

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 2-13 – Friday, April 5, 2013

A special Packard Edition by request of some of the Bletchley Park volunteers. They read about Packards in SCU-Newsletter 1-13 and would now like to know the story of the Packard saloon in the Bletchley Park garage.

The Packard motor cars and their potentially vital importance to the dissemination of ULTRA in the event of the threatened German invasion.

Back in 1938 the Head of the SIS (or MI6), was Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair – like all the Heads of MI6 – he was known only as ‘C’. With the likelihood of war looming, he had come to realize that communications within the organisation were seriously out-of-date. Many embassies and legations had no wireless communication with SIS headquarters in London and indeed, often relied on cable, ordinary telegrams or even telephone !

In today’s parlance, he ‘head-hunted’ Richard Gambier-Parry, who was then the UK Sales Manager of the mighty American radio company - Philco. He was given the task of totally overhauling MI6 communications under the divisional title of ‘Section VIII’ then set about choosing his staff. Incredibly, many were ‘stolen’ from Philco itself. There is little doubt Gambier-Parry was the right man for the job. He was handsome, urbane, good family, fine military record in World War I, a ‘Ham’ himself, and a brilliant selector and leader of men.

This ‘Section VIII’ division of MI6 was initially concerned with many forms of secret communication but most of it became wireless based. The Unit worked at Bletchley Park in 1939, where it built its ‘War-Station’ wireless stations, (as cover from the existing one at Barnes), then in the winter of 1939/40 it moved to nearby Whaddon Hall.

Inevitably, the war came along as so many predicted. In mid-1940, the MI6 (Section VIII) staff were put into military uniforms so as to 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. The newly formed unit was called ‘Special Signals Unit No. 1’ (or SSU1). That was rapidly changed to ‘Special Communications Units’ (or SCU1) – some said it was done to remove the ‘SS’ tag !

However, I now want you to imagine that it is mid-1940.

Following the German Blitzkrieg, you know from the BBC broadcasts that much of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), was bottled up, in and around, Dunkirk. There, the ‘little ships’ had evacuated tens of thousands of British and French troops from the port and from the nearby beaches.

They came ashore in several ports around the south east coast of England most – not in organised units – but often mixed up. A Guardsman, followed by a private in the East Surreys, a Royal Engineer sapper, and so on most with their side arms but little else. It would be quite wrong to describe the scene at the ports as chaotic – but the reorganisation of so many units split up was a major problem.

The now growing sense of unease – stories of German parachutists landing dressed as nuns – indicates the level of fear that ran through our lives. Rumours abounded. Large fields had posts erected to prevent aircraft landing. I remember one field near Oxted in Surrey had cars up-ended and partially buried, to serve the same purpose. Everyone, including the youngest children carried their gas mask, and concrete pill boxes appeared almost overnight.

All station and road signs were removed. Anyone advertising a local product had the place name painted over – ‘*Eat Phipp’s Bread – baked here in xxxxx*’. The newly formed ‘Local Defence Volunteers’ are parading, at first with shot guns, pitchforks and pikes but soon with Ross .300 rifles from Canada. They wore an armband marked ‘LDV’ – later to become the Home Guard. My late older brother Ron – medically unfit for the army – was one of them !

Worse still, there is news of a jubilant German Army, stretched all along the French/Belgium coast facing the south of England, just a few short miles away. The success of the Dunkirk evacuation, in a motley collection of ships, had not gone unnoticed. However, the Germans had the advantage of time, to assemble barges from the French and Belgian canals, much more suited than many of our ‘little ships’ !

It was anticipated that the invasion would come over the shortest route through Kent and Sussex – directly aimed at London, only some 70-80 miles from the coast. Most crucial government departments were based there – the War Office, Air Ministry, Admiralty, Cabinet Office, War Room and so on, with Fighter Command just outside London.

