

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-21  
Wednesday, February 24, 2021

**1. Sorry for the long gap since the last SCU-Newsletter. Gosh - it was last August!** However, I hasten to say it is not due to ill health except that I am getting older - 95 in May so perhaps a little slower? There is much to tell you but let us start with responses to these Newsletters. As they go out to 800+ readers and a few Clubs syndicate them, I do receive a number of questions and/or comments on each of them. One in particular connects to the last Newsletter so here it is.

**2. The ‘Cathedral set by Philco Radio.** I mentioned in SCU-Newsletter 3-20 - that Brigadier Richard Gambier-Parry the boss of MI6 (Section VIII) had worked for Philco UK after leaving the BBC where he ran its PR. I showed the “Cathedral” set in it - a product of the new Philco factory built at Perivale - just west of London. This response is from **Farrell Winder, W8ZCF Cincinnati, Ohio, USA** and I have his permission to publish it in full.

*My curiosity regarding the Philco Radio referenced in your SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 2-20 has unleashed some more detail on my part which I am sending to you and others which may be of interest. As I mentioned to you in my previous note that my father acquired this Philco via a yard sale in a time frame of around 1957-1959. He probably used the radio for some time then passed it on to me. From 1959 this would mean that the radio was probably largely dormant until now, some 60+years later.*

*The amazing thing to me is that I attached an antenna and connected it to 110 V, turned it on, the dial light came on and clear quality audio comes from the speaker (no Hum).*

*From the tag inside the cabinet - it was manufactured by the Philco Storage Battery Company in Philadelphia, PA.*

*I think that it demonstrates that the great Philco Co used high quality parts that have demonstrated the high reliability! You will note that I did not remove any of the coats of dust on the parts and they kept right on performing!*

**Thank you Farrell -** What’s the expression? - **‘They don’t make ‘em like that anymore!’**



**3. Item 5 of SCU-Newsletter 3-20 refers to my journey to India with three colleagues in 1945.**

You may recall we were **‘Urgently required in New Delhi’**- and part of this is recorded in ‘The Secret Wireless War’ - but with the speed of travel today it does seem almost from the dark ages!

We set off from Hearne Airport near Bournemouth on the South Coast in one of the BOAC’s Douglas C-47 a larger version of the famous Douglas Dakota DC-3. Our flight took off in the early morning and we flew all morning until landing for lunch (!) at Marseille airport.



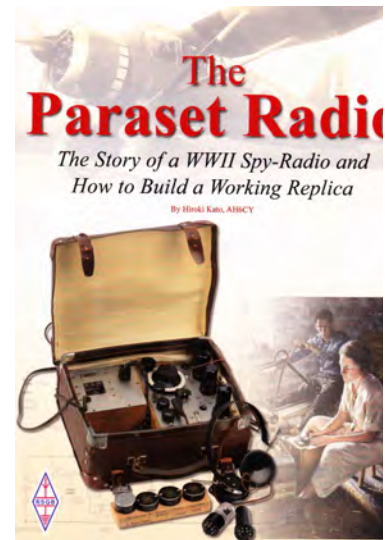
On the next table to us were eight German Generals in transit under escort. The pilot came round to ensure we had finished lunch and were ready - then we took off again flying all afternoon when we landed in Malta a journey of about 700 miles.

There we were put in a hotel in Valletta - possibly the only one habitable in that ruined city? We were taken on a bus tour of that part of the island before having dinner and spending the night. Next day after breakfast we took off again heading for Cairo about 1100 miles away.

The pilot flew over the North African battlefields and pointed out the hundreds of wrecks of tanks and vehicles of all kinds - just rotting away. Approaching Cairo, the pilot asked over the speakers if any of us had seen the Pyramids? Following a chorus of *No's* - we then circled them several times before landing at Cairo for the night. We were in the Heliopolis - a quite magnificent hotel with marble everywhere. My bathroom was wall-to-wall marble with matching floor and fittings.

