



CDA Journal

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'Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow'

Civil Defence Volunteers 1939

**1,900,000 Civil Defence Volunteers
during the course of World War Two**

**"All the greatest things are simple, and many can be expressed
in a single word: freedom; justice; honour; duty; mercy; hope."**

Winston Spencer Churchill

Civil Defence Volunteers 2020

500,000 + new Civil Defenders in 24 hours.

**"Ask not what your country can do for you,
but what you can do for your country"**

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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Avon Community Resilience Team
Bethnal Green Disaster Commemoration
Civil Aid & Malden Emergency First Aid Society
Civil Defence Creed
Ghost Observer
75th Anniversary— CD Stand-down**

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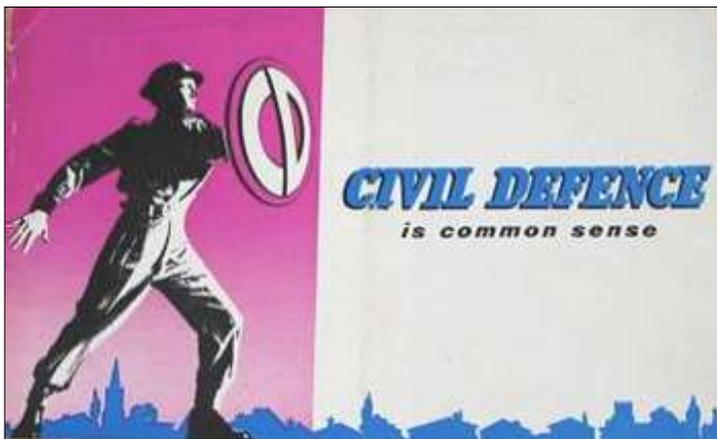
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the May 2020 issue of the Civil Defence Association Journal.

The global coronavirus pandemic has affected pretty well every person in the UK. It is a truism that when something like this hits you *personally*, it can have a profound effect, and not just coping with the social distancing. In my own case, my wife is in long term residential care and very vulnerable, and daughter in law is working in the care sector.

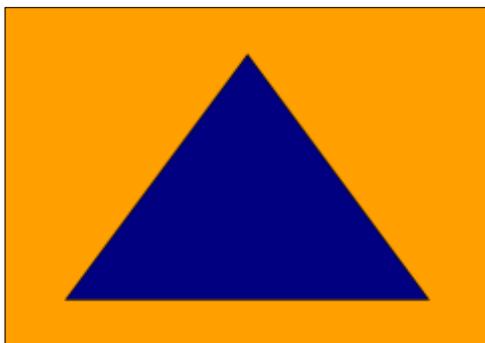
Once again, a national emergency has brought out the very best in people. Our wonderful National Health Service is doing a magnificent job, and what a debt of gratitude we owe the professional medical staff, the Ambulance Service staff, Fire Fighters and Police Officers. Not forgetting those people working in the care sector, the armed forces, and manufacturers, suppliers and distributors involved in this nation-wide effort. And then we have the awe inspiring response from citizen volunteers across the land offering their services in direct support of the full-time services—500,000 in 24 hours! It proves once again, (if proof were needed!) that the majority of good people will respond in a positive way to help and assist others in time of emergency.

It is a marvellous development and, hopefully, Her Majesty's Government will take it forward when the current immediate crisis is over.

Some of the items in the current edition include: a report from Simon Hill of Civil Aid and Malden Emergency First Aid Society about its response to the Coronavirus outbreak; the setting up of Avon Community Resilience Team; part two of the history of Gravesend Civil Defence Control Centre; a fascinating story about a World War Two 'hidden hero', a radio specialist who worked behind the scenes undertaking highly secret work monitoring and recording enemy radio traffic.

Please do continue to stay safe.

Graham Whitehead



CDA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

Because of the Coronavirus problem that, not least, closed all Pubs etc. the physical meeting was not able to be held. However, in accordance with the Constitution and with the approval of the Committee, the important elements were dealt with in accordance with the votes received by post, E-Mail and telephone by the Secretary in a virtual meeting. The Minutes, Annual Report 2019 and 2019 Accounts had been sent to all members with the Agenda etc. prior to the meeting.

For the record it is appropriate to mention that our Chairman, Mr Patrick Stanton, decided that, due to failing health, it was appropriate that he did not stand for re-election. It is also appropriate for grateful thanks to be extended to him for his service to both Civil Defence and the CDA over so many years.

