

# The United Kingdom, September 1939-August 1942

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# CHAPTER I

## The United Kingdom, September 1939–August 1942

### (i) The Twenty Committee

**B**RITISH DECEPTION operations in the Second World War began almost by accident. The intelligence and security services found that they had the means of misleading the enemy, and the urgent need to make use of them, long before their military colleagues had thought seriously about deception at all.

Intelligence and counter-intelligence operations always tend, like any other, to develop a momentum of their own. A major task both of intelligence and of security authorities is to hamper the intelligence-gathering of unfriendly powers. This is done not only by restricting their intelligence-gathering activities, but by inducing them to draw incorrect conclusions from such information as they do acquire. Even if there is no initial intention positively to deceive, even if security is initially visualised only in the most passive and defensive of forms, situations are bound to arise in which, although it is not possible to prevent the enemy from acquiring *some* information, it is possible to ensure that the intelligence he does so acquire is misleading or false.

It may, for example, be impossible to prevent the enemy from carrying out aerial reconnaissance and thus acquiring at least some visual information. In such cases the information can be falsified by camouflage, concealment, and deceptive display. Even more urgent is the requirement to provide misleading information when an enemy agent defects and makes himself available as a channel through which deceptive intelligence can be passed to his employers. If such a ‘double agent’ is to remain trusted by his original masters, he must either keep going a flow of information of some kind, or provide a credible reason why he cannot – a reason which itself will be deceptive. Should a double agent fall into their hands, the security services thus find themselves virtually compelled to provide him with deceptive information to pass over to the enemy.

Such a requirement was presented to the British authorities before the war even began, in the person of an agent known to the British as *Snow* and to the Germans as *Johnny Snow*, a Welsh-born engineer, travelling on a Canadian passport, who had settled in England

in 1933. Whether he was recruited first by the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)\* or by their opposite numbers in Germany, the Abwehr,† is uncertain. His work with a firm fulfilling contracts for the Admiralty, and his frequent visits to Germany, gave him plenty of opportunity to satisfy both his employers. He does not appear to have informed the Germans about his relations with the British Secret Service, but in September 1938, when war between Britain and Germany seemed imminent, he told the British security authorities that the Germans had nominated him as their principal agent in Britain. His reliability seemed to be confirmed when during the course of 1939 the Abwehr provided him with a radio transmitter, which he turned over to the British authorities. Still, when war broke out in September 1939 the British took no risks. *Snow* was arrested and detained in Wandsworth gaol. There he was reunited with his radio set, and his transmissions to Germany began under the guidance of MI5.

By now *Snow* was not alone. MI5 provided him with a colleague, a retired policeman known as *GW*, whom *Snow* notionally recruited to work for the Abwehr for the same motive that he allegedly did himself – fanatical Welsh nationalism. The Abwehr itself put *Snow* in contact with another of their agents, who when confronted by MI5 allowed himself to be enrolled as a double agent under the name of *Charlie*. A further notional recruit was provided by MI5, one *Biscuit*, who was sent to see the Abwehr authorities in Lisbon, passed their inspection, and was provided with a radio channel of his own. *GW* was also provided with an independent channel through German sympathisers in the Spanish embassy, who passed out the information he provided in the diplomatic bag. By the summer of 1940 MI5 was thus running half a dozen agents who appeared to command the complete confidence of the German Intelligence Service. They did not as yet appreciate that these constituted the sum total of German agents then operating in the United Kingdom.

The misinformation passed by these double or ‘special’ agents was at first provided very much *ad hoc*. Some preliminary discussion took place between the Service ministries and MI5 on the eve of the war about setting up machinery for co-operating in providing convincing answers to the questionnaires which the Abwehr sent to *Snow* and his colleagues, but nothing initially was done. The Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral J H Godfrey, and the Director of Air Intelligence, Air Commodore A R Boyle, provided sufficient informal advice and co-operation to prevent the channels from running dry, but MI5 itself was not yet properly equipped to maintain them. Responsibility for

\* On the outbreak of war SIS became formally part of the Military Intelligence Directorate with the title MI6. The Security Service was entitled MI5. These titles will be used throughout this book.

† See p 45 below.

the running of these double agents lay with B branch of MI5 which dealt with all threats to national security. The enormous tasks which confronted the security authorities at the outbreak of war, and even more those which suddenly emerged during the invasion crisis of 1940, kept MI5 in a state of continuous and unhappy flux. It was not until March 1941, when Sir David Petrie became Director General of the Security Service, that MI5 began to command, and deserve, the respect of the armed forces and of Whitehall which enabled it to function so efficiently for the rest of the war. And only in the summer of 1941 was B Branch, later B Division, under Captain Guy Liddell, able to concentrate its attention entirely on counter-espionage; double agents being the responsibility of its subordinate Branch BiA.

During the 'phoney war' of September 1939–May 1940 B Division had, as we have seen, recruited and successfully run a small number of double agents, mainly through its control of *Snow*, but its scope was restricted by the low level of activity of the Abwehr itself in the British Isles at this period of the war. With the fall of France the situation was transformed. Suddenly required to provide, at practically no notice, a flood of information about Britain in anticipation of the projected invasion, the Abwehr recruited, hurriedly trained and despatched to the British Isles as many agents as it could lay hands on. Some were landed by boat, some dropped by parachute, some posed as refugees, others tried to remain hidden. Most of them were furnished by the Abwehr with identity documents based on information provided by *Snow* which made possible their virtually instant recognition. Some had let themselves be recruited only in order to escape to England, where they at once surrendered to the security authorities. Those who did not do so proved utterly incompetent, and fell sooner or later – in most cases sooner – into British hands. All had assumed that the Wehrmacht would arrive to rescue them within a matter of weeks and were neither morally nor physically equipped for prolonged operations in a hostile environment. A few hard cases had to be executed. There were few difficulties in recruiting double agents from the remainder.

The technical problem of running double agents – the provision of case-officers, of safe houses, of reliable communications, of a credible identity – has been so well described by Sir John Masterman in his book *The Double Cross System\** that little more need be added here. It was a task which called for a unique combination of intellectual ingenuity and psychological skill, and understanding of the psychology not only of the agent but of the German spy master who was running him. From 1941 onwards the responsibility for the double agents came to rest mainly with three officials of MI5. Lieut Col T A Robertson, formerly a regular soldier; Captain J C (later Sir John) Masterman, in

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\* J C Masterman *The Double Cross System in the War of 1939–45*. Yale University Press 1972.

peace time a Student of Christ Church, Oxford; and a London solicitor, Mr J A Marriott.<sup>1</sup>

This ‘triumvirate’ in BiA, assisted by a team of case-officers, looked after the double agents, operating them as credible channels of communication. What MI5 could not do however was determine what messages should be passed over these channels, and throughout 1940 the operatives of BiA found themselves in the situation of having to press the armed forces insistently, and initially rather unsuccessfully, for information which could be transmitted by these ‘Special Means’.\*

There was a further complication. Since in the summer of 1940 the United Kingdom was, or at any moment was likely to become, a theatre of war, the military authorities considered that the handling of double agents should be their responsibility. GHQ Home Forces, having staked their claim, did not press the matter, having more important matters to worry about. But undeniably it was the responsibility of the military to decide, in the light of the military situation, what, if any, deception policy should be. Should the defences of the United Kingdom be depicted as formidably strong? Should they be depicted, in certain areas at least, as invitingly weak? The question was discussed at a meeting between the Directorate of Military Intelligence and MI5 on 10 September and referred to the Chiefs of Staff Committee; who decided, probably wisely, to attempt no selective deception. Information passed through the double agents was therefore designed simply to emphasise the strength of British defences of every kind.

