

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-18
Thursday, January 25, 2018

1. Winston Churchill and Richard Gambier-Parry's MI6 (Section VIII).

When he was abroad, Churchill's ULTRA messages were handled by MI6 (Section VIII) and relayed to him via our 'Mainline' wireless station in the field in front of Whaddon Hall. The exception was when he was travelling in Royal Navy ships - for instance to meet the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Admiralty jealously guarded their right to handle ULTRA messages arising at Bletchley Park directly - albeit *badly* handled at times. See item 2 below.

His most frequent trips during the height of the war were in the Middle East where the traffic was relayed to him via our wireless station at Abbassia outside Cairo. When he was 'In the Field' or at Summit meetings and away from Cairo, the man responsible for handling his ULTRA traffic - and for Churchill's traffic intended for London - was a senior colleague in MI6 (Section VIII) and later my friend - Edgar Harrison. This he did using an MI6 (Section VIII) transceiver connection to Abbassia - who then handled the traffic to and fro to London.



Winston S. Churchill



Edgar Harrison of
(MI6 (Section VIII))



Edgar addressing the
Veterans of the 1941 evacuation
from Kalamata in Greece.

Edgar had joined the Royal Corps of Signals as a boy soldier in 1928 only 14 years old. He left home in South Wales to go to Catterick Army Barracks in North Yorkshire in his school short trousers and boots with only five shillings (£0.25 today) in his pocket. I told Edgar's remarkable story in an earlier book based on his notes and recorded conversations with him. I am now rewriting the book - using more material about Winston Churchill.

2. The Admiralty, ULTRA and the Duke of Edinburgh.

There can be no question about the *vital* importance of ULTRA to the Royal Navy in - for example - the Battle of the Atlantic. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound was First Lord of the Admiralty from 1939 to 1943. Sadly his period of command was also punctuated by mistakes and also several misuses of ULTRA signals. However, one must accept he was increasingly unwell. He suffered from severe arthritis making sleep difficult - he later had a brain tumour but after two strokes - he finally resigned in September 1943 but sadly died of the brain tumour just one month later.



For instance, on learning from Bletchley Park that the Germans were about to launch an attack on Crete - he warned Admiral Cunningham commanding the Mediterranean Fleet at Alexandria - that the Germans were about to attack '*an island in the Mediterranean.*' That could have meant Malta, Crete or Cyprus - up to a thousand miles apart. What was Cunningham to make of such misinformation?

Perhaps Dudley Pound's most serious mistake was to order the great Russia bound convoy PQ17 to scatter in July 1942. This was in spite of ULTRA signals that showed the Tirpitz was still in Altenfiord Norway and the Hipper behind it. Admiral Pound refused to believe the accuracy of this information and made up his mind that these great warships were at sea. Nor would he listen to the up-to-date ULTRA reports from Lieutenant Commander Norman Denning in the Naval Operational Intelligence Centre (OIC) based at the Admiralty Citadel in London. Nor would he listen to warnings about the dangers of scattering the convoy from Admiral John Tovey - Commander in Chief - Home Fleet. After conferring with colleagues Dudley Pound made the final decision to scatter - but what an added stress for a man already ill!

So, with Dudley Pound's order prevailing, the convoy scattered with disastrous results. Many ships were lost to bombers of the Luftwaffe and U Boats. Twenty-two merchant ships were sunk with a total of 142,518 tons of shipping and with them 3,350 motor vehicles, 430 tanks, 210 bombers and 99,316 tons of general cargo including radar. Plus of course many seamen, lost in appalling conditions.

In 2011 - Her Majesty The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Bletchley Park and I was asked to explain to the Royal Party how Bletchley Park broadly operated. I said that whilst everyone talked about the Bletchley Park's code breakers, it was actually a Triumvirate. Firstly with the 'Y Service' collecting the German Enigma, secondly the code breakers brilliant work at Bletchley Park and finally MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon - who disseminated it to Allied Commanders in the Field where it could be put to use.



