June** at Finsbury Barracks (HAC), City Road, London EC1Y 2BQ at 11:30am. Lunch will consist of curry with vegetarian and non-curry options and priced at £10 per head. The bar will be open from 1230 to 1630 hrs.

The AGM notification letter and proforma will be sent out in due course.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS!

*The following memories of the late Bill Bennett were written **Brian Guinnesssey**.*

I first met Bill in 1967 when we were both telegraphists in 3 Sqn. Twelve years in RAF signals was a great asset to the operating element in the Sqn and Bill was always up for any Sqn or Regimental exercise.

On one such exercise in Denmark, sometime in the 70's, Bill had the Sqn OC, Peter Myhill in his detachment. Peter volunteered his services to carry any kit etc and was given the generator by Bill who also asked him to bring some eggs to supplement the compositions. When they eventually trekked into their location it turned out to be a chicken farm and the radio station was in a barn with mains electricity.

Sometime in the late 70's Bill decided to leave the Regiment to join some other ex 3 Sqn members at 21 SAS Regiment where he spent quite a few years before opting for service in a more conventional TA unit, 5 Queens, now the PWRR. By now I had also left the Signals Regiment, and after a few months, I decided to join Bill in the Infantry where we were offered posts as Recruiting Sergeants for 5 Queens, at Tonbridge TAC, to train and process new recruits that were arriving in substantial numbers, following an intense advertising campaign in all the Kent newspapers.

We did not however have an in depth knowledge of the recruiting process and having been left to our own devices we set up a 4 week training programme including shooting, assault course etc. culminating with various tests and a written exam. Everything went well as far as we were concerned and at the end of the first training period at a special meeting we presented the paperwork (test results etc) to the powers that be. We were then informed that a large percentage of our selected candidates had criminal records and were therefore not acceptable for military service. Bill aired his views at the meeting, as only Bill could, and the upshot was that we had to readdress our recruiting campaign but this time taking into account the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974!

WE NEED YOUR MEMORIES

I get many emails telling me how much you enjoy your newsletter, but new articles are very slow coming in. It has been said in the past that most of the news is about the 60's, but then again, we were a talkative lot and had such a lot of happy memories. I often browse through the 39th site on Facebook and everyone is reminiscing, so you must have had a good time as well. So why not put pen to paper and share them with us. Photographs would also be welcome. **Ros Hicks**

Editor's note: Following on from Peter Hovenden-Jones' Special Communications

history, we have received the following article from Geoffrey Pidgeon

THE PACKARDS OF MI6 (SECTION VIII)



One of the original 'A' detachment Packards being used as an SLU attached to Naval HQ at Alexandria.

One of the most intriguing stories from the early days of Section VIII is the use of mobile units. The very first of these coincided with the early work on Enigma. It was realized that if the SIGINT gleaned was to be immediately put to use, it had to be placed in the hands of the Army Commanders at the earliest possible moment.

The outgoing intelligence from Bletchley Park to the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry and Cabinet Office was at first sent by despatch riders and later by teleprinter on dedicated landlines. However, these dealt only with the fixed headquarters buildings in London and were not suitable for the wider distribution becoming necessary. The early breaking of some codes meant that intelligence gathered needed to be forwarded to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) over in France and the only logical way was by wireless.

The Army naturally had a wireless facility attached to its HQ. However, although the established Army wireless service was not very sophisticated it would have had the drawback of opening the new and highly secret SIGINT from Bletchley Park up to a wide 'audience' – untutored in its vital importance and attendant secrecy.

Section VIII purchased a Dodge car and this was fitted out by 'Spuggy' Newton with a complete W/T system and sent to the HQ of the BEF at Wachines in France on Tuesday 14th November 1939. A second car was made ready shortly afterwards and sent to the RAF Advanced Air Striking Force at Meaux.

The operations carried out by these cars were hugely successful. This proved the importance of taking the Signals Intelligence or SIGINT gleaned at Bletchley Park – directly to the Military Commander in the field via Whaddon Hall – thus bypassing the ‘usual channels.’

However there was first a political angle to be played out. In chapter 21 in ‘The Secret Wireless War’ – John Darwin says in his diary entry for 25th October 1939.

‘I think we must take greatest care not to antagonise the Royal Corps of Signals. So long as our station is definitely for SIS work all should be well - but DMI Field Force (McFarlane) must not communicate with us over Paddy Nesbitt’s head. Otherwise there will be hell to pay.’

Clearly, the Army’s own Director of Signals Communication would resent the presence of someone else at HQ passing information by wireless hence John Darwin’s concern. To operate properly they needed the least disruption and the best possible cooperation from the military personnel based at the BEF HQ.

The value of mobility in passing information to Commands was made abundantly clear when it was seen that the Dodge was able to handle intelligence traffic whilst moving back to Dunkirk.

It is known that Bill Sharpe, later to be Lieut. Col in charge of Section VIIIIP at Whaddon, then my boss in Calcutta and Singapore in SCU11/12, and eventually the first CO of No1 Spec Comms Regt (TA), was an operator with a mobile unit with Lord Gort’s HQ in France before Dunkirk. Whether he was with the Dodge is not recorded but Section VIII also owned an Oldsmobile, a Humber, and a Ford and one of them went to Air Advance Strike Force. The operator in this second car was ‘Spuggy’ Newton.

