

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 4-12

A Packard Special.

Monday, July 23, 2012

1. The Packard 'Treasure' laying in Bletchley Park's garage.

I have had several requests recently about the Packard Motor Car in the garage at Bletchley Park. I am happy to explain the Packard's vital role in the dark days after Dunkirk and when we were facing the likelihood of a German invasion. Most of what follows I wrote as an article for the members of the – **Packard Automobile Club of Great Britain** – attending the Packard Rally held at Bletchley Park in 2005. I started the Members leaflet by telling of Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair appointing Richard Gambier-Parry to reorganise SIS communications that were clearly not adequate for the war he was anticipating. I also explained how Hugh Sinclair then purchased Bletchley Park with his own money as a 'War Station' for SIS and GC&CS. From here on – this is largely as told to the Packard members.

The Packard Sedan in the garage of Bletchley Park – seemingly without its illustrious tale being passed on to visitors. It is one of around 60 of these superb machines – purchased for Richard Gambier-Parry's MI6 (Section VIII) – in the dark desperate days following Dunkirk. His unit converted them into Mobile wireless units or SLUs to provide SIGINT (now we classify it all as ULTRA) to Army Commands and to be a 'standby' at places such as the Admiralty, War Office, Cabinet Office, Fighter Command, in case London was overrun following an invasion.



Richard Gambier-Parry's Section VIII of MI6 was concerned with all forms of secret communication but most of it was wireless based. Inevitably, the war came along as predicted by so many. After being largely based at Bletchley Park with the rest of SIS and GC&CS, and having built its two wireless stations, the unit moved out and set up in Whaddon Hall in Whaddon. This is a old-world village, about five miles west of Bletchley Park the home of - ULTRA - Enigma - or the Code breakers - take your choice of name.

In mid-1940, the civilian Section VIII staff were all put into military uniforms so as to protect them and disguise the units secret functions, but continued to be paid from SIS funds. Ostensibly, they were in The Royal Corps of Signals and held various military ranks. This was in the days and weeks after the miracle of Dunkirk with our Army units being frantically reorganized around the existing Army Regional Command structure. These long-established commands were at Aldershot (Southern Command), Chester (Northern Command), Edinburgh (Scottish Command) and so on across the country.

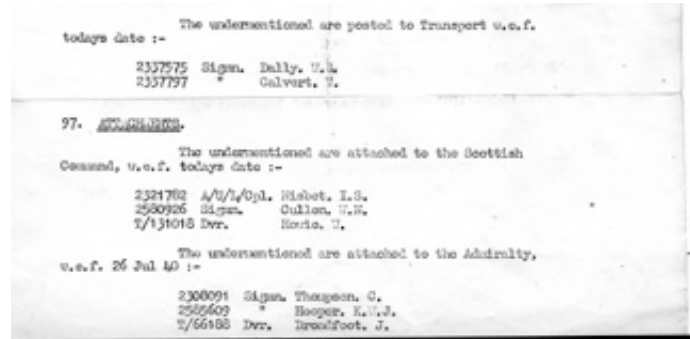
You must remember that it was seriously anticipated that the German Army would soon follow up its successes in France and the Low Countries and invade England, via the South Coast aiming directly at London. To provide a mobile wireless facility, the unit purchased the entire stock of new Packards in the UK from the UK's Packard distributor Leonard Williams Limited at Brentford. They were first sent to Tickfords Coachbuilders at Newport Pagnell (now Aston Martin), for stripping and camouflaging.

My father was at Whaddon Hall in late June 1940 and saw some of them before they went to be treated. He described them as being in a wonderful selection of colours including one or two in lemon yellow !

The initial aim of these mobile unit was to enable intelligence – *including that now beginning to emanate from Bletchley Park* – to be disseminated out to Army Commanders in those regions. At the same time, others were sent to the Admiralty, War Office, Fighter Command and other vital centres of command to provide them with a mobile wireless station in case their base had to be evacuated. Some of those, like the Admiralty were connectd to Bletchley Park by teleprinter that might be cut in the event of bombing.

On the right is the lower part of Part 1 Orders of Richard Gambier-Parry's newly militarised version of his MI6 (Section VIII), dated 25th July 1940.

The full document shows the enlistement of my father into the Royal Corps of Signals along with those who played their part in the success of the ULTRA operation.