Left to right: Me, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Her Majesty, Sir Francis Richards Chairman of Bletchley Park Trust and Simon Greenish CEO of Bletchley Park. I was told afterwards that we had exceeded our allotted time - but the Royal Party seemed very interested - perhaps due to the ULTRA-Matapan connection with HRH?

I said Mavis Batey could not be present as intended due to ill health but had been in the Bletchley Park team that discovered the Italian Fleet was putting to sea. Alastair Denniston (Operational Director of GC&CS) realised the urgency required with this information and conscious of the Admiralty's use of ULTRA - decided to break from standard protocol. That protocol required all Naval ULTRA intelligence to go out via the Admiralty. Instead, he asked Richard Gambier-Parry to send *this* ULTRA message about Matapan from his MI6 (Section VIII) Windy Ridge wireless station in Whaddon Village, directly to Admiral Cunningham at Mediterranean Fleet HQ. Thus bypassing the Admiralty!

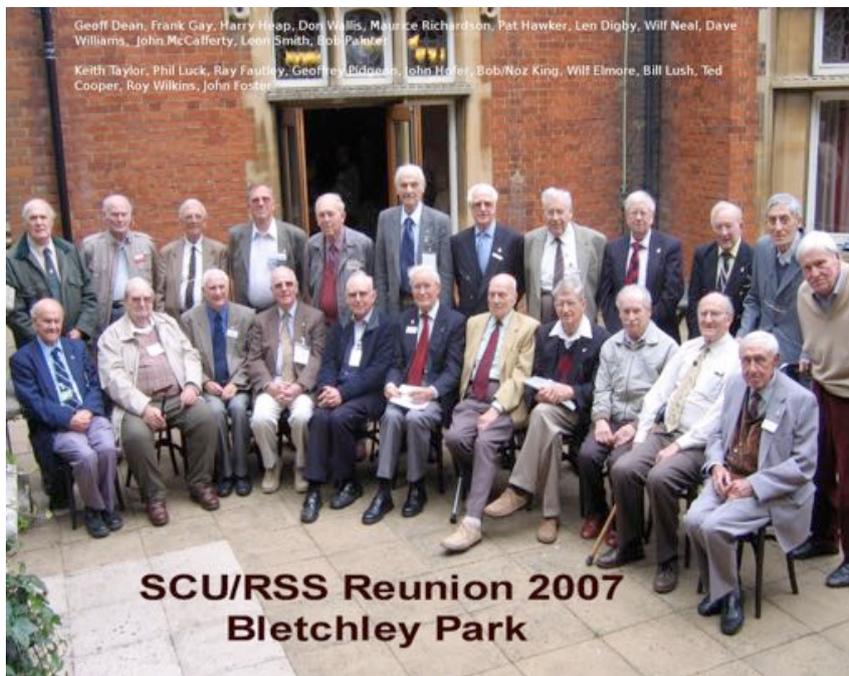
It would have gone to Abbassia and then out to one of the few remaining Packard SLUs (Signals Liaison Units) of 'A Detachment' based at Alexandria. Whilst found to be useless in the desert, Packards were still in use in urban areas - hence this one in Alexandria. Humber estate cars or standard Army Morris wireless vans more suitable for desert conditions had replaced them at military commanders HQs in the desert - all now fitted with our own wireless gear taken from the Packards.



That ULTRA message led to our naval victory known as the '**Battle of Cape Matapan.**' The Italian fleet never again put to sea. His Royal Highness told us he was at Matapan - '*...but I was only a Midshipman then!*' In fact, the Duke of Edinburgh served on the Battleship HMS Valiant during the action. Later Winston Churchill described it as the greatest Royal Navy victory since the Battle of Trafalgar. It should be added that Denniston was very heavily criticised by the Admiralty for ignoring the strict protocol.

3. RSS and SCU members Annual Meetings.

This picture is of the 2007 annual meeting of **RSS** (Radio Security Service) and members of the **SCU** (Special Communications Units) - both parts of Richard Gambier-Parry's empire! We were allowed to use the Bletchley Park ballroom in those days and this was taken just outside. There are 23 of us present in **2007** but fast-forward to **2017** and sadly *only 4* of that 23 were in attendance.



