



promoting professional dialogue, recognising technical achievement

## **SECRETS, SILK, AND CYANIDE**

**Secret Operations in  
Buckinghamshire 1939-1945**

***Maj Gen Bill Robins CB OBE***

Lecture Series



# Fibre Optic Cables and Optical Networking

## - the optimal connectivity solution

**Major Andy Sutton, Specialist Group Information Services**

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Princess Mary Hall, Blandford Camp. Virtual access via MS Teams is also available

5.15pm – Light refreshments

6:00-7:00pm – Lecture and Q&A

Book in via <https://forms.office.com/e/ceJ7bJj7Xs>

# Lectures 2024

| Date               | Activity | Location                 | Description                                                                   |
|--------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 February         | Lecture  | MOD Stafford and virtual | The Challenges Presented by a Congested Radio Frequency Spectrum              |
| 6 June             | Lecture  | Blandford and virtual    | Special operations during WW2 – coincides with the D-Day Anniversary.         |
| 4 July             | Lecture  | Blandford and virtual    | Fibre optic cables and optical networking, the optimal connectivity solution. |
| 17 October         | Lecture  | Blandford and virtual    | Bletchley Park and its part in D-Day                                          |
| 21 November        | Lecture  | Blandford and virtual    | Operational narratives from Royal Signals officers and soldiers.              |
| Week of 9 December | Lecture  | Physical and online      | DSTL technology (to be confirmed)                                             |

# Secrets, Silk and Cyanide



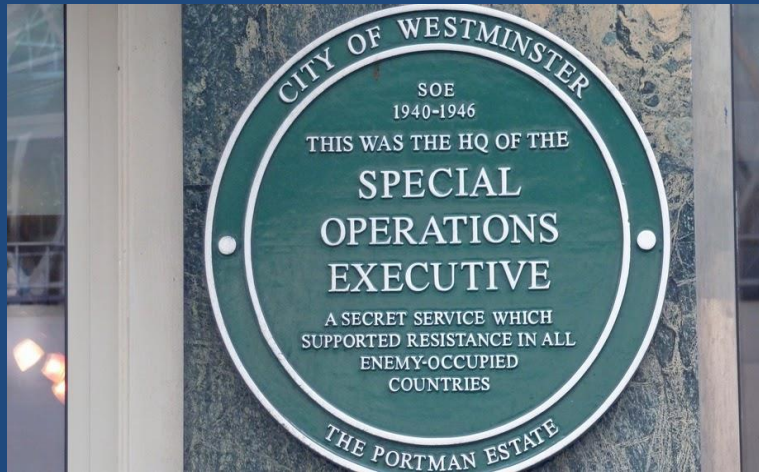
Special Operations in Europe  
1940-1945

**Noor**

**16 June 1943**  
**Near Angers, France**



*("They Landed by Moonlight" painting by Robert Taylor © The Military Gallery, Ojai, Calif.)*