The print is small here but the bottom section says ‘**The undermentioned are attached to the Admiralty w.e.f. 26 Jul 1940**’ Look carefully at their Army numbers; the first begins 2321.. but the second begins 2585... and shows that he – Sign. Hooper K.W. J. – is a member of MI6 since all numbers for ‘Special Enlistments’ began with a recognisable group of four digits. Below Hooper is a ‘Driver Broadfoot’ so we can see this was a complete ‘SLU’ in a Packard – heading for the Admiralty just as I described. A driver, MI6 wireless operator and an Army wireless operator/general duties man. The Packard in the section above it is heading for ‘..Scottish Command’ ! All this is from Chapter 9 ‘Special Communication Units’ in ‘The Secret Wireless War.’

As the Packards returned from Newport Pagnell, the Section VIII workshops at Whaddon rapidly installed a wireless transmitter (of our own manufacture) in the Sedans, with an American National HRO wireless receiver. Power could come from many sources, including localised mains supply, batteries with a ‘Tiny Tim’ charger, and an Onan AC generator.

These units later became famous as mobile ‘SLUs’ or ‘Special Liaison Units.’ This name was given to them by F. W. Winterbotham Head of MI6 (Section IV - Air), who had been charged by Stewart Menzies – by then ‘C’ after the sudden death of Hugh Sinclair in November 1939 – to ensure the security of outgoing Ultra traffic.

In early 1941 it was decided to send mobile ‘SLUs’ to North Africa provide ULTRA right into the Army and RAF Headquarters in the field – right inside the Commanders enclave. Packards were chosen for the task and the unit was designated ‘A detachment’. Here is one of the Packards seen in Alexandria – complete with aerial poles on the roof. Compare its drab camouflaged finish with the model in the Bletchley Park garage shown on page 1.



I joined Section VIII at Whaddon in late 1942. I continued to work there in the workshops, helping to make agents sets, and later fitting out SLUs. I went to other places fitting our gear into aircraft, MTBs, (Motor torpedo boats) etc. After VE Day in 1945, I was sent to SCU11/12 in Calcutta.

During my time at Whaddon, there would always be Packards going into and out of Whaddon Hall grounds. It must be remembered we had about 70 cars of the 1939/40 ranges, all under Major Freddie Pettifer’s care. Immediately after the war, the largest stock of Packard spare parts were to be found at ‘The Pettifer Engineering Company’ in Paxton Place, Gypsy Hill, London !

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 BP and back. This hut was mainly concerned with MI6 agents work and 'Monty' was in charge of all the wireless traffic that arose from Section VIII's stations such as Weald and Nash, all of which are within ten miles of Bletchley Park. So special was this lady that she had to live in 'The Chase' in Whaddon Village, within the security zone of our unit.

Amongst our different models of Packard, we had three limousines that were used by our 'boss' Brigadier Richard Gambier-Parry, by his deputy Lt. Col. Ted Maltby (Head of SCU3 & RSS at nearby Hanslope), and Lord Sandhurst. He had earlier been Head of Radio Security Service (RSS) who intercepted the Abwehr and Gestapo - a task carried out by SCU3/RSS from August 1941.

The Packard 'Sedans' were perfect for their chosen task of providing mobile wireless communication for MI6 in the UK. They were powerful, had a spacious interior and a large boot. However, those sent out to North Africa with the 'A detachment' in early 1941 to handle Ultra military, and Main Line traffic, sadly were found to be unsuitable. Once they came off road, and had to deal with sand, they were in trouble. The Whaddon wireless gear was stripped out of the Packards and fitted into Humber shooting brakes and Morris Army vans instead. They worked satisfactorily throughout the North African campaign until they joined up with the Allied armies following the Operation Torch.

A picture taken near 8th Army HQ in the North African desert. It shows a Lockheed Hudson aircraft fitted with our 'Ascension' air-to-ground wireless gear to make direct contact with agents on the ground. It had flown out from its base at Tempsford.

One of Ascension's designers' Wilf Lilburn of Section VIII is centre in the picture. In front is a Packard Sedan SLU of our 'A detachment' here - carrying out tests in conjunction with the aircraft.