But clearly the problem extended beyond the competence of the military, even if that term was taken to include naval and air matters as well. As the intentions of the Germans changed from amphibious attack to air bombardment, the information they required from their agents became wider in scope. Whereas during the summer of 1940 Snow and his colleagues had been instructed to report on troop dispositions, coastal defences, the location of airfields and the rates of aircraft production, by October the emphasis had switched to the food situation in the United Kingdom, the location of food and other supply depots, the impact of material shortages on public morale, the effect of air bombardment on different classes of the population – anything, in fact, which would enable the Third Reich to conduct siege warfare against the United Kingdom and appreciate its effects. It was easy to see that by manipulating the answers to these questions the whole of German bombing policy might be affected. But in what way *should* it be affected? Should the German Air Force, for example, be encouraged to concentrate its efforts on bombing London, where measures for the protection of the civilian population were relatively advanced and vital targets were widely dispersed, rather than to switch its attacks to the Midlands

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\* See Appendix 5, para 16c for definition.

and the North? What should the Germans be told about the state of stocks of raw materials? These and other questions were raised in a letter which the Chairman of the Home Defence Executive, Sir Findlater Stewart, wrote to GHQ Home Forces on 31 October 1940, 'A decision at the highest level' wrote Stewart 'ought to be obtained before any "slant", real or false, about eg the effect of air raids on civilian morale or of submarine warfare on our raw material situation is given to the enemy'.

It was not simply a matter, however, of obtaining a decision 'at the highest level' on this point alone. Once the decision was obtained there would have to be continuous guidance and control of the information passed through the double agents to meet the changing needs of the war. Since the information might involve any and every aspect of national life as well as material affecting all three Services, such guidance would have to come from a body with very broad competence indeed. On the other hand the very existence of the double agents had, for obvious reasons, to be kept as one of the most closely guarded secrets of the war. Even the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee of the Chiefs of Staff Committee was felt to be too large and too public a forum for the discussion of so sensitive a subject. So in January 1941 there came into being, without specific authorisation from any political or military authority, a body known as the W Board; consisting initially of the three Directors of Service Intelligence (Rear Admiral J H Godfrey RN, Major General F H N Davidson and Air Commodore A R Boyle), Captain Guy Liddell representing MI5, and the Director of MI6. Lieut Cdr the Hon Ewen Montagu, RNV R, from Admiral Godfrey's staff, acted as Secretary. It was only on the insistence of Liddell, over the objections of the Director of Military Intelligence, that even Sir Findlater Stewart was invited to join. The W Board reported to no one and was responsible to no one. It needed, for its efficient functioning, not only total secrecy, but the greatest possible measure of flexibility and informality in the conduct of its affairs. It would, as Air Commodore Boyle pointed out at the first meeting 'be necessary to pass items of true information to the enemy ... and if such matters had to be referred to others such as the Chiefs of Staff ... either permission would be refused or there would be such delay as to have dire results; also the Twenty Committee and the W Board would have to do some 'odd things' of the kind that it was the job of Directors of Intelligence to authorise on their own responsibility'. This freedom, in the view of the Secretary of the Board, 'was the greatest single factor in enabling double agent work to achieve its successes'.

At the first meeting which he attended, on 11 February 1941, Sir Findlater Stewart confronted the W Board with the issue of public policy with which he was principally concerned: how to obtain approval 'at the highest level' for a deception policy which might lead to certain targets being attacked by the German Air Force in order to spare

others (though he pointed out that if it *did* leak out that a town had been bombed as a result of W Board activities they would be damned for it, whether they had secured permission or not). It was hardly a matter even for discussion within the Cabinet. Stewart's own suggestion was that the Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson, should be briefed to make a direct and confidential approach to the Prime Minister. Although a member of the Cabinet, he pointed out, Anderson 'was not a politician'. As a former Permanent Under Secretary at the Home Office and a one time Governor of Bengal, Anderson was inured to the need for executive decisions on delicate matters affecting the national interest. So Anderson was approached and duly consulted the Prime Minister. Nothing was minuted, but Stewart was apparently told that 'obviously there was a job to do and he should get on with it'. If ever there were to be a row, he was warned, he would not be able to claim official authorisation for his actions, but he could rely on the unofficial approval of Anderson and of the Prime Minister. That was enough for Stewart, a man very much in the mould of Anderson himself; who thereafter represented civilian authority on the W Board until the end of the war.

The W Board had neither terms of reference nor limitations on its responsibilities. In practice its task was to give guidance on the deceptive material passed to enemy intelligence via double agents. The executive responsibility for selecting and approving such material rested with another body which came into existence at the same time, and was known simply as the Twenty Committee – 'Twenty' from the Roman figures which appropriately constitute a double cross. The first meeting of the W Board, on 8 January 1941, was indeed described in the minutes merely as 'a Meeting to discuss the Twenty Committee'. That body had held its first meeting six days earlier.

Like the W Board, the Twenty Committee had no terms of reference, but in view of the legends which have grown up about it it should be made clear what it did *not* do. It did not 'run' the double agents. That, as we have seen, was the work of MI5's section B1A, and in certain cases overseas MI6. Broadly speaking its task was to elicit, collate, and obtain approval for the 'traffic' which was passed by the double agents, and to act as a point of contact between B1A, the Intelligence Branches of the Service Departments, the Home Defence Executive and the Secret Intelligence Service. All these bodies were represented on the Twenty Committee.

The Chairman was, according to Sir John Masterman 'appointed by the Director-General of the Security Service and responsible to him, but at the same time the Committee was a sub-committee of the W Board and the chairman of the Committee was presumably responsible to them'.<sup>2</sup> But when the Committee was set up, the post of Director General of the Security Service, to which Sir David Petrie was to be appointed in March 1941, had not yet been created. The

activities of MI5 were being supervised on behalf of the Prime Minister by Lord Swinton, formerly Secretary of State for Air. Although the situation was no doubt retroactively regularised, a great deal of initiative was obviously exercised at all levels. ‘In practice this rather anomalous position proved no handicap’, Masterman was to write later. ‘Broadly speaking bad men make good institutions bad, and good men make bad institutions good’.<sup>3</sup> The men who ran the Twenty Committee were good.

At the first meeting of the Twenty Committee on 2 January 1941 the Chairman presented a memorandum which defined the problem as it appeared to MI5. MI5 had built up a ‘fairly extensive’ network of double agents, but unless the Services were prepared to provide traffic for them – traffic which would have to contain a significant proportion of true information – it would be very difficult to keep them in being. But if they could be kept in being and operated successfully, they would provide a very useful instrument indeed. Through them MI5 would not only gain information about enemy intelligence services, but could limit and control the information which those services could obtain from the United Kingdom – as well as diverting enemy secret service funds into British coffers. The radio traffic of these agents would help British cryptanalysts to break enemy cyphers. The questionnaires provided by their German controllers would show what information was already available to German intelligence and for what operations the enemy was preparing. Finally, the double agents could be used to mislead the enemy about British intentions. But if they were to be used for such positive deception it would have to be in accordance with a long range plan. ‘We cannot’ stated the memorandum, in a phrase which deception experts were to use repeatedly during the next four years, ‘put over a new deception suddenly’. But if a few really important agents could be identified, and have their credibility built up through being entrusted with accurate information, then they could ‘be held in readiness and at the disposal of the Service Departments for a large-scale deception which could at the critical moment be of paramount operational importance’.

In the light of what eventually did happen, when a few really important agents *were* so built up to become the key elements in a large-scale deception which at the critical moment of the Normandy landings *was* of paramount importance, this was a truly remarkable prophecy. But it is significant how low a priority at this stage was placed on deception as a justification for the running of double agents. For both MI5 and MI6 their principal value lay in the information they provided about enemy intelligence services and enemy intentions. For the Services their value if any lay in confusing the enemy. In the dark days of 1940–1941 the armed forces were in no position to plan the kind of major operations in which a large-scale deception would be of paramount importance, and it was impossible to say when they ever would be able to do so.