He continued the family tradition started by his father who was a WWII Air Raid Warden in London. His initial period in Civil Defence was with the AFS. He was a founder member of the Association of Pioneer Rescue Officers (APRO), which later became British Civil Defence (BCD). Patrick was involved in rescue work in Armenia (then part of the former USSR), and was awarded a Soviet Medal of Valour which he received in the Russian Embassy in the presence of Countess Antrim, representing HM the Queen, and Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister.

There followed earthquake rescue action in Turkey followed by a very significant involvement in the formation of the Syrian 'White Helmets'. He was very much involved in the East Midlands Branch of The Institute of Civil Defence and, while Chairman, was the leader of the action to establish the Civil Defence Memorial Garden at The National Memorial Arboretum. He was also the inspiration behind the establishment of the CDA. He was awarded the Gold Medal of The Institute of Civil Defence.

The Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting on 30 March 2019 were approved.

Election of the Executive Committee to serve from the end of this meeting until the end of the 2021 AGM.

The names etc. of those elected are shown on page 2.

The Executive Committee Report for 2019 was approved.

The Accounts for the 2019 calendar year were approved.

Subsequent to the meeting Colin Harmsworth recorded his thanks for his election as Chairman and hopes to be able to follow the example set by Patrick Stanton.

CIVIL AID & MALDEN EMERGENCY FIRST AID SOCIETY

Civil Aid (NVCAS) and Malden Emergency First Aid Society (MEFAS) have responded to the current coronavirus emergency so far.

On Monday 23 March, 2020, the decision was taken to move large tents and emergency feeding equipment out of stores to another location overnight. Defibrillators (AED's) and other First Aid equipment also were removed from stores to enable volunteers to serve the immediate local community in which they live.

On Friday morning 27 March, I reviewed the Emergency plans of both charities and in the case MEFAS I made contact with the Borough Resilience Planning Manager. Later that day a request was made for 15 camp beds.

So far, the following items (all stored from new and boxed) have been issued to Local Authority staff from our stores:

- 30 Camp beds
- 40 Pillows
- 45 Emergency Sleeping bags
- 15 Emergency blankets
- 50 personal hygiene packs

In addition, 20 Furley stretchers were taken to a local cemetery as part of the Council's Resilience plan.

Measures are in place to protect our volunteers and equipment is moved to another area in advance to prevent contact upon collection. All equipment once issued will not be returned to our stores and we will endeavour to replace once the current emergency is over.

All ready we have a report of the 10 camp beds being used last Friday night, for vulnerable homeless people removed into shelter from the streets.

Civil Aid will also hand over keys to vehicles should the need arise to support the Authorities.



Simon Hill
NVCAS/MEFAS

BETHNAL GREEN DISASTER COMMEMORATION 2020

The 77th anniversary of the Bethnal Green tube disaster was marked on Sunday 1 March 2020 by a Memorial Service at St. John on Bethnal Green Church with brilliant sunshine all day. Despite worries about weather and coronavirus the church was full with supporters, relatives of the victims and a few survivors.



Fr. Alan Green led the Service saying that there was naturally anger when the disaster occurred, but now that the victims and survivors are remembered permanently with the Memorial in Bethnal Green Gardens there is hope for the future. The support of their families and future generations, knowing more about what happened, allows love to replace the anger. With the amazing diversity of the Bethnal Green community, transcending the violence of the dark days of the 1940s, there is more hope of respecting each other and ensuring that love replaces hatred in these difficult times. He asked for us to hold in our hearts not just the victims, but the survivors, rescuers and their families and everyone involved in the disaster.

Whilst the names of the victims were read out 173 candles were lit on the altar in their memory. Then Sandra Scotting, honorary secretary of the Stairway to Heaven memorial Trust, gave a short report about the Memorial project. She thanked the clergy for a very uplifting Service and said how comforting it was that we were allowed to honour and remember our loved ones at the church each year.

Missing from the usual congregation was the Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust's treasurer Derek Spicer, whose death last year has left a huge hole in the charity's committee. Alf Morris, founder and survivor, was unable to attend this year, but his daughter was asked to take happy 90th birthday wishes home to him for next week.

Then families, Pearly Kings & Queens, MP Rushanara Ali, Patron Tommy Walsh and survivors, paraded across the road, led by Nick Ridsdale carrying the Standard of the Civil Defence Association, to the Memorial for a short blessing. Despite the traffic a minutes silence was observed to remember all those involved in the disaster. The local firemen and police representatives formed a guard of honour around the Memorial.

