

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-19  
Friday, February 8, 2019

**1. General Patton crosses the Rhine - very closely followed by my friend Wilf Neal!**

There has been a recent showing of the film 'The Bridge at Remagen' and documentaries about 'From the Rhine to the Elbe' but how *did* the Allied armies cross the great obstacle of the river Rhine - and importantly to me - how was Brigadier Richard Gambier-Parry's MI6 (Section VIII) involved?

Field Marshall Montgomery commanded the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group that by early 1945 comprised General Simpson's 9<sup>th</sup> US Army and General Miles Dempsey's British 2nd Army. Typically Montgomery's preparations were thorough and massive. To cross the river (there it was 400 yards wide) and to eliminate the German fortifications, the 2nd Army alone collected 60,000 tons of ammunition, 30,000 tons of engineer stores, and 28,000 tons of above normal daily requirements. The 9th Army stockpiled 138,000 tons for the crossings. More than 37,000 British and 22,000 American engineers would participate in the assault, along with 5,500 artillery pieces, antitank and antiaircraft guns, and rocket projectors.

All was set for this huge operation to cross the Rhine to commence on the night of **23<sup>rd</sup> March** 1945 and the First Allied Airborne Army carried out Operation Varsity - at 10 am on the 24<sup>th</sup> with an airborne attack over the Rhine.

Meanwhile, General Patton received permission from General Bradley (Commanding 12th Army Group) to allow his 3<sup>rd</sup> US Army to cross the Rhine and sweep on into Germany. He set in motion assaults at several places the first being Oppenheim on **March 22<sup>nd</sup>**. The first bridge in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army sector was at Oppenheim. Men of the 150<sup>th</sup> Engineers began the work on the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> March and by 27<sup>th</sup> March five divisions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> US Army had crossed over the pontoon bridges - the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in less than 17 hours. During the period 24<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March thousands of vehicles of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had crossed the Rhine.

When General Patton crossed the pontoon bridge he stopped in the middle and with his staff, the press corps and photographers around him - he had a pee into the Rhine. What follows are his own words!

***"I drove to the Rhine River and went across on the pontoon bridge. I stopped in the middle to take a piss and then picked up some dirt on the far side in emulation of William the Conqueror."* - General George S. Patton, March 1945**

When Patton was with his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ - Brig. General Oscar Koch his G2 (Intelligence Officer) was always in the immediate vicinity. The Signals Liaison Unit (SLU) to receive their vital ULTRA from Bletchley Park - via Windy Ridge in Whaddon Village was invariably parked in close proximity.



This SLU was in a US Army Dodge ambulance fitted out at Whaddon Hall by the MI6 (Section VIII) Mobile Construction team of seven (counting me) with our wireless gear. There were four wireless operators from our SCU 8 at Little Horwood (near Whaddon Village) including Wilf Neal.

Here we now have the high point in the fierce competition between these two brilliant but frankly egotistical Generals - that had erupted earlier during Operation Husky in Sicily. Patton knew that Montgomery's crossing of the Rhine was to be on the **23<sup>rd</sup> March** so deliberately launched his crossing on the **22<sup>nd</sup> March** - a day earlier!

Oh! and by the way, the Signals Liaison Unit (SLU) wireless van handling Bletchley Park's ULTRA to General Simpson's 9<sup>th</sup> US Army (part of Montgomery's 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group) was in another of our Dodge Ambulances and the operator was Len Digby. Both Len and Wilf (with General Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> US Army) later received from France the - **Chevalier in the Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur.**

Here they are at Bletchley Park a few years ago. I am standing between Len on the left and Wilf. We are behind the famous Mavis Batey who had given a talk including the importance of the Signals Liaison Units (SLUs). I am proud to say Mavis and I became friends and she was one of the real Cryptographers at Bletchley Park - having broken important codes. Sadly, we have since lost both Len and Mavis.



## 2. OSS Station Victor and SIS.

One of the untold stories of World War II has been the OSS secret wireless station 'Victor' in the ancient Berkshire village of Hurley. Fortunately, the story has now at last been told by Philip Williams in his fascinating book '**OSS Station Victor - Hurley's Secret War.**'

**OSS** - the Office of Strategic Services - was a wartime intelligence agency of the United States during World War II, and a predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency - the CIA.

July 11, 1941, President Roosevelt established the Office of the Coordination of Information (COI) and named Donovan as its director. From this moment forward, Donovan became known as the 'Father of American Intelligence.' After the United States became involved in World War II, the COI became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in June 1942, with Donovan still in charge.



As the Head of OSS - Maj. General William 'Wild Bill' Donovan once defined the ideal OSS candidate as '*A Harvard Ph.D. who can handle himself in a bar fight!*'

The OSS consisted of men and women from many areas and backgrounds - lawyers, historians, bankers, baseball players, actors, and businessmen. Their assignment was to conduct espionage, sabotage, and morale operations against the Axis powers, and conduct in-depth research and analysis on the nation's enemies and their capabilities

One of two wireless stations constructed by the OSS in the UK, Station Victor dealt with all Secret Intelligence (SI) communications, the largest being the Sussex Plan and Operation Proust. It's bigger sister Station Charles (STS53c at Poundon) dealt with Special Operations (SO) such as the extremely successful Operation Jedburgh.