## One of the SOE Baker Street offices





**Noor Inayat Kahn**



## SOE B2 SHORTWAVE RADIO SET

Weight 32 lbs

Frequency 2-9 MHz

Range 500-1000 miles

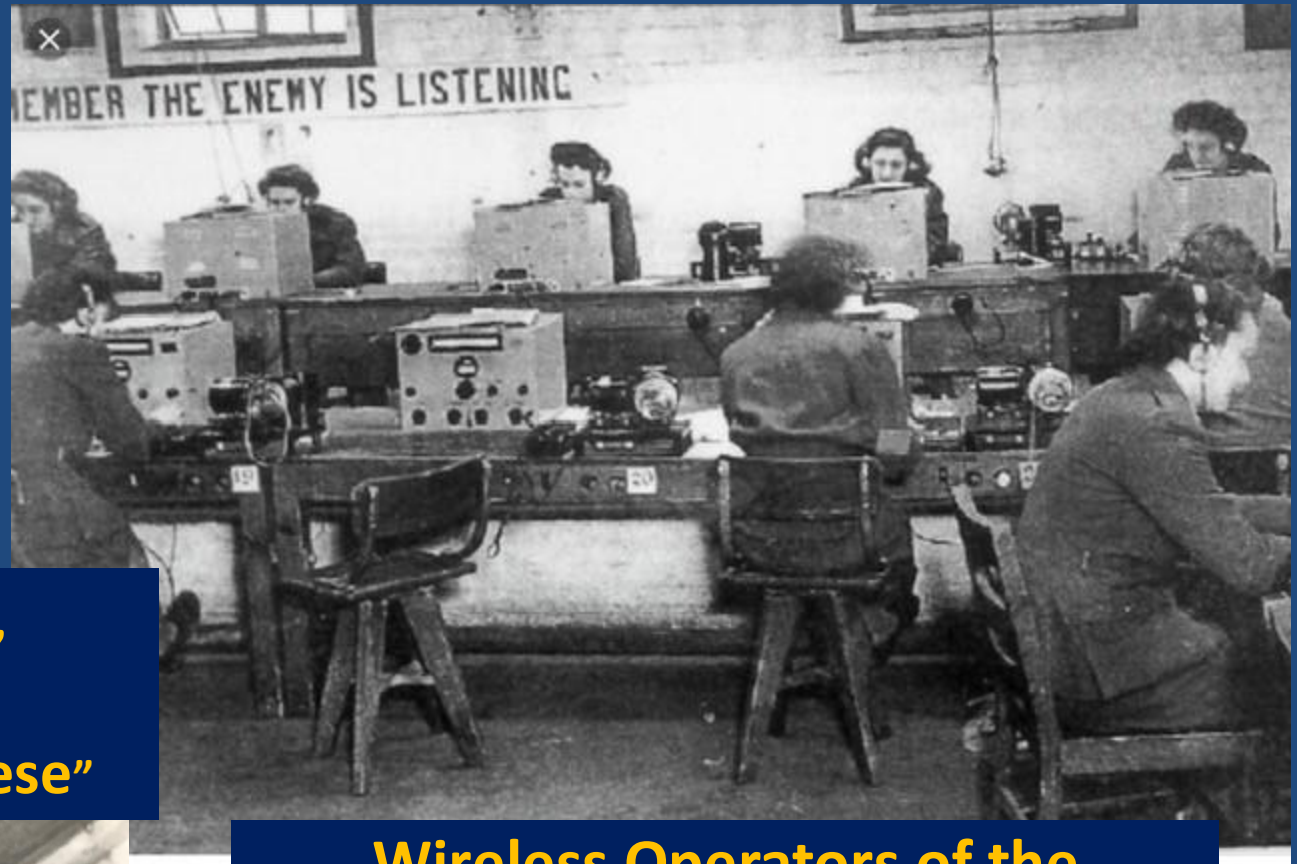
Output 20 Watts

# **The Home Stations**

**Oxfordshire and  
Buckinghamshire**

# Short Wave (High Frequency) Aerial Field





**Odd Starheim,  
SOE Norway  
Codename: "Cheese"**



**Wireless Operators of the  
First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)  
Station 53b, Poundon, 1943**

# Special Communications Operators supporting SOE at Poundon House, 1945



# **SOE and Friends**

# The Secret World of North Bucks

## 1. SOE: Special Operations Executive “Set Europe Ablaze!”



Colin Gubbins



## 2. FANY: First Aid Nursing Yeomanry

## 3. Special Communications Units (SCUs)



# SOE STATION 53: POUNDON AND GRENDON

Key  
SOE/  
FANY

Base

Transmitter



Poundon - 53b



Grendon - 53a



# FANY Wireless Training School at Chicheley Hall, Newport Pagnell



Later the Czechoslovakian Training School of SOE

# SOE: THE STATELY 'OMES OF ENGLAND



**Arisaig  
(Survival)**



**Poundon: Station 53b**



**Beaulieu  
(Finishing)**



**Chicheley Hall, FANY**



**Grendon: Station 53a**

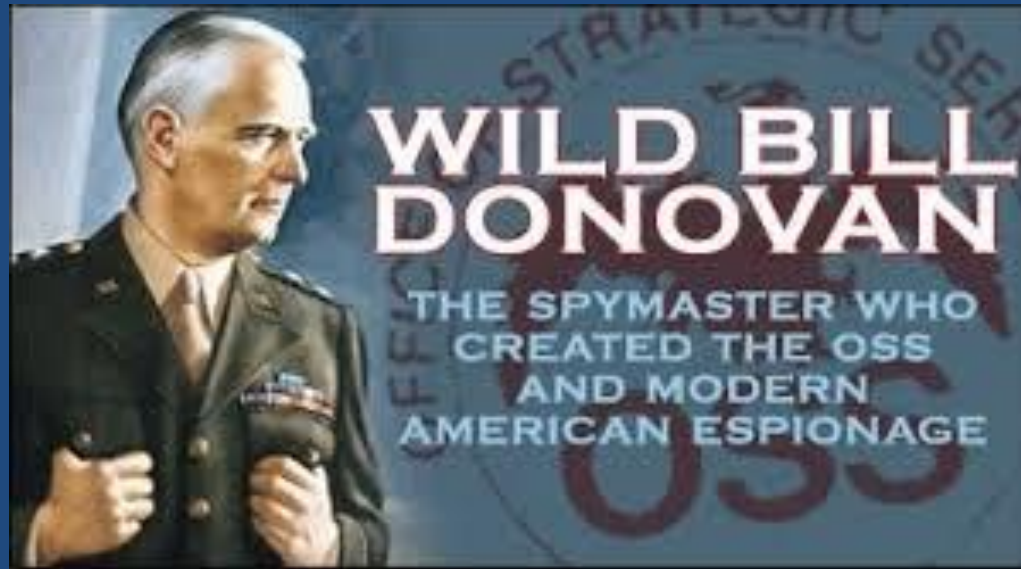
**Wild Americans**

# The Secret World of North Bucks

## 4. OSS: US Office for Strategic Services

Formed in 1942: Propaganda, Subversion, Sabotage, Post-War Planning, some Intelligence collection

*Forerunner of CIA*



# OSS: STATION 53c AT POUNDON, 1944



# **Black Propaganda**

# The Secret World of North Bucks

## 5. The Political Warfare Executive (PWE)



Transmitters at Gawcott (GS1), Crowborough and more

### Propaganda and Disinformation

- Misdirecting German fighters away from allied bomber raids
- Highlighting Nazi high-level corruption and depravity to Wehrmacht listeners
- Attempting to subvert traditional Army officers to plot against Hitler

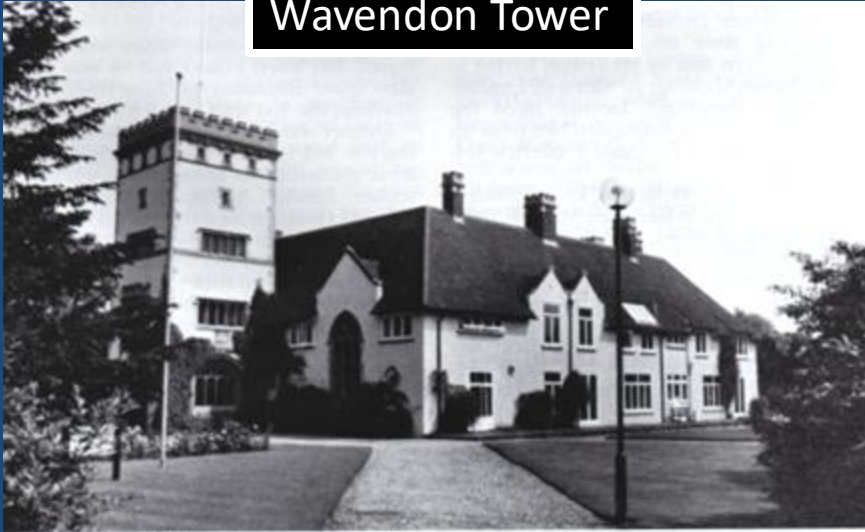


**Sefton Delmer**  
**Black Propagandist**

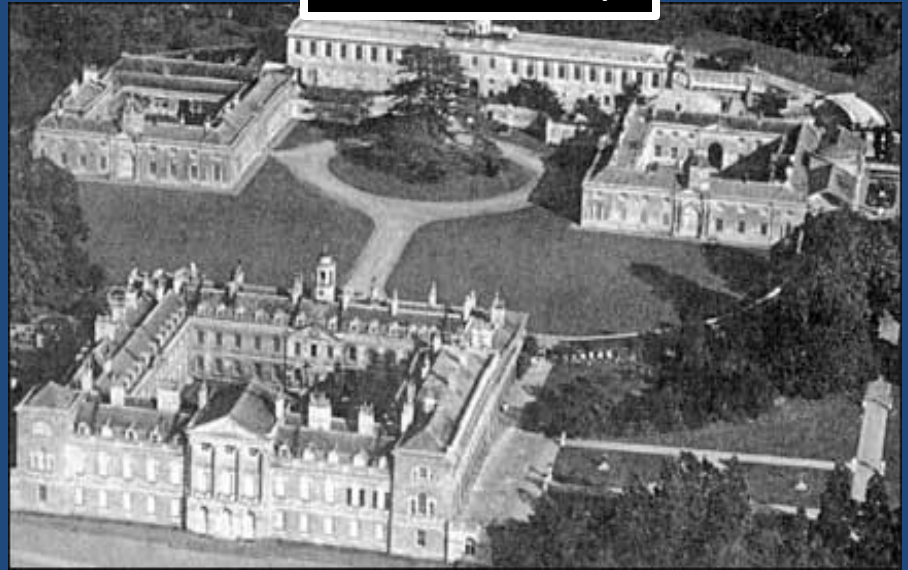
***“Truth is the first casualty of War”***

