



The Agent Killer

A Spy Set with a Bit of a Reputation!

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Those of you who've read the English version of Pierre Lorain's book *Clandestine Operations*, adapted by David Kahn¹, or the original and much earlier French version *Armement Clandestin*, will be aware of Pierre's claim that the Whaddon Mk.XV was the very first type of spy set to be sent into France by any of the British Secret Services following the occupation of his country by German forces in 1940. Unfortunately, that isn't true, it wasn't! Apparently, one of his father's friends from the French Resistance had told him that these first sets were built in wooden boxes and the only one housed in this way that Pierre could find during his search in the 1960s and early '70s was a Mk.XV receiver in a Paris museum (see **figure 1**), which he thought at the time of publication of the French language edition of his book (1972) was this very early type of spy set. It's clear from his introduction to the radio section of the book that he was absolutely certain he'd found the right one because the design was so amateurish and outmoded (out-dated?), and it looked so much like you'd expect an early one to look - he thought it had been designed back in the 1930s! Bear in mind, though, that he also had the more advanced Polish and Special Operations Executive (SOE)

suitcase sets from the 1940s to compare it against when writing his book, so by comparison with their sleek, well-ventilated, black crackle cases the wooden boxes and paxolin panels of the Mk.XV might have appeared a lot more antiquated and amateurish than, perhaps, they were at the time.

The Mk.XV was actually produced in several versions enclosed in either steel or wooden cases, but it wasn't one of the very early sets because their mark numbers, as we know now, were issued in sequence. The receiver and transmitter units of the Mk.XV were also produced separately in wooden cases, and not as a single unit in a wooden box as the very early British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) agents' sets were. The Whaddon Mk.XV receiver that Pierre saw in the Paris museum had been obtained from the main SIS station in Paris after it closed down at the end of the war. Most probably it had been brought in from the UK as a back-up for the more usual Mk.III transmitter and HRO receiver combination that had been used as the main station equipment there after Paris had been liberated in August 1944. It's quite an understandable mistake to make given the lack of official information back in the 1960s and early '70s. In fact, Pierre had gathered much of his information through personal contacts with members of the French Resistance and SOE, as well as from visiting museums and reading an early version of Professor M.R.D. Foot's book on SOE in France², so what he was able to discover

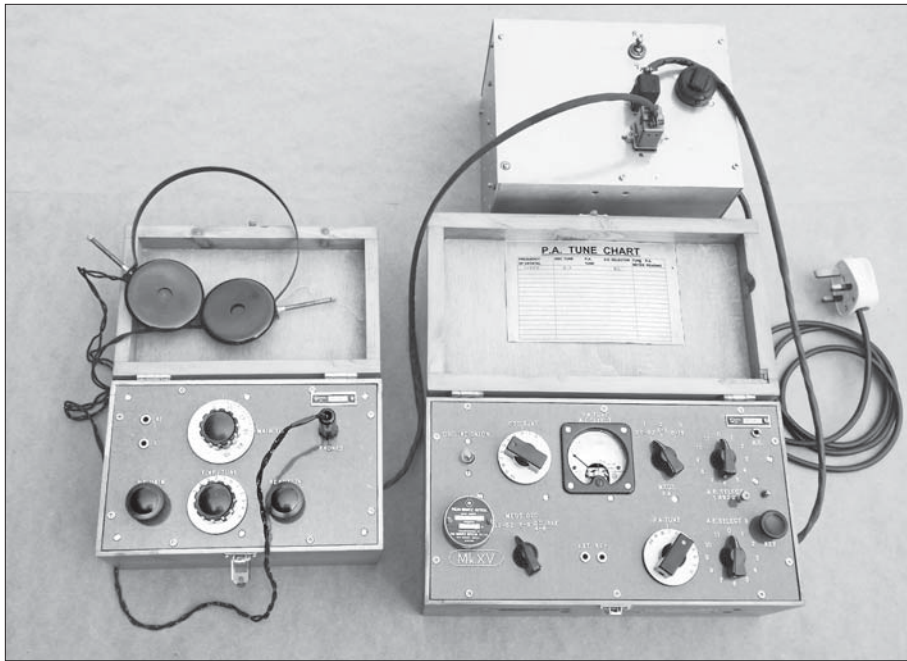


Figure 1: The individual units of the Whaddon Mk.XV - these were built in separate wooden boxes. The receiver has a 3-stage line-up (RF/Regen. Det./AF) covering 3.5 – 12 Mc/s using 6SK7 tubes. The transmitter has a metal 6F6, or 6V6, crystal oscillator driving a 6L6 PA to an output of about 15W. (Photo courtesy Brian Murfitt, M1JLM)

about the radio side of things was limited by what people could remember and what was on display in museums. Some of SOE's spy sets ended up on the surplus market after the war and information about them, including circuits, was published in several of the popular British and Australian radio magazines in the late '40s and early '50s, but nothing was published about the Whaddon SIS sets until very much later.

