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The Warsaw uprising in August 1944. My eldest son Laurence recently reminded me that I had not written of my father's very small part in this largely overlooked story of Polish heroism and sacrifice. I do so now - mindful of history's failure to report the Warsaw tragedy sufficiently.

1. My father delivered wireless crystals from his MI6 (Section VIII) wireless stores at Whaddon Hall - to Northolt airfield - to be flown to the Polish fighters. His day started with a call to go immediately to see Richard Gambier-Parry (Controller of SIS Communications) in his office in the Hall. He was told that a supply of crystals of known frequencies, was to be delivered urgently to the RAF Northolt airfield to the west of London. Gambier-Parry added that the order to implement the instruction at once - *'came from the top'* and although he knew whom from - he did not tell father at the time.

We know now that Winston Churchill was very closely watching the outcome of the uprising and he ensured that we parachuted in arms and ammunition to help the fighters. Indeed, he personally pleaded with Stalin and Roosevelt to give assistance of the beleaguered partisans.

There were a number of Polish secret agents spread throughout Nazi-occupied Poland - some were SOE (Special Operations Executive) and others SIS (MI6). But, shortly after the 1944 Uprising began - a number of them lost direct contact with London. Hence, the urgent call for fresh crystals to be supplied.

Clearly, the whole operation had already been put in motion. As soon as father was ready with his case of crystals, one of our Packards appeared in the stable yard outside his office. Astonishingly, only few minutes later - a number of army Military Police motorcyclists drew up in the road outside - to act as outriders!



To the left is a Packard in showroom splendour - similar to the 60 delivered to Whaddon Hall in 1940. Ours were all later camouflaged like that on the right. This one was part of the six Packards of 'A Detachment' sent to North Africa to convey ULTRA - from the MI6 (Section VIII) wireless station in Whaddon Village - to our station in Cairo - then out to Commanders in the Field. These super motorcars were soon found to be useless off-road and replaced by Humber Super Snipe Estate cars and Morris vans.



This is a Military Police motorcyclist - one of number used on as outriders to father's Packard.

But why was a Military Police escort needed?

Firstly, that the order '*at once*' had come from the top - and speed was of the essence but secondly that this was to be a journey down the busy A5 following the ancient Roman road from London to the northwest - the Watling Street. In days before the motorways - it passed through narrow villages, such as Stony Stratford north of Bletchley, and Markyate to the south of it.

The Military Police outriders pulled others to one side to allow free passage of the Packard - but coming towards Markyate - they encountered the rear end of a *full* army division moving south. It would be impossible for the car to pass the scores of vehicles but father was soon aware that its lorries were slowing down.



It is a fact, that the entire division was pulled over by the Military Police to allow his Packard to pass through Markyate without delay.

Arriving at Northolt, the Packard was waved through at the gates, and then drew up alongside an aircraft where several men were waiting. Father handed over the case, returned to his car and was driven back to Whaddon Hall but now - *without the benefit of a Military Police escort!*

Remember, this time seventy-two years ago; thousands were dying due to one of the most treacherous acts ever perpetrated in war. The Russian army was sitting on the east bank of the Vistula watching the slaughter unfold only a few miles away in Warsaw. The author and journalist Arthur Koestler - called the Soviet attitude '*One of the major infamies of this war which will rank for the future historian on the same ethical level with Lidice.*'

These brave men and women were short of food and water. They were poorly armed, short of weapons and ammunition - bombed and shelled - yet they fought on against tanks and flame throwers for over sixty days. Although the exact number of casualties remains unknown, it is estimated that about 16,000 members of the Polish resistance were killed and about 6,000 badly wounded.



In addition, between 150,000 and 200,000 Polish civilians died, mostly from mass executions. These figures come from Wikipedia and I do urge you to read that - or one of the many other accounts - of this sadly overlooked story of World War II. Thousands ended up in concentration camps and the gas chambers! My selection of photos avoids the many - more gruesome scenes recorded.



Of course, during World War II there were many other treacherous acts. Of course, Pearl Harbour stands out amongst them but Warsaw remains one of such malevolence - that reading about it even now - is stomach turning to me.

It seems I have taken to offering 'advice' on books to read. I found an highly rated account on the uprising by the famous Polish poet Miron Bialoszewski - 'A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising.' However, I found its narrative so graphic and depressing that I believe the Wikipedia article paints a sufficiently accurate picture of this awful event - which we know was a low level marker - in the annals of warfare in World War II!

2. The Long Range Desert Group, SAS and Edgar Harrison of MI6 (Section VIII)!

The Long-Range Desert Group (LRDG) played a fascinating role in desert operations during World War Two, but unlike the Special Air Service (SAS), it is largely unknown. A new book on SAS by Ben Macintyre reminds me of Edgar Harrison's part in saving the remains of an SAS attack party!