With the experience of the Packards in North Africa it was decided, for the re-entry into Europe, to build the SLUs into Guy 15 cwt stripped-out army wireless vans for the British and Canadian commanders like Montgomery, Dempsey and Crerar. We used stripped-out Dodge ambulances for the US Army and Air Corps commanders. like Patton, Bradley, Spaatz, (etc). I helped fit out these SLU units used by SCU8 for 'D Day' (+) as a member of the seven man team called 'Mobile Construction' in the grounds at Whaddon Hall, under our boss Dennis Smith.

Sadly by this time the Packard glory days were over as mobile SLUs. The wireless gear was stripped out and they were used – almost as taxis since one could call one up for our journeys. Whenever I travelled with my boss Dennis Smith to an airfield, like Tempsford mentioned above, or to a port on the South coast, he usually called for a Packard. On long journeys – with the driver's permission – I was sometimes allowed to drive these superb machines. At least these drives were sanctioned as opposed to my driving a Packard coupé along an RAF airfield runway – it still makes me shudder !

I hope you have enjoyed this brief summary of the use of Packards by MI6 (Section) VIII under its militarised name of 'Special Communication Units' - probably the most secret military unit of the war. If you would like to see the Packard 'on the move' in and around Whaddon Hall, then perhaps you might invest in the DVD 'The Secret Wireless War' – by Grindelwald Productions ?

This is effectively in two parts: firstly about Whaddon and the Voluntary interceptors of RSS where veteran **Bob King** talks about the 'Y' Service to Barbara Rixon in his wireless shack; the late **Maurice Richardson** about being on duty at the Windy Ridge transmission station in Whaddon Village sending out ULTRA received by teleprinter from nearby Bletchley Park. **Wilf Neal** talks about his life as one of the SLU wireless operator in the **Dodge attached to General Patton's 3rd US Army**, and Jane and I talk about my days working at Whaddon Hall. The film includes shots of Whaddon Hall and its grounds, Windy Ridge in Whaddon Village and of Bletchley Park.

The second half is devoted to the fascinating story of **Black Propaganda** told by the late **Phil Luck** of Section VIII who worked as an engineer at the broadcasting stations sending out this material to the German people and forces. All its wireless stations were built and manned by Richard Gambier-Parry's teams – just another angle to this remarkable man's wartime activities. It will especially appeal to wireless enthusiasts as well as historians.

I must add that I have absolutely no financial connection with the 'The Secret Wireless War' DVD. However, I thoroughly recommend it to those keen to learn more about the various strands that go to make up the story now to be told at the Bletchley Park Museum. The DVD is available from Amazon UK.

I admit liking one of the seven *five star* reviews about the DVD *"...Bletchley Park has all the acclaim, but in fact it was only one part of a much bigger campaign called ULTRA headed by Winston Churchill described in more detail in this film. Highly recommended."*

I could not have put it better myself !

2. Book Prices.

I have recently reviewed the prices of 'The Secret Wireless War' and 'Edgar Harrison – Soldier – Patriot and Ultra Wireless Operator to Winston Churchill.' From the end of August – at Book distributors like Amazon – the prices should be as follows. In both cases these are lower than before but for the soft cover versions only.

'The Secret Wireless War' UK £14.99 Europe €17.99 USA \$23.99.

Edgar's book – UK £11.99 Europe €14.99 USA \$17.99.

3. A replica of General Patton's 3rd US Army SLU built into a Dodge 'Ambulance' for Bletchley Park ?

I hope that we shall later be able to purchase a Dodge Ambulance and replicate the Dodge SLU used by our wireless teams in France. There they were parked in the very nerve centre of an Army Commander's HQ. We shall make ours to represent that used by General George Patton's 3rd US Army in its fight from Normandy to Germany 1944 – 1945.

I naturally know the layout but that will be checked by Wilf Neal of SCU8, who was one of our four wireless operators assigned to General Patton. David White has promised me a National HRO receiver and we shall be looking for the hardest part – a MkIII transmitter. Perhaps that could be a body only since nobody will be allowed into the body of the wireless van to examine the display. More details later.

Of course, raising the cash required will also be difficult but the Trust Executive have already promised support for this important venture. The biggest problem is where to house the completed wireless van as it is quite large. However, if we succeed in completing the project this would be a major attraction at Bletchley Park and a true connection to **ULTRA from BP to General Patton** – with no myths attached !

With best wishes from Jane and from me.

Geoffrey