# PWE MANSIONS

Wavendon Tower



Woburn Abbey



Gawcott

MILTON BRYAN STUDIOS  
OPERATED BY THE  
POLITICAL WARFARE EXECUTIVE  
1942-1945

FROM THESE PREMISES THE DAILY EXPRESS  
CORRESPONDENT SEFTON DELMER AND HIS  
MULTI-NATIONAL TEAM WAGED BY VARIOUS  
MEANS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BLACK  
PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE NAZIS

<http://clutch.open.ac.uk/schools/emerson00/home.html>

Milton Bryan

# **Spies and Eavesdroppers**

# The Secret World of North Bucks

## 6. SIS: Secret Intelligence Service



GC&CS

## 7. Government Code and Cypher School



## 8. The Y Services



# SIS HOUSES

SIS Wireless HQ  
Whaddon Hall

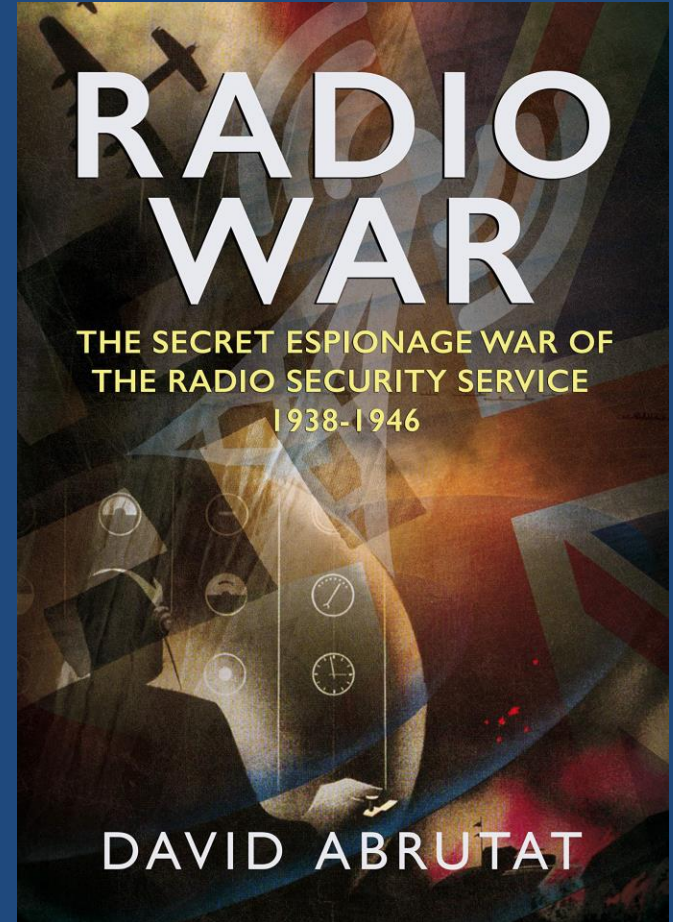


GC&CS  
“ULTRA” Bletchley Park

## 9. RSS: The Radio Security Service



Radio Security Service (RSS)  
at SIS Hanslope Park



# **Prisoner Interrogation at Latimer House**

## 10. Latimer House: Senior Prisoners Interrogation Centre



# **Wicked Weapons from Whitchurch**

# The Secret World of North Bucks

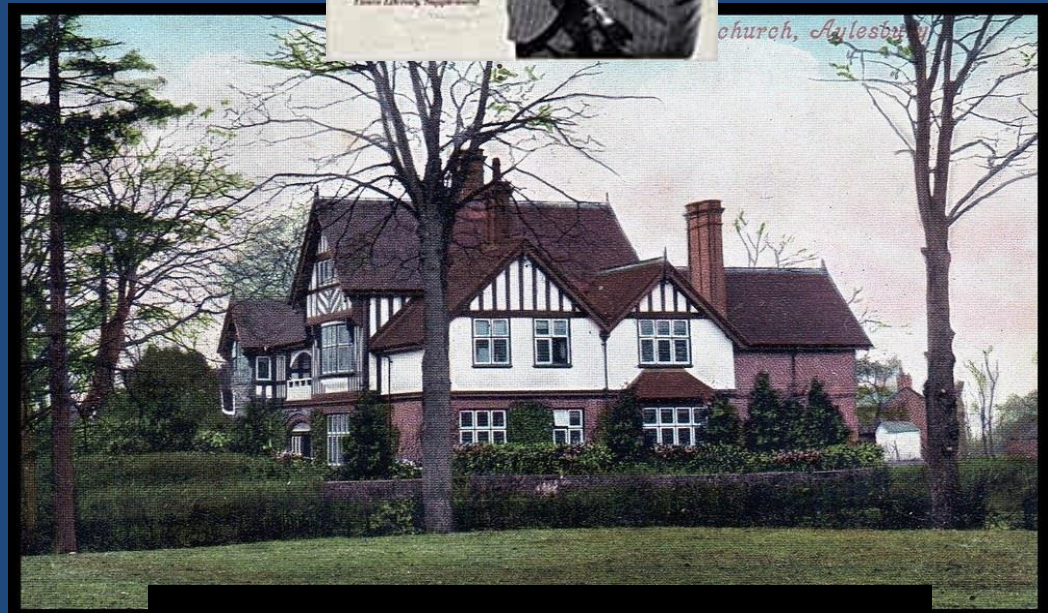
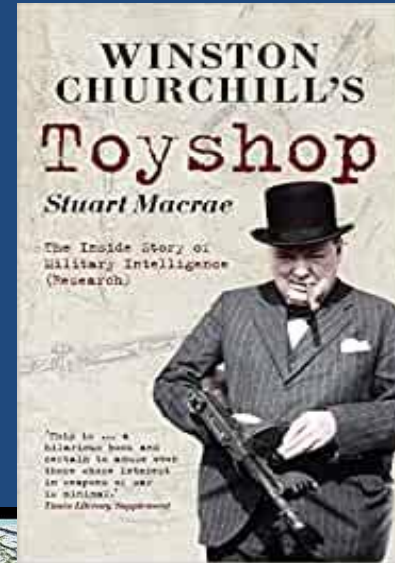
## 11. MD1 (Mr Churchill's Toyshop) Innovative Weapons Development



