

SRH-033

HISTORY OF THE OPERATIONS
OF
SPECIAL SECURITY OFFICERS
ATTACHED TO FIELD COMMANDS

1943 - 1945

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1. The Special Security Officer (SSO) system was organized for the purpose of providing a means of rapid and secure dissemination of Ultra intelligence to operating commands. The system was developed and put into operation by the old Special Branch, MID. At the time of the June 1944 reorganization of the Military Intelligence Service the functions of administering the SSO system were transferred to the new Special Branch, although certain of the dissemination functions were retained by the Director of Intelligence. Moreover, all policy problems were retained under the direct control of the Deputy Chief, MIS. This division of authority did not prove wholly satisfactory. In February 1945 complete responsibility for the administration of the SSO system was vested in the office of the Deputy Chief, MIS, where it still remains.

2. This history is concerned with the development of the SSO system as a whole and will cover the entire period of its operation regardless of the place in the MIS organization where the functions may have been located. Because each theater of operation presented different problems, it was necessary to place a large measure of responsibility in the senior SSO in each theater (eventually his title was changed to Special Security Representative, abbreviated as SSR) for the supply of Ultra to commands operating in his area. A history of the operations within each theater is therefore of much greater value in attempting to evaluate the merits of the system. For this reason detailed histories by theater have been prepared and are attached hereto. The purpose of this introductory statement is to describe the steps which led up to the organization of the system and the manner in which the "home office" was operated in support of the separate theater organizations.

3. The need for field dissemination of Ultra did not become acute until 1943. Arlington Hall did not make its first entry into mainline Japanese military systems until March of that year, and it was not until the fall of 1943 that any worthwhile intelligence of an operational nature was being produced from these military systems. High level diplomatic traffic had been available since 1941 but its value was strategic in nature and very seldom did anything of immediate tactical importance develop from this source. There were in existence during the period from 1941 to 1943 certain special channels of communication by means of which Ultra intelligence could be made available to various field commands. The Navy had a direct Ultra channel to CINCPAC at Pearl Harbor, with an extension to the Commander, Seventh Fleet in Brisbane. General MacArthur had his own cryptanalytic organization, Central Bureau Brisbane, which had special channels of communication to Signal Security Agency (Arlington Hall)

There was no direct intelligence channel for Ultra from the Military Intelligence Service to any of these commands.

4. German military Ultra in great volume and of the highest operational significance was being produced by GCCS in London. The results were disseminated over a special Ultra intelligence channel maintained by British Special Liaison Units (known as the SLU organization). Throughout the North African campaign the SLU organization served key American officers with this intelligence in accord with British security practices. The Military Intelligence Service did not participate in this service, and as a matter of fact was not completely aware of its existence until the summer of 1943. German military Ultra was never produced by Arlington Hall, the primary reason being that it was not possible to intercept German military traffic on the North American Continent.

5. The first steps taken to unify the method of field dissemination of Ultra and to insure that all Ultra intelligence was made available to the appropriate operational commands, was to come to an understanding with the British. In the spring of 1943 an agreement was entered into between G-2 and London providing for complete cooperation in the Ultra intelligence field. By the terms of this agreement, the British assumed primary responsibility for the production and exploitation of German military Ultra, and the United States Army agreed to devote its attention to the production and exploitation of Japanese military Ultra. Full exchange of the products of each service was provided, and the principle was established that each service, in cooperation with the other, would establish methods of dissemination to its own operational commands.

The subject need not be further discussed here other than to say that the British SLU organization was the pattern upon which the SSO system was developed for dissemination of Ultra to Pacific commands.

6. The German problem having been solved in principle, attention was then directed to providing a system for the Pacific. The peculiar nature of Ultra intelligence required a system of dissemination which, in some respects, was contrary to established principles of command responsibility. The high level Japanese military cryptographic systems were of such difficulty that only a tremendous organization equipped with expensive and bulky electrical tabulating machinery could produce any results. Consequently, detailed items of immediate tactical significance to an Army commander in the field could be read at Arlington Hall, but could not be produced by an agency located in the theater and near the Army commander interested. Therefore "combat intelligence" was being produced in Washington, some 15,000 miles away from the front lines. To forward this intelligence through normal command channels of communication