Incomplete official documents have been released very slowly over the years since the 1970s and those involved with the SIS (MI-6) radio section during the war have largely remained silent because they took signing the Official Secrets Act very seriously. Even so, some information has leaked out gradually over the

intervening years and more recently a few of those involved with MI-6 Section VIII that dealt with communications and radio equipment for SIS during the war have felt that enough time has elapsed that they can now talk about what they did. So we've discovered, amongst other things, that mark numbers were introduced in late 1939, when SIS (MI-6) Section VIII moved from Barnes, just south of London, to Whaddon Hall in Buckinghamshire, north-west of London, and that they were issued in sequence. The Mk.XV found by Pierre Lorain had not been introduced until 1943, whereas the first agents to be dropped by parachute with their radio sets were infiltrated into France in 1941, and some sets had been sent in overland through Spain to Vichy

France even earlier than that. So, obviously it wasn't the first type of set he'd found, but a later one. However, all this did not become apparent until several decades after Pierre Lorain had submitted his manuscript for publication, so his mistake is understandable and quite excusable in view of what his book covers as a whole. It has an excellent introduction to cryptography and contains many wonderful drawings of the planes, weapons and radios used by SOE, SIS and the Free French during the war.

Two other books about WWII radio communications and agents' sets have been published in the last couple of decades that have provided much new evidence, and allowed a better picture to be put together of which sets were used, by whom, and when. The first is volume 4 of *Wireless for the Warrior* by Louis Muelstee and Rudolf Staritz³, which only covers clandestine radio sets and was published in 2004. This volume has a great deal of information about many sets, but even so some of the dates given for the WWII SIS (Whaddon) sets have been shown to be slightly inaccurate by fresh information revealed by the second book, *The Secret Wireless War*⁴ by Geoffrey Pidgeon, which is about the role of SIS (MI-6) Section VIII based at Whaddon Hall and their part in the dissemination of "Ultra" intelligence from Bletchley Park to commanders in the field. This was published in 2008 and contains many personal accounts of individuals who worked for Section VIII before and during the war. It also includes, in some cases, entries from their diaries that cover the war-time period; though you'd have thought it was strictly forbidden to keep such a diary while serving in that sort of secret outfit.

However, some obviously did and their somewhat sketchy and brief accounts add vital clues as to when certain sets were introduced, such as the Mk.III (Tinker Box), which according to John Darwin (in Chapter 21), was used on field trials in the first few days of January 1940 and therefore must have been designed and introduced late in 1939. The personal histories and early experiences of the designers of many of the SIS war-time radio sets make fascinating reading.

The Difference Between SOE and SIS

Although there were 9 different British secret services during WWII, the three main ones were SIS (MI-6), which was concerned with the overseas intelligence matters and espionage; MI-5, which was the internal security service and dealt with counter-espionage; and SOE, the agency responsible for organising and supplying resistance movements in occupied countries with the means for sabotage and subversive warfare. They were all completely separate organisations under different Government Ministers, but SOE was only a temporary secret service set up for the duration of WWII. It was formed in July 1940, after the fall of France, and disbanded in January 1946, a few months after the war ended.

SIS (MI-6) originated as the Secret Service Bureau in 1909 and was well established as the main British secret service by the beginning of hostilities in 1939. It was engaged in espionage and gathered intelligence for the Foreign Office, the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, and was responsible for setting up and running Bletchley Park at the beginning of WWII. It is generally known as MI-6 or SIS, interchangeably, and those who worked for it during the war often refer to it as

SIS (MI-6). SIS had set up a sub-department called "Section D" in 1938 to look into unorthodox forms of warfare. The War Office, which was responsible for the British Army, had also set up GS(R) to look into the same sort of "ungentlemanly" warfare. GS(R) stood for "General Staff (Research)" and this had evolved into Military Intelligence (Research) by 1940 and was then known as MI(R).

SOE was formed by the amalgamation of Section D and MI(R) plus a propaganda group from the Foreign Office called "Electra House" or "EH" for short. The removal of Section D from their sphere of influence was a major blow to the senior people at SIS, as they could foresee problems coordinating their activities with the country sections at SOE who were responsible for organising resistance in the various occupied countries of Europe – they were both working towards quite different ends with radically different methods. Sabotage was hardly conducive to quietly and secretly gathering intelligence about enemy fortifications, troop movements, or secret weapons. This created a great deal of tension and distrust between the two organisations and was the cause of a fierce rivalry that must have hampered SOE's ability to carry out its main duties to some extent in the early years of the war. SIS had better contacts and more sympathetic support in the upper echelons of the regular armed forces and amongst politicians, who viewed the "ungentlemanly" methods of SOE with some distaste. SOE also had a greater need for air and sea transport, because its resistance networks grew larger and their requirements for arms and other supplies were much greater than any of the

intelligence-gathering groups run by SIS in occupied countries.

SOE inherited a couple of training establishments and an old hotel, formerly a stately home, that came with Section D and MI(R), but otherwise had to build up its training and finishing schools from scratch. The old hotel, the Frythe near Welwyn in Hertfordshire, became its R&D centre and the other two establishments continued providing the same sort of training as they had under Section D and MI(R), namely combat and explosives training. SOE was totally reliant on SIS (MI-6) Section VIII at Whaddon Hall for radio equipment and wireless communications for the first couple of years of its existence. It was not until the spring of 1941 that SOE formed its own Signals Section, and even then it was still reliant on SIS (MI-6) for its wireless communications and equipment for more than another year. While arguing with higher authorities for signals independence during 1941, SOE had started developing its own agents' sets at the Frythe.

The First SIS Suitcase Set

Geoffrey Pidgeon joined MI-6 Section VIII at Whaddon Hall in July 1942 and was assigned to the mechanical workshops making parts for the Mk.V, which was produced in several forms including the suitcase version shown in **figure 2**. This image of a Mk.V suitcase set was taken from a WWII German Police Handbook, which had been published with the specific purpose of alerting members of the Abwehr, Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and Gestapo as to what British spy sets look like. The Mk.V was the main agents' set at the time Geoffrey joined Whaddon and had been produced in modest numbers for well over a year.

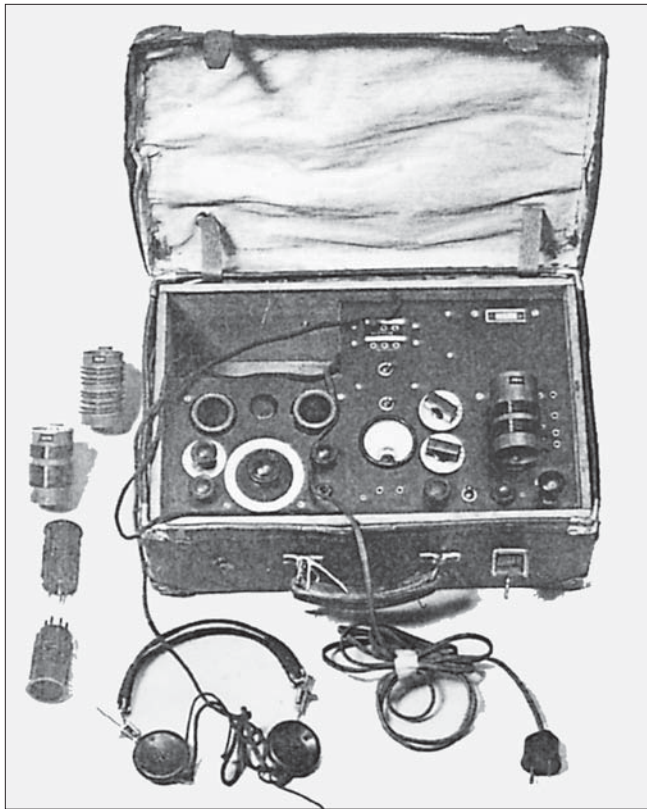


Figure 2, Photograph of a Captured Mk.V suitcase set scanned from a German Police Handbook. This was the original type of spy set dubbed “Le Paraset” by the French. (Image Courtesy Geoffrey Pidgeon and Pat Hawker)

These sets were used not only by SIS agents, but also by those from SOE and the Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action Militaire (BCRAM). The BCRAM was the intelligence wing of the Free French forces, led by General De Gaulle, who were exiled in Britain during the Second World War. This French intelligence service based in London had started out in 1940 as the Service Renseignement (SR), then in April 1941 its name changed to the BCRAM and later, in January 1942, it changed yet again to the BCRA. In fact, it was the

French, possibly agents of the BCRA or members of the resistance groups that worked for them, who first dubbed the Mk.V suitcase set "Le Paraset", but at Whaddon Hall it was well on its way to acquiring an altogether different title by July 1942; that of "Agent Killer." The set was very heavy and it was fairly difficult to disguise the fact if it had to be carried any distance. Volume 4 of *Wireless for the Warrior*³ gives its weight as 15kg, or 33 pounds, but a few French sources claim it's close to 18kg, or around 40 pounds. A few agents may have been picked up because they couldn't conceal its weight, but others

were tracked down because of the interference the Mk.V caused to nearby broadcast receivers. Some were just unlucky, and got caught by spot checks at railway stations, or because a safe-house or sub-network was blown by informers, or just plain bad luck. Whatever the reason, word had got back to Whaddon Hall that there were problems with this set and as the number of captured wireless operators mounted its reputation as an agent killer grew.

