

# The Walls Have Ears

THE GREATEST INTELLIGENCE  
OPERATION OF WORLD WAR II

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## CHAPTER I

# The Tower of London

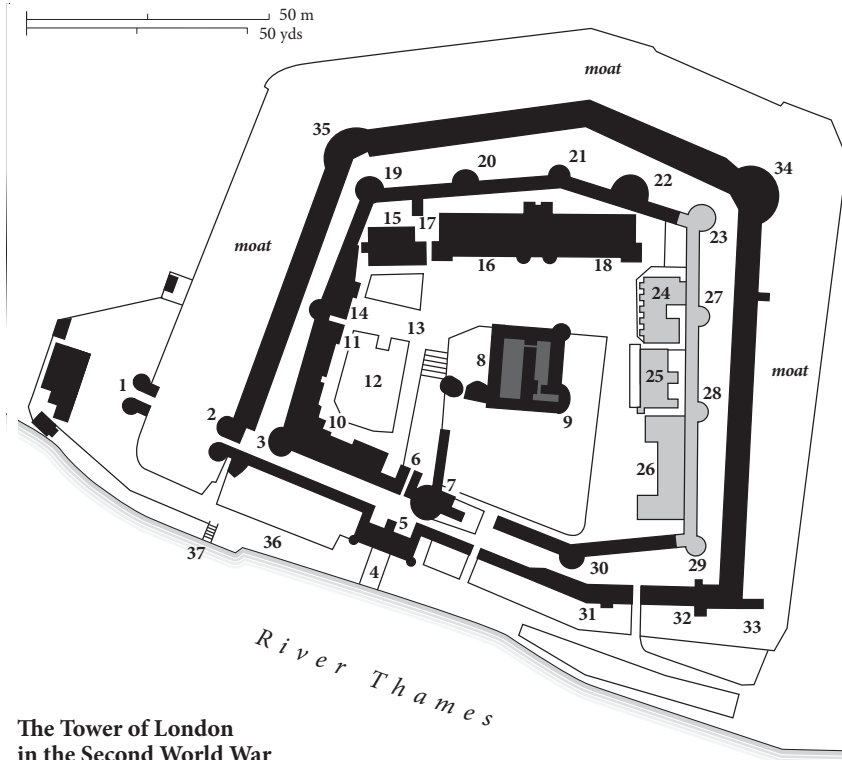
The upholding of the Munich Agreement did not last. The invasion of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939 brought Britain closer to conflict. Chamberlain issued an ultimatum that if Germany invaded Poland, Britain would declare war.

In May of that year, just a few months before the outbreak of war, MI1(a) and MI5 had liaised over accommodating prisoners of war in the Tower of London.<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for their interrogation by Naval Intelligence had already been prepared,<sup>2</sup> and Kendrick had liaised closely with Ian Fleming of the Naval Intelligence Division at the Admiralty. Fleming had selected the Naval Intelligence team that would work at Kendrick's secret wartime site.<sup>3</sup> Kendrick had also authorised a team of specialist engineers to enter the Tower of London and 'wire it for sound'<sup>4</sup> and liaised with the Post Office to supply listening apparatus. To maintain absolute secrecy, the engineers who installed it were required to sign the Official Secrets Act, as did all personnel who worked in the M Room. Anyone who broke the silence could face up to 14 years' imprisonment.

The day that German forces invaded Poland, on 1 September 1939, Kendrick (then in the rank of major) opened his clandestine unit at the Tower of London. Within the historic walls of this iconic fortress that had seen the deaths of royals, traitors and spies, Kendrick launched a bugging operation against the enemy on British soil that combined all three services of army, air force and navy. Their joint cooperation would be carefully masterminded and choreographed by Kendrick