After breakfast next day the pilot took off again to Bagdad where we stopped for lunch - driven into the city to a hotel (Princess or Princes?). Then we took off again flying to the Trucial Oman coast - now the United Arab Emirates. We arrived for dinner not much before midnight in high humidity and a temperature still in the upper 80's F. We took off soon after midnight and landed in Karachi (then in India) in the morning. An 'Urgent journey' of over three and a half days and now the flight time is just ten hours! Unfortunately, we had to wait another day for a plane to fly to Delhi!

**4. The Paraset Radio - by Hiroki Kato AH6CY.** This excellent book by Hiroki has just been published by the RSGB (Radio Society of Great Britain). Apart from its historic value it is a splendid guide for the increasing number of radio amateurs making replicas of our MI6 (Section VIII) wireless sets.



The picture on the cover is of a MkVII first made in the HQ of MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon Hall - and I was there when we switched from making the heavy MkV to the MkVII. I then went with others to nearby Little Horwood, where we started to make them in larger numbers. We went from 50 at a time to 100 and it is *just possible* (!!!) that I made the Morse key on the set illustrated (just out of sight) or even the metal chassis itself?

However, shortly afterwards I was transferred back to Whaddon Hall - where I joined Dennis Smith's Mobile Construction team of seven. Then began a most exciting time - working in aircraft, Motor Gunboats in the English Channel and fitting out wireless vans ready for D Day. I was 17 ½ when I joined Dennis!

It is important to note that MI6 (Section VIII) was the communication arm of SIS and Richard Gambier-Parry was 'The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) Controller of Communications.' However, during World War II it was usual to use MI6 instead of SIS and that still abides today.



The SOE also used our MKVII in both forms - the original as shown and secondly in a steel hinged box, the MkVII/2 or 'Cashbox' version. However, it is my belief that our MkVII and MkVII/2 - were the first sets designated 'The Paraset.'

#### **Hiroki and me in discussion at the Bletchley Park Veteran's meeting 2018**

(Picture by my daughter-in-law Aneeta)

We now forget that we had to solder every joint! I had an 'American Beauty' soldering iron in my tool kit issued by my father from his MI6 wireless stores. I think it was 100watt? So chaps let us follow Hiroki's lead and go back to basics with valves, variable condensers, resistors and wire!

For supplies of some of the fittings we used - do as Hiroki suggests and contact Henk van Zwam (email: [parasetguy@paraset.nl](mailto:parasetguy@paraset.nl)). There are many tips in Hiroki's book to help you source materials but sorry chaps - I no longer have an Atlas capstan lathe to make the Morse key knobs for you!

**5. Whoops!** In describing the four men '*Urgently required in New Delhi*' - I overlooked telling you *why* we were apparently urgently required? This was all just a tiny part of the plans decided in late 1944/early 1945. The US armed forces were gradually forcing the Japanese forces to release their hold on the islands they had occupied. At the same time the battles in Burma had turned in our favour. Until then, the SIS wireless station in New Delhi with 'satellites' in Calcutta, Kandy, etc, were enough to handle the SIS traffic. However, it was decided to build a larger more powerful station in Calcutta to deal with the projected arrival of General McArthur in Manila and the recapture of Rangoon.

There was also the need for a station in Okinawa ready for the assault on Japan itself. So far as MI6 (Section VIII) was concerned, the construction of a new station just outside Calcutta had started in early 1945 and more operators than they required were already in place.



Until then the transmission by our station in Calcutta was from a US Army 399 wireless truck - a fully fitted self-contained wireless unit on the back of a 10 wheel Studebaker lorry. We had two and they has been off-loaded to stand on a hard-core base beside the site of the new station at Bajola West - then a village near Dum-Dum airport north west of the city. It was some 15 miles from our receivers and operators at our base at Dhakuria in East Calcutta.

Now with the end of the war in Europe at an end - the plans were accelerated. Teams were being formed ready in Calcutta and we four were among the last needed to complete them. I know that I was to be in the team made ready to head to Manila. 'Fergie' Ferguson was to be in the Rangoon team and Fred Stapley was going to Okinawa. I cannot recall where Brian Birch was heading!