The Whaddon Mk.V

The Whaddon Mk.V is not only heavy,

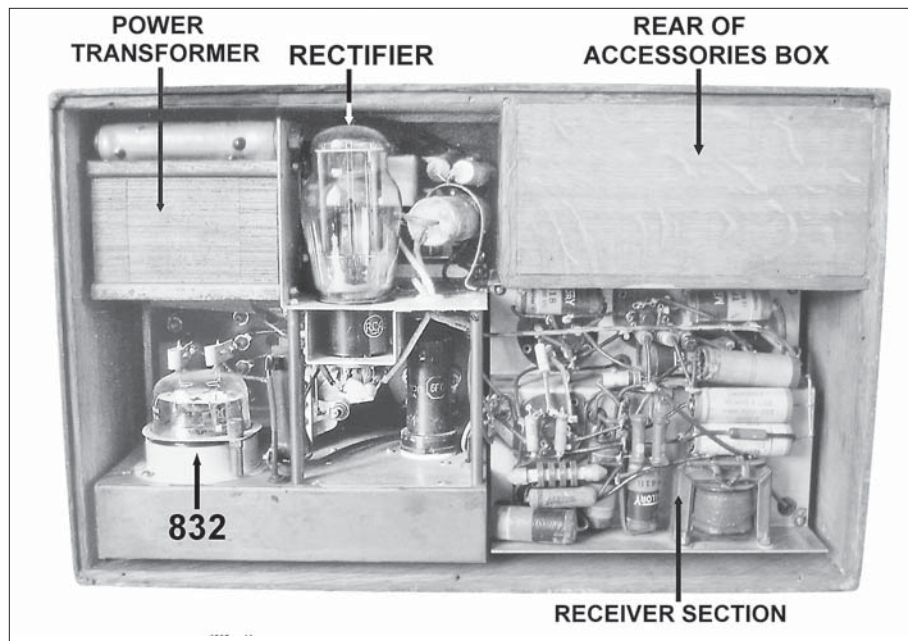


Figure 3: Inside view of a Whaddon Mk.V transmitter-receiver showing tube and major component placement. (Photo Courtesy CHR D, Lyon)

but it's also quite powerful as clandestine sets go. The transmitter produces 25 watts from an 832 double tetrode driven by a metal 6V6 or 6F6 crystal oscillator. A rear view of the set out of its case is shown in **figure 3**. Note that it's built on aluminium sub-chassis, or partitions, inside a wooden box. The 832 power amplifier is clearly visible on the lower left-hand side beneath the power transformer. Just to the right of this is the rectifier, and further over towards the middle of the set is the oscillator stage. Below the wooden bottom of the accessories box on the right, you can see the component side of the receiver assembly. This is a 3-stage affair with an RF amplifier ahead of a regenerative detector, followed by an audio amplifier driving headphones. All tubes in the receiver are 6SK7 types, and the circuit is

very similar to that of the later Mk.XV receiver.

The front panel layout shown in **figure 4** has been sparsely labelled to help identify some of the main controls as not many of the markings are easy to read in this photo. The power amplifier (PA) plate current meter (150mA FSD) is roughly in the centre of the front panel, with a round P5 quartz crystal just below it. The receiver section is to the left of the plate meter, below the accessories box. The large knob with a metal scale, as indicated, is the main tuning control and above that is an opening in the panel for the 6SK7 RF tube. On either side of the RF stage are the antenna and detector coils, all in a line. This set also has a fine tune control, which is just to the upper left of the main tuning control. The two National "R" knobs to the right of the

