



HISTORY OF THE INTELLIGENCE CORPS

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Early Intelligence

Prior to the Boer War the British Army tended to form ad hoc intelligence organisations during campaigns in order to provide the commander with the necessary information and intelligence to defeat our enemies. John Churchill, The first Duke of Marlborough stated that 'no war can be conducted successfully without early and good intelligence'. Lord Wellington employed Exploring Officers - the most famous being Lt Col Colquhoun-Grant (Whose Waterloo Medal resides in the Museum of Military Intelligence) - and George Scovell, his code breaker. Despite the influence of these great commanders, the military intelligence organisations were disbanded in peacetime.

Boer War

A variety of information and intelligence gathering units were raised during the Boer War 1899-1901, such as Rimington's Tigers and the Corps of Scouts, and as a consequence there developed a need to analyse the information collected. This led to a three-tier system of sources and agencies employed to collect the information; field intelligence officers with the combat units; and staff intelligence officers with the formation headquarters able to analyse the information. Where as before the war no formation below Divisional Level had an intelligence officer, Colonel Hume, Director of Military Intelligence (South Africa) from 1900, was able to identify the requirement for Field Intelligence Departments with scouts and interpreters. By the end of the war the intelligence element of the British Forces increase from 2 officers to 132 officers and 2321 soldiers.

Hume's recommendations were implemented by Lieutenant Colonel David Henderson, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the author of 'Field Intelligence, Its Principles and Practice' (1904). His manual was to prove a vital document for the next war as the Field Intelligence Departments were disbanded at the end of the war in 1901. The intelligence Department at the War Office remained thrown together with the Mobilisation Department. The activities of the Department in collection of intelligence on Germany prior to the Great War were not particularly approved of by the more conservative elements in the War Officer. As a consequence the department was under-funded. A small counter intelligence department- later known as MI5- was established under Captain Vernon Kell in 1909. By 1912 a second department - MI6 or the special Intelligence Section - under Commander Mansfield Cumming (the original 'C') was established to control intelligence gathering overseas.

First World War

Steps were also taken to raise an Intelligence Corps on the outbreak of war. The Intelligence Department at the War Office identified a number of Army officers, plus Metropolitan Police officers and other civilians that would be called up at the outbreak of hostilities. Following the expiry of the British ultimatum to the Germans on 5th August 1914 some fifty or so individuals received a telegram inviting them to join the newly formed Intelligence Corps. The Corps was formed under its first Commandant, Major TGJ Torrie, 17th Light Cavalry, Indian Army, and consisted of a Headquarters, Dismounted and Mounted Sections, a Motorcycle Section and a Security Duties Section. Initially there were no other Ranks except soldier servants' or officers' batemen who were enlisted in 10th (Service) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, Intelligence

(B). In due course police officers and other with suitable civilian qualifications were employed as Field Security Police (either transferring to the 10th Fusiliers or retaining their own cap badges). On 12 August 1914 the embryo Corps embarked on the Olympia at Southampton for France with the British Expedition Force. On the 9 September 1914 Torrie left the Corps (he was killed in action on the Somme in 1916) to be replaced by Captain, later Field Marshal Lord Wavell. Wavell moved to the General Staff on 07 December 1914 and was replaced by Major Dunnington Jefferson who was responsible for establishing the high reputation of the Corps during the war.

The work of the officers and men of the Intelligence Corps and Intelligence Department during the First World War extended to all theatres and behind enemy lines. Second Lieutenant Rollerston West was one of the first to make an impact earning a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) having ridden his motor-cycle to retrieve maps left in the French village of Pontoise despite the proximity of the advancing German Army (this was the early days of the war in 1914). He noted that the bridge in the village over the river Oise was prepared for demolition - it was the last that needed blowing in order to prevent Von Klucks cavalry breaking across the river and over running the withdrawing British Expeditionary Force. Despite orders from his brigade commander to withdraw, Rollerston West remained to assist an Engineer Lieutenant, Pennycuik, to set the charges and blow the bridge almost within sight of the pursuing Germans.

Former metropolitan Police Officers operated, as field security police, to great effort behind our own lines identifying enemy agents, be they French, Belgian or German nationals. One such group of German saboteurs operating in Antwerp docks were uncovered by Edmin Woodhall, a Senior NCO later assigned to protect the Prince of Wales whilst he served at the front (or as close to it as Prince Edward could get before nervous Generals sent him home). Woodhall was also involved in the initial investigation into the capture of Percy Toplis - the Monocled Mutineer (Toplis was heavily implicated in the mutiny of British troops at Etaples in 1917). The Field Security Police helped ensure that the rear areas and lines of communications remained free from the threat of subversion, espionage and sabotage.