Both HUMINT and SIGINT were being received (mostly by teleprinter) from various sources – including the infant ULTRA from Bletchley Park. If, as was anticipated, the invasion headed straight into London, many of these departments had their own ‘War Station’ or ‘bolt-hole’ lined up – just as Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair had prepared by purchasing Bletchley Park for his SIS and GC&CS. However, the teleprinter and telephone connections would be lost as they moved, or damaged by bombing, so ‘Mobile wireless stations’ were needed as back-up.

Richard Gambier-Parry already had experience with the concept, having created two such mobile units sent to France early in 1940. They were built at Whaddon Hall to where MI6 (Section VIII) had moved from Bletchley Park – complete with their wireless stations – over the winter of 1939/40.

One unit was built into a Dodge limousine and the second possibly a Humber – both belonging to SIS. The men who carried out the work were Bob Hornby, who had been Chief Engineer at Philco and Arthur ‘Spuggy’ Newton, who had been Philco’s car radio designer. These two cars were sent to join the BEF in France to receive SIS SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) including the infant ULTRA. One car was stationed with the Army at GHQ Field Force and the other with the RAF at Advanced Air Striking Force. They had nothing whatever to do with either the RAF or the Army’s Intelligence units. The wireless operator in one was ‘Bill’ Sharpe (later my boss in SCU11/12 in India), and the second was manned for a time, by Arthur ‘Spuggy’ Newton.

These wireless vehicles were later called ‘Signals Liaison Units’ or ‘SLUs’ by Wing Commander Fred Winterbotham. He was Head of SIS Section IV ‘Air’ – based at Bletchley Park. Winterbotham had received orders - down from Winston Churchill - to ensure the total security of ULTRA operations.

Now, in mid-1940, having suffered a terrible blow in France, with the loss of almost all of the army’s equipment, a very troubled but defiant Nation was waiting for the enemy’s next move.

Meantime, it was decided that American cars were the most suitable for use as these mobile wireless units. They had powerful engines, spacious interiors and a large boot that would accommodate the essential batteries, battery charger and A/c generator. By 1939, most US car manufacturers had stocks of right-hand drive cars available in the UK, to meet the growing demand for larger cars, at a reasonable price. However, the renowned ‘Packard’ was regarded as being the best ‘all-rounder’ from the US cars available for Richard Gambier-Parry’s purposes.

An order was given to Leonard Williams & Co. who were Packards UK distributor at Brentford in west London – ostensibly by the ‘War Office’ – for their entire stock of new cars from the 1939/40 ranges. That included about 60 ‘Sedans’ (saloons to us), three super-eight limousines, two or three of each – ‘Business’ coupés and the superb ‘Super Eight’ drop-head coupés. As they arrived at Whaddon Hall, they were then taken in batches to Tickfords at nearby Newport Pagnell. Tickfords were long established coach builders, providing custom bodies to Bentley and Rolls Royce cars.

The cars were in their splendid Packard colours as they arrived and my father reported seeing several late batches appear – in such stunning colours as light blue and bright yellow. How different they looked when they came back from Tickfords in their camouflaged finish. (P.S. They were super to drive - Geoffrey.)



The picture on the previous page is from the Packard catalogue but the picture on the right is the **actual** Packard Sedan parked in the Bletchley Park garage. It was used in the DVD 'The Secret Wireless War' (The title was agreed with me), available from Bletchley Park Bookshop or Amazon but I have no financial interest in the DVD.



The DVD will help one to understand the work of the Vi's and the SLUs. It includes appearances by **Bob King** (Vi & RSS), **Wilf Neal** (receiving ULTRA in a Dodge Ambulance SLU) was with Patten's 3rd US Army in France, the late **Maurice Richardson** at Windy Ridge in Whaddon Village transmitting ULTRA to the SLUs in France received by teleprinter from nearby Bletchley Park. **Myself** – plus a guest appearance by **Jane** !

The second half of 'The Secret Wireless War' DVD explains the use of wireless stations constructed by Section VIII in the highly successful 'Black Propaganda War' – it is most interesting.