Maj Gen Millis Jefferis  
*"We broke every rule in the book."*



PIAT anti-tank weapon

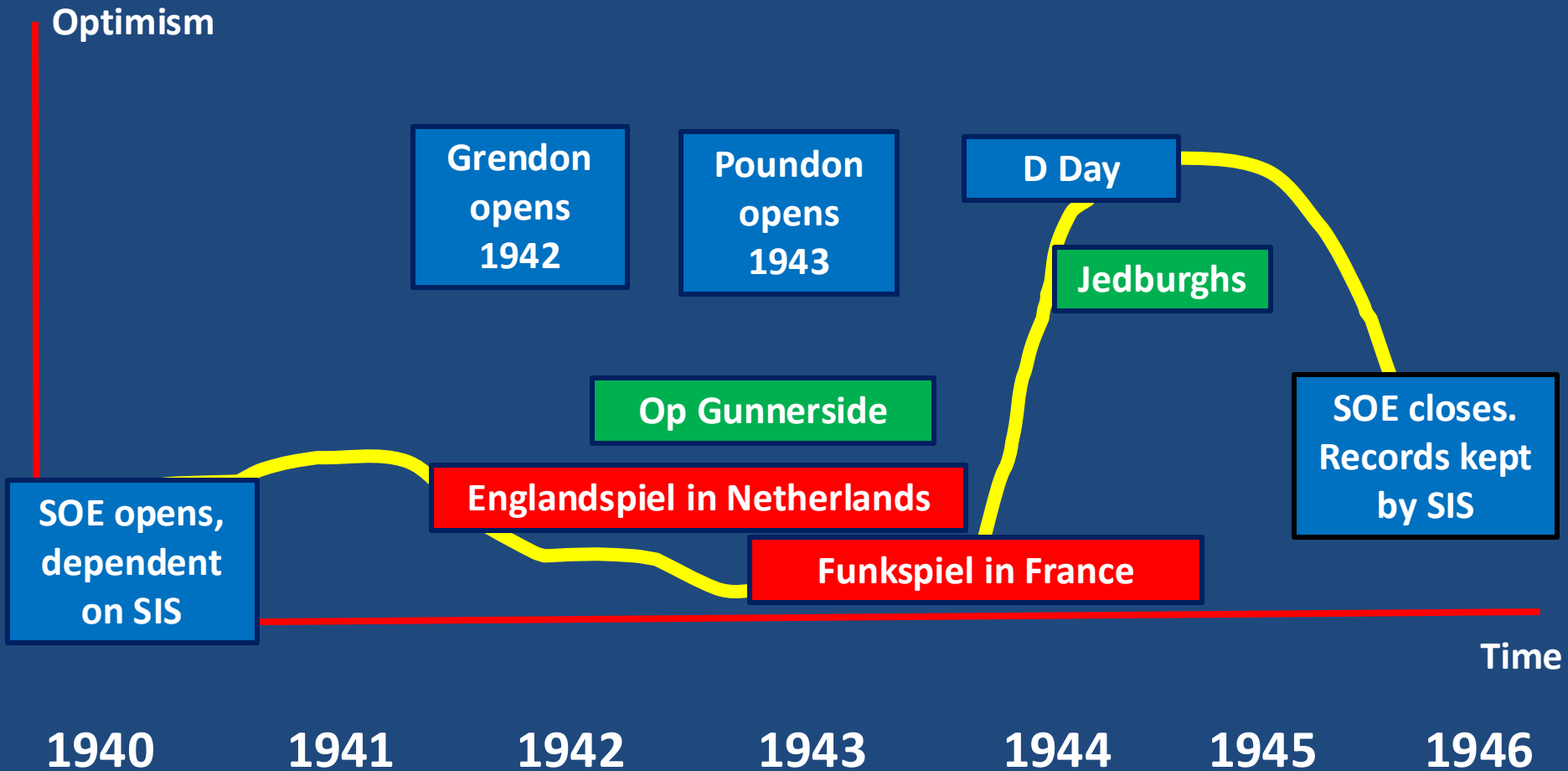


The Firs, Whitchurch

# The Secret World of North Bucks

|            |                      |                                  |
|------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. SOE     | Resistance, Sabotage | Grendon, Poundon                 |
| 2. FANY    | Radio, Crypto        | Grendon, Poundon, Chicheley Hall |
| 3. SC      | Radio, Crypto        | Grendon, Poundon, Whaddon Hall   |
| 4. OSS(US) | Sabotage, Espionage  | Poundon                          |
| 5. PWE     | Propaganda           | Woburn, Wavendon, Gawcott        |
| 6. SIS     | Espionage            | Whaddon Hall, Nash, Creslow      |
| 7. GC&CS   | Decryption, ULTRA    | Bletchley Park                   |
| 8. Y       | Radio Interception   | Worldwide                        |
| 9. RSS     | Counter Intelligence | Hanslope                         |
| 10. MI5&6  | Interrogation        | Latimer                          |
| 11. MD1    | Innovative Weapons   | Whitchurch                       |