Signals Intelligence was a new military science. From the early months of the war we were able to locate German Units through simple direction finding. Many German signals were sent in clear at this stage, only being encrypted at a later stage. The Germans developed a system of tapping the vast network of landline communications employed by the British along, and to the rear of the front line. The Allies only became aware of the eavesdropping equipment in early 1916, but succeeded in duplicating the apparatus. By the end of the war our equipment had been developed to the extent that it was possible to monitor signals from a landline from 3000 yards away - the technical equivalent of monitoring the signals that emit from your average personal computer or mobile telephone. The product from the intercepted landline and radio transmitters were decoded and analysed by the Intelligence Corps. This element of the Corps was assisted from 1917 by members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps - known as the Hush-WAACs.

The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was initially an aerial observer unit used to recce and to spot artillery targets - a task done by Unmanned aerial vehicles in modern times. Kite balloons were also employed by the army to give a better view of the battlefield. Aerial photography was first employed to effect at the battle of Neuve-Chapelle in 1915 when pilots were obliged to fly 800 feet above ground whilst the Observer leaned out of the cockpit and took the required pictures under fire. That same year stereoscopic imagery was introduced by Lieutenant Bingham of 11 Squadron RFC following his purchase of a civilian commercial camera in Amiens. September 1916

saw the establishment of the first School of Photography, Mapping and Reconnaissance in Farnborough. Major General Trenchard, commander of the RFC saw that each squadron had three intelligence corps personnel attached to interpret the huge quantities of photography that had been acquired. Between July and September 1916 alone some 19000 photographs were taken of the Somme battlefield.

The Corps successfully ran a number of agents behind enemy lines. In Europe these were able to observe the movement of German troops across the continent and provide timely and accurate indications of German intentions on the western and eastern fronts. One aspect of the operation is described in Janet Morgan's excellent book 'Secrets of the Rue St Roch (Allen Lane/Penguin 2004) detailing the training and infiltration of a female agent in Luxembourg. The Corps also developed prisoner of war and refugee debriefing techniques, and became involved in psychological operations.

However, at the conclusion of the war most of the Intelligence Corps was disbanded.

Second World War

In the years leading up to the Second World War no effort was put into contingency planning for wartime Intelligence Corps. The Army was less prepared for this second Great War than it had been for the first. But for the work of Major, later Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templar there would have been no intelligence organisation at all on 04 September 1939. His work, supported by Captain (Retired) F C Davies MC who trained the security sections, allowed the British Expeditionary Force to deploy to France with 31 Field Security Sections. Upon this small foundation the Corps eventually grew to 3040 officers and 5930 other ranks. The Corps was formally constituted with the consent of King George VI on 15 July 1940, with the formation being notified on 19 July 1940 in Army Order 112.

The skills of the Corps's soldiers in languages and interrogation were once again used to extract information from the Prisoners of war, and the civilian population of countries liberated by the Allies. The Field Security Sections also boasted an Airborne Section with 89FSS being formed in June 1942 and Lance Corporal Loker being the first cap-badged member to jump from a Whitley bomber over Manchester Ringway Airfield (on the site of the modern Manchester Airport). 89 Military Intelligence Section still serves with 16 Air Assault Brigade, the modern successors of General Urquhart's 1 Airborne Division.

Other members of the Corps were to learn to parachute at Ringway before being dropped as Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents in Europe and the Far East. SOE was tasked by Winston Churchill to 'Set Europe ablaze' through acts of sabotage behind enemy lines. The SOE units also collected information and intelligence. The exploits of SOE were portrayed in the official 1946 film 'Now It Can Be Told' that showed the training and deployment of two agents, one of whom was Harry Ree, an Intelligence Corps Captain. Ree, a Mancunian with an accent so strong that he had to operate in the Alsace region in order to disguise his rather unique French accent, successfully put out of operation a Peugeot factory producing tank parts. Attempts to flatten the factory by air raids had failed - Ree succeeded by having a quiet word with the owner who obligingly sabotaged his own plant. Later shot crossing from France to Switzerland. Ree was awarded the DSO.

Corps members were also involved in the formation of the Long Range Desert Patrol Group and the Special Air Service (SAS). Lt Col Peter Clayton, Intelligence Corps, being one of the four original founders.