Many had passed away and others found travelling too difficult. Remember, I was most likely the youngest 'on parade' in 2007 and will be 92 in May - DV. (Seated fourth from left).

After a gradually diminishing welcome from Bletchley Park we now meet at the nearby TNMOC (The National Museum of Computing) in 'Block H' - the home of Colossus - where we have been made most welcome.

Why should all this matter to The Bletchley Park Trust?

These men are the chaps who supplied the difficult-to-read Abwehr Enigma traffic to Bletchley Park, who handled ULTRA out to Allied Commanders in the Field from Windy Ridge, or were in our SLUs (Signals Liaison Units) wireless vans - right at the sharp end - of the whole Bletchley Park organisation and much more besides. The three page Eulogy to Richard Gambier-Parry that hung in the Hall of the Mansion suddenly disappeared along with his portrait. **It detailed just part of the great range of his unit MI6 (Section VIII) activities - so absolutely essential to the success of Bletchley Park!**

A reminder to historians that Richard Gambier-Parry was recruited by 'C' - Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair - as 'Controller of SIS Communications' in early 1938 months before 'C' went on to purchase Bletchley Park. When a few GC&CS ('code breakers') first paid a visit to Bletchley Park - Gambier-Parry's men had already started work on building the two wireless stations. These were to be the 'War Station' (or Bolt Hole?) replacements for the long established SIS station at Barnes alongside the Thames and the newly created transmitter at Woldingham in Surrey. They were fully operational in good time before the outbreak of war in September 1939.

As Mavis Batey reported, SIS occupied the upper floors and she told me it was considered a 'no-go-area for GC&CS personnel!' At the very top of the house Gambier-Parry's men built a wireless station the so-called - 'Station X.' However the bulk of wireless traffic was handled in the station built in Hut 1 - just across the lawn from the Mansion. Apparently it was named Hut 1 simply because it was the first! It was officially known as 'Main Line' and designed to handle top-level diplomatic and covert traffic.

Because of the sheer volume of traffic it was decided that larger wireless stations with more extensive aerial farms were needed so Richard Gambier-Parry's base moved out to Whaddon Hall in Whaddon Village - some five miles west of Bletchley Park. The transfer was completed in March 1940.

This is the now larger 'Main Line' wireless station in the field directly in front of Whaddon Hall. Amongst other traffic it handled was Winston Churchill's when he was in the Middle East. Often this was 'In the Field' and according to Edgar Harrison, the messages to Whaddon Hall were prefixed 'XW' being X its long established call sign from way back at Barnes and W for Whaddon.



Even so, one small but important SIS section remained in the Mansion at Bletchley Park - totally independent of both Denniston and Travis. As I reported on page 48 in 'The Secret Wireless War' - it was the SIS cyphering and decyphering unit for its own traffic under its supervisor - Miss 'Monty' Montgomery. The team was later transferred to part of Hut 10 where they continued as an autonomous unit. When arriving for work at the Mobile Construction Hut near the exit gate, I often saw 'Monty' being picked up in the mornings from 'The Chase' in Whaddon High Street - next to Whaddon Hall. She had an MI6 (Section VIII) Packard - to and from Bletchley Park daily.

The latest news is that the next exhibition area to be built at Bletchley Park is to tell the long-overdue story of the use and dissemination of ULTRA. MI6 (Section VIII) was not only an important part of the *input* to Bletchley Park but played a huge part in ULTRA's *dissemination*.

I only wish that more of my colleagues could have known this belated but splendid news. However, I do hope that the Bletchley Park Trust takes this opportunity to truly acknowledge the great part they played in Bletchley Park's vaunted success and feature our work at last!

The more you read about Bletchley Park and 'Code breaking' - the more you come to realise how much of its success actually depended upon Wireless.

Whilst not overlooking the part played by the Allied and Russian armed forces - *and* with my apologies to the **Sun Newspaper** -

'**Code breakers**' - the constant theme of the Bletchley Park Museum - did not win the war on its own. **It was 'Code breaking with Wireless' - wot won it!**

With my warm regards and best wishes,

Geoffrey

Richmond - Thursday, January 25, 2018