# THE TOWER OF LONDON



## The Tower of London in the Second World War

- |    |   |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|
| 1  | Middle Tower  | 24 | Officers' Quarters – believed to be 'F. Block'.<br><i>The ground and first floors were used for British staff (other ranks). The second floor was reserved for thirty German officers and forty-five other rank prisoners, and a barrack room for the prisoners' Mess Room. Today, it is the Fusilier Museum</i> |
| 2  | Byward Tower  | 25 | Old Hospital Block – used for prisoners who needed to be segregated  |
| 3  | Bell Tower  | 26 | New Royal Armouries – more prisoners' accommodation, to enable the special centre to hold a total of 120 German prisoners  |
| 4  | Traitor's Gate  | 27 | Constable Tower – its use in the Second World War is not known, possibly as overflow for No.28 and No.29   |
| 5  | St Thomas's Tower   | 28 | Broad Arrow Tower – three rooms used and 'wired for sound' back to an M Room   |
| 6  | Bloody Tower  | 29 | Salt Tower – four rooms used which were wired to an M Room on the top floor  |
| 7  | Wakefield Tower   | 30 | Lanthorn Tower   |
| 8  | White Tower   | 31 | Cradle Tower   |
| 9  | Chapel of St John the Evangelist  | 32 | Well Tower   |
| 10 | Queen's House   | 33 | Develin Tower  |
| 11 | Gaoler's House  | 34 | Brass Mount  |
| 12 | Tower Green   | 35 | Legge's Mount  |
| 13 | Block (site)  | 36 | Tower Wharf  |
| 14 | Beauchamp Tower   | 37 | Queen's Stair  |
| 15 | Royal Chapel  |    |  |
| 16 | Waterloo Barracks   |    |  |
| 17 | Jewel House   |    |  |
| 18 | Oriental Gallery  |    |  |
| 19 | Devereux Tower  |    |  |
| 20 | Flint Tower   |    |  |
| 21 | Bowyer Tower  |    |  |
| 22 | Brick Tower   |    |  |
| 23 | Martin Tower –<br><i>Commandant Anthony de Salis's office was in here</i> |    |  |

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himself, in a delicate balancing act that made each service feel it was in control.

Joining Kendrick in the Tower were Flight Lieutenant (later Group Captain) Samuel Denys Felkin, Squadron Leader Edmund Pollock and three captains of the Intelligence Corps: William Rose, G. Buxton and J.B. Carson.<sup>5</sup> Arriving within a fortnight were Major Arthur Richard (Dick) Rawlinson, in charge of interrogation of enemy prisoners,<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Frederic Trench (RMLI), Lieutenant Commander Edward Croghan (RNVR), and army Captains Charles Corner and Leslie Parkin.<sup>7</sup> Trench already had a pre-war history in intelligence as a naval spy, recruited by Mansfield Smith-Cumming, the first head of SIS.<sup>8</sup>

Edmund Pollock had been a British businessman and hotelier in Vienna before his arrest by the Gestapo on 13 March 1938. His hotel confiscated and business assets frozen by the Nazis, Kendrick, who was a personal friend, managed to secure his release and escape out of the country through diplomatic channels.<sup>9</sup> Pollock, an ex-officer of the Royal Air Force, had been decorated with a First World War Military Cross. At the Tower of London, Pollock was initially placed in charge of the Air Intelligence section AI1(K), to be succeeded within weeks by Denys Felkin who would serve in that role until the end of the war.<sup>10</sup>

Denys Felkin (b.1894) had also lived in Vienna, was a close friend of Kendrick and had worked for him as an agent during the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> From 1914–15, Felkin had served in the Artists' Rifles and at the end of the First World War he had become a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps. Once the hostilities were over, he was posted to the Reparations Committee in Berlin where he acquired fluency in German and worked alongside the British diplomat and economist Sir Andrew McFadyean. In 1931 while in Paris, Felkin met American socialite Charlotte Warner Burchard, the cousin of Princess Henry XXXIII of Reuss.<sup>12</sup> They married in Paris in December that year. In 1934, the Felkins moved to Vienna where Denys became manager of the Ideale Radiator Gesellschaft. His posting was believed to be a guise for intelligence work because he had no technological training relevant to the company.<sup>13</sup> He used the work to travel

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and monitor the rise of the Nazi regime in neighbouring Germany. Then, still pre-war, he was transferred to Paris as manager of the Paris Radiator Company – again believed to be a cover for (unknown) intelligence work.