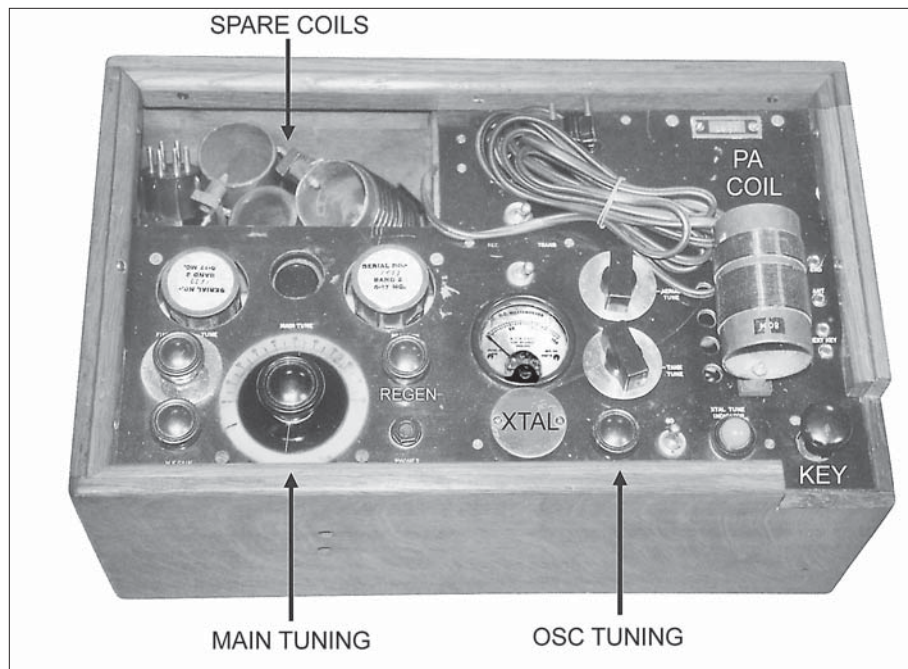


Figure 4: This is a front panel view of a Whaddon Mk.V transmitter-receiver showing main control layout. (Photo courtesy CHR D, Lyon)

plate meter are for plate and antenna tuning. The plug-in transmitter coils have two windings, one for the PA and the other for antenna tuning. There are three coils to cover the full HF range from 3 to 18 Mc/s. This is an early Mk.V and a later version has built-in tapped PA and antenna coils with switches for selecting the inductance for tuning and matching. The lamp immediately below the PA coil on the left-hand side is the oscillator tuning indicator. This is fed from a link on the oscillator plate coil, which is tuned by the control marked "OSC" in figure 4. The switch between the lamp and the oscillator tuning control is for shorting out part of the oscillator coil on the higher range. There is a built-in hand key in the lower right-hand corner as well as sockets for an external key about halfway up the right-hand edge of the front panel,

just below the ANT and GND sockets.

George the First

The Whaddon Mk.V was the set used by the first wireless operators sent into occupied France by SOE. From the time of its inception, it was almost a year before SOE's F section (F for French) was ready to send anyone back to France. This agent was Georges Bégué, also known as George Noble in SOE. He had attended college in England and married an English girl, but they didn't stay in England after he graduated and had settled in France. Because he spoke good English, Georges had been attached to a British unit as a liaison officer when the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was sent to France towards the end of 1939. Later, after the German invasion of France in May 1940, he was evacuated from Dunkirk and ended up back in

England. Following the fall of France and the signing of the armistice, Georges joined the Royal Signals as he had been a signaller in the French Army - not all French soldiers who reached England after the fall of France were of the same political persuasion as General de Gaulle, and when Pétain signed the armistice with Hitler some joined the British Army rather than de Gaulle's Free French forces. A chance meeting with a French journalist in London later led to Georges being recruited by SOE and becoming George Noble.

When he parachuted "blind" in the small hours of 6th May 1941, George's objective was to contact a local politician and sound out support for setting up a resistance group around Châteauroux in the Indre region of France. Then, having done that, he was to spread out from there doing what he could to contact or set up other groups elsewhere. He took with him a Whaddon Mk.V suitcase set for reporting his progress back to London and made his first transmission on 9th May. He is listed as the first SOE wireless operator to parachute into France in WWII, but in truth he was much more than that. He was also responsible for contacting any existing resistance groups in his area, if there were any, while providing wireless contact with London for other SOE agents who had been sent in after him. Most of his transmissions were from the Châteauroux area, where he kept his main set. After a while he was handling all the SOE radio traffic for both the expanding network in the occupied north of the country and another around Lyon in the south. There were really only two main ones at this stage and the organiser, or courier, from the one above the demarcation line between

the free and occupied parts of France had to cross the line to deliver messages for George to transmit, and this was a dangerous journey at the best of times. It was also dangerous for George to handle too much traffic because that kept him on the air too long. As a matter of fact, it was George who first suggested that "personal" messages could be transmitted by the BBC to confirm when certain operations were to take place in order to reduce the time wireless operators had to be on the air.

In the following years, many wireless operators were nicknamed "George" or "Georges" by members of the French Resistance, no matter what their real names, simply because Georges Bégue was the first and calling them all by the same name appealed to their sense of humour. Usually "George" or "Georges" was followed by a number, but it's hard to say how this number related to those who went in before them as Marcel Clech was "Georges 53," but only about the fifth operator to land in France. Wireless operators were also referred to generally as "pianistes" by members of the French Resistance. Maintaining radio communications with SOE headquarters was a crucial role and they were the vital umbilical cord back to London, arranging essential drops of arms and supplies for resistance groups. It was an extremely dangerous job and an SOE wireless operator's life expectancy was quite short in the early and middle years of the war.