Sandra Scotting MBE

GRAVESEND CIVIL DEFENCE CONTROL CENTRE (2)

The telephonic nerve centre was the larger 23ft 3in (7.1m) x 12ft 6in (3.8m) Message Room on the south side of the party wall from the liaison officers' room. Its distinguishing features are the twelve timber telephonists' cubicles, known as phonogram booths, fixed to three of the walls. Half of these were for receiving incoming calls and half for making outgoing ones. Old-pattern candle-stick telephones were used. A supervisor sat behind a central table and a messenger took message forms completed by the telephonists and passed them through hatchways in the partition walls with the two control rooms and, reciprocally, received messages back to be



Message Room

given to the telephonists for sending out. During training exercises most telephone contacts were with the control centres at Gillingham and Maidstone. A pair of teleprinters (one for incoming and the other for outgoing messages) were on tables against the other long wall, on which was mounted a cabinet containing the equipment to operate the warning sirens in the district. Somewhere in this room there was also a wireless transceiver and a store of six walkie-talkies which could be used outside in connection with a radio communications vehicle.

The 12ft 6in (3.8m) x 11ft (3.4m) Messengers' Room on the south side of the party wall was for the debriefing of foot, cycle, motorbike and car messengers bringing information from the outside and for giving them messages or orders to take out. The room was provided with tables, chairs and filing cabinets and a wall information and map board. There is also a wall-mounted electric bell, perhaps sounded from a bell-push once outside. Next to this is a small 12ft 6in x 7ft 6in (3.8m x 2.3m) Waiting Room, for those coming from outside to be called in to the Messengers Room or to receive messages to take out. This was also provided with chairs and a table.

Command and Control

The two control rooms are entered via sliding doors, one from the Messengers' Room and the other from the Liaison Officers' Room. Information received was to be analysed and orders issued from within them and, passed through the hatches, into the message room for onward transmission. The two control rooms are separated from each other by a thin partition wall and by a timber-framed Controller's Room.

The northern of the control rooms is the 24ft (7.4m) x 16ft (5m) District Control Room for Gravesend with wall boards at its ends and side. These were variously (a) tally boards to record the available civil defence resources outside which could be deployed as well as information about casualties among the population and (b) maps on which pins were inserted to mark civil defence rendezvous points, refugee collecting centres, warden posts, emergency feeding centres and other assets as well as to show the evolving situation outside. Alongside an Operations Officer, tables were provided in a line for the five heads of civil defence sections. Other tables were later provided for the scientific staff who plotted information about fallout notified by the Royal Observer Corps (and about chemical and biological agents, if encountered), advised the Operations Officer and recommended the sending out of reconnaissance parties where this seemed necessary. There were also places for plotting staff and a movements officer. Elsewhere against the walls of the room were a plan chest and filing cabinets.

The longer, 30ft (9.2m) x 16ft (5m) southern Sub-Divisional Control Room for Gravesend, Northfleet and Swanscombe was arranged in a similar way, having the same types of staff but its southwestern corner was divided into a 6ft (1.8 m) x 4ft (1.2 m) space by a wood panel wall. This is not explained in plans or documents but is remembered by an eyewitness to have been a small kitchen and retains a low serving door, its internal space being within government guidelines for a food preparation area. This had no fixed fittings or furniture although there was a power point. The latter was sufficient for a Baby Belling cooker or similar. A fume pipe rises from this space to an outside vent. There was no water supply in the kitchen itself, this having to be taken in containers from taps in the toilets. Emergency food rations were held in boxes. At some point the women's dormitory became used as a kitchen. The timber panelled and upper glazed 8ft (2.5m) x 6ft 6in (2 m) Controllers' Room provided a place from which operations in either control room could be overseen, being provided with doors into them. It has a power point but no fixed furniture, just a desk and a hat stand.

How the Control Centre would have functioned

The functional elements of bunkers and their contents followed mandatory Home Office instructions which were to provide for 'control, liaison, receipt and despatch of telephone messages and despatch carrying'. As long as these key elements were provided, the exact layout might, in some degree, be varied according to local circumstances, but subject to Home Office approval via the county civil defence authority. No establishment figure for Gravesend's bunker has yet been found but it would have required around 35 people to fully function, to which would need to be added reliefs, if available. The bunker team would have been made up of local civil defence volunteers, liaison officers and some council staff, all under the authority and direction of the Controller, Gravesend's Town Clerk. Below him were the District and Sub-Divisional Operations Officers.

Government guidelines set out the two main processes for the control of civil defence operations as:

- (a) to provide from time to time situation reports on damage and operations for the next higher authority
- (b) to call for reinforcements from outside the area, and to inform the reinforcing

- authority about rendezvous points and routes
- (c) to give services other than the Civil Defence Corps access to information available in the centre.'

From these stated imperatives, the bunker was intended as the prepared local hub within which information about the post-attack situation outside (whether taking the form of a conventional or atomic bombardment) would be received and evaluated so that in a cycle of decision, advice and instruction, the various actions of rescue and recovery services could be directed. (The presence of Scientific Officers to receive and evaluate fallout information seems not to have been an original feature but was to be so later.)

At a strategic level, and alongside other district and sub-divisional controls across Kent, the bunker was expected to provide information to the county control at Maidstone, allowing the staff there to gain an overview with which to liaise, as necessary, with the Regional War Room at Tunbridge Wells. Means of communication at this level could be anything still working, including teleprinters. Local tactical information might, variously, reach the bunker by telephone from wardens' posts, brought by messengers or radioed from reconnaissance vehicles. Once received, there was an established flow-line for this to be handled by telephone, teleprinter or wireless. The person in the Message Room receiving the message would write it down and an indoor messenger would give it a serial number, after which he/she would pass it through a hatch into one of the two control rooms within which were wall maps and tally boards on which to plot information.

If brought in by a despatch carrier (on a motorbike or bicycle or on foot) the individual would enter the waiting room and the message would be taken via the Messengers Room into the Message Room in which it would be copied by a clerk or telephonist, given a serial number and passed through one of the hatches as in the case of a telephone message. In the Control Room concerned, another messenger would hand all copies of a message to a Plotting Clerk, to allot to each occurrence a number, and to mark that number on each message so that all subsequent reports and messages concerning that incident could be keyed to it. The original message was then to be passed to the Operations Officer, with copies to the Controller, Fire and Police officers and to the heads of civil defence services, as required and as quickly as possible.

The Operations Officer's responsibility was: to respond to the message received, to frame, with guidance from heads of civil defence services, the instructions to be given to the places and depots at which waited the relevant reaction services. Meanwhile, the Plotting Clerk and/or assistant marked on a wall



Messengers Room

map any damage reported in the message, but not already plotted. The assistant was to maintain a running record of occurrences as they were plotted and of the numbers of the messages relating to each occurrence, also maintaining a record on the tally board of the services ordered out of depots by the Operations Officer.

Heavy saturation bombing or an atomic attack would, from the extent and scale of destruction, have to be plotted as an area on a map rather than as an individual localised occurrence. Messages out from the Operations Officer were to be passed through the outgoing hatch from either Control Room into the Message Room, then to be sent by telephone or passed into



Civil Defence volunteer outside the bunker taking radiation readings following a nuclear attack (demonstration)

the Messengers Room for handling by a despatch carrier under the supervision of the Message Supervisor. (The original *in'-message and carbons of 'out'-messages were to go to a records clerk for keeping the messages relating to each occurrence in a separate folder or clip). The clerk checked that 'out'-messages had been acted upon. These were the intended procedures for simple 'in' and 'out' messages, perhaps based on wartime experience, but it was recognised that there would be complications arising from messages of interest to a service other than the Civil Defence Corps (eg about damage to public utilities, communications and the blocking of roads), for which suitable adjustments were to be made. The operation of the arrangements would have depended upon control centre personnel keeping their nerve while the world outside appeared to be going mad. Anecdotally, some volunteers felt uncertain as to whether they or their colleagues would have been willing to abandon their families if called to do so on the outbreak of war or of the emergence of its perceived imminence.

External Civil Defence assets

If still functional, civil defence services at pre-positioned places or depots outside were to be formed of the warden service, search and rescue teams, first-aid parties and ambulances, assisted by other services such as the Fire Brigade, council works staff, members of the National Hospital Service Reserve, the Women's Voluntary Service, the Red Cross and the St John Ambulance Brigade as well as the police and others. This reserve was publicly announced to require 3,500 people for the Gravesend civil defence district.

Many of these were to be activated at the last moment, where necessary by telephone or by the police calling at doors. For a proportion of them, including volun-

teers from the public, who were without prior training in civil defence, there would have to be rapid instruction sufficient for them to perform basic duties.

Rest and feeding centres in schools and community halls, for the displaced and bombed-out, were to be run by the civil defence welfare services and other bodies, with overall coordination from the control centre. Some appear to have been provided with emergency rations to be stored in peacetime.

Timely civil defence preparedness assumed the availability of an adequate warning time (called the Transition to War Period). This was to be judged from an informed governmental interpretation of a worsening international situation.