Colonel David Stirling of the Scots Guards and No. 8 Commando, founded the SAS in the Western Desert in 1941. He is shown here alongside a typical SAS raiding party. **Field Marshal Montgomery** described Stirling as '*mad, quite mad*' but believed that men like Stirling were needed in time of war.



Now enter Edgar Harrison of MI6 (Section VIII). He had just had a spell in Russia; officially advising Russians on installing wireless sets in the British tanks, being supplied to the Russian Army. However, he was actually gaining intelligence, as part of Colonel Way's Mission.

Now back in Cairo, he was given the task of training agents to use Morse - intending them to be based in southern Europe. He had a mixed bag including Greeks, Romanians, Italian, Yugoslavian, Arab and Bulgarians. His base was to be the Kufra Oasis way down in the western desert - that had been captured from the Italians. Kufra was by that time, also the base for the Long Range Desert Group and the SAS.

Later, Edgar had to lead a search party from base - with LRDG support - to find an Arab agent who had been behind German lines near Tripoli. They knew the Germans had moved on and were aware of the hamlet from where he had been transmitting. He was eventually found - to his huge relief. They now set out on the long journey back to Kufra. Whilst travelling, Edgar received a message telling them to do everything possible to pick up members of David Stirling's SAS (Special Air Service) and their escorting LRDG patrol. It had apparently run into heavy opposition.

The SAS had made what was hailed as a successful raid on a principal airfield. They destroyed many planes on the ground but raised a veritable hornets nest! The Germans and Italians were very angry indeed and the group was subjected to almost continuous air attacks. Part of the Edgar's party went on to Kufra whilst the remainder, including Edgar, went on to find the survivors of David Stirling's party of SAS and its accompanying LRDG group.



The two groups finally met but due to the obvious urgency - instead of the normal travel at night - they also had to travel by day. Thus, due to German strafing and bombing attacks they were losing more men and equipment. The newly formed group was now badly shot up, they sustained more casualties and Edgar's main communication equipment was lost. All he had left was a transmitter but no receiver. They did not know how far they were away from Kufra, possibly as much as 200 miles, when they arrived at what was an improvised airstrip.

This was one of the satellite strips that a Lieutenant Arnold had made during his time at Kufra. He was a magnificent man of Anglo-French extraction. He had gone out from Kufra making secret store depots and constructing satellite landing strips all over the area. Arnold eventually received the MC for guiding Allied troops through the Mareth line.

Edgar's friend in Cairo was Roy Peacock had also worked with agents and the LRDG. Roy like Edgar - was in the Royal Signals but presently based at the ISLD station in Cairo. However, during their time together, if one was known to be out in the desert from Kufra, they had made a habit, to call the other on the hour or half hour. That was just in case there was any kind of SOS or urgent call. So Edgar opened up on his frequency and kept on sending their position, telling of their desperate situation and their exact location.



Edgar Harrison - pictured here - was seemingly an officer in the Royal Corps of Signals but actually an important member of MI6 (Section VIII) with its HQ based at Whaddon Hall five miles west of Bletchley Park.

The night wore on whilst they waited and waited but remember - that Edgar was sending in Morse, with no idea if his transmission was being received! Then - *and he always felt deeply touched about the following event* - they heard the noise of an aircraft. It seemed hardly believable but yes, Roy Peacock had received his repeated messages and arranged for a rescue plane.



They put on all the lights they could on the trucks and Jeeps to help its landing on this lonely desert airstrip. The plane - an RAF Lockheed Hudson - landed safely, then took off again with all the wounded.

They had also packed on board all the others of their party they could spare and the plane returned safely. Edgar and the remainder of the SAS and LRDG party, after more strafing from the air finally returned to Kufra with no further loss.

The LRDG received the highest of compliments from the unlikeliest of people. That unlikely person was **Field Marshal Erwin Rommel**, the legendary 'Desert Fox' and Commander of the Afrika Korps.



His compliment to the LRDG was: '*The Long-Range Desert Group caused us more damage than any other British unit of equal strength.*'

Although referred to in an earlier book - I shall be writing more on Edgar Harrison's desert adventures with the Long Range Desert Group in a rewritten book - about his work as Winston Churchill's ULTRA wireless operator. He was a (*very*) senior colleague in MI6 (Section VIII) and a good friend after the war.

Note: During World War II - the acronyms **SIS** and **MI6** were never used when referring to their work abroad. Instead, their place was taken by the using the letters **ISLD** - the 'Inter-Services Liaison Department.'

With my warm regards and best wishes,
Geoffrey
Richmond - October 2016