Still, as Masterman was to write later, 'This glittering possibility was always the bait used when other authorities had to be persuaded to help us. It served to maintain belief in the system and was a more attractive selling-point than the day-to-day counter-espionage activities which we could secure'.<sup>4</sup> And unknown to the members of the Twenty Committee, in the Middle East, the only theatre where the British were capable of taking the initiative, the first measures of serious operational deception were at that very moment being put into effect, with the ultimate success which was eventually to make the British armed forces the most enthusiastic of customers for the services which the double agents were able to offer.\*

This memorandum was considered by the W Board at its first meeting on 8 January 1941; together with an immediate enquiry as to what information should be passed back to the Germans about the effect of air raids. On this the W Board ruled that accounts of the extent of air raid damage should be reasonably true; that the state of national morale should be truthfully reported; that the enemy should be encouraged to disperse his attacks as widely as possible; and that no information should be given about any differing reactions to bombing as between richer and poorer areas of towns – a subject about which the Germans were showing particular curiosity. Thereafter a routine was established. The Twenty Committee met weekly, to discuss both matters of general policy and detailed questions about traffic with the case-officers of individual double agents. The W Board increasingly left matters in the hands of the Twenty Committee, meeting to settle only especially important and delicate questions. Whereas it met seven times in 1941, in 1942 it met only four times, in 1943 twice and in 1944 and 1945 once.

For the first half of 1941 attention continued to focus on air policy. In order to avoid having to make a judgement of Solomon between on the one hand persuading the Germans to diversify their targets and on the other encouraging them to concentrate on London, the Chief of Air Staff suggested that RAF airfields should be indicated to them as attractive targets: that these should be reported as containing a high concentration of aircraft and to be inadequately defended by AA guns. This was approved, and double agents were briefed accordingly: one file full of misleading information being smuggled out by GW through his contacts in the Spanish embassy. By July, however, no identifiable effect had been observed on the pattern of German bombing, and the policy was discontinued. The Germans continued to be embarrassingly curious about the effect of their bombing of British cities, so in July 1941 one double agent was instructed to visit Coventry and report what he saw. BIA arranged for him a notional visit during which police protective activities prevented him from gathering more

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\* See Chapter 2 below.

than the sketchiest of impressions; but even the information which MI5 thought it safe for him to transmit seemed to the Home Defence Executive to be dangerously specific; almost indeed inviting a further German attack. The solution, as the Chairman of the Twenty Committee pointed out to the W Board on 30 July 1941 was for the Home Defence Executive itself to provide the information it wished to have transmitted to the enemy. 'The Germans' he wrote, 'whatever we do or say, will choose some targets to bomb. The choice is not between bombing or no bombing, but between the bombing of this or that objective. Surely therefore it is better to attempt to direct them to places which we consider at least less vulnerable than others, rather than to take no action and let things take their course?' In fact the report of this double agent as finally approved consisted mainly of reported rumours. He was carefully unspecific about the damage he actually saw; and he discouraged further raids by stating that all surviving factories of any importance were being widely dispersed.\*

In spite of the appeal by the chairman of the Twenty Committee the Home Defence Executive (HDE) found it difficult to provide anything very positive for his channels to use as traffic. But it was not only about the HDE that BiA felt it had cause to complain. The Service Departments provided general directives, of uneven quality, as to the type of information that might be passed, and in the light of these directives BiA submitted traffic for their approval. All too much of it, to their way of thinking, was not approved. The War Office in particular seemed to them to be more concerned with emphasising the areas on which information could not be passed than those on which it could,† and when Air Commodore Boyle ceased to be Director of Air Intelligence the interest of the Royal Air Force also declined. Only the Royal Navy, where the imaginativeness of the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Godfrey, was compounded by the enthusiasm of the naval representative on the Twenty Committee, Lieut Cdr Montagu, continued to show an active interest in the running of double agents.

The important thing, however, was to obtain enough information of any kind to provide credible traffic, and this BiA was able to do. A few additional tit-bits were provided: a bogus sabotage operation, for example, was mounted in a food store, to satisfy a particular German demand on one of their agents. But throughout 1941 the double agents continued to serve the purposes of MI5 by building up their credibility,

\* See F H Hinsley and C A G Simkins, *British Intelligence in the Second World War. Volume 4: Security and Counter-Intelligence 1940*, Appendix 8.

† Masterman wrote of this negative attitude with sympathetic understanding: 'The War Office and the Home Forces representatives pointed out that we were still on the defensive and that the great gains of deception could only be garnered when we passed to the offensive. In a defensive phase the chief merit was concealment, in an offensive phase the misinformation we could pass to the enemy'.<sup>1</sup>

persuading the Abwehr that their sources of information in the United Kingdom were so adequate that it was not necessary for them to open any new ones, and by their continued traffic providing the British with an increasing quantity of information about German operational intentions and the structure of the Abwehr itself. From the point of view of MI5 the double agents were earning their keep simply by remaining in being.

For the operatives in BiA however this was only the beginning. It was not enough to have fashioned such an instrument: at some point it must be used for a positive operational purpose. Hitherto misinformation had been passed with the primary object of keeping the agents in being – *defensively*. Had not the time come when the channels should be used *offensively*: to deceive the enemy into making major operational mistakes? This was the view which was being developed with increasing conviction by Lieut Col Robertson and his associates by the early summer of 1942. As Marriott expressed it in a memorandum of 30 June, the double agents must be getting the reputation of ‘men who seldom or never say anything untrue but who equally, as must be apparent to the Germans, never say anything which is new’. Would it not be better, he asked, to ‘aim at supplying the Germans with so much inaccurate information that the intelligence reports furnished by the Abwehr to the German High Command based on that information would themselves be misleading and wrong?’ With this view Lieut Cdr Montagu heartily agreed. ‘Our agent goes on a tour’ he wrote on 10 July, ‘and produces a dull sort of bowdlerised Baedeker – he sees nothing exciting, he sees so few troops of so few units that one would think there were no troops in England; he sees few aerodromes although every recce by the Germans must have shown the country stiff with aerodromes; no factory was making any armaments anywhere, and although he saw some ships he was seldom lucky enough to see a convoy or capital ship under repair’. They were in fact entirely neglecting ‘the opportunity of filling the German intelligence files with a mass of inaccurate information ... I feel’ he concluded ‘that to fill the German files with what we want, and to help deceive them on operations of all sizes, is of such value as to be really worth a real effort’.

The army representative disagreed: they could hardly, he argued on 27 July, put over a planned deception unless they knew what the operational plans were going to be. Moreover he felt that BiA had lost its sense of proportion: Marriott’s memorandum, he considered ‘emphasises the fact that we must serve the agents rather than that they should serve us ... we must keep a realist outlook, and not become fascinated by the project as though it were a game’. They must not exaggerate the potentialities of the double agents: ‘the German General Staff will not move a single division on an agent’s report alone, it must be supported by other evidence, e.g. aerial reconnaissance, W/T, R/T, Embassy reports, etc’. Finally, he was highly sceptical of the claims

put forward by MI5, that it now controlled 80 per cent of enemy espionage in the United Kingdom. If there were still uncontrolled agents at work, the contrast between the true information they supplied and the false information furnished by the double agents would over a time become apparent, and the double agents would be completely discredited.

Some of this military scepticism was well founded. Although the confident assertion ‘the German General Staff will not move a single division on an agent’s report alone’ was proved untrue in June 1944, the War Office was entirely correct in assuming that German military intelligence placed little confidence in the information provided by the agents of the Abwehr unless they could check it from their own sources. It was also correct in stating that agents’ reports had to be seen as only one element in a whole complex of information, all of which had to be consistent if it was to be believed; but the organisation for creating and managing this complex was soon to be created. Where they were at fault was in questioning the extent to which MI5 now controlled the German espionage network in the United Kingdom. This was something that could now be stated with a fair degree of conviction, thanks to ‘Signals Intelligence’.