Not Bad for a Gal from Baltimore!

A second wireless operator was sent to France during the summer of 1941, but he was soon picked up by the Abwehr and George was pretty much the only radio link with SOE headquarters back in England for 5 months until he was

arrested in October 1941. Ironically, the Gestapo and Vichy police had been trying to track down "radio de Châteauroux" for some time, though when they actually caught him it was purely by chance at a safe house in Marseille – the infamous Villa des Bois. SOE then had no radio link with France for a few months. But, by a stroke of good luck, George had made contact with another SOE agent in the unoccupied zone of France (la zone non occupée or ZNO) just before his capture and happened to mention to her where he'd hidden one of his sets. That agent was Virginia Hall (alias Brigitte or Germaine Le Contre), an American from Baltimore posing as a French-American journalist working as the New York Post's official correspondent in Vichy France – the ZNO. Virginia had entered Vichy France openly in August 1941, having travelled overland via Spain. This was before Pearl Harbour, of course, and the U.S.A. hadn't yet entered the war. She adopted the SOE nom de guerre of Marie Monin, though some referred to her affectionately as "Marie of Lyon." Others knew her as "Germaine." Having worked for the British SIS since the outbreak of war (September 1939 in Europe), she was already used to the clandestine way of life and became a pivotal figure for SOE in Vichy France, particularly after the arrests of the other two SOE agents who had preceded her (Georgés Bégué and Pierre de Vomécourt). She turned out to be a very significant player in the early days of SOE in France, and organised resistance cells and arms drops around the Lyon area as well as acting as a focal point for new agents arriving in the ZNO, providing them with practical and moral support. She was able to find another SOE wireless operator who'd

gone astray and lost his equipment, and set him up with George's set. Communications were established with the UK once again in February 1942, all thanks to Marie of Lyon. Murphy being what he is, though, another wireless operator landed on the Mediterranean coast of France from a submarine a month or so later, and then they had two! Two others came in quick succession; the SOE recruiting and training program was beginning to build up, and sea and air transport was improving.

Meanwhile George had been sent to Beyleme prison near Périgeux, then later transferred to Mauzac prison in the Dordogne, from where he escaped in July 1942 using a door key he'd fashioned out of sardine tins. Eventually, he found his way over the Pyrenees to Spain with the help of the Vic escape network, and was interned there. British Embassy staff in Spain managed to get him out and he returned to London in October 1942. As it was impossible for George to return to France for another mission – he was too well known to the Gestapo by this time – he became F Section's Chief of Signals.

Virginia (Marie) had been forced to beat a hasty retreat from Lyon when German forces occupied the ZNO in southern France in response to the invasion of North Africa by US troops in November 1942. She was also too well known to the Gestapo to stay in France and hiked across the Pyrenees to Spain, despite the extreme cold and problems with "Cuthbert," her prosthetic lower leg – Virginia had lost her leg below the knee in a shooting accident in Turkey in 1933. She remained in Spain for some months on an SOE assignment and returned to England later in 1943. Frustrated by SOE not allowing her to

return to France, she retrained as a wireless operator and returned to France for OSS in 1944. Virginia Hall was an unbelievably courageous lady, very determined and extremely tough. Her life story is well worth reading and you'll find numerous books about her if you do a search on the Internet. A film about her life is currently being made and should be released some time in 2019. I'm not sure how accurate it will be, but the director should have no trouble making it interesting and exciting without reverting to fiction!

The Original Paraset

Clues discovered in reference 4, and further clarified by its author, have shown that the Whaddon Mk.VII, which is generally known as the "Paraset" these days, was not actually introduced until

late in 1942. The French had started calling the Whaddon Mk.V suitcase set "Le Paraset" long before that, when agents of the BCRA were using that set as well as agents from SOE. So, it's fair to say SOE agents used "Le Paraset", but it was not the Mk.VII they used, but the Whaddon Mk.V instead. By the time the Mk.VII was introduced in late 1942, SOE had already gone over to using its own equipment, which was a bit more advanced than that offered by SIS Section VIII. There is the possibility that the Whaddon Mk.VII may never have been called "Le Paraset" at all by those who first came up with that fond appellation. However, there is also the possibility that the nickname was later transferred from the Mk.V to the Mk.VII by the French, but that is by no means certain. It could