# Lows and Highs in SOE Europe



# **SOE and FANY**

## **Wireless Wars**

# Challenges for SOE and FANY

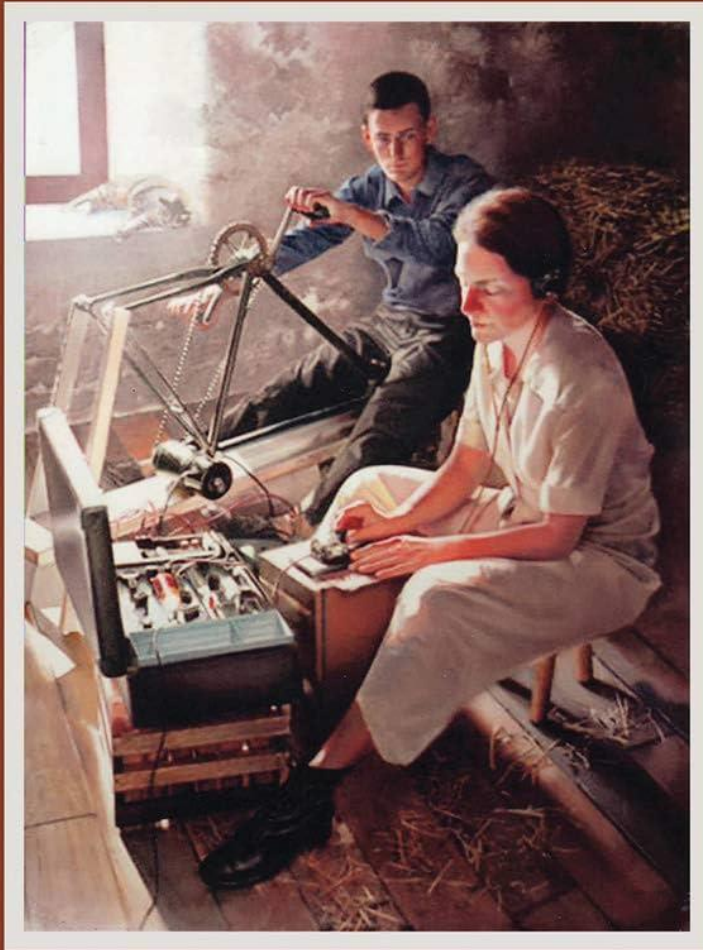


**FANY and Special Communications Officers  
Poundon 1943**

1. **Inexperience in:**
  - Survival
  - Communications
2. **Security:**
  - Baker Street HQ
  - Field
3. **Competent opponents:**
  - Gestapo
  - SD

# The Spy with the Wooden Leg

THE STORY OF VIRGINIA HALL



Nancy Polette

## Agent Communications Skills

### Morse

- Mutilation
- Atmospherics
- Painfully slow data rate

### Radio

- Frequency prediction/crystal choice
- Hiding skywave long wire antenna
- DF: 15 mins to locate to 200m radius

### Power

- Risky use of mains power
- Generating own power (left)

### Crypto

- Coding speed and skill
- Corruption by spelling or coding error

# Challenges for SOE and FANY



**FANY and Special Communications Officers  
Poundon 1943**

1. **Inexperience in:**
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## Leo Marks (1920-2001) SOE Codemaster 1942-45



Silk codes  
Code poems  
One-time pads

Merciless agent testing  
Mercilessly driving decryption  
*"NO indecipherables"*

**The Code Poem given by Leo Marks to FANY Violette Szabo, captured  
in a fire fight June 1944, shot at Ravensbruck, February 1945**



The life that I have  
Is all that I have  
And the life that I have is yours.

The love that I have  
Of the life that I have  
Is yours and yours and yours.

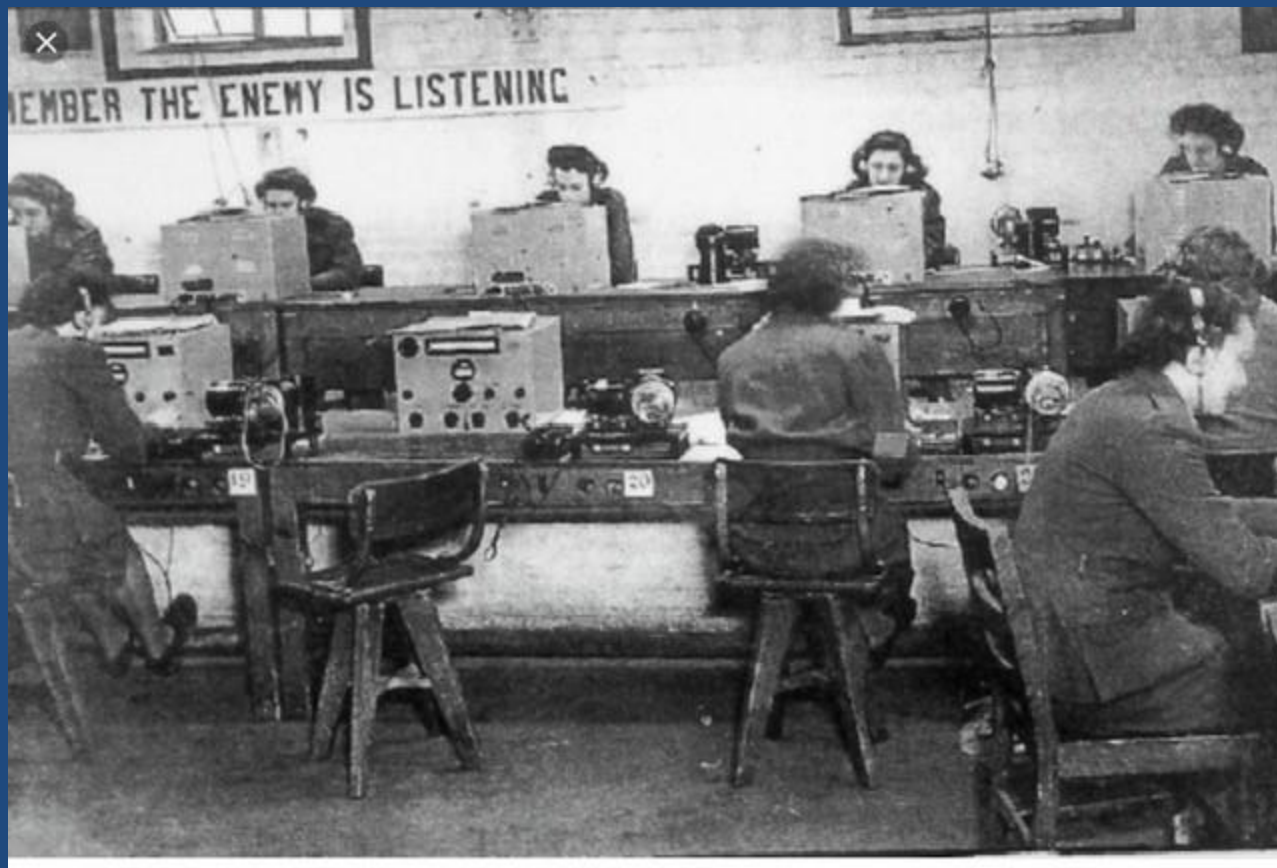
A sleep I shall have  
A rest I shall have  
Yet death will be but a pause.

For the peace of my years  
In the long green grass  
Will be yours and yours and yours.