## (ii) Signals Intelligence\* (Sigint)

The state of emergency imposed in Britain when invasion appeared imminent in June 1940, a condition which remained essentially unaltered for the next four years, gave the security authorities quite exceptional advantages. Apart from any other restrictions, it set very narrow constraints on the capacity of the Abwehr to communicate with its agents in the United Kingdom. With some it could still keep in touch through correspondence via neutral countries, especially Spain and Portugal: The agents wrote apparently innocent letters to cover-addresses in Lisbon and Madrid, the real messages being written between the lines in secret ink. But although very full information could be conveyed by this channel, transmission was slow and by the time it reached Berlin might well be out of date. A limited amount of material could occasionally be passed in the diplomatic bags of neutral embassies such as, as we have seen, that of Spain. The most satisfactory channel was radio transmission, but for this three problems had to be solved. First,

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\* The term Ultra, which has become current as a name for intelligence obtained by interception and decryption of enemy radio communications, was not in general use during the war except as a caveat attached to documents classified as MOST later TOP SECRET. ‘Special Intelligence’ was the term used to describe naval material in this category. Army and Air decrypts were termed ‘Most Secret Sources’ MSS, and Abwehr material ‘ISOS’ or ‘ISK’. Signals Intelligence (Sigint) was the phrase in most general use, and seems to be that most suitable for use in this volume, as in the earlier ones.

the agents had to be provided with transmitting and receiving sets, and after June 1940 this was easier said than done. Secondly their transmissions had to evade detection by the security authorities; and finally they had to communicate in a secure cypher.

On the outbreak of war the branch of military intelligence responsible for radio services, MI8, had set up a special unit, the Radio Security Service (RSS) to watch for illicit transmissions from the British Isles. One such quickly came to their attention – the set which was being operated by their colleagues of BiA on behalf of *Snow*; and the traffic between *Snow* and his control in Hamburg provided British cryptanalysts working at the Government Code and Cypher School (GC and CS) at Bletchley Park with valuable information about the Abwehr's communication techniques. So did the communications of another wireless agent, *Tate*, who was parachuted into England with his set in September 1940 and who rapidly became, under the supervision of BiA, one of the Abwehr's chief sources of information about air raid damage. But the most valuable source of cryptographic information came from traffic intercepted and monitored by RSS from the beginning of 1940, which proved to be that of an Abwehr control located in a vessel in the North Sea communicating with agents in the Low Countries. Meanwhile a special section was set up at Bletchley Park to study all communications between Abwehr stations which did not have available the Enigma coding machines on which most high-level German official communications were carried. In December 1940 this section was able to break the hand cypher which carried the bulk of the Abwehr traffic, which became known after the head of the Section as ISOS (Intelligence Service Oliver Strachey).

The breaking of the Enigma cyphers themselves has been fully described in the first volume in this series, and this is not the place to rehearse the story again. The reconstruction of the machine itself at the beginning of the war was an allied effort to which the Polish and the French security services made a major contribution, and thanks to their preliminary work a beginning was made with the reading of the Enigma traffic at Bletchley in January 1940. Little could be done so long as the Wehrmacht remained substantially within its own frontiers and transmitted the bulk of its traffic by land-lines. But when in April 1940 the Germans invaded Norway the volume of their radio traffic increased enormously, and Bletchley was able to read much of their traffic – mainly that of the German Air Force – within a few days. The attack on France and the Low Countries the following month made available a further mass of material. But Bletchley was not yet organised for rapid interpretation and transmission of information to operational commands overseas, and neither were those commands equipped to absorb it. The information from this 'Signals Intelligence' (as it quickly came to be called) was transmitted to General Gort's headquarters as if coming from a well-placed agent, and was not in consequence

accorded a very high degree of authority by the users; if indeed it arrived in time to be acted on at all. Sigint therefore provided little or no help to the British forces during the Dunkirk campaign.\*

Most of the Enigma keys which were broken at this stage of the war belonged to the German Air Force; partly because of the sheer quantity of air force traffic generated during the Battle of Britain and the subsequent 'Blitz', partly because of the low level of security observed by German Air Force signal sections. This gave useful information not only about the German Air Force itself but about the army units to which German Air Force liaison units were attached. German naval Enigma had also been reconstructed cryptanalytically by early 1941, and during the course of that year a series of successful captures of German vessels provided enough information for much of the German Enigma traffic to become currently readable, at a critical stage in the Battle of the Atlantic. A change of keys the following February did much to restore the security of the communications of U-boats in the North Atlantic, which were then read only with great difficulty until Bletchley achieved a decisive breakthrough in December 1942 which led to victory in the Battle of the Atlantic in the summer of 1943.

But more important for our purposes was the success achieved at Bletchley in December 1941 in cracking the Enigma cypher used by the Abwehr, the traffic so exposed becoming known, after the cryptanalyst principally responsible, Dillwyn Knox, as Intelligence Service Knox (ISK). By 1942 all the cyphers of the Abwehr, both hand and machine, had been broken, and most of their traffic was being currently read.† It was for this reason that in the spring of 1942 MI5 could assert, with a high degree of certainty, that they controlled 80 per cent of the German espionage network in the United Kingdom.

The Army and the Royal Air Force staff attached to GC and CS advised on the distribution of intelligence not only to the Service ministries but, through Special Communications and Liaison Units supplied by the RAF and controlled by MI6, to their operational commands overseas, which ensured that the misunderstandings and delays of the Dunkirk campaign were not repeated. ISOS material and its distribution were the responsibility of the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, whose Director (later Director General) was also responsible to the Prime Minister for the security of all Sigint material.

This was logical enough. MI6 carried the prime responsibility for

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\* For an account of the difficulties involved in supplying Sigint to the field see Hinsley Vol I pp 144–145.

† The other principal channel of Abwehr communications was in a cypher known as *Fish*, carried over a teleprinter service which automatically enciphered on transmission and deciphered on reception. Each machine used was named after different fish. *Tunny* was broken early in 1942, and its traffic was named *Istun*. For general purposes and cover however the term ISOS continued in use for all intercepted Abwehr traffic. The traffic of the rival service of the SS, the Sicherheitsdienst, was termed ISOSICLE.

the collection of information about the enemy from covert sources. It was, in addition, responsible for the security of its own operations and had its own counter-espionage service, Section V, whose activities inevitably overlapped with those of B Branch of MI5. Broadly speaking, MI5 was responsible for counter-espionage within the United Kingdom and the Empire, including Palestine and Egypt, whereas MI6 was responsible for the collection of all counter-espionage intelligence in foreign countries. It was to Section V that the head of MI6 delegated responsibility for the security of ISOS, and its officials considered it their duty to make available to MI5 only such intercepted Abwehr and other traffic as seemed strictly relevant to the exercise of their responsibilities within the Empire and the United Kingdom.

This duty they carried out in a fashion which for a time appeared to MI5 to be arbitrary and unco-operative. In order to understand and counter the operations of the Abwehr against the United Kingdom, MI5 considered, it needed to build up a complete picture of the operation of German intelligence services all over the world, as well as of the structure and personnel of the Abwehr and its relations with other branches of the German government. Such a picture was indeed being constructed by the Radio Security Service, which had developed an Analysis Bureau specifically for this purpose. But when the decision was taken, early in 1941, to give MI6 control of MSS material, RSS was transferred from its parent body, MI8, to Section V of MI6, and its members were forbidden to communicate directly their conclusions to any branch of MI5. This led to major difficulties in the operation of some of the most valuable of BiA's double agents.

In December 1940 there had arrived in London from Lisbon a twenty-eight year old Yugoslav businessman, Dusan Popov. Popov had been recruited as an agent the previous summer in Belgrade, by an Abwehr official with whom he had been at the University of Freiburg, one Jebsen, and was sent to England as an Abwehr agent. Popov was a young man of remarkable coolness, courage and sense of humour whose character emerges very clearly, in spite of a certain amount of fantasising, from his own book *Spy, Counter-Spy* (London 1974). He reported his recruitment by the Abwehr to the British embassy in Belgrade, and as a result MI6 did all it could to make his journey to London comfortable. On arrival he was contacted by BiA and recruited as a double agent under the code name *Tricycle*.