Charles Corner and Arthur Rawlinson had served in the First World War – Corner with the King's Royal Rifle Corps and Rawlinson with the West Surrey Regiment. The latter had transferred to intelligence duties in France from 1917 to 1918 with MI1(a), the section of military intelligence that dealt with prisoners of war.<sup>14</sup> In the inter-war period, Rawlinson had had a career as a screenwriter and worked on the script for the British film, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934). At the outbreak of the Second World War, Corner and Rawlinson were both called up to an emergency commission and posted to MI1(H). Soon after his time at the Tower of London, Rawlinson became deputy director of Military Intelligence (Prisoners of War) and later head of MI19.<sup>15</sup>

Leslie Parkin was a charismatic character who fitted well into the world of espionage, especially the wartime bugging operation. Born in 1893, he was a fine pianist who had taken lessons with Russian-born concert pianist, Benno Moiseiwitsch. Liz Driscoll has vivid memories of her uncle:

He spoke several languages (German, French and Persian) with an intimate knowledge of Persia, Poland, Russia, Belgium, Holland and Germany from the 1920s and 30s. I remember him as a kind, entertaining, generous and talented uncle who loved animals and children, drank south-African sherry and who was a wonderful pianist.<sup>16</sup>

Parkin had served on special duties in the First World War, and worked in Germany as general manager for the Eastern Telegraph Company in Hamburg in the 1930s. He and two other businessmen were expelled from Germany in April 1939 in reprisal for the British expulsion of secret Nazi police agents. It is probable that the Nazis had also suspected him of spying. Parkin was an expert in telegraphy and technology, proving indispensable for the technological side of the M Room. His

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knowledge of Nazi Germany meant that he could interrogate or befriend the prisoners.<sup>17</sup>

Lieutenant Richard Pennell (RNVR) conducted interrogations at the Tower from late October 1939. He had originally joined the Royal Naval Reserve as a Midshipman in January 1931 and attained promotion to Lieutenant in 1935. At the Tower, he aided Trench in carrying out interrogations for the Naval Intelligence section, designated as NID 11 by the Admiralty, and later NID 1 (P/W).<sup>18</sup> Pennell eventually moved to other naval intelligence operations; in July 1942 he saw action in the Channel and in October of that year took part in Operation Jubilee (the Dieppe Raid).<sup>19</sup> Promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1943, he went on to command HMS *Tartar* and the escort destroyer HMS *Quantock*.<sup>20</sup>

Although initially small, the unit was a highly sophisticated and exceptionally well organised operation. It would soon be expanded by Kendrick and continued to run for the duration of the war. Around him was a dedicated team of men and women, some of whom he had known from his pre-war days in Vienna, whilst others had served with him in intelligence in the First World War. Between 1939 and 1942, Kendrick's team of secret listeners were British-born men who were fluent in German. At their work stations, they recorded the prisoners' conversations but by 1943, the information coming out of the M Rooms across Kendrick's three bugging sites (Trent Park, Latimer House and Wilton Park) was highly technical and the German dialects so hard to understand that British secret listeners struggled to decipher and transcribe the recordings properly. Kendrick needed native German speakers to monitor the thirty bugged rooms at each of the sites.<sup>21</sup> He turned to the companies of the British army's Pioneer Corps where several thousand German-speaking émigrés, mostly Jewish refugees, were serving and 'digging for victory'.<sup>22</sup> They had fled Nazi Germany and Austria prior to the outbreak of war and wanted to fight Hitler but, instead of being stationed on the front line, had been placed in a labour corps of the British army. Their chance to play a more direct role came in 1943 as Kendrick sought to recruit 101 of them for 'special duties'. They became an extraordinary team who were deeply loyal to him. Secret

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listener George Pulay and his family already owed their lives to Kendrick for getting them out of Vienna.<sup>23</sup>

Having signed the Official Secrets Act, ex-refugee secret listeners, like Fritz Lustig, remained silent for over sixty years and never talked about their work in the M Room. During their time as secret listeners, they did not set eyes on a single German prisoner of war, yet they came as close as possible to them behind the walls of the M Room.<sup>24</sup> They eavesdropped on over 10,000 German POWs, from U-boat crew, to Luftwaffe pilots and army officers to high-ranking generals and Field Marshals. The prisoners were captured in many theatres of war, from North Africa, Italy, Greece and France to Belgium and Holland. They included German pilots shot down over the English skies and U-boat crews pulled from the freezing waters around Britain.<sup>25</sup>

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A special section of the guards was responsible for bringing prisoners in and out of the Tower. They had no idea of the clandestine side of the operation and asked no questions. The daily administration of the special compound, initially known as the *Prisoners of War Collecting Centre in London*, came under the jurisdiction of commandant Captain Count Anthony Denis Rodolph Fane de Salis, an officer of the Guards who was based in Martin Tower on the north side of the complex.<sup>26</sup> De Salis (b.1897) was from an old aristocratic family, the son of British diplomat and landowner the 7th Count de Salis; he was a regular in the army during the First World War, commissioned Lieutenant on 1 March 1918, and given a special appointment from 1 June 1920 to 8 January 1921.<sup>27</sup>