Civil Defence would have been less able to react to a suddenly-occurring crisis. Either way, in the event of an attack, rescue services as well as the population in general would, of course, have been subject to the spread of radioactive fallout and it was understood that deployment of civil defence forces might have to be delayed because of that. Based on scientific advice, the necessary instructions for deployment locally would have been given from the bunker.

At this period, the disabling or interfering effect on electrical communications and electrical equipment from the electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) produced from a nuclear explosion appears not to have been fully understood, giving rise to the subsequent need for the Home Office to issue guidance, however tentative, to civil defence authorities. Manual telephone exchanges and valve wireless sets were less susceptible. EMP was likely to have a devastating effect on power stations and the national grid.

To be continued

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Your Editor recently received some thoughts on the present global pandemic from CDA Member Eugene Guidice who lives in the USA. I'm sure you will find them thought provoking and inspiring. Further words of wisdom will appear in forthcoming editions of the CDA Journal. Editor.

Service with Joy

Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy. - Mahatma Gandhi

As we go about our daily routines in the new realities of our professional and personal lives, and especially given the isolation many of us are working in, I think it is paramount that we find some sort of joy that can accompany our work. Granted, it may be hard to find but I would submit that being able to find some joy, be it the opportunity to see things greening up in the front yard or looking forward to a good meal at the end of the day can add the needed joy to our daily life.

Maybe the joy can be found in the fact that we may be isolated from each other but in point of fact, we are all striving in the same direction, namely to stay safe, healthy and to help others to do so.

AVON COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TEAM

The purpose of the Avon CRT is to support communities within Avon to be able to be better prepared to cope with adverse situations like the effects of a storm, high winds and flooding. Volunteers will help reduce the demand put on the emergency services and be a link between the community and blue light services.



The Avon CRT is coordinated by the charity Search And Rescue Assistance In Disasters (SARAID) which aims to create a team of volunteers trained to support communities during emergencies. Both Avon Fire & Rescue Service and Avon & Somerset Police support the setting up of the Avon CRT.

Volunteers could be tasked with delivering supplies following a flood, clearing hoarders' houses, attending community events, fire prevention and crime advice and searching for missing people.

SARAID held a number of initial open days at which members of the public could find out more about the CRT and express an interest in signing up as a volunteer. The events were an opportunity to meet volunteers from SARAID, see some of the equipment used as a CRT volunteer and gain an insight into regional emergency planning.

CRT volunteers are being trained in disciplines such as basic first aid, map reading, search techniques, radio communications and volunteer coordination amongst other things.

As well as gaining skills and experiences that can be useful in day-to-day life and in the workplace, volunteers benefit from the camaraderie and strong bonds that working as part of a close-knit team brings.

With acknowledgements to Avon Fire & Rescue & SARAID

STOP PRESS

Clive Phoenix RIP

During the preparation of this issue of the CDA Journal, we learned with sadness, of the death of Clive Phoenix. Clive, who served with BCD and was a long time member of CDA, succumbed to the Coronavirus. He had underlying health issues and had been unwell for some time.

We hope to include a full obituary in the next issue. His name will be added to the Book of Remembrance.

GHOST OBSERVER

My name is Ray and I was born on 3 May 1922 in Camberwell, south east London and was in the radio industry all my working life. In early 1941 (aged 18) I was working at Radio Transmission Equipment (part of the Philips Group) in Balham, SW London. My work was testing and aligning radio communications receivers, type R107.

Lucky to be here

One day, at around mid-day, I was having my lunch in the firm's canteen – and suddenly I wasn't. When I got my senses back I found that I was lying on top of a lady and was covered with broken glass, money and plaster dust. The glass was from the kiosk where the lady had been taking money for lunches. Both of us appeared to be unhurt and, after helping her to get up, I started to pick up the scattered money from all around the broken kiosk. I was told later that two draughtsmen had been killed in the Drawing Office adjacent to the canteen, only about 15ft from where I was sitting on the other side of the separating brick wall. Luckily for me and others in the canteen, it had been only a small bomb that had exploded.

Apparently, according to eye witnesses in the street, the bomb had dropped from an aircraft with French markings. At the time, no air-raid warning sirens had been sounded. After continuing work (no help given in those days!) until the normal finishing time of 6pm, I caught the Tube home from Clapham to Morden and then by bus to North Cheam in Surrey where I was living with my parents.