and through every intermediate G-2 between the War Department General Staff and the combat commander concerned would delay its receipt and, in many cases, the particular message would lose all value by the time the commander finally received it. More important were the security considerations involved. Experience in World War I and the experience of the British in World War II had proved that wide dissemination of Ultra very often led to a compromise and complete loss of the source. The business of cracking codes is movie thriller stuff and the natural reaction of an uninitiated person is to make some comment about it to other responsible officers who would normally be supposed to be in on the secret. Careless talk by one uninformed person to another soon results in the "secret" being public information. To avoid these dangers, the British had adopted several rules of dissemination which had proved highly successful in maintaining the necessary security. They were:

a. Ultra was never to be made available to anyone, from a commanding general down to the code clerk who sent the message, without first explaining to the recipient the security questions involved, and how even the most innocent comment might lead to loss of the entire source;

b. Ultra would be disseminated only via special communication channels which would be used solely for that purpose. This would prevent a casual knowledge of Ultra on the part of personnel employed in communication centers, and would also enable complete control of dissemination within the theater of any messages transmitted over this channel;

b. The special dissemination channels would be maintained by officers and enlisted men from a central organization and would be furnished only to commands which had actual need of Ultra intelligence. The local commander would therefore not have the authority to over-rule this personnel on any matters involving security.

d. Strict rules for the dissemination within the command, limiting the number of officers authorized to see the intelligence, and the uses which could be made of it, would be prescribed by the central organization.

7. The Pacific field dissemination system was devised in the summer of 1943 on the basis of the principles outlined above. It was decided to designate the officers who would maintain the special channels as Special Security Officers (SSO's). SSO's were to be assigned to the Military Intelligence Service and remain under the operational control of the A. C. of S., G-2, WDGS. They would be attached to the theater commander for purposes of administration and discipline and would disseminate Ultra in accord with rules announced in security regulations issued by the War Department. Authority was obtained from the Chief of Staff in the summer of 1943 to consult the theater commanders in the Pacific and to obtain their concurrence

with this plan. The commanding generals of the Pacific Ocean Areas and the China-Burma-India Theater readily concurred, but the Commander in Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, raised certain objections to the proposal on the ground that the SSO should be assigned outright to his command rather than remain under the control of the War Department. Col. Carter W. Clarke, then Chief of Special Branch, was sent to Brisbane to confer personally with CINCPAC, SWPA on this difference of opinion. As a result of this conference, General MacArthur concurred in the original plan.

8. The first War Department security regulations governing overseas dissemination of signal intelligence were issued in October 1943. Following the British practice, two classifications were established: ULTRA DEXTER and DEXTER. Subsequently these terms were increased to three, as follows: ULTRA PEARL
THUMB

The regulations governing Pearl and Thumb were subsequently revised, in conjunction with the Navy, and the single code word FINUP was adopted for all low level signal intelligence.

9. The original Ultra Dexter regulations were implemented in the fall of 1943, when special security officers were sent to the following theater headquarters: Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane (Major James Ashby, Jr.); China-Burma-India, New Delhi (Captain John F. B. Funnells); Pacific Ocean Areas, Ft. Shafter, T. H. (Major Edwin E. Huddleston, Jr.). The original plan was to limit overseas dissemination of Ultra to theater headquarters and to await recommendations from the special security officers before making provision for broader dissemination. It will be recalled that the operational situation in all three theaters in late 1943 and the first half of 1944 was not such as to require dissemination to subordinate operational commands. Accordingly, all three special security officers undertook to serve the respective theater commanders and their staffs. To accomplish this each officer carried with him his own set of cryptographic equipment (SIGABA) for the enciphering and deciphering of Ultra messages. Special arrangements were set up to provide pouch service as well, and such material as the Diplomatic Summary was sent regularly by special Top Secret pouch. It should be noted that both radio and pouch communications were sent to the special security officer personally. Thus he received radio communications in enciphered form and did the actual deciphering himself. He was therefore the only person to see such messages in the clear, and showed it personally to the theater commander and other specified staff officers. At no point did the contents leave the control of the special security officer. Pouch material was delivered to him unopened, and he thereupon showed relevant material to appropriate headquarters officers, retaining actual custody of it himself. This system proved both secure and efficient. Except for certain considerations peculiar to SWPA the special security system won the approval and confidence of theater officers concerned.

10. Meanwhile, preparations were under way for the establishment of a special security system to serve in ETO in connection with the expected invasion of the spring of 1944. A large number of officers were recruited and sent to ETO for training (see ETO histories). Accordingly there arose the need of a Table of Organization which would provide vacancies for enough special security officers to fill the needs of both the European and Japanese wars. In December 1943 a staff study was prepared which described the special security requirements and stated the estimated personnel needs. Approval was thereupon given by the Adjutant General for a field quota of 80 officers. In July 1944 this quota was enlarged to 172 officers and 65 enlisted men, a total which proved sufficient for the duration of the war.