Security at the Tower was increased and no civilian was permitted in the compound unless in possession of a special pass signed by de Salis or the adjutant.<sup>28</sup> An extensive part of the Tower was given over for the prisoners' special interrogation and holding quarters: the Old Hospital Block (for prisoners who had to be segregated), four rooms in the Salt Tower, three rooms in Broad Arrow Tower, the small Warden's room at the middle Drawbridge, store rooms in the Moat near Wharf Guard (Nos.1-11), the



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first floor of F. Block's No.3 barrack room (for other ranks of staff), and the ground floor company store as their Mess Room.<sup>29</sup> The second floor of F. Block was reserved for prisoners as follows: No.4 barrack room to house 30 German officers, No.5 barrack room for 45 prisoners of other ranks, and No.6 barrack room as the prisoners' Mess Room, No.3 Sergeants' room was used for stores and No.4 Sergeants' room for Quartermaster Sergeant officer John D. Hodges, and the Wharf Guardroom and Detention Room for use by the guards only. A shelter was constructed outside the entrance to the barrack rooms for use as a kitchen until the construction of a cookhouse had been completed. Cooking was undertaken by two Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) women. The special compound could hold up to 120 prisoners at any one time.

Prisoners were exercised in the dry moat between St Thomas's Tower and the Well Tower. In wet weather when the moat was too damp, they were taken to the wharf front near the Byward Tower and to a point opposite the Cradle Tower.<sup>30</sup> Procedures were in place to deal with any prisoners who escaped, including the immediate ringing of the bell to the Warders' Hall in Byward Tower. In the event of a fire in the prisoners' quarters, the detainees were to be assembled under strong guard in the Salt Tower. In the event of an air raid warning, 'prisoners will remain in their quarters. Sentries will be doubled. Every precaution will be taken to ensure that the prisoners do not attempt to expose a light'.<sup>31</sup>

Prisoners brought into the Tower were swiftly interrogated. A number of softening techniques were used to encourage them to give away their intelligence.<sup>32</sup> After interrogation, the prisoner was taken back to his room which he shared with one or two other prisoners. The British interrogators were frequently seen by them as incompetent or stupid for conducting a 'phoney' interrogation,<sup>33</sup> with the result that prisoners went back to their room and talked to their cellmate about what they had not told the interrogator – unaware that the rooms were fitted with bugging devices.<sup>34</sup> The tiny microphones were hidden in the fireplaces and light fittings, and wired back to listening apparatus in another room, the M Room, which housed the listeners who were recording the prisoners' conversations.<sup>35</sup> Information about the number of listeners at the Tower

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is not given, nor are details about the technical equipment used and who supplied it.

In his wartime diary, Guy Liddell (MI5's director of counter-espionage) wrote on 12 September 1939 that Kendrick was 'kicking his heels at the Tower of London while waiting for the arrival of German prisoners of war. I suggested that we might perhaps pool our resources with SIS in the matter of the interrogation of prisoners, of whom there are over 200'.<sup>36</sup> Kendrick was not kicking his heels for long.

## THE FIRST GERMAN PRISONERS

The first prisoners arrived at the Tower on 17 September 1939: forty-three officers and other ranks were brought from U-39 which had been sunk off north-west Ireland on 14 September after an attempt to sink the British aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal*.<sup>37</sup> The first enemy U-boat to be sunk in the war,<sup>38</sup> all the crew of U-39 survived, including its captain Lieutenant Commander Gerhard Glattes and Chief Quartermaster Peter Aussen. A nominal register of all the crew was compiled by Captain de Salis.<sup>39</sup> On 20 September, they were interrogated at the Tower by Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Frederic Trench and Lieutenant Commander Edward Croghan.<sup>40</sup> Very little information was achieved from these interrogations because the captain 'had had opportunity to impress upon his crew the importance of reticence'.<sup>41</sup> The interrogations were completed a week later on 27 September.