## FANY Officers at Poundon, early 1943



## Receiver Room, Poundon, 1943



# Agent transmissions intercepted by the Sicherheitsdienst (SD)



## Agent location fixed by Direction Finding radios..



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-267-0148-08  
Foto: Utecht / Utrech / Uetrecht | August 1941

## Resistance colleagues already being picked up

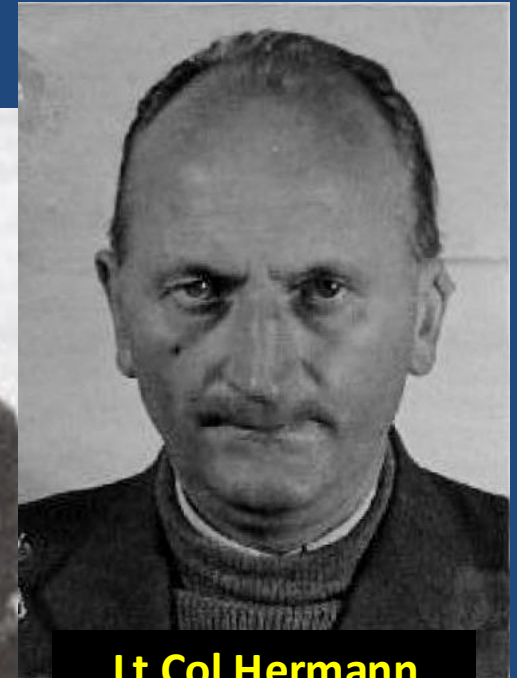


# Arrest and Interrogation



# **Tragedies: Netherlands and France**

# Netherlands. Der Englandspiel: the English Game



**Lt Col Hermann  
Giskes, SD**

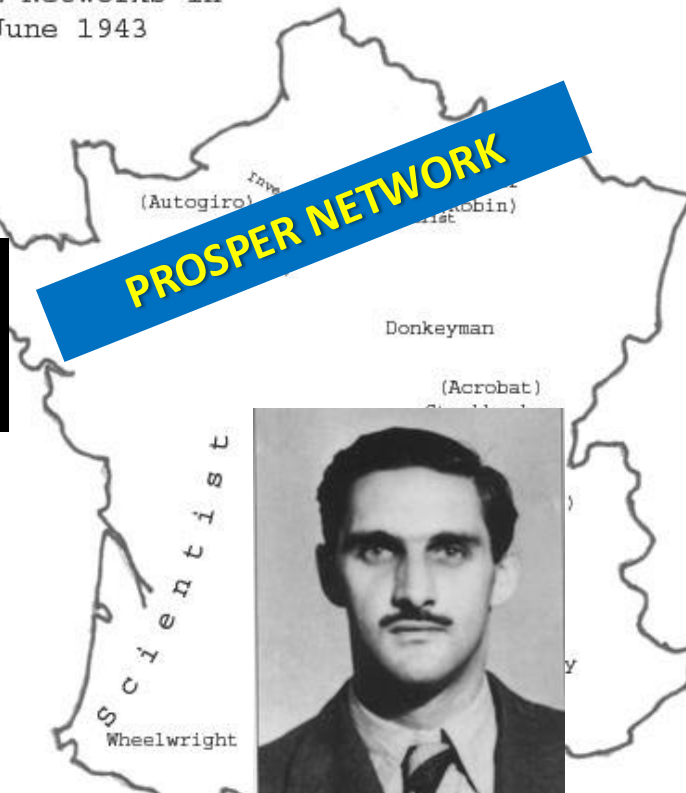
# France. Der Funkspiel: The Radio Game



**Colonel Maurice Buckmaster**  
**Head of French Section SOE**  
**Baker Street, London**

or SOE Networks in  
nce, June 1943

**PROSPER NETWORK**



**Captain Gilbert Norman DLI**



**Lieutenant Colonel**  
**Hans Kieffer**  
**Head of SD, France,**  
**Avenue Foch, Paris**

# Noor Inayat Khan

A most unlikely spy



# END OF THE NETHERLANDS ENGLANDSPIEL, APRIL 1944

|   |                                                                        |   |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| ○ | 1 April 1944                                                           | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | From: Abwehr Netherlands                                               | ○ |
| ○ | To: Messrs Blunt, Bingham, and Successors, SOE (NL)                    | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | You are trying to make business in Netherlands without our assistance. | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | We think this rather unfair in view of our long and successful co-     | ○ |
| ○ | operation as your sole agents here.                                    | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | But never mind: whenever you will come to pay a visit to the Continent | ○ |
| ○ | you may be assured that you will be received with the same care and    | ○ |
| ○ | results as all those who you sent us before.                           | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | So long,                                                               | ○ |
| ○ |                                                                        | ○ |
| ○ | Hermann Giskes                                                         | ○ |
| ○ | Lt Col                                                                 | ○ |
| ○ | Abwehr                                                                 | ○ |

# END OF THE FRENCH FUNKSPIEL, JUNE 1944

6 Jun 44

From Lt Col Hans Kieffer ,Head of Paris SD  
to Col Maurice Buckmaster SOE (F)

We thank you for the arms and ammunition which you have been kind enough to send us.

We also appreciate the many tips you have given us regarding your plans and intentions, which we have carefully noted.

In case you are concerned about the health of some of your visitors, rest assured they will be treated with the consideration they deserve.