After arriving in Delhi we were sent down to Calcutta by train - now *that* was quite an experience! Something like 20 hours with six stops when food from a limited menu was ordered through an open door and it appeared very quickly, However, if we had not finished, the poor waiter had to hang on outside until the next stop as much as three hours away, to collect his tray, plates and cutlery!

**Atomic Bombs:** Out of the blue we heard that an 'Atomic Bomb' had been dropped on Hiroshima on August 6<sup>th</sup> and another on Nagasaki on August 9<sup>th</sup>. I believe we had just arrived in Calcutta when the first was dropped or we were travelling by train from Delhi. However, nobody had the faintest idea what an atomic bomb was? There were all kinds of theories put forward before we began to assimilate the official news. Quite apart from anything else, we had to locate these cities on a map of Japan!

Suddenly the new wireless station in Calcutta was to become even more important. This picture is the 'work-in-progress on the new station with one of the two US Army 399 wireless cabins to the right - still operational.



It is clear we depended on the US for a great deal of our gear. Most of my father's stock in his MI6 wireless stores in Whaddon Hall was from the US and I had used South Bend and Atlas lathes from the USA in my earlier work.

It was now to be a round-the-clock relay station handling ULTRA and Main Line wireless traffic from all over the Far East including Australia. Plus eventually Japan, all of China instead of just Kunming, Thailand, Hong Kong, Hanoi, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and so on.

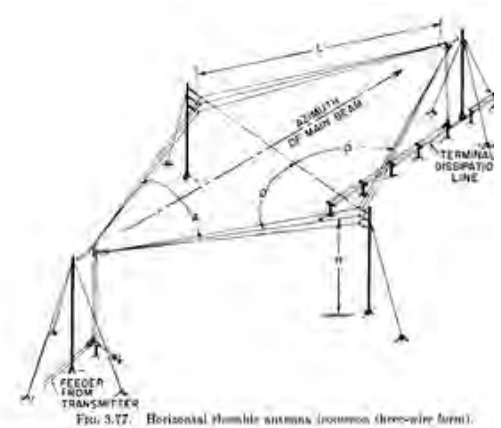
All our SCU 11/12 hierarchy descended upon Calcutta. Col. Bill Sharpe, Robin Adie, 'Plug' Walton and John 'Tommy' Tucker - et al!

The transmission station was to have as a priority - a 'London rhombic aerial' - four sections of wire in a diamond pattern strung between four aerial masts - with feeder lines back to the transmitter.

This is just as we built it in our new wireless transmission station. The four aerials were a quarter of a mile apart and it was described as a 'one mile rhombic.' It was the first of several but smaller aerials built there.

So, instead of a journey to Manila, I found myself in the crew to build the now more important station.

This had been a paddy field it was still very wet. I was pleased to be wearing US Army 'Jungle boots' made of canvas that I had 'liberated' from the OSS stores in Ballygunge Road - soon after they departed!



In fact, I was able to fit out several of my pals as well. Among other benefits they kept leeches from attaching themselves to your legs - they are truly loathsome insects. I should have said that as the only one of the 'new batch' who could drive - I was given a Jeep and trailer most useful later - when I was put in charge of the wireless stores at our base.

Here I should point out that I had also 'liberated' some US Army boots as well as the jungle boots and I am wearing them in the picture.

While I am in confessing mode - the hat is also from the US special forces/OSS stores with a fibreglass lining. Little wonder they later put me in charge of stores - I was clearly good at 'liberating!'



With the help of some Indian P&T (Post and Telegraph) workers, we laid out three five-strand copper wires, complete with insulators. Therefore, it totalled three miles of copper wire often laid in the heat of the day.

Back at Dhakuria in the evening after we finally finished - we sank quite a few bottles of beer to celebrate.

Next day we returned to the site to find no trace of our aerials - three miles of copper wire had disappeared over night. Our engineers in the 399 units heard not a thing. Everyone was upset - not least us poor chaps who had worked so hard.