On the evening of 22 September, thirty-eight German officers and other ranks of U-27 were brought into the compound after it had been sunk.<sup>42</sup> It was the second U-boat to be sunk in the war, with an expectation that the crew would provide early intelligence on Germany's dockyards, ports, technology and new U-boat construction.<sup>43</sup> After being searched to remove items that could be used in an attempted escape, the prisoners were allowed to keep their gas masks, steel helmets, identity discs, badges of rank, decorations and pay books.<sup>44</sup>

The prisoners faced intensive days of interrogation by Trench and Croghan, which ended on 27 September.<sup>45</sup> Amongst them was chief

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wireless operator, petty officer Werner who was interrogated about his training and duties.<sup>46</sup> He told Trench and Croghan that he had trained for a year at Flensburg and aboard U-27 had worked up to ten hours per shift on irregular watches. He revealed details of German short wave, medium wave and long wave transmissions and reception, including the naval Enigma machine.<sup>47</sup> He explained that messages were coded, coming through in double or triple code. After the first decoding of a message, the version obtained had to be decoded again, and the process repeated even a third time:

Codes were changed frequently, in cyphered messages no call signs were used, the addresses being mentioned not at all, or at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of message. Some of the cypher traffic from Kiel and Nauen contained political and war news. Messages in code were handed to the 1st officer or captain, who had the table of settings for the Naval Enigma machine. Messages could only be sent by express order of the captain, and were in 4-letter groups.<sup>48</sup>

Werner explained that on its last mission, U-27 had maintained complete silence to avoid the anti-submarine detection on British destroyers. So exceptionally good was the equipment used that the only possible defence for U-boats was to lie on the sea-bed, but this was seldom possible.<sup>49</sup>

Werner's colleague, First Lieutenant Beckmann, attempted to send a letter back to Germany from the Tower but it was intercepted and translated. In it, he said: 'The treatment here is good, and there is no need to worry. This is in itself an astonishing fact, considering the colossal anti-German agitation of the English people through their newspapers.'<sup>50</sup>

Most of the crew of U-27 were held until 28 September, then transferred to one of Britain's regular prisoner-of-war camps. Over a thousand POW camps were eventually opened across Britain to hold enemy prisoners until their repatriation at the end of the war.<sup>51</sup>

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Before their transfer from the Tower, commanding officer Glattes of U-39 and commanding officer Franz of U-27 were taken out for lunch by Statham (?) and Havard (?) of Naval Intelligence and were thoroughly pumped.<sup>52</sup> On 28 September, interrogators at the Tower were joined by Lieutenant Pennell, RN.<sup>53</sup>

Four prisoners arrived on 1 October: General Freiherr von Reitzenstein, Sub-Lieutenant Körner, and Petty Officers Heckt and Schnalfeldt. Von Reitzenstein's Dornier aircraft (a Do.18) had been shot down by a sub-flight of Skuas from HMS *Ark Royal* and he and his crew were then picked up in the North Sea by a naval vessel. On the morning of 3 October, they were interrogated by Naval authorities. That afternoon, Kendrick placed von Reitzenstein and Körner in the same room, hoping that they would talk. If they did, the hidden microphones would pick up everything. They initially exchanged pleasantries, then had a bragging contest. Kendrick noted that von Reitzenstein appeared to win by a small margin and was 'obsessed with the idea that he is a very clever young man, and anxious to impress this fact on everybody'.<sup>54</sup>

Von Reitzenstein had endured a five-hour interrogation earlier that day, during which he had talked fairly consistently, but with a considerable amount of embellishment. With lots of guffawing and chuckling, he and Körner were convinced that they had successfully deceived the interrogators and repeatedly said: 'Herrgott, was haben wir die verkackert' (*My God – what shit we served them up!*).<sup>55</sup>

They had not fooled the interrogators. Kendrick found them 'crude and incapable of deceiving anyone'.<sup>56</sup> Although files are scant between early and late October 1939, some gaps can be filled by the personal diary of interrogator Bernard Trench. He noted that he met with Peter Fleming, elder brother of Ian Fleming (later the inventor of James Bond), at the Admiralty to discuss prisoners of war escaping.<sup>57</sup>

During October, Trench and fellow interrogators questioned surviving crews of U-40, U-42, U-12 and U-14.<sup>58</sup> On 27 October, Squadron Leader Edmund Pollock submitted a report to Fighter Command Intelligence (Air Ministry) about the interrogation of two surviving crews from a British attack on German seaplanes on 21 October. One had been