The skills acquired in fitting out those two cars for the British Expeditionary Force in 1939 was of great benefit to the Whaddon engineers in 1940 after the miracle of Dunkirk. With the rising threat of invasion in the summer of 1940 from the victorious German Army now right along the French coast, Gambier-Parry acquired some sixty Packard motorcars via the Ministry of Supply. These had come from Leonard Williams Limited who was Packard’s UK distributor based in Brentford, in West

London. At Whaddon they were fitted out as mobile wireless stations.

Teams of men worked on the 60 or so Packard Sedans to be used in this way. This happened over the period June - July 1940 and my father saw them arrive in batches at Whaddon Hall in bright showroom colours to be sent to Tickfords (later Aston Martin), at Newport Pagnell to be camouflaged.

The teams included Wilf Lilburn, Bob Chennells, Arthur ‘Spuggy’ Newton, Edgar Harrison, Percy Cooper, Bill Sharpe (back from the BEF), and Bob Hornby, father of Paul who served in the TA Regt and is a member. Indeed everyone else at Whaddon Hall who could use a screwdriver and soldering iron was put to work.



One of the Packards from ‘A’ detachment being used in connection with the Ascension air-to-ground agents equipment fitted to the Ventura out from Tempsford. Wilf Lilburn is in the middle.

Packards had been chosen because (a) the passenger area was large enough to provide space for wireless gear and operator and (b) the car was as powerful enough to handle the weight of the equipment. The workshop teams installed a Mark III transmitter of our own manufacture and an American HRO wireless receiver. The electric power needed could come from many sources including local mains connections, batteries (with Tiny Tim charger), or an Onan AC generator.

The Army returning to Britain from Dunkirk, had little or no command structure so to facilitate its more rapid reorganisation, use was made of the one system that had not been affected by the withdrawal - the Regional Army Commands. These were known as Southern Command in Wilton near Salisbury, Northern Command in York, Western Command in Chester, Scottish Command in Edinburgh, and Irish Command in Belfast.

Gambier-Parry sent one of these new Packard wireless units to each of these Commands – including Edgar Harrison to Chester.

However, the main reason for these mobile units spread across the country was even more vital. It must be realised, that in spite of Churchill's brave words to the public, there was great pessimism in the military High Command. We had a disorganised and partially demoralised Army, that had just returned home from Dunkirk without its major equipment, an Air Force of then unknown quality, and in spite of the overwhelming superiority of our Navy, the German's had only a short sea passage to arrive on our southern shores.

It was considered certain that the German invasion, when it came, would be across Sussex and Kent leading directly to London. It was essential that SIS communications and ULTRA traffic from Bletchley Park should be able to operate, even if the southern counties fell, leading to the occupation of London. The Packard's were positioned at those Army Commands so there was SIS/ULTRA intelligence available right the way up to Scotland.

These units became famous as part of the early mobile 'SLUs' or 'Special Liaison Units.' This name was given to them by Fred. W. Winterbotham Head of MI6 (Section IV - Air), who was later charged by Stewart Menzies ('C') Head of SIS, to ensure the security of outgoing ULTRA traffic.

Although there were no Packards based at Bletchley Park itself, there was a daily run in a Packard to and from Whaddon to the 'Park.' That was take one single passenger - Miss 'Monty' Montgomery - to Hut 10 at Bletchley Park and back. A section of this hut was entirely concerned with MI6 agents cipher work and 'Monty' was in charge of all the traffic that arose from 'our' (MI6 (Section VIII) stations such as Weald and Nash, all of which were within ten miles of Bletchley Park. So special was this lady that she was billeted in 'The Chase' in Whaddon Village, within the security zone of our unit.

Epilogue.

Packards were first sent abroad in early 1941 as 'A Detachment' to be the SLUs for the Army and Air Force Commands in the deserts of North Africa. However, they quickly proved unsuitable off-road and their equipment removed and fitted into Humber shooting

brakes and Morris Army wireless vans stripped of their standard Army gear.

Sadly, with the realisation in 1941 that there was no active role for the Packards they were mostly restored as passenger motorcars. The rear seat was fitted back and we had them on call for almost any journey. Many times my boss Dennis Smith and I have been driven onto an airfield and the sentries stood to attention and saluted – assuming that at least an Air Marshal must be in such a prestigious car.

Geoffrey Pidgeon

VISIT TO WHITECHAPEL BELL FOUNDRY

As mentioned in the last Issue the visit will take place on 18th September at 1400 hrs. Those wishing to attend should send their names and cheque for £10 per head to the Treasurer, Julian Webster at The Chase, Moat Drive, Prestwood, Great Missenden, HP16 9DB. Members' families are welcome,

The tour lasts about 1½ hours and involves walking, climbing stairs or standing throughout. Wheelchair access is only possible on the ground floor and children under 14 are not permitted.

E-CIRCULATION

Since the last Issue several members have requested e-circulation of OSCAR. Should anyone one else wish to have it sent electronically; please send an e-mail to the Membership Secretary:
jwebster@copperkins.plus.com

A 'ROS' BY ANY OTHER NAME

I mentioned at the last AGM that I was still receiving messages from former colleagues of Ros Higgs (now Barron) who thought it was me. It happened again recently when someone recalled me giving a lecture on a visit to Poland, which I have never visited. So below, to avoid any mistakes in the future:

Ros Hicks – nee (Linda) **Dunbar**. Served from 1962 until 1967 in 65th. Cpl, 5 sqn and 7 sqn (cipher)

Ros Higgs – now **Barron** Served from 1969-1986 in 39th WO2, 1 sqn, HQ sqn

So if you joined **after 1967** – it wasn't me!