I had just got in the front door when my mother took one look and said, "What have you been doing? You're filthy – straight in to the bath!" Then I got another scare. On undressing, I discovered that my whole body was covered in dried blood – mine! However, a warm bath (only allowed five inches of water at that time) I got rid of most of it, revealing I had scratches all over my body. On trying to sponge my back, I could feel some rough patches and wondered what they could be. I called to my mother and asked her to look. "You've got bits of glass sticking in your back" she said and started to pull one of them out. Then I screamed – it hurt like hell! There were tiny slivers of glass in my hair and even between my toes, but no serious cuts. All my clothes, even my shoes, had to be thrown away as there were little bits of glass embedded in them. It was a miracle I had survived.

New job

Later, in July 1941, I moved to Marconi's Wireless Telegraphy Co in Hackbridge, near Mitcham in Surrey. The factory was producing radio receivers and transmitters for use in RAF aircraft that included Lancaster and Halifax bombers. The receivers were type R1155 and the transmitters type T1154. My work was mainly on the R1155 receivers where I was an electrical tester and fault-finder. The job was using radio test equipment to diagnose electrical faults. The faults were mostly due to incorrect wiring, wrong value or faulty components or badly soldered connections (dry joints). These dry joints would quite often just fall apart during vibration testing of the equipment. The faults were so numerous that I had a team of ten ladies doing nothing but rectifying them.

One average, some 25 R1155 receivers passed through my hands every day. At that time the working day was from 8am to 6pm with a break at lunchtime. We worked a six-day week, having Saturday off one week and Sunday the next. A work colleague of mine, Eric Taylor, had been an amateur radio operator before the war, and he and I often discussed radio, Morse code and what we would do after the war.

Home Guard

For a short period I was a member of the Home Guard. After a full day's work I didn't like being shouted at and marched up and down the street for no apparent reason. Neither did I enjoy trying to master the intricacies of the Sten gun (a dreadful thing that was only spot-welded together). The only satisfaction I had at that time was that I was the only member of the group with a knowledge of Morse code. However, this fact did not go down very well with the NCOs. On one occasion, a Sunday (and my day off work), we had an all-night so-called 'exercise'. From my point of view it was an absolute disaster. It was pitch dark (remember no lights of any sort allowed), pouring with rain and I, and others, were crawling along on our bellies (with the stupid Sten gun on my back) through wet grass and muddy puddles for hours. I got back home, filthy, soaking wet and starving at 6am. After a bath and change of clothes I was ready for my breakfast – but no time for that, I had to be at work by 8am.

So, when I eventually got to work on that Monday morning, I was not a 'happy bunny'. My friend Eric asked me, "What's the matter?" as he said that I looked terrible. Well, he asked for it. I told him what I thought about the weather, the blackout, the Home Guard, NCOs and, in particular, the night exercise. I also mentioned that I had not had any breakfast (remember I was a growing lad of 19 then). However, the language I used then will not appear here! A few days after the night exercise, Eric asked me what my Morse code speed was. "Don't know", I replied, "I've never been tested although I taught myself the code when I was 14 years old". So, for the next few weeks, during our lunch breaks, I had tuition in the art of reading Morse and writing it down. Always in capital letters, never in long-hand, although at the time I didn't know why. Soon I was copying some 18 words a minute without errors, much to my amazement. Then Eric said that perhaps I could assist the war effort better in my spare time rather than being a very reluctant part-time soldier. "How?" I asked but got no reply at all.

An official visitor

I was to find out some time later, on one of my Saturdays off. Someone was at the front door (which had been blown off its hinges by a land-mine the night before). A bowler hat, rolled-up umbrella and a dark suit appeared – indicating that the visitor was a figure of authority. And he was asking for me. My parents were agog. What had their little perisher (me) been up to? In those days, our front room, or 'parlour' was only used for special occasions, and this is where we talked. Well, he talked and I listened as well as I could. I felt very intimidated by him. Ordinary people like us never met authoritative people like him. Then, when he said that I had to sign a piece of paper, I did so without realising what it was that I had put my name to. The next thing he said was something that really scared me, "you have signed the Official Secrets Act of the United Kingdom and anything we discuss must not be

repeated to anyone. That includes your parents, relatives and close friends". What the hell was I into now? 'Mr Bowler hat' then questioned me about where I, my parents and my grandparents were born. Then he asked my political opinions; I replied that as I was under 21 and not entitled to vote, I was not a member of any political party. He said nothing about where he was from, I could only guess. I asked him if he would have a few words with my parents because they would be worried about his visit. He said to them, in my hearing, "Your son might soon be doing work of great importance to this country". Sheer panic set in!