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shot down by two Spitfires of No.72 Squadron, the other by a Spitfire from No.46 Squadron. Pollock commented, 'all these prisoners are very reticent, and it is hard to obtain information'.<sup>59</sup>

At this early stage of the war especially, prisoners were not willing to give much away during interrogation. The Geneva Convention (1929) required them to give only their name, rank and number. Throughout the war, no unorthodox methods or torture were to be used by interrogators, as laid down in British military guidelines and in accordance with the Geneva Convention.<sup>60</sup> The guidelines stated that POWs 'shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity. Measures of reprisals against them are forbidden.'<sup>61</sup>

On 15 November 1939, Pollock interrogated an unnamed German pilot who was part of a Staffel (squadron) that had attacked a British convoy off Grimsby.<sup>62</sup> The Staffel consisted of nine He.115 aircraft that had set off from List, each carrying two 250-kilo bombs. During interrogation, Pollock gleaned that the He.115 had two BMW radial engines with ordinary ignition systems and carburettors. The prisoner had not been told the object of the raid before leaving and was most surprised when attacked by British fighters. He told Pollock: 'The experience was terrifying. As soon as we were attacked, my one aim was to see how quickly I could get down to sea level and land. I hoped that your fighters would then stop shooting.'<sup>63</sup> He survived with minor injuries.

Until early November 1939, Kendrick and Felkin's reports on interrogations and bugged conversations were written up as general summary reports. From early November, full transcripts of the conversations between prisoners were produced and this became the format for the rest of the war. They were designated as Special Reports (SRs), and have survived in the National Archives, kept separately from prisoners' interrogations. They provide a unique insight into life for German prisoners in the Tower. The earliest surviving copy of a Special Report signed by Kendrick is dated 2 November 1939.<sup>64</sup> It is a verbatim conversation between two unnamed air force officers the previous day, thought to have been Oberleutnant

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Awater (observer) and Lieutenant Fischer (pilot). The following patchy remarks were overheard:

First Voice: Ja also mit dem Funkgeraet . . . (*Well, about the radio apparatus . . .*)

Second Voice: Ja wissen Sie, damals in Paris, da hatten die innerhalb einer halben Stunde genauen Bericht ueber den Einschlag. (*You know, in Paris at the time, they got an exact report about the hit within half-an-hour.*)

First Voice: Ob der Deutsche Funk hier arbeitet? (*I wonder whether the German radio works here.*)

Second Voice: Mit gedaempften Schwingungen? (in querying tone) (*With subdued(?) / muffled(?) oscillations(?) / waves(?) . . . ?*)

First Voice: Ja mit ungedaempften Schwingungen bringen die es nicht fertig. (*Yes, with oscillations(?) / waves(?) which are not subdued(?) / muffled(?) they wouldn't manage it.*)

Kendrick noted that there was a pause whilst the prisoners arranged their beds for the night. After some small talk, the conversation continued:

First Voice: Ich glaube, man kann England von Deutschland aus beschossen. Sagen Sie mal, wieviel schafft denn die 8.8? (*I think one can shoot at England from Germany. Tell me, how far can the 8.8 reach?*)

Second Voice: Ja, so 14 kilometer (*Well, about 14 kilometres.*)

First Voice: Das ist zu klein. (*That's not far enough.*)

Second Voice: Ja, mit der Gleitrakete, dann soll es schon geh?? (*Well, with the gliding rocket [Gleitrakete] it should be possible.*)

A copy of this first Special Report was sent to the War Office, Trench of the Admiralty, and Felkin of Air Intelligence AI1(K).<sup>65</sup> Although the conversations provide only patchy information, any snippets, however insignificant, were necessary to start building an intelligence jigsaw on,

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for example, Germany's fighting capability, bombing capacity, radio communications, and technological advances in warfare. Unguarded casual conversations between prisoners could yield information that was generally withheld during interrogation.