But Victor had a larger remit. It was also the base station for X-2 counter intelligence and for the Special Signal Detachments (SSD's) attached to the various US Army groups that dealt with SI & X-2 communications. These were similar in many ways to the MI6 (Section VIII) SLUs in Dodge vans provided by MI6 (Section VIII) to the US Army commanders - like Patton, Simpson, Bradley, Quesada, Bradley and Hodges.

X-2 was created due to the British SIS insistence that the OSS set up a separate branch for it to receive information from the Ultra intercepts and was sometimes referred to as V-48 after the (then) forty-eight States in the US.

At each US Army Headquarters the Special Signal Detachments were equipped with **SCR-399 wireless sets mounted in 2 ½ ton 6x6 trucks as shown** and SCR-193 wireless fitted jeeps where they would work SI and X-2 traffic - to and from Station Victor.



We had one of these at Calcutta in 1945 and another down in Singapore when I went there in mid-1946. These excellent wireless units when taken off the truck were our stand-by as an emergency station. Ours were mounted on Studebaker trucks.

With its privileged access to Ultra counter intelligence, X-2 traffic had to be coded/encoded at the counter intelligence (Section V) headquarters at 14, Ryder St where X-2 shared offices. These messages would be sent via teleprinter to Station Victor, who would handle the code groups over the air to the relevant SSD for decryption by an X-2 officer. Within X-2 were Special Counter Intelligence Units (SCI) that were attached to the G-2 (Intelligence Officer) of each US Army and Army Group who would then action this information.

**Victor's receiving site station** on top of the hill off Honey Lane, Hurley. It was the main operational building of the station and contained all the teleprinters connecting Grosvenor Street and Ryder Street. Underground cables ran to the transmitters two miles away on the same ridgeline overlooking Bisham.



Special Intelligence traffic was kept separate from X-2 and was handled by the message centre at OSS headquarters at 70-72 Grosvenor Street in Mayfair. They left Victor to code/decode their messages which came from the field agents operating throughout occupied Europe.

Once France had been liberated, during October 1944 Station Charles was closed down leaving Victor as the only OSS communication station operating from the UK mainland. X-2 traffic was routed from London to a communication station in Cherbourg known as 'Sunshine' whilst Victor started to handle the traffic from agents operating within the German Reich itself.

The OSS Communications Branch in the ETOUSA (European Theatre of Operations USA) wouldn't have been able to operate without the support and planning by our own Brigadier Gambier-Parry's (MI6 Section VIII). In 1943 he had the near impossible problem of allocating the very few frequencies left for use by the agents and wireless operators working with the OSS.

A British 'Liaison officer' - Captain Albert (Bert) Gillies one of our 3 or 4 instructors at Section VIII's agent training school at 23 Hans Place - just behind Harrods in Knightsbridge. Here SIS agents were taught basic Morse and the use and maintenance of our transceiver wireless sets - latterly the MkVII - before being sent into occupied Europe. Like all of us in MI6 (Section VIII) whatever your nominal rank in the Royal Corps of Signals - Gillies was not paid by the army but by MI6.

Captain Albert Gillies task at Station Victor was to ensure compliance with protocol covering a number of aspects. Before deployment, a signal plan would be received by the control or planning department at Victor which told both base station and agent when to send or receive a signal and on what frequency.

The American wireless operators at Victor were chosen from the US Army, Navy and Army Air Corps because of their very high standard of Morse. But however skilled - **and they were the very best** - they would not have been used to the strict disciplines of secret agent Signal Plans. Failure to comply could at worst - mean torture by the Gestapo followed by death to an agent.

The picture is of **Cpl. Curtis Sturgeon of the US Army Air Corps** one of the 'chosen few' at Victor working on his Hallicrafters SX-28 receiver. His right hand is on his Morse key.



I should add that the signal plan also gave the agent his or her call sign that could change daily in order to confuse the enemy as the Abwehr and Gestapo were constantly using wireless direction finding equipment to track them down. **One such vehicle is shown here with its tracking aerial attached to the rear.**



### 3. Oxford's Bodleian Library and 'The Secret Wireless War.'

In SCU-Newsletter 3-18 I told you of my pleasure that this book was now in the **Library of Congress in Washington** but since last summer it is also in the **Bodleian Library at Oxford**. The Library was founded in 1602 and it contains 12 million books but to be correct at the time mine was added - 12,000,001. It has a fascinating history as can be seen on Google but its importance, as a reference library cannot be overstated.

There are many images that I could put in front of you but this will suffice, the very impressive door to the old Bodleian Library. It shows the Coat of Arms of Oxford Colleges. Its size can be judged by the fact that the pedestrian door - is just the two lower panels on the left!



### 4. The 2018 reunion of Bletchley Park Veterans.

Just think there were over 10,000 working in shifts at Bletchley Park including my late mother as a nurse in its Clinic - let alone all the thousands more in the 'Y' Service and MI6 (Section VIII).

Of course, there were others who today find the travelling too much. Sadly, I can only spot three from our unit in the picture - including me!



Sorry for the long delay since SCU-Newsletter 3-18 but I hope you will find this one of interest - it again shows the many aspects of the 'Secret Wireless War' and in Station Victor I found yet another.

With my best wishes,  
**Geoffrey**  
Richmond 2019.