*Tricycle* had brought with him a questionnaire from the Abwehr, together with a supply of secret ink for communicating the answers, and it was very largely to provide convincing replies to this particular questionnaire that BiA had called the Twenty Committee into being. He was required to obtain samples of ration cards and identity cards, together with details of the organisation in Britain for dealing with fifth column activities and parachute landings. He was to discover the location of food depots and to report on the state of morale of the

working classes. From the Army he was to discover details of coastal defences, anti-aircraft defences, the location of headquarters and the order of battle of all military units. From the RAF he was to discover details of aircraft construction, the location and rate of output of specific factories and the state of supply of raw materials. From the Navy he was to find out what vessels were being built or repaired and where; what ships had been sunk or damaged by mines or torpedoes; what war material was coming in from the United States and where it was being unloaded. In addition he was to make contact with the entourage of the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral Sir John Tovey, and with a number of eminent members of the House of Lords who were believed to be in favour of a compromise peace.

For this ambitious programme the Twenty Committee was able to provide answers only of a very vague and general kind. Lieut Cdr Montagu gallantly sacrificed his reputation by posing as a Jewish officer anxious to ingratiate himself with the Germans in order to get good treatment in the event of invasion, and so prepared to pass over information of high quality. A bogus chart of the minefields covering the East Coast was prepared which *Tricycle* took back with him to Lisbon. The Abwehr was impressed, the German Naval Command less so. The Abwehr in general professed themselves disappointed with the generality of the answers which *Tricycle* provided to its questions, but showed no disposition to mistrust him. Nor did it query the authenticity of two sub-agents whom he notionally recruited. One, a former Army officer allegedly cashiered for bad debts and now a registered dealer in arms, known to MI5 as *Balloon*, provided economic and industrial intelligence. The other, a lady known as *Gelatine*, was well-connected, indiscreet, and provided a great deal of confidential political gossip.

*Tricycle* returned to Lisbon to report in January, and again in March; and in June 1941, on his return to London he was able to give a full account of the Abwehr organisation in Portugal. Then in August his German employers sent him to the United States, and things began to go wrong. The British security authorities in Washington secured the co-operation of the FBI in ‘running’ him, but that organisation did not appreciate the need for preserving the cover of a double agent in the interests of long-term deception. In its eyes the purpose of a double agent was to entrap other agents, who should then be prosecuted with maximum publicity. Moreover *Tricycle’s* extravagant lifestyle, which had merely aroused amused and admiring comment among the tolerant officials of MI5 in wartime London, caused deep offence to J Edgar Hoover’s puritanical lieutenants. Deeply mistrusting him, they refused to provide any ‘chicken feed’ – harmless but accurate information to maintain his credibility. The Abwehr, partly because of administrative difficulties and partly because he was getting no information for it, ceased to provide any money, and its senior officials began to wonder whether he was not merely inefficient, but actually under Allied control. The

existence of these doubts was revealed by ISOS decrypts but since *Tricycle* was no longer operating within the British Empire MI6 did not inform MI5 about them. Nor did it provide MI5 with the intercepts of *Tricycle's* own traffic with his Abwehr controls.

By the summer of 1942, therefore, BiA was growing anxious about *Tricycle*. So long as he remained in the United States nothing could go very badly wrong, but in August the FBI refused to handle him any longer. He had to return to London. To maintain his credibility with his German employers he insisted on doing so via Lisbon, somewhat to the alarm of his British case-officers who feared that his chances of surviving German interrogation were remote. MI6 was therefore persuaded to release its intercepts of his traffic and BiA sent an official to Washington to extricate *Tricycle* and brief him for his encounter with the Abwehr. This passed off entirely successfully. On his return to Lisbon in October *Tricycle* took the offensive, berating his employers for failing to provide him with enough funds to do a decent job in the United States. It was clear that whatever doubts about his integrity may have been current in Berlin, *Tricycle's* Abwehr controls in Lisbon still regarded him as a star performer. They proved apologetic and understanding, asked him to return to London, providing him with a new questionnaire and £25,000 in cash. This, needless to say, went to swell the coffers of BiA.

Both the Abwehr and BiA were at one in regarding *Tricycle* as an erratic but reliable agent who had produced little as yet but who was rich in promise for the future. The British expectations were to be amply fulfilled, and we shall return to *Tricycle* later in this story. But while *Tricycle* was in America another agent had arrived from Lisbon, who was almost single-handed to provide a justification for the existence of the Twenty Committee: Juan Pujol Garcia, better known as *Garbo*.

When at the beginning of 1942 Bletchley began reading the Abwehr Enigma traffic between the station in Madrid and their headquarters in Berlin, it was soon realised that reports were being passed, allegedly from a German agent in the United Kingdom, which were rich in ludicrously inaccurate detail. Convoys sailed made up of non-existent ships. British Army regiments were referred to by non-existent numbers. A remarkable situation was reported at Liverpool where there were apparently 'drunken orgies and slack morals at amusement centres'; while in Glasgow dock-workers were prepared to 'do anything for a litre of wine'. It was clear that this agent was not operating from the British Isles and it seemed barely credible that he had even visited them; but his identity remained a mystery until he himself revealed it to a representative of MI6 in Lisbon early in March. He was in fact a 29 year-old Spaniard of good family who, having been profoundly disillusioned with all totalitarian regimes as a result of the Spanish Civil War, was deeply devoted to the cause of British victory. In January 1941 he had offered his services as an agent to the British in Madrid

without success. He then turned to the Germans, who were only slightly more forthcoming; but after lengthy negotiations and elaborate deception he succeeded in persuading the Abwehr officials in Madrid that he was about to visit London on behalf of the Spanish security services to investigate a currency racket. The Abwehr thereupon recruited him as an agent and provided secret ink, questionnaires, and an accommodation address in Madrid to which to address his reports. *Garbo* went no further than Lisbon. There he settled down with a map of the United Kingdom, a Blue Guide to England, a Portuguese study of the British Fleet and an Anglo-French vocabulary of military terms. With these slender resources he concocted, between July 1941 and April 1942, when he finally reached the United Kingdom, nearly forty long reports based on his own imaginary observations or those of equally imaginary sub-agents whom he had notionally recruited.

These were the reports referred to above. MI6 initially told MI5 nothing about them. But towards the end of February 1942 MI5 learned of *Garbo*'s existence from the Lisbon representative of Section V on one of his periodic visits to London, and on 3 March asked for a full report on this mysterious figure. Two days later the MI6 representative officially informed the Twenty Committee of his existence, and a week later, on 12 March, he was able to give further details. Thanks to the good offices of the US Naval Attaché in Lisbon, MI6 was now in contact with *Garbo*, and he was operating under its control.

This produced a situation that BiA found thoroughly unsatisfactory. It had no official access to the ISOS decrypts revealing *Garbo* traffic, yet it had somehow to harmonise the reports of its own controlled agents in Britain with those fed through this MI6 channel in Lisbon. News of this anomalous situation leaked out at a high level and Sir John Anderson asked Sir Findlater Stewart to convoke a committee to investigate the possibility of a closer co-ordination between MI5, MI6 and the Special Operations Executive 'as it affects the work of the Twenty Committee'. This caused general consternation. To bring in SOE was to extend the number of those who knew about the double agents far beyond anything BiA considered necessary or desirable, and a rather embarrassed meeting of the W Board was held on 28 March 1942 to restore the situation. The head of SOE agreed to forget all he had heard and Sir Findlater Stewart was reassured that liaison would be improved. The immediate problem was eased by bringing *Garbo* to England, which he reached on 24 April 1942. He then came under the jurisdiction of BiA.\*

Even now, however, MI6 did not feel justified in making available to the Twenty Committee the decrypts of intercepted Abwehr traffic relating to *Garbo*, and a highly anomalous situation resulted. The Service representatives did not even know of the existence of these decrypts,

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\* For the further history of *Garbo* see Appendix 2.

and they regarded *Garbo* with understandable suspicion. Could anyone possibly be taken in by such obvious inventions? Was *Garbo*'s own story not utterly incredible? By June 1942 the position of BIA had become impossible. It knew from ISOS intercepts that *Garbo*'s story was true and that his reports were being relayed as accurate by his Abwehr controls. But unless the Services could be convinced of this, they would not provide through the Twenty Committee the material to enable *Garbo* to concoct more credible reports. On 5 June 1942, the chairman wrote to the head of MI6, persuasively explaining the problem. On 11 June he received at last an affirmative and satisfactory reply: copies of all decrypts relevant to double agents would henceforward be made available to the Twenty Committee at each of its weekly meetings.