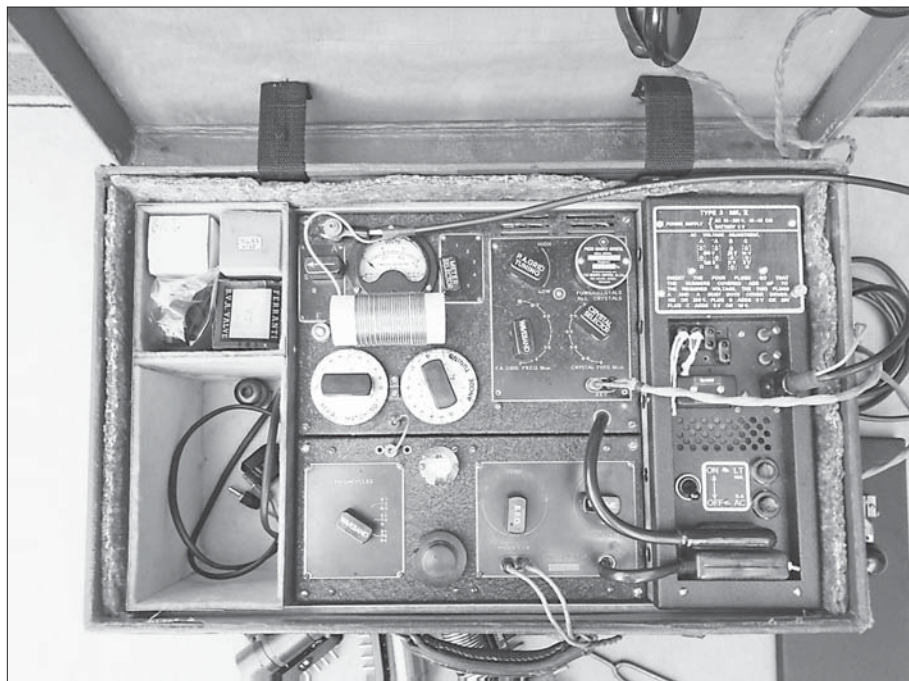


Figure 5: SOE Type 3 Mk.II suitcase set with a 3.1 – 15.2Mc/s superhet receiver (2 x 7Q7 + 2 x 7R7) and two-tube 20W transmitter (EL32 and 6L6). Also known as the B2. Year of introduction 1942. (Photo Courtesy Brian Murfitt, M1JLM)

have been a case of mistaken identity again, just like the Mk.XV found by Pierre Lorain long after the war, which wasn't at all what he thought it was. The only war-time references to "Le Paraset" appear in a BCRA report from March 1942, and later references seem to stem from the French edition of Pierre Lorain's book, so it is conceivable that it could be another mistake.

Clearing up a Few Misconceptions

So, what the French originally called "Le Paraset" was actually the Whaddon Mk.V and this was used by agents of the SIS, SOE and the BCRA. SOE agents would have stopped using it and gone over to using their own equipment from mid-1942 onwards, when they were able to gain signals independence from SIS and set up their first radio station at Grendon Underwood in Buckinghamshire. They already had an R&D establishment at the Frythe (Station IX), near Welwyn, in Hertfordshire, where much of SOE's work on special gadgets, weapons and clandestine radios was done. SOE had started developing its own agents' sets in 1941, when John Brown (licensed as G3EUR after the war) was recruited from the Royal Signals Camp at Catterick to work on them. He was impressed by the early Polish clandestine sets, and possibly influenced by them. Certainly, when it was obvious that SOE's own production facilities would not be capable of producing enough sets to satisfy its predicted short-term needs, the organisation turned to the Polish Radio Workshops at Stanmore Park, in Middlesex, for help. SOE's procurement staff provided the Poles with components and they built nearly two hundred sets for them towards the end of 1942 and several hundred more in 1943.

By 1944, the SOE factory at Stonebridge Park had expanded and was able to cope with the demand for Type 3 Mk.II (B2) sets (see **figure 5**) and the Marconi Company was producing enough A-series sets (Type 21 Mk.II and their Mk.II* variant) to keep up with the ever increasing demand in the build up to D-Day.

The Marconi Company also developed a compact Mk.III version of the Type 21 set, more commonly known as the Type A Mk.III to amateurs nowadays, which saw service in France later in 1944. Many of the short post-war documentary films about SOE on the Internet's *YouTube* show either B2 suitcase sets or the Type A Mk.III being used by female SOE wireless operators. Several of these films feature Yvonne Courmeau of the Wheelwright network near Toulouse using the distinctive Type A Mk.III set, which has a tuning dial in the lower right-hand corner that resembles an edgewise meter in appearance. She transmitted 400 messages in 12 months and was lucky not to be caught as she broke the cardinal rule of wireless security by transmitting from the same location for several months. Only Auguste Floiras of the Jockey network in the south east of France sent more messages – 416 in 15 months.