What happened to the wire? I cannot account for it all but a week later 60ft long copper aerials for domestic wireless use - were on sale on a stall in the Sir Stuart Hogg market in the centre of Calcutta!



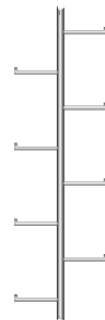
Having repeated the exercise but this time with Ghurkha guards on site, we assembled to plan the later lifting of three miles of aerials to the top of the masts. ‘Tommy’ Tucker looked at me - he knew the work I had been doing back at Whaddon Hall including flying from Tempsford and Hartford Bridge. He jokingly asked if I had a head for heights? I told him 10,000 feet did not worry me - so long as the pilot knew what he was doing and where we were going!

That amused my pals *and* ‘Tommy’ - but he immediately pointed to a nearby 100ft steel mast and told me to climb it. I nearly passed out! The metal masts appear in the picture below. Well, I started up but came down again after 20 feet or so. ‘Tommy’ told me you will do better next time and I desperately wanted there - ***not to be a next time!***

Attached to each section of the mast was a steel bar about 2 inches across and on that were welded pegs with turned up ends. I suppose these were 6 to 8 inches long. I have to say ‘*about*’ and ‘*suppose*’ as this was 76 years ago and memory fades over time!

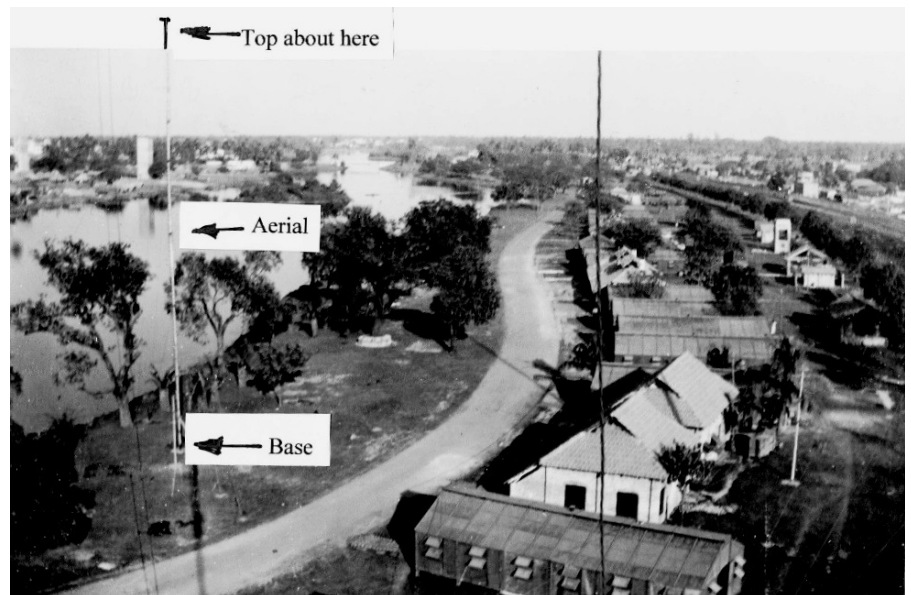
Suffice it to say you have no safety harness - just a stout belt to strap yourself to the top - *when you arrive!* You are utterly dependent on grasping the next peg with one hand - while making sure your foot finds a step on the other side.

Unlike climbing a ladder at an angle - the mast is vertical - so ‘hanging on tight’ was imperative! It still looks very ‘hairy’ but was a simply terrifying the first time I had to go to the top.



This is a shot taken at our base in East Calcutta alongside Dhakuria lakes. The first tiled building housed our offices and operating bays.

This was taken from part way up one of the masts. The dark line in the centre is a stay wire going nearer the top.



An aerial - just like those in our transmission aerial field can be seen as a thin silver line to the left reaching above the horizon. It looks like a cotton thread but it is 100ft high.

We now have reason to believe there is ‘Light at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel’ but meantime keep safe and well!

With kind regards and best wishes to you and yours.

*Geoffrey*