We have already seen how, by the early summer of 1942, the need for the smooth functioning of a team of double agents whose complete reliability could be tested by intercepts had led to a growing impatience on the part of BIA with the constraints imposed upon it. Now it had won its battle with MI6 over access to all relevant Abwehr material. Next it had to persuade the Services to make more positive use of the instrument that lay to their hand. Quite how powerful that instrument might be was described in a memorandum which Robertson presented to the W Board on 15 July 1942.

'It is reasonably certain' this memorandum opened 'that the only network of agents possessed by the Germans in this country is that which is now under the control of the Security Service'. For this claim three supporting arguments were cited. A watch on mail sent to known Abwehr cover addresses had revealed no uncontrolled agents. There was no evidence of payment being made to any uncontrolled agents through the usual channels in Lisbon and Madrid: indeed one controlled agent in England had £18,000 available for disbursements and had received no instructions to make any. Finally, the Radio Security Service had discovered no uncontrolled agents operating. There was no guarantee that the Germans would not pick up incidental information from miscellaneous sources, but

'it is inconceivable that there should exist in England any organisation or network of agents so carefully concealed, so different in its nature from anything of which we have knowledge, and so wholly divorced from the network which we control that it is able to operate without colliding at any point with the controls we have described above ... It follows from this that if we, being in control of the network, choose to say one thing, and a single agent who is not controlled to say another, it is we who stand a better chance of being believed'.

There was no question of this being a skilful Abwehr plant. Thanks to ISOS decrypts

'we have been able to watch the Germans making arrangements for the [agents'] despatch, discussing arrangements arising from payments sent to them

or letters received from them, and passing on from one Stelle\* to another their reports and comments on them. In two or three cases we have been able to observe the action which has been rapid and extensive taken by the Germans upon the basis of these agents' reports'.

It therefore followed, concluded the memorandum 'that the combined General Staff in this country have, in MI5 double agents, a powerful means of exercising influence over the OKW German High Command'. It could feed the Germans the information it wanted them to have, and on which their decisions would have to be based. 'Once this point is appreciated by our own General Staff it will be realised that they have in their hands a powerful weapon, and one upon the exercise of which it is worth while to spend considerable time'. At present the only time which the Services were so spending was the two hours a week which their representatives spent on the Twenty Committee – normally in a purely passive role – vetting the traffic suggested by MI5. Something more positive was needed if the German files were to be filled, as Lieut Col Robertson put it, with the information that the British would like to see there. He suggested indeed that there should be a permanent Inter-Services Section which could 'devote its whole time to the framing of double agents' traffic, enquiries resulting from such traffic, and similar problems'.

To these suggestions the Services now responded affirmatively. This was not because the MI5 paper was in itself persuasive. During the last weeks in July the whole aspect of the war had changed. With the decisions taken, during the visit of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff to London at the end of July, to launch an allied invasion of French North Africa, the Chiefs of Staff Committee at last had a positive operational plan; and as had been frequently pointed out during the past two years, it was a great deal easier to have a deception policy when one knew what one *was* going to do than when one did not. The Director of Naval Intelligence gave Lieut Cdr Montagu responsibility for naval deceptive activities. The Army appointed a full-time staff officer from GHQ Home Forces, and the RAF promised that its own representative on the Twenty Committee would devote more time to the matter. But more important than any of these changes was the appearance at the Twenty Committee, on 27 August 1942, of Colonel J H Bevan from the War Cabinet Offices; head of the London Controlling Section of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

### (iii) The London Controlling Section

We have seen how the W Board and the Twenty Committee came into being primarily to supervise the supply of information and misinfor-

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\* Stelle = station. See p. 46 below.

mation on which the successful running of double agents depended. They were in no way responsible for 'deception policy' as such: they had neither advisory nor executive authority and only a handful of people in Whitehall even knew of their existence. If any body was responsible for deception as a whole in the early years of the war it was the Joint Inter-Service Security Board. This had been set up in February 1940 under the auspices of the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, when the British and French were planning their abortive intervention in Finland. It was later given responsibility 'for the co-ordination of all means of preventing leakage of information to the enemy, and for the preparation and executive action in connection with measures designed to deceive the enemy as to our plans and intentions'. On it sat representatives not only of the three Services but of MI5 and MI6, who assisted when necessary in putting over false information through their own channels. But its deceptive activities, such as they were, were confined to the protection of convoys or the movement of troops overseas, and it met only *ad hoc* to consider them. It was responsible neither for formulating nor for implementing any overall deception 'policy'. In the early years of the war no such policy existed.

The idea that such a policy was possible and desirable owed its origin to one man: General Sir Archibald Wavell, C in C Middle East between 1939–41. We shall see in due course\* how he applied his ideas to the conduct of the campaign in the Middle East, building up a special deception section ('A' Force) on his staff at Cairo under the guidance of Lieut Col Dudley Clarke. From December 1940 onwards 'A' Force had proved its worth, growing from a body concerned purely with tactical deception in the Western Desert to one masterminding strategic deception throughout the Middle East. In October 1941 the Chiefs of Staff Committee took advantage of Lieut Col Clarke's presence in London to summon him to give them an account of his operations.<sup>6</sup> Clarke proved persuasive. The Joint Planning Staff examined his ideas and recommended, on 8 October, that an organisation along the lines he had created in Cairo should be established in London.<sup>7</sup> They considered that, like that of 'A' Force, such a body should operate as an intrinsic part of the operational planning staffs. Its success however would depend, like that of 'A' Force, not on the effectiveness of its organisation but on the personality of its head, who would, they pointed out, need to be a man of 'considerable ingenuity and imagination, with an aptitude for improvisation, plenty of initiative and a good military background'. He would have to function as a commander with a staff, and not as chairman of a committee. This 'Controlling Officer', as they christened him, would be responsible both for preparing plans

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\* See Chapter 2 below.

to cover intended operations and for executing them, using existing machinery. There should be no separate 'deception staff'. The services of the intelligence and security authorities, of the Political Warfare Executive, and of the armed forces themselves would all be available to implement such executive action as was necessary to give artistic verisimilitude to his schemes.

The Chiefs of Staff approved this boldly imaginative proposal on the spot,<sup>8</sup> and made an equally imaginative choice for a Controlling Officer. Colonel Oliver Stanley, MC, was eminent both as a social and as a political figure. After a distinguished military career in the First World War he had entered politics, becoming President of the Board of Trade in Mr Chamberlain's administration from 1937 until January 1940, when he had succeeded Leslie Hore Belisha as Secretary of State for War; an office he held until the formation of the Churchill administration four months later. He commanded the confidence of the Services and had wide experience to reinforce it. His appointment was camouflaged under the title of Head of the Future Operational Planning Section of the Joint Planning Staff. Unfortunately his distinguished background was not enough in itself to enable him to operate effectively in the Whitehall bureaucracy. The clandestine nature of his role in itself made it difficult to convince the Services of its importance. He was given a single staff officer and a secretary, but the representatives from each of the three Services needed to provide his office with even minimal effectiveness were not forthcoming. He was not even told of the existence of the double agents; only that MI5 had 'special means' of conveying information to enemy intelligence if required.