When Awater was first brought to the Tower, he was interrogated by both Kendrick and Felkin and gave what they considered to be a trustworthy account of the formations of the German air force, synthetic fuel used in German aircraft and a description of one of the first attacks on Hanover: 'The British flew over an aerodrome at Hanover fairly soon after the outbreak of war and machine-gunned a German machine which was practising landings on the aerodrome and then before it could be attacked by fighters disappeared again above the clouds. He states that he actually saw this himself.'<sup>66</sup>

Other remarks heard at the Tower that day include a prisoner commenting: 'We can't make an escape from here. We must try when we are in camp . . . not I, I am married and would not like to be put in a prison. If we make a getaway, we can under certain circumstances be shot. God forbid!'<sup>67</sup>

In another conversation, the prisoner said: 'Keep your chin up, later on I am going to ask for a razor and good cigarettes, newspapers and books. The German government can pay for it afterwards. We've got to live after all.'<sup>68</sup>

Petty Officers Grimm and Unger of the German air force discussed with each other details of their interrogation by Felkin. Unger, who had arrived at the Tower on 7 November, told Grimm: 'We also talked about an exchange (i.e. with English prisoners in Germany). He [Felkin] does not believe that anything like that will be done.'

Unger then asked Grimm, 'Do you still intend to fly if you should have the opportunity of returning to Germany?'

Grimm replied: 'Is there likely to be an opportunity? What do you think?'

Unger added: 'He [Felkin] asked me whether I knew anything about the attack on Kiel and which ship had been hit. I would not tell him even if I knew.'<sup>69</sup>

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Later that month, the same prisoners were in conversation with petty officer Hochstuhl who had been in the Tower since 23 October.<sup>70</sup> Hochstuhl commented that Hitler had lost a lot of blood already in Poland.<sup>71</sup>

Unger replied: 'Dear Lord, redeem us from our torment and let there be peace! Either there shall be peace or England shall perish!' Then comments were overheard about British and German losses:

GRIMM: The English newspapers never say how many ships they have lost. I estimate 50,000 tons a month. I estimate that perhaps 4 or 5 U-boats have been lost.

HOCHSTUHL: With crews?

GRIMM: Yes, we had over 90 [U-boats]. Now we have many more.<sup>72</sup>

The comments might seem trivial, but they provided an emerging picture about Nazi Germany. Snippets like these enabled British intelligence to gauge Germany's naval strength and leak it to other prisoners in the hope that those prisoners might provide further information. Germany herself would not readily admit to how many U-boats had been sunk. The Admiralty, for example, found it difficult to obtain independent verification of the number of U-boat losses without mention of them in prisoners' conversations which provided at least a marker for the Admiralty to judge whether the losses which they had collated matched those mentioned by prisoners. British intelligence also used the bugged conversations to build a picture of the enemy threat. During the course of the war, the intelligence-gathering process and reports generated would become more detailed and refined.

## SECRET WEAPON

A bugged conversation on 26 October between two unnamed U-boat officers in the Tower produced sketchy results. They discussed how men were being commandeered for submarine service in the German navy, and how Russians and Europeans could never be bed-fellows.<sup>73</sup> They did



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not believe that England would be bombed and were ‘amused at the sight of civilians in Plymouth carrying respirators and wearing steel helmets’. However, that same day, Awater and Fischer of the German air force made the first reference to a ‘secret weapon’ in a bugged conversation.<sup>74</sup> It was written up by Kendrick as a report on 9 November 1939:

They [the prisoners] apparently do not know whether our fighters mount cannon or only machine guns. They think the war will end when the Führer comes out with his secret weapon.<sup>75</sup>

The prisoners did not appear to know, or chose not reveal, precisely what that weapon was. Three days later, Felkin wrote in an intelligence report: ‘Hitler’s secret weapon is talked about a lot. They [POWs] believe in it, but say there is no possibility of bacteriological warfare.’<sup>76</sup>

These particular bugged conversations are highly significant because they provide intelligence that predates the Oslo Report which had been written by German physicist Hans Mayer and secretly passed to the British Legation in Oslo on 4 November 1939.<sup>77</sup> Copies of the report were swiftly sent by the British Legation to MI6 and Naval Intelligence.<sup>78</sup> The Oslo Report was believed by historians to be the first crucial evidence confirming development of Germany’s secret weapon. The bugged conversations turn this on its head, although the conversations do not mention the Peenemünde Army Research Centre in the Baltic by name (as the Oslo Report does). The conversations from the Tower are believed to be the first wartime reference to Hitler’s secret weapon from any known intelligence source.