Now the task was to fit the Packards with our wireless gear. The rear passenger area was stripped to allow a bench to be built, to support the US made wireless receiver, and our own Section VIII designed transmitter. At that time, it would be the earliest model of our MkIII – built in the workshops, by then in the stables of Whaddon Hall. Every man who could use a screwdriver was roped in – working round the clock – to complete this most urgent of tasks.

The delivery of Packards included two or three (?) of these Super-Eight drop-head coupés. One was exclusively for Gambier-Parry's personal use, the second by Freddie Pettifer.

In Chapter 17 of 'The Secret Wireless War' I describe how as a young idiot (just 18) I drove Freddie's 'pride and joy' at 100mph along the main runway of Horwood RAF airfield. I still shudder when I think about it !



Freddie was in charge of all Section VIII's transport and for a time he was responsible for the Bletchley Park transport organisation.

As each 'Sedan' was completed they were sent off in support of the selected 'Critical' organisation. The crew of three, would consist of a driver, a general 'support' man and a Section VIII wireless operator.

My father had joined MI6 at Whaddon Hall, as a civilian in June 1940. However, in Chapter 9 of 'The Secret Wireless War' where his name appears on the second page, you will see one of the 'Daily Orders' of the unit that is now posing as a military organisation. The civilians recorded were being 'enlisted' into the Royal Corps of Signals – as cover in case of capture, and to conceal what was basically a civilian outfit.

However, the main reason for looking at the second page of Chapter 9, is to note the items at the bottom under the paragraph headed '97'. Now you will see the real purpose of Section VIII's Packards: Firstly, one team is to be attached to **Scottish Command** and the second to the **Admiralty**. In the case of the Scottish Command, I remind you I said that our military forces were in some disarray. Whilst many returning troops were sent to their regimental barracks across the country – the best fully operational – nationwide organisations were the Army's Regional Command centres.

These were a series of long-established military bases, some going back before the Napoleonic War. Southern Command was at Aldershot, Western Command at Chester, Northern Command at York, **Scottish Command** at Edinburgh and so on. So each of them received one of the MI6 (Section VIII) SLUs to receive ULTRA SIGINT and HUMINT if required.

In the case of the London, as we have seen, one of the SLUs went to the **Admiralty**, one to Air Ministry, to St. James Park to cover the War Room, the War Office and so on through to every *vital* organisation. They were to move with them in the event of war, to provide continuous contact with the ULTRA output from Bletchley Park, via the MI6 (Section VIII) wireless station in Whaddon Village.

I hope I have been able to convey some of the drama and tension of that hot summer of 1940 – with the Battle of Britain just beginning in the skies over southern England. The first phase of the German invasion plan was to destroy the RAF and its airfields in Kent, Sussex and Surrey. That failed, due to the bravery of the RAF in what became known as ‘The Battle of Britain.’

However, Richard Gambier-Parry had made certain that in the event of invasion – vital SIGINT would be available through his mobile wireless vans – wherever the dispersed Government departments ended up.

The picture taken near 8th Army HQ in the North African desert. It shows a Lockheed Ventura aircraft fitted with our ‘Ascension’ air-to-ground wireless gear to make direct contact with agents on the ground. The gear was designed by Wilf Lilburn standing centre and Dennis Smith my boss in Mobile Construction at Whaddon Hall. I may very well have helped fit its gear – under supervision by Dennis !

I remind you that Wilf Lilburn had lived with us at Caterham in 1939 and was one of Richard Gambier-Parry’s leading wireless engineers. The Packard Sedan was one of those sent out from Whaddon in 1941 to act as SLUs in ‘A Detachment’ but were fairly useless when off-road.



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). The Red Cross was on them as we fitted them out but removed before going to France.



To the left, is the US Army Dodge Ambulance fitted out as an SLU ready for ULTRA sent to US Army Commanders in France. To the right, a British Army Guy 15cwt standard wireless vehicle stripped and fitted with Section VIII gear ready to go to the British and Canadian military Commanders.

**Our other news will be in SCU-Newsletter 3-13 later.
Best wishes from Jane and me
Geoffrey**