Under the circumstances, and given the complete absence in Whitehall of any experience of strategic deception, there was very little Colonel Stanley could do. His appointment coincided with the darkest days of war, when the checking of the British offensive in the Western Desert and the Japanese attack in the Far East rendered any offensive operational planning out of the question and made it difficult to indicate to the most credulous enemy that there might be any. But he did not waste his time. In December 1941 the Chiefs of Staff approved his proposals for a notional attack on the Norwegian coast, Operation *Hardboiled*, the first of many such feints which were to be mounted over the next three years. For this, forces were actually nominated and trained; plans were drawn up with Stavanger as the objective; billeting requisition forms were printed in Norwegian; supplies of Norwegian currency were earmarked; the Norwegian General Staff in London was consulted, and enquiries were made about the availability of Norwegian interpreters. The operation was freely gossiped about in London, and the double agents retailed some of the gossip in their traffic. It would be claiming too much to assert that all this activity was in itself the cause of the rumours of a British operation which began to circulate in Stock-

holm in January 1942 and in the German Press the following March, or in the reinforcement of the German garrison in Norway which took place in April and May. Hitler was himself abnormally sensitive about his northern flank and needed no prompting to take extraordinary precautions for its defence. But whether or not it served its strategic object, Operation *Hardboiled* gave the deception authorities some useful practice and encouraged the patient case-officers of the double agents with evidence that the misinformation which they fed to the Abwehr could on occasion be taken seriously by the German military authorities.<sup>9</sup>

The units notionally training for *Hardboiled* were in fact used for an amphibious attack successfully mounted against Madagascar in May 1942. This operation provided the deception authorities with an opportunity to put into effect a cover plan which involved the co-operation of both London and Cairo. The expedition, consisting of an infantry brigade, a commando and supporting troops, sailed from England on 23 March and called at Durban on 22 April. At Durban briefings were given to the officers of the force and maps were distributed which indicated that the objective of the attack was the Italian-occupied Dodecanese Islands in the eastern Mediterranean. At Alexandria arrangements were made for the reception of the expedition and staff officers gossiped freely about its notional destination – gossip, again, retailed by the double agents at the disposal of 'A' Force. The Italians were sufficiently impressed to reinforce the garrisons of Cos and Leros and certainly when the expedition arrived off Diego Suarez on 4 May, it achieved complete surprise. Here again the deception authorities could not claim a proven success. It can be said only that if the sailing expedition had come to the attention of the enemy, they were provided with an alternative and no less plausible explanation of its intentions; and if reports of its true destination reached them this would have been quite likely itself to have been considered a deception rather than the truth.<sup>10</sup>

But during this period the deception authorities had another and more chastening experience. In December 1941, after General Auchinleck's forces in the Western Desert had successfully expelled the Axis forces from Cyrenaica in the aftermath of Operation *Crusader*, operational planning had begun for a further advance westward to Tripoli. 'A' Force covered this with the notional plan that no further advance would take place, but that Auchinleck would now build a strong defensive flank in Libya and transfer substantial forces to Persia and Iraq; to reinforce the Russian forces in the Caucasus who were threatened by the German advance in south Russia, and to provide encouragement to the Turks.

Stanley himself saw weaknesses in this deception and pointed them out in a memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff dated 5 January 1942.<sup>11</sup> It was not yet certain that the advance to Tripolitania would take place;

such rumours would disturb the neutral Turks; while anyhow the story seemed unnecessarily elaborate when the obvious and urgent need to send reinforcements to defend Malaya against Japanese attack would provide a far better cover if any was wanted. Rommel's successful attack at El Agheila in January 1942 in any case pre-empted British plans, but not before 'A' Force had flooded the Middle East with reports of the strength of British defensive capabilities in the Western Desert.

At the same time, unfortunately, the Press and the BBC in London were being encouraged by the military authorities to emphasise the strength of the reinforcements which were being sent to Malaya, in the hope that this would act as a deterrent to Japanese attack. The revelation of actual British weakness both in the Western Desert and in Malaya, coming on top of these encouraging reports, was not good for allied morale. It was clear that manipulation of the Press for deception purposes was a highly dangerous and potentially self-defeating process.<sup>12</sup> As a result the Chiefs of Staff issued a directive on 11 February 1942 to the effect that in future all major deception plans should be referred by Commanders-in-Chief to the Chiefs of Staff Committee for approval; and that directives to Directors of Public Relations should be devised by the Joint Planning Staff, in consultation with the Foreign Office and with Colonel Stanley, 'to enable them to give confidential guidelines to the Press in harmony with our operational intentions'.<sup>13</sup>

These and other difficulties may have made the Chiefs of Staff less optimistic about the potentialities of strategic deception than they had been the previous October. Clearly Colonel Stanley himself felt increasingly frustrated, and in May 1942 he asked the Prime Minister to release him so that he could return to a career in active politics. Permission was granted – in November of that year he became Secretary of State for the Colonies – and on 21 May the Chiefs of Staff approved his replacement as Controlling Officer by Lieut Col J H Bevan, an officer with considerable experience in military intelligence who had been involved in tactical deception activities in Norway in April 1940.<sup>14</sup> Also so involved had been the well-known author and traveller Lieut Col Peter Fleming; and Fleming had been summoned by General Wavell to head his deception staff in India when he had assumed command in that theatre in July 1941. As it happened, Fleming could not leave England until February 1942. The reports which he then carried about developments, or lack of them, in Whitehall may have been influential in convincing Wavell that the seed sown the previous October when Dudley Clarke had visited London had not as yet borne much fruit. For whatever reason, on the very day that Bevan took up his post as Controlling Officer Wavell sent a signal to London, this time addressed personally to the Prime Minister.

'I have always had considerable belief this ran' in deceiving and disturbing enemy by false information. C in C Mideast instituted Special Branch Staff

under selected officer charged with deception (of the) enemy and it has had considerable success. I have similar branch in India and am already involved in several deception plans. These however can have local and ephemeral effect only, unless part of general deception plan on wide scale. IHQS (sic) can only be provided from place where main strategical policy is decided and Principal Intelligence Centre located. Coherent and long term policy of deception must be centred there. [I] fully appreciate value of work done by ISSB and Controlling Officer but have impression the approach is defensive rather than aggressive and confined mainly to cover plans for particular operations. May I suggest for your personal consideration that policy of bold imaginative deception worked between London, Washington and Commanders in the field by only officers with special qualifications might show good dividend, especially in case of Japanese'.<sup>15</sup>

This message was supremely fortunate in its timing. Its arrival coincided not only with Bevan's appointment but with the first serious plans being laid, in association with the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the invasion of continental Europe. The Prime Minister circulated it to all members of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff referred it to the Joint Planning Staff, which on 18 June put forward a strong supporting recommendation.<sup>16</sup> The text of this document showed how much had been learned during the past few apparently sterile months.

'Experience [suggested the JPS] has shown that to achieve its object the deception plan must –

- (i) simulate intentions which are plausible
- (ii) reach the enemy through as many possible of his normal channels of information
- (iii) to this end be backed by real evidence of troop movements, shipping, signal traffic, etc. Moreover it is impossible to develop strategic deception on a large scale unless our general strategy is clearly defined and likely to be adhered to. In the absence of firm strategic policy, any deception plan entails the grave risk of drawing the enemy's attention to a move which may in fact prove to be one we really want to make when the time comes'.

The JPS proposed that the existing deception section 'which we suggest might be known in future as "The Controlling Section", should be responsible for strategic deception on a global scale. Deception specifically to cover the forthcoming operations against the continent of Europe should be the responsibility of a staff attached to the Supreme Commander. The Controlling Section should concentrate on broad deception policy and co-ordination of theatre deception plans. Finally, the Americans should be invited to set up a parallel organisation in Washington, which should maintain close liaison with their colleagues in London'.