The next day (Sunday) I went to work and mentioned to Eric that I had been visited by this gentleman (being careful not to say that I had signed anything) and asked if he have any idea what it could be about. Eric replied, "Yes, I expected something like that would happen" and that was all that I could ever get out of him on the subject. A few weeks later, I received a parcel through the post, which included a letter telling me that I had been recruited as a member of the Radio Security Service (RSS) and that I was now a Voluntary Interceptor (or VI). My work would be General Search (GS) and that I had been allocated that part of the radio spectrum between 7 and 7.5Mc/s (now, of course, MHz) to listen for any Morse code signals. Several pads of 'Signals Heard' log sheets) were included that had columns for writing the date, time (GMT), frequency, call sign and any text received, Also there were some pads of 'Message Form' sheets (Photo 3) that had provision for writing the actual messages intercepted (received) by me. As well, in the parcel, were some envelopes stamped 'SECRET' and some slightly larger plain envelopes, a whole sheet of postage stamps and some gummed labels printed with 'PO BOX 25, Barnet, Herts'. That address I have never forgotten.

Nearly found out!

My listening period was usually from 8pm to 10pm after my normal working day. This was for five nights during the weekdays, so I told my girlfriend, Barbara (some years later to be my wife) that it would be best if we met only at weekends. This didn't go down very well with her because I couldn't tell her why. However, one Wednesday night she called at my house with one of her girlfriends and my parents actually let them in. I was concentrating on writing down what I was receiving and then, suddenly, they were there. I don't know who was more shocked, them or me. Barbara took one look at me and shouted, "You're a spy, I'm going to call the police!" In a state of near panic I babbled that I was just testing a radio for my firm (Marconi), but the look on Barbara's face indicated that she didn't believe a word of it – clearly she thought at that moment that I was a spy. What could I say? In fact, it was many, many years later (not until 1980) that I was able to tell her what I had actually been doing that fateful evening.

Hidden in plain sight

I was given a Royal Observer Corps (ROC) uniform as a cover, although I knew nothing about spotting aircraft. It was only worn when attending the occasional 'pep talks' by a Royal Signal Corps officer from PO Box 25. Soon, I developed a routine of copying Morse code signals on log pads; writing any messages (nearly always five-letter groups) on the message pads; putting the sheets into the 'Secret' envelope; then placing that envelope into the larger plain envelope and sticking the 'Box 25' label onto the envelope. Finally I stuck a postage stamp on to the

envelope. The following morning I would post it on my way to work. A few days later the log sheets would be returned to me by post with remarks such as 'SUSPECT' or 'MORE PLEASE' stamped on such items that interested whoever was reading them. Sometimes a number such as '2/34' in red pencil would be written over the callsigns. These numbers meant absolutely nothing to me at the time. I learned over 40 years later that they were the numbers given to radio networks of which Box 25 were already aware. After my first few weeks of reading the Morse code signals, I began to notice that there were some stations that seemed to be regularly transmitting. They used the same callsigns, same frequencies and the same operating times. One of these stations, Box 25 informed me, was Reuters, a press service station.

Although its messages were not required (the station was well known to Box 25) it did provide a means of frequency calibration for my home-built receiver. There were some other stations, however, that did interest Box 25 very much. These stations were using three-letter callsigns (eg BGT de DFC) that I, and many other VIs, had logged. They were using procedures that were very similar to those used by amateur radio operators. I was only able to copy one end of the communication between the two stations, because the answering station would be on some other frequency. Some of the stations that I intercepted, when sending messages containing 5-letter groups, would sometimes use the Morse letters 'i i' (di-dit, di-dit) apparently to indicate that a sending mistake had been made during the preceding 5-letter group. Many of these signals were very weak, fading into the noise at times, indicating that the signals were probably sent from hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away.



*Ray wearing his
ROC uniform circa 1941*

Learning how we helped

As I discovered many years later, the Message Forms that I had filled in with the coded messages usually comprising groups of 5-letters were sent by motorcycle dispatch riders from Box 25 (Barnet) to Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. This was where a brilliant group of code-breakers, mathematicians and linguists decoded the signals that had been intercepted by VIs and other services, such as the Y Service, and the intercept services of the Army, Navy and RAF. At Bletchley Park) the networks using the three letter callsigns that had been intercepted were found to be those of the German Secret Service and the Gestapo. For 30 years after the war ended, the VIs were not able to disclose what they had been doing. This was because our work was covered by the Official Secrets Act, something that can't be 'unsigned'! During 1979, the BBC made a documentary programme called The Secret Listeners. It was in this programme that the VIs were first mentioned and the presenter gave the viewers (including the VIs, who were as much in the dark as

everybody else) a few clues as to what they had been doing when copying down all that Morse code stuff. I have also since learned that the Radio Security Service was known as MI8c, part of MI6.