Several more references to a secret weapon would be made by prisoners held in the Tower before the end of December 1939. Hochstuhl commented to Ambrosius: ‘Let us hope that the secret weapon comes through soon.’<sup>79</sup> The following day, Ambrosius, Meyer and May were in a room together, and Ambrosius commented: ‘They [the British] have a wholly [sic] fear of the secret weapon. They think it is the mines.’<sup>80</sup>

The references were dismissed because they had come from lower-rank prisoners and it was thought that they were expressing vague fantastical hopes of a super weapon. Even so, a secret weapon was

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mentioned periodically in 1940 in bugged conversations, copies of which were sent only to MI6.<sup>81</sup>

## EXPANDING THE UNIT

On 26 October 1939, the unit was renamed the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC), a rather unglamorous and awkward title that was designed to mask its secret role.<sup>82</sup> Transcripts of conversations continued to be signed off as originating from MI1(H) for several months to come, in spite of the change of name. In December 1939, the unit came within the branch of military intelligence MI9, designated MI9(a), after a meeting between the Director of Military Intelligence, Deputy Director of Military Intelligence, MI5, MI6, Director of Naval Intelligence and Director of Intelligence (Air Ministry).<sup>83</sup> Rawlinson was assigned to all matters regarding prisoners of war from an intelligence aspect.<sup>84</sup>

The Tower of London could never be a valid location for this unit in the long term; it could only hold 120 prisoners at a time in the special area designated to MI1(H). Successful campaigns on enemy-occupied territory would mean that Kendrick and his team would have insufficient staff or quarters to interrogate and process the numbers of prisoners. Kendrick had already been seeking a larger site, amidst concerns of a German invasion and heavy bombing of the capital. To move to a site that was not so prominent would divert attention away from the secret nature of the unit. The new site was Trent Park at Cockfosters in North London, where the War Office requisitioned the mansion house, stable block and part of the parkland for 'special purposes'.<sup>85</sup> Once the property of Sir Philip Sassoon, a wealthy Baghdadi Jew whose family had made a fortune trading in opium, the estate and businesses had been inherited on the death of his father, Edward, in 1912.<sup>86</sup> During the 1930s, Sir Philip had hosted lavish bohemian parties for famous guests of his era, amongst them Charlie Chaplin, Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill.

During the war, the Tower continued to receive the occasional German prisoner on behalf of the intelligence services; the most famous

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of whom was Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, who was held there for four days in May 1941.<sup>87</sup>

In late autumn 1939, work began on the construction of temporary wartime structures next to the main house at Trent Park. These would accommodate the interrogation block, cells and administration offices. Former interrogator, Matthew Sullivan, described the scene:

The cell block, including high-fenced exercise yards and raised watch towers, was adjacent to the mansion which belonged to Sir Philip Sassoon, connoisseur and man of affairs. The interrogating officers lived here and in the cottages and had use of the large park.<sup>88</sup>

An M Room was initially constructed next to the interrogation block. The house and estate were described later by one of the German generals:

[There] is a large nursery with a wonderful fruit and vegetable garden and greenhouses under whose wide glass roofs fragile peach tree branches were suspended like thick spiders' webs. The castle courtyard, laid with large paving stones, was bounded on the southern side by a double barbed-wire fence, and shelter-trenches had been dug on the longer side. An additional double and higher barbed wire fence bounded the western and northern sides of a square lawn about 120 x 70 metres in size. In fog and limited visibility, only the smaller courtyard was available for the use of the prisoners while the larger one was available during fine weather. Longer walks through the fields and woods were organised on several days each week in the company of officers, but only after giving one's word of honour not to attempt to escape.<sup>89</sup>

While Trent Park was being fitted out, December saw a busy period at the Tower with the interrogations of thirty-five surviving crew of U-35 which had been scuttled at the end of November 1939.<sup>90</sup> They arrived early in the morning of 3 December with their captain, Werner Lott.<sup>91</sup> The following day, Pennell and Trench interrogated three of the officers

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who were described as ‘very pleasant and communicative’.<sup>92</sup> Their morale was high and they did not expect the war to last long. The interrogations continued over the next five days. On 9 December, fifteen prisoners from U-35 were transferred to unnamed prisoner-of-war camps. The others remained at the Tower for further interrogation.<sup>93</sup>

From its inception, Trent Park was never to be referred to as a prisoner-of-war camp or a prison, but as ‘Cockfosters Camp’ or ‘Camp 11’.<sup>94</sup> Like Bletchley Park, the fact that its existence remained unknown for decades was a testament to its success.