The Chiefs of Staff approved these suggestions in their entirety.<sup>17</sup> Lieut Col Bevan's section was now to be named 'the London Controlling

Section' and Bevan himself received a directive of wide scope.\* He was to 'prepare deception plans on a world-wide basis with the object of causing the enemy to waste his military resources'. He was to co-ordinate the deception plans proposed by Commands at home and abroad and the cover plans prepared by the ISSB for specific operations. He was to watch over the execution by the armed forces or other appropriate bodies of the deception plans he had prepared, and control the support of Service deception schemes by leakage and propaganda. Finally, his work was 'not to be limited to strategic deception alone but [was] to include any matter calculated to mystify or mislead the enemy wherever military advantage may be so gained'.

It will be noted that the Controlling Officer was given no executive authority commensurate with these broad responsibilities. His function was to plan, to co-ordinate and to supervise. His effectiveness would lie in the closeness of his co-operation with the Joint Planning Staff, with whose offices his own were located in the War Cabinet Offices at Storey's Gate, and in the direct access he would enjoy to the Chiefs of Staff. There was no 'deception staff' as such. Deception was seen as being unequivocally an operational responsibility, both notional and factual plans being made and implemented by the same authorities. Lieut Col Bevan was directed to keep in close touch with the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, the Political Warfare Executive, the Special Operations Executive, the Secret Intelligence Service and similar arcane bodies, but his base was firmly established among the operational planners of the Service staffs.

Psychologically this was to be of profound importance. The military of all three Services always tend to be ambiguous in their attitude towards their colleagues who are concerned with intelligence, subversion and in general the less orthodox aspects of warfare. While respecting their abilities and recognising the value of their contribution, they sometimes find it difficult to treat directives or advice emanating from such sources with quite the same respect as they do instructions coming down through normal operational channels of command. This was something that Bevan realised the moment he took up his new and vast responsibilities. He would be able to implement these only if he gained the confidence of the senior military commanders who controlled the resources he would have to use; and this could be done only by emphasising the essentially operational nature of his activities.

The Chiefs of Staff also accepted the recommendation of the JPS that they should enlist the co-operation of their United States colleagues. The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 28 July, agreed in principle to co-operate along the lines suggested by the British, and instructed their own secretariat to work out an appropriate scheme.<sup>18</sup> The Ameri-

\* See Appendix 3, COS 42 184th Meeting, Annex I.

can system developed slowly, and co-operation was at first very much *ad hoc*. The Joint Chiefs did not yet possess the kind of joint service secretariat which provided so convenient a framework for the London Controlling Section; while traditionally their military and naval commands enjoyed a degree of autonomy which made any central direction extraordinarily difficult to impose. But in August 1942 a body was set up, known as Joint Security Control, consisting of two members only: Major General G A Strong of the United States Army and Captain George C Dyer of the United States Navy. This focus enabled the London Controlling Section to obtain the kind of co-operation, information and guidance from the United States that it needed for its own activities.

Bevan's directive of 20 June was drafted on the assumption, first that large-scale planning for an Allied invasion of Continental Europe was about to begin, and second that deception for this would be the responsibility of the Supreme Commander of that operation. But almost immediately the British Chiefs of Staff came under heavy pressure to prepare plans for an immediate assault on the French coast by British forces – Operation *Sledgehammer* – and Bevan's first task was to produce a cover plan for this. He had time to do no more than point out the huge complexity of this task<sup>19</sup> when the assignment was cancelled. The Chiefs of Staff unanimously declared the operation unfeasible; the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet supported them; and President Roosevelt instructed his Chiefs of Staff to accept the alternative proposed for the invasion of north Africa, Operation *Torch*. Although a Supreme Commander, Lieut General Dwight D Eisenhower, was nominated for this operation, Lieut Col Bevan was made responsible for the management of all deception in connection with it. On 27 July he received instructions from the Chiefs of Staff to prepare two major plans. The first had as its object the containment of the largest possible number of enemy forces in North-West Europe during the coming autumn. The second was to provide cover for the armada which would soon be converging from the United Kingdom and the east coast of the United States on the coast of French North Africa.<sup>20</sup>

The measures taken by the LCS to carry out these instructions and the success which attended them will be examined in due course. It remains to describe the relations established between that Section, with all its new responsibilities, and the Twenty Committee, which had so valuable an instrument under its control and was, as we have seen, so impatient to use it.

It will be recalled that on 15 July 1942 the W Board had considered a memorandum in which MI5 had claimed that it now controlled the only German intelligence network of any consequence in the United Kingdom, and had pointed out the possibilities which this opened up for positive deception of the enemy on a very large scale. What was now needed was a deception policy, which this could be used to

implement. Lieut Col Bevan had now been given responsibility by the Chiefs of Staff for the working out of just such a policy, and the W Board agreed that he must be put ‘100 per cent in the picture’: informed, that is, not only about the double agents but also about Sigint. There was no question but that he should join the Twenty Committee. It was even suggested that he should become its Chairman, but to this BiA demurred. Although operational deception was a major function of the double agents, the Chairman of the Twenty Committee pointed out in a minute to Liddell on 5 September, it was not their only role, and the delicate business of running them and controlling the flow of appropriate information was one which the security authorities ought to keep in their own hands. ‘I am convinced’ he wrote ‘that the Security Service alone is in a position to run XX agents; but at the same time, the running of them depends upon retaining the good will and the full support of all the Services’.

Bevan himself did not favour the idea of chairing the Committee. It did not, as he explained to the W Board when he attended its meeting on 24 September, fit in with the directive he had received from the Chiefs of Staff, and it would make too heavy demands on his time. There may also have been in his mind a certain fear lest too close an association with the Twenty Committee might distort, or be seen to distort the operational nature of his work on which he laid such proper stress. He was happy to be simply a member of the Committee and to be kept in close touch with its work. What really mattered, however, was the close and continuous informal liaison between Bevan’s small staff at Storey’s Gate and Robertson and his associates in BiA. Thereafter, as Masterman himself expressed it, the Twenty Committee saw it as its business ‘not, as it had been in the past, to promote and press through small plans of our own but to provide channels for deception according to the plans of the Controlling Officer’.<sup>21</sup> The instrument had been created. Now it was to be put to the test.

## REFERENCES

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2. ibid. p 64.
3. ibid. p 65.
4. ibid. p 71.
5. ibid. p 104.
6. CAB 121/105, SIC file A/Policy/Deception/1, COS(41) 344th Meeting, 7 October.
7. ibid. JP(41) 819 of 8 October.
8. ibid. COS(41) 348th Meeting, 9 October.
9. ibid. JP(41) 101 of 27 December.
10. CAB 154/2, ‘A’ Force War Diary Vol II, p 60.
11. CAB 121/105, COS(42) 810 of 5 January.
12. ibid. COS 42/94 of 6 February.

13. *ibid.*, COS 42 47th Meeting, 11 February.
14. *ibid.*, DMI to Ismay, 11 May 1942, COS 42, 153rd Meeting, 18 May, Controlling Officer to Ismay, 20 May COS 42 157th Meeting, 21 May.
15. *ibid.*, Wavell telegram to the Prime Minister 12461/C of 21 May 1942.
16. *ibid.*, JP 42 619 of 18 June.
17. *ibid.*, COS India 60 of 21 June 1942; CAB 79/21, COS 42 184th Meeting, 20 June.
18. CAB 88/6, CCS 96 of 20 July 1942; Joint Chiefs of Staff 6-23-42, Record Group 218, National Archives of the United States, CCS 334, JCS 26th Meeting, 28 July 1942.
19. CAB 121/105, COS 42 208 o' of 20 July.
20. *Ibid.*, Controlling Officer memo C/O/22 of 1 August 1942.
21. Masterman, *op cit.*, p 55.