Keeping quiet

Many books and documentary programmes have appeared since 1980 about the work of the Bletchley Park teams. Winston Churchill said of BP that it was “The goose that laid the golden eggs, but never cackled!” By that he meant that BP was so secret that nothing was known of its existence by anyone – apart from those who worked there – and they never revealed anything. The nearest that the VIs got to being discovered was in the Daily Mirror contribution by a ‘Special Correspondent’ entitled Spies Tap Nazi Code. This issue was dated Friday, February 14, 1941 and referred to ‘hush-hush’ men who listened to Morse code messages. It must have been very embarrassing for the Radio Security Service. I have an original copy of that issue of the newspaper.

This is an edited version of an article which first appeared in the newsletter of the Radio Society of Great Britain and for which due acknowledgement is made.

Special thanks to Chris Shire, Hon. Sec., No.12 Group, ROC Association who made me aware of this historic document. Editor.

BERWICK COASTWATCH - SAFETY TIPS

The effect on the body of entering water 15°C and below is often underestimated. This shock can be the precursor to drowning.

What's the risk? Anything below 15°C is defined as cold water and can seriously affect your breathing and movement, so the risk is significant most of the year. Average UK and Ireland sea temperatures are just 12°C. Rivers such as the Thames are colder - even in the summer.

What happens? Cold water shock causes the blood vessels in the skin to close, which increases the resistance of blood flow. Heart rate is also increased. As a result the heart has to work harder and your blood pressure goes up. Cold water shock can therefore cause heart attacks, even in the relatively young and healthy. The sudden cooling of the skin by cold water also causes an involuntary gasp for breath. Breathing rates can change uncontrollably, sometimes increasing as much as tenfold. All these responses contribute to a feeling of panic, increasing the chance of inhaling water directly into the lungs.

This can all happen very quickly: it only takes half a pint of sea water to enter the lungs for a fully grown man to start drowning. You could die if you don't get medical care immediately.

How can you minimise the risk? If you enter the water unexpectedly: + Take a minute. The initial effects of cold water pass in less than a minute so don't try to swim straight away. + Relax and float on your back to catch your breath. Try to get hold of something that will help you float. + Keep calm then call for help or swim for safety if you're able.

EVENTS

2020

The 'Events' column has been temporarily suspended due to the current coronavirus pandemic and the necessary restrictions in place.

Once the go-ahead is given to start returning to normal activities, we will publish a revised and updated list.

In the meantime, the CDA Committee is making tentative plans to hold a 'Civil Defence' event at the National Memorial Arboretum in November. Nothing has yet been confirmed, so we will keep you informed as to what progress is being made.

CIVIL DEFENCE CREED

"I am a volunteer Civil Defence worker.

I am part of the Civil Defence organisation of the nation, my county and my community.

As part of the Civil Defence team, I will always remember that I have voluntarily assumed an obligation to save lives, alleviate suffering and assist in the survival of the victims of a disaster.

I will use every means within my power, over and above the call of duty if necessary, to aid and assist those in danger."

The 'Civil Defence Creed' first appeared in the August 1963 edition of 'The Gloucestershire Defender'.

Birmingham Air Raids Remembrance Association

Meetings held January to November on the Third Thursday of the month at 12 noon.

Updates on Association projects Meal and a chat.

Venue: Brasshouse, 44 Broad Street, Birmingham, B1 2HP.

All welcome.

Contact Anita Ward, Tel 07792 300 261

The BARRA notice has been updated, so please make a note of the changes.

It may be of some comfort and reassurance for next of kin of deceased CDA members to know that arrangements can be made for a Civil Defence coffin flag to be despatched, often at quite short notice, to be used at the funeral. Please be assured that such a request will be handled with sensitivity and discretion.

In such instances, the Secretary should be contacted on:
01629 55738.

Members and Families may also like to know that Deceased Members of the CDA have been added to the roll of the Perpetual Mass Association at the Benedictine Monastery of the Holy Cross in Chicago. Thus they will share in the spiritual benefits of the monthly mass and the daily office of the monks.

75th ANNIVERSARY - STAND-DOWN OF CD SERVICES



2020 marks the 75th Anniversary of the Stand-Down of the various branches of the Civil Defence Services in July 1945.

The artist W L Clause produced a watercolour painting to commemorate this event.

It features a view of the parade from behind the band. In front of the band there are three groups of military and civilians personnel, some in uniform. An officer on a horse, rides past the Royal box, saluting HM King George VI. Behind the Royal box is an audience of civilians.

With acknowledgements to the Imperial War Museum.



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