The Photographic Interpretation wing of the Corps was re-established because General, later Field Marshal, Sir Alan Brooke did not believe that the RAF had the skills required to support ground operations. The Photographic Interpreters (now known as Imagery Analysts - IAs) were to give imagery support to all the major operations of the war, and many minor ones. Imagery was analysed and supplied in support of the successful Bruneval raid by the Commandos in 1942 when key German radar equipment was captured. Similarly support was given to the Dambusters raid on the Mohne Dams. It was Army Photographic interpreters that identified the V1 rocket sites at Peenemunde and in the Pas de Calais in April 1943, and later the operation bodyline team identified the V2 rocket sites in 1944. Most famously the Intelligence Corps Photographic Interpreters identified the German Panzer units resting in the Arnhem area just prior to the launch of Operation Market Garden.

Signals Intelligence developed beyond all recognition during the war compared to the simple tactical interception and direction finding of the First World War. The importance of the teams working to crack the Enigma Code at Bletchley Park is now well known - the Corps contributed greatly to the work at the locations, plus the outstations that collected the raw information. One such collection site is now the home of the Corps - Chicksands in Bedfordshire. About 40% of the army personnel at Bletchley were cap badged Intelligence Corps. An Enigma machine can be viewed at the Museum of Military Intelligence.

At the tactical level, box bodied vehicles, known as 'Gin Palaces', operated as mobile signals interception units providing support to operations at Corps and Divisional level. The Terrence Cuneo painting of Captain Makower and Sgt Swian illustrates the dangers faced by the Corps' soldiers operating, then as now, close to the front.

Once again representatives of the Corps were 'in at the kill' at the war's end and soon formed a key element of the various armies of occupation in both Europe and the Far East. Colonel Ewart was Montgomery's interpreter when the Germans surrendered at Luneburg Heath. In January 1945 the Corps' establishment was some 3040 officers and 5930 soldiers with 1553 attached officers. The Intelligence Corps played a prominent part in rounding up war criminals, and members were directly involved in the arrest of Heinrich Himmler at Bremervoerde.

Post war the threat was from Communism and the Corps has played a major role in the games of counter-espionage, intelligence and counter-intelligence that characterised the Cold War in Europe and Asia in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Since the second world war, the Corps has deployed with the British Army on all its major deployments - Palestine, Cyprus, Korea, Suez, Brunei, Indonesia, Dhofar, Northern Ireland, Falkland Islands, the Gulf, Africa and the Former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In recognition of its meritorious service the Corps was declared an 'Arm' on 01 February 1985. An 'Arm' is defined as those Corps whose role is to be close in combat with the enemy. The Freedom of the Borough of Ashford (Kent) was granted to the Corps in 1989, giving the Intelligence Corps the right to march through the borough with bayonets fixed and flags flying.

The Intelligence Corps is honoured and proud to have Field Marshal HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, KG, KT as Colonel-in-Chief. The Corps' first and only cap badge was approved being a Union Rose surrounded by a crown and flanked by the Laurel leaves with the motto 'Manui Dat Cognitio Vires' - 'Knowledge Gives Strength to the Arm'. The Corps has had no other official or unofficial motto. The regimental quick march became 'Rose & Laurel' and the slow march 'Purcell's Trumpet Tune and Ayre'.

We have regimental Alliances with the Australian Intelligence Corps and the Intelligence Branch of the Canadian Armed Forces. Bonds of friendship are maintained with the Malaysian Intelligence Corps, United States Military Intelligence Corps and HMS Leeds Castle.

Chicksands

The Intelligence Corps has moved into the 21st Century co-located with the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) at Chicksands. The DISC is the UK Defence Agency responsible for training all personnel in intelligence, security and information support.

Chicksands is one of the most striking military bases in the UK. The centrepiece is the remarkable 12th Century Gilbertine Priory, which was home to both nuns and monks for 400 years. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, the Priory became the home of the Osborns for a further 400 years before being sold to the War Officer in 1938. Chicksands was where the German coded signals were intercepted before being passed to Bletchley Park (Station X) for decryption. For 45 years it was the home of the United States Air Force Security Unit - they now share space in the Military Intelligence Museum with two other unique intelligence collections. The site remains firmly linked with Military Intelligence and Counter Intelligence. The Intelligence Corps has had it's home in Chicksands since 1997, and is now home to the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC).