

‘EDGAR HARRISON — Soldier, Patriot and Ultra Wireless Operator to Winston Churchill’

(229pp with 200 photographs and illustrations)

Geoffrey Pidgeon became a wartime colleague of Edgar Harrison when he joined MI6 Section VIII at Whaddon Hall. Geoffrey launched his hugely successful book **‘The Secret Wireless War’** at Bletchley Park in 2003. It has become a unique reference to the vital role played by MI6 (Section VIII) in their interception of enemy wireless communications in World War II, and its later dissemination of the ‘Ultra’ intelligence gleaned from it by code breakers at Bletchley Park.

In 2005 Geoffrey finally persuaded Edgar to write his incredible story. However, Edgar, already in his nineties, sadly died later that year before the work was finished. Geoffrey took up the reins and worked tirelessly going through Edgar's notes. There were many gaps in the story that he has since filled in with research. However, although credited as the author, Geoffrey wishes to be known more as an editor who merely provided the ‘finish’ to the work.

Edgar Harrison (1915-2005) was born in South Wales on St David's Day in 1915. He enlisted in 1929 as a Boy Apprentice in the Royal Corps of Signals and trained at Catterick. He went on to serve for several years in China. In January 1940 he was enrolled at Bletchley Park in M16 (Section VIII) and went on in that unit to have the most extraordinary adventures in World War II.

He was in Norway at the time the Germans invaded from where he had to beat a hasty retreat, and was in Brussels during the Blitzkrieg before escaping back to England via Dunkirk. While stationed in Greece the Nazis launched an overwhelming attack. However, he refused to surrender with other Allied troops. Instead, he made his escape via Kalamata in a rowing boat before being rescued by a British destroyer, HMS Kandahar. He was landed in Crete where he handled the Ultra traffic during the invasion by the Germans, and later evacuated to Cairo where he spent time recuperating from the wounds sustained in Greece during the retreat to Kalamata.

Edgar was then parachuted into Yugoslavia with wireless gear for General Mihailovic and he became involved in close-quarter fighting between the various factions. His security situation became intolerable and he was taken out by submarine. He was then sent to the Ukraine, ostensibly training Russian tank crews in the use of British wireless equipment. After a number of close encounters at the front, he returned to Cairo. There, and in view of Rommel's successful drive into Egypt, he was ordered to set up the agents' wireless station deep in the Libyan desert down at Kufra Oasis, the base of the Long Range Desert Group.

From there he was posted to Algiers, then to Sicily and on to Italy. Eventually he returned to MI6 (Section VIII)'s HQ at Whaddon Hall, five miles west of

Bletchley Park, before going to France and Germany. During all this he was, on five occasions, the MI6 wireless operator assigned to Winston Churchill at meetings with Allied leaders. After the war Edgar became the Principal Signals Officer of the Foreign Office - not bad for a boy who joined the Royal Corps of Signals as a Boy Apprentice in 1929 - age 14.

Amongst Edgar's many adventures, he fought at the Battle of Kalamata. This was the last battle fought against the German invaders on mainland Greece by the Greek and Allied forces.

Edgar was nearly captured by the Germans but he refused to surrender. He 'found' a small boat and rowed out into the Mediterranean on his own. He was later picked up by a destroyer — HMS Kandahar and taken to Crete where he and two colleagues from Section VIII handled the Ultra traffic during the later assault by German Paratroops.

Whether in London or overseas, Winston Churchill required to be kept up-to-date with the Bletchley Park output of SIGINT and Ultra. When he was abroad, these messages were received via the Main Line wireless station at Whaddon by a wireless operator from MI6 included in his entourage. Edgar Harrison was the chosen MI6 (Section VIII) wireless operator on several occasions.

Comments by Churchill to Edgar Harrison include:

'You are a remarkable signaller Harrison.'

'What do you mean you think you know Harrison?

You either know, or do not know!'

THE SECRET WIRELESS WAR

(412pp with 200 photographs and illustrations)

THE STORY OF M16 COMMUNICATIONS 1939-1945

Possibly the most important UK wireless traffic in World War II was handled by a unit formed in 1938 by Brigadier Richard Gambier-Parry head of MI6 Section VIII - the communications division of SIS.

This book tells of its formation and includes diary entries by one of the 'founding fathers' recording the secret meetings that took place, and the assembly of its talented staff.

It reports the earlier days of the original SIS wireless 'Station X' based in Barnes in south west London, and the building of its second station in a bungalow in Surrey with the strange name of 'Funny Neuk' - which turned out to be owned by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair – 'C' - Chief of Secret Intelligence Services.

The units wireless station at Bletchley Park is described and its replacement by the stations at nearby Whaddon Hall which then became the wartime headquarters of Section VIII.

It documents the work of our agents in embassies abroad, and of those in German occupied territories; the story of Churchill's personal wireless operator, and there is the description by a German soldier of the Afrika Corps of his operating an Enigma machine at Rommel's headquarters in the desert.

The curious story of 'Black Propaganda' is told and the units handling of the military ULTRA traffic out to commanders in the field.

Personal tales by those who were part of this most secret of units abound in the book and it is an important record of people and events that—it is no exaggeration to say—helped to win the war.

Whilst essential, the technical side of the tale has not been allowed to dominate the book which is extensively illustrated.

GEOFFREY PIDGEON the author of these two books was born in Fulham in 1926. The family moved to Caterham in Surrey in the early 1930's and he was educated at Caterham School. In 1940, the home was slightly damaged during the Battle of Britain being fought in the skies overhead. It was decided to move to Stony Stratford to be near to his father who was, by now, working for MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon Hall near Bletchley Park.

He joined MI6 (Section VIII) and in 1943 he was enlisted in the Royal Corps of Signals at Whaddon ostensibly as a Signaller, but he was **NPAF** (**Not Paid Army Funds**). His enlistment papers appear in both books.

In 1947 he joined the family bathroom business, retiring when he was 80. He has now been married to Jane for 60 years; they have three sons who are the fifth generation of the family to be involved in the bathroom and kitchen business. He has voluntarily worked for numerous bodies in the industry; he served on its Metrication Board, over the years he was a member of 22 BSI committees, chaired one, and led BSI delegations to Paris on European Standards. He has written and lectured on bathroom products and design. His paper about 'Safety in the Bathroom' is still quoted today. His most recent achievement, and one he is quite proud of, is helping to alter the UK water regulations to allow the use of the superior valve ('push button') fitting to WC cisterns instead of the outdated and water-wasteful syphon.

He is now setting out to finish his third (and absolutely last) book. Its title is 'Bathrooms, my family and Thomas Crapper'.

Both books are available from Royal Signals Museum Shop, Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8RH

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"The Secret Wireless War" is **£24.99** and *"Edgar Harrison – Soldier – Patriot and Ultra Wireless Operator to Winston Churchill"* is **£14.99**.