Auf Wiedersehen,

Hans

# **Triumphs: Norway and France**

# Norway

## Operation GUNNERSIDE February 1943



Joachim Rønneberg



The Hardanger Vidda



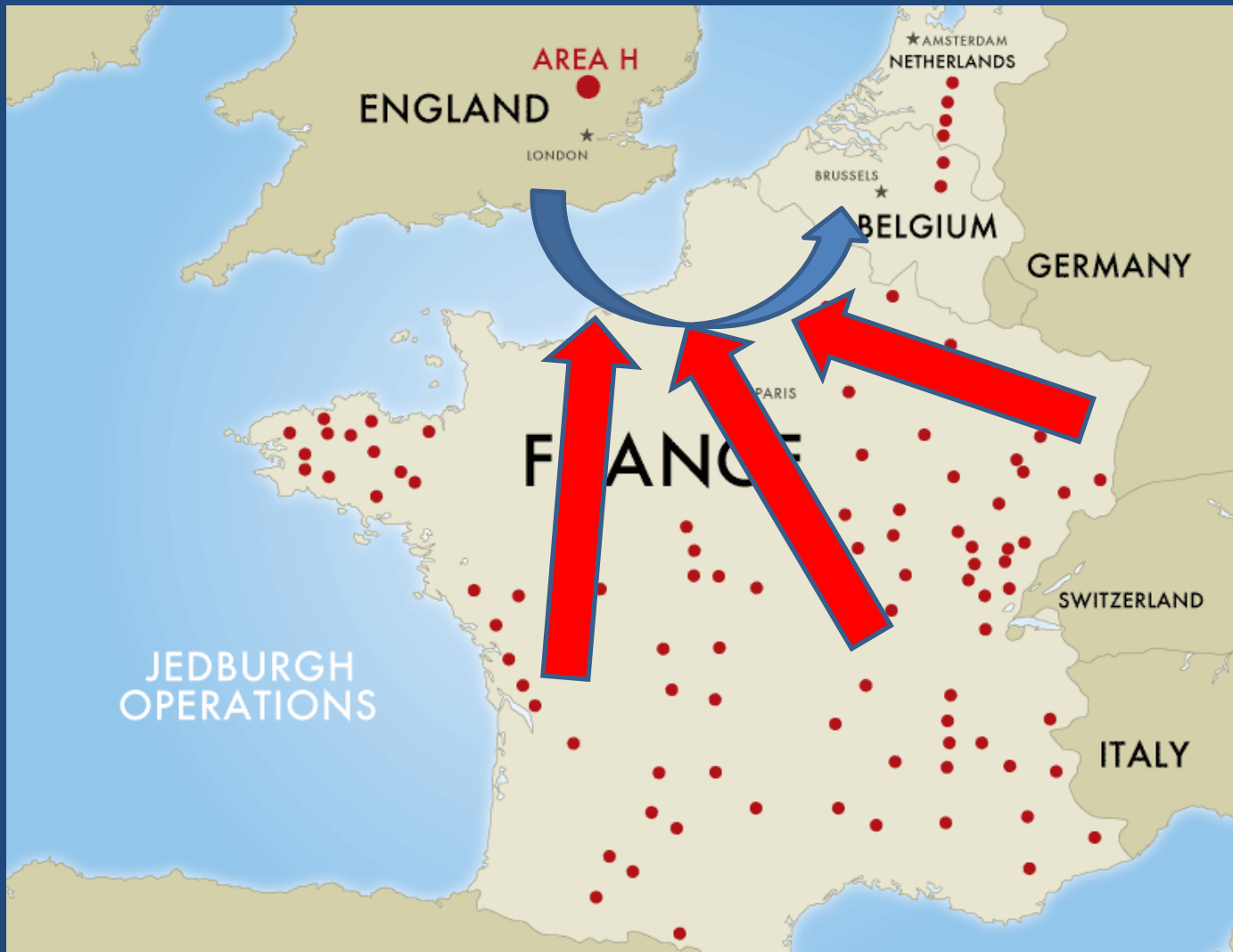
Rjukan Heavy Water Plant  
Telemark

# Normandy: June 1944



Colorized by Marina Amaral - [www.marinamaral.com](http://www.marinamaral.com) #DDay75

# Jedburgh Teams



# Jedburgh Demolition Class 1944



# Jedburgh Teams





**Pearl Witherington**



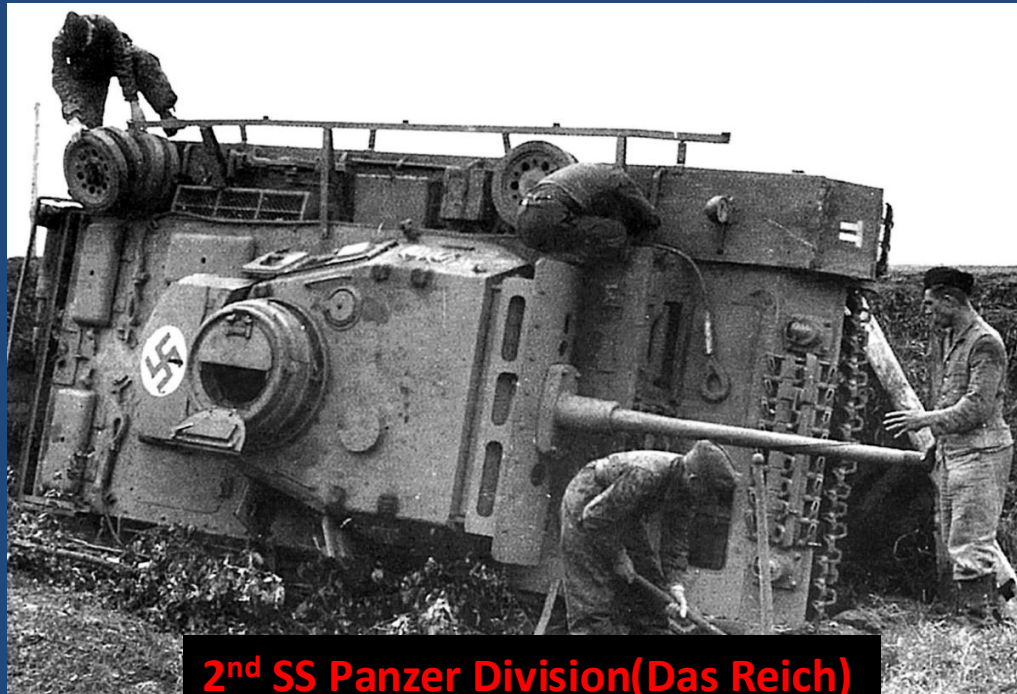
**WRESTLER  
NETWORK**



**Jedburghs and Resistants**

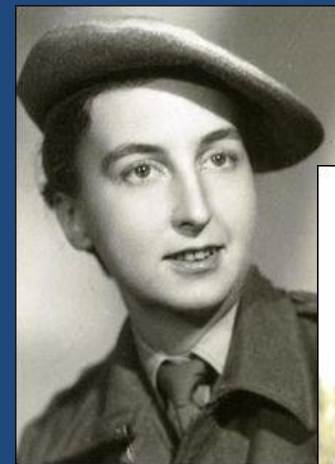


**Small Arms Training**



**2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Division(Das Reich)**

## Pearl Witherington



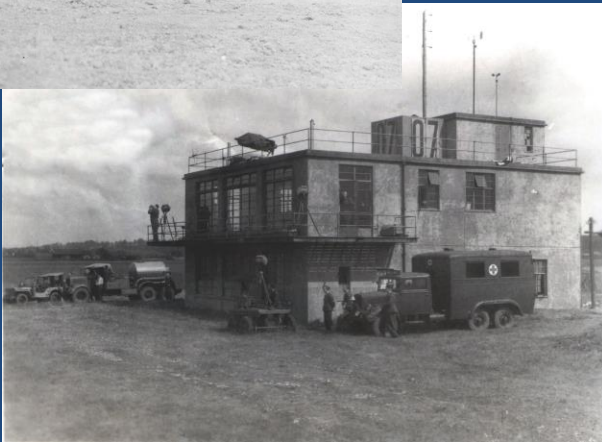
# The RAF Special Duties Squadrons

## 138 Squadron

Whitley  
Halifax



RAF  
Tempsford



## 161 Squadron

Lysander  
Whitley  
Wellington



## Estimates

623 aircrew KIA from both squadrons.  
995 agents dropped into occupied Europe by parachute  
485 landed by aircraft  
575 agents and others brought back to the UK.

**And (almost) finally...**

# Lows and Highs in SOE

Optimism

SOE opens,  
dependent  
on SIS

Englandspiel in Netherlands

Op Gunnerside

Grendon  
opens  
1942

Poundon  
opens  
1943

Funkspiel in France

D Day

Jedburghs

SOE closes.  
Records kept  
by SIS

Time

1940

1941

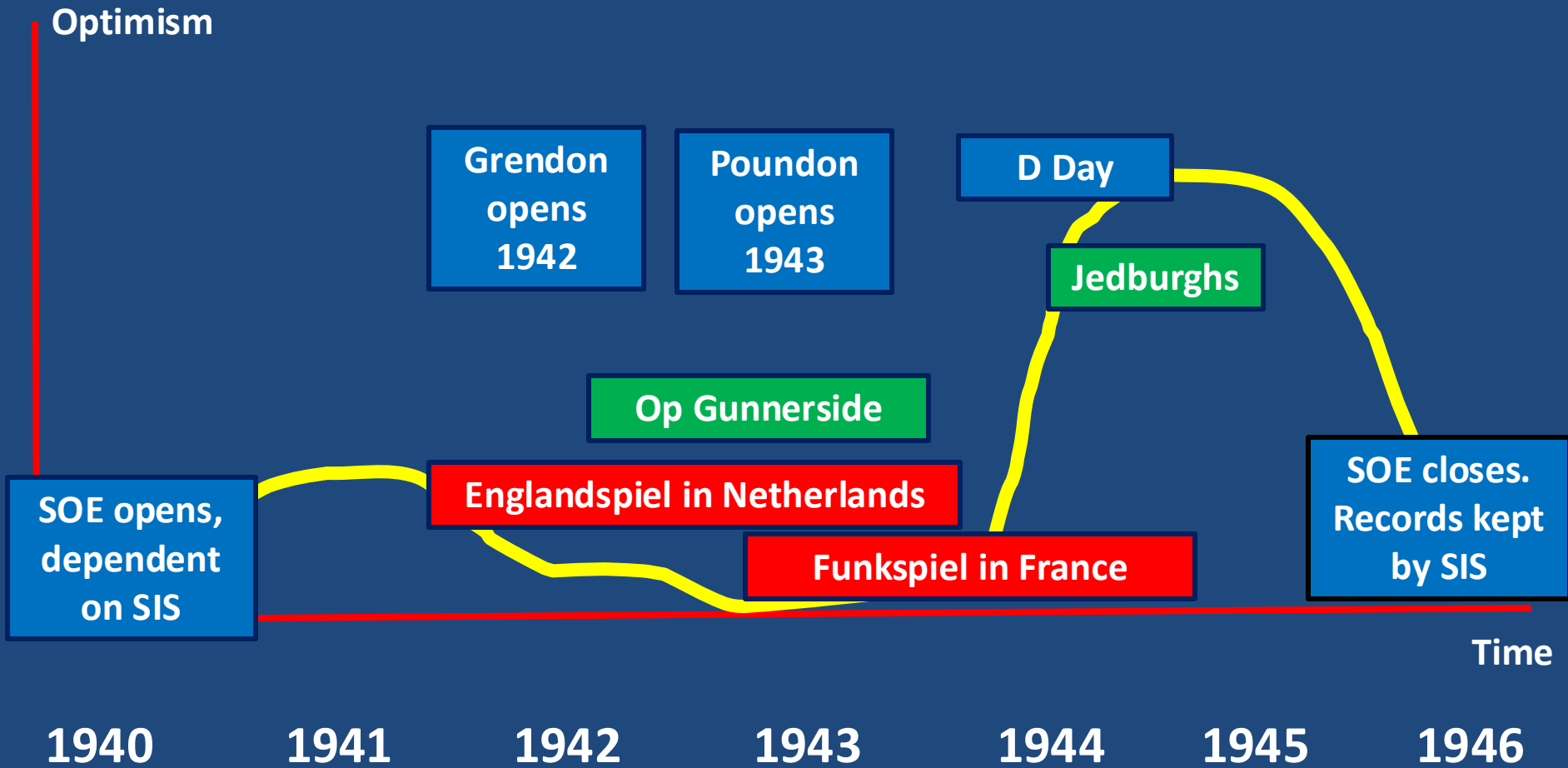
1942

1943

1944

1945

1946



SOE: should we  
have done it?

Keegan: "NO! Morally unacceptable"

Hastings: "YES! Vital for self-respect"





Halifax tyre-burst at Tempsford 1943

End



# FRENCH AND DUTCH TRAGEDIES

A bitter legacy in France, worse in the Netherlands. Distrust affected Battle of Arnhem.

## Cock-up?

- Shortage of radio operators: networks shared them; they knew too much
- Gung-ho lack of security
- Baker Street magical thinking: refusal to accept inconvenient evidence.
- Competent Abwehr, SD and Gestapo
- Rollup of Dutch network revealed a lot about PROSPER

## • Conspiracy?

- SOE the patsy in a deception campaign?

## **DECEPTION**

### **A multi-layered Russian doll**

The wartime structure of British deception was so complex and obscure that it eventually defeated its official historian, Professor Sir Michael Howard

*Patrick Marnham*  
*War in the Shadows, 2020*

# A CONSPIRACY AGAINST SOE?



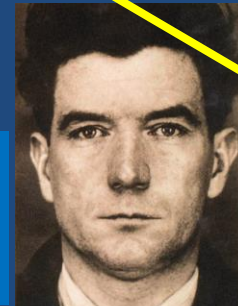
Col John Bevan  
Head LCS  
Deception Maestro



Lt Col Claude Dansey  
Deputy Head SIS  
"A most evil man"



Maj Nick Bodington  
F Section SOE  
SIS Mole in SOE?



Henri Dericourt  
F Section  
Triple agent?



Karl Bomelburg  
Head Gestapo Paris



Lt Col Maurice Buckmaster  
Head of F Section SOE



Major Francis Suttill,  
Head of PROSPER



...and 27+ agents

**GUILTY?**

**PATSY?**

**VICTIMS?**