11. In the spring of 1944 sufficient information had become available, based on recommendations of special security officers and upon projected operational plans insofar as they were available to MIS, to permit a decision as to the extent to which Ultra should be disseminated below the level of theater headquarters. Accordingly, the regulations were rewritten (10 July 1944) to allow dissemination to the level of Army (or equivalent Air Force Formations) and to Corps level when the Corps was operating independently. In April and May of 1944, by way of preparation for the revised Ultra program, officers were recruited for SSO duty in the Pacific and Far East. The first group, numbering about 20, began a training period on 3 July 1944 and were sent overseas about 1 September 1944. This group included a full complement for CBI and a group of officers for SWPA. The training course consisted of a week's tour of ASA, two weeks' training in the specific duties of the special security officer (study of regulations; lectures by returning officers familiar with the theater concerned; consultation with relevant sections of OPD; cryptographic security; communications, etc.) and from four to six weeks straight intelligence training, which included the Far Eastern Intelligence Course and selected reading of Ultra materials; where possible the officers spent from one to four weeks actually working on Ultra traffic as members of the various Ultra sections of MIS. The value of this latter aspect of training cannot be over emphasized. This first group which went overseas have all testified to the importance of an adequate intelligence background. By and large, this group was well trained, but as the operational situation grew more active it became necessary to send additional special security officers on very short notice. In many cases such officers had to be dispatched with very little training or background in Ultra. If there were one lesson to be learned from experience in connection with the SSO program in the Far East, it is this: a large potential pool of security officers should be recruited early--as early as possible and long before they will actually be needed overseas. They should function as working members of MIS--this is the very best type of training--and be available for overseas assignment as the need arises. The greatest single handicap in the past administration of the SSO system was the lack of adequately trained personnel to meet the suddenly increasing needs of the Pacific war. While it can be said that the program was carried out efficiently in the face of numerous obstacles, and that the sudden expansion in SSO requirements could not have been anticipated,

the ultimate results could have been more satisfactory if we had had too many qualified personnel available rather than too few. Admitting that it is always difficult to obtain as many highly qualified officers as one would like, this phase of the problem should be given particular and immediate attention in the event that the need for an SSO organization should ever arise again.

12. The manner in which the SSO program was carried out in the respective theaters is fully explained in the individual histories. It remains only to discuss briefly the functioning of the home office. Before the G-2 reorganization of June 1944, the administration of the overseas dissemination was handled by two officers in Special Branch. After the reorganization, when the SSO field quota expanded from 3 to some 65 officers in the Pacific and Far East, the administration was made the responsibility of the newly constituted Special Branch. A total of three officers were actually engaged in the administrative phase of the SSO program. These officers were concerned with the following aspects of the SSO program: recruiting and training of SSO's; review and revision of Ultra, Pearl and Thumb regulations; handling of all administrative correspondence, by radio and pouch, between MIS and SSO's overseas; liaison with interested sections of the intelligence group in connection with intelligence requests from SSO's; coordination, where necessary, with ASA, CFD, OCS, the Navy, and with various other organizations of the War Department; all personnel problems, including promotions, travel orders, security clearances for both officers and enlisted men; a myriad of miscellaneous matters which cannot be conveniently catalogued but which arise in any unit of the size and scope of the SSO organization. While it is a matter of record that there was no serious breach of security throughout the war, and while theater officers have uniformly testified to the quality of the service they received, it is submitted that a larger home office, more fully staffed both with officers and civilians, would be desirable "next time".

13. In January 1945 the functions of Special Branch were transferred to the Office of the Chief, MIS and placed under the direct supervision of the Deputy Chief. Inasmuch as the Special Branch program was under the direction of the Deputy Chief from the outset, this transfer proved more satisfactory, since it eliminated an extra step in the chain of command and simplified the matter of coordination with the Director of Intelligence, a major part of the Special Branch job. Again the duties were performed by three officers, although this number was increased to five during the summer of 1945. There were no substantial changes in procedures as a result of the above mentioned transfer.

14. Apart from personnel, the most important single factor in the efficient and secure operation of the SSO system, was the special communications channel, which worked magnificently and proved eminently satisfactory throughout the war.