The SOE agents' sets all have simple superhet receivers and the lower power Type 21 Mk.II transmitters use a single tube power oscillator (TT11, or 7C5 in the case of the Mk.II*) whereas the Type A Mk.III and B-series transmitters use a two-tube design with separate crystal oscillator and PA – 7H7 and 7C5 in the A (Type 21) Mk.III and EL32 and 6L6 in the B (Type 3) Mk.II. The Whaddon Mk.VII would certainly not have been

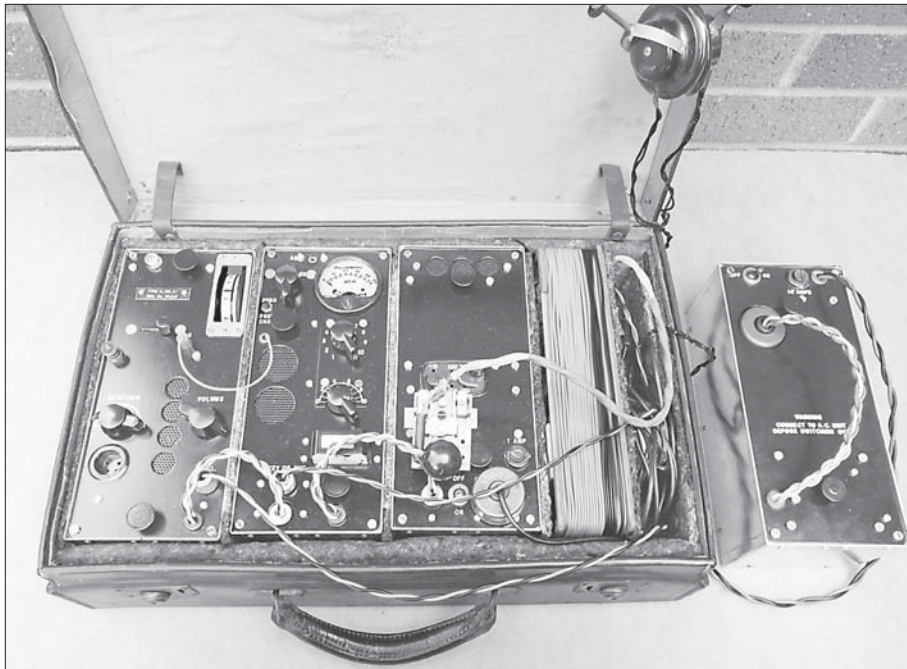


Figure 6: SOE Type 21 Mk.II suitcase set with a 3–9Mc/s three-tube superhet receiver (7Q7 + 2 x 7H7) and a single-tube transmitter (TT11 crystal oscillator producing about 6W). Also known as the Type A Mk.II. Year of introduction 1942. (Photo Courtesy Brian Murfitt, M1JLM)

used by any of SOE's female wireless operators, as fancifully claimed by some Mk.VII replica builders, since female wireless operators were not deployed until 1943 when SOE controlled its own communications and used its own equipment. Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan, for example, would have been trained on Type 21 Mk.II or Type 3 Mk.II sets, and probably used a Type 21 Mk.II, as shown in **figure 6**, in the field as she was sent to Paris. Agents that were deployed further south in France used more powerful, longer range sets such as the Type 3 Mk.II (the famous B2).

Various remarks made by David White (G3ZPA), the former curator of Bletchley Park Radio Museum, have been

misconstrued and used to link the Whaddon Mk.VII with SOE. When SOE was disbanded in early January 1946, the wireless station at Poundon (STS 53b) was taken over by SIS (MI-6) and the SOE staff dismissed. SIS, the Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS) and the British Army had all used Poundon radio station (STS53b) and Poundon House at various times since then and what was found there just before it was closed would have had more to do with SIS or DWS than with SOE. The radio station at Poundon Hill, on the other side of the road from the radio station in the fields around Poundon House, had an SOE code (STS53c) but was never used by them directly. They provided

some personnel to help OSS get it up and running when it was completed, but only because the station was going to handle Jedburgh radio traffic. Jedburgh was a joint OSS/SOE operation. OSS also handled Ossex radio traffic from there until Station Victor in Berkshire was ready, and then they moved there lock stock and barrel. SIS took over the STS53c site until the end of the war, when they handed it over to DWS. Any Whaddon Mk.VII sets found there would have been left by OSS or SIS. In fact, there are reports that the engineering staff at SOE's R&D establishment tested a few Whaddon Mk.VII sets when they first came out and found them unsuitable for their purposes; so they didn't use them.

A lot of confusion has also been caused by the fact that there is a Grendon Hall in Northamptonshire, which was used by OSS as a holding centre for Ossex agents in the latter stages of the war, as well as a quite different Grendon Hall being used by SOE at Grendon Underwood in Buckinghamshire. Whaddon Mk.VII sets were issued to Ossex agents by OSS prior to their departure for France either side of D-Day, and that may well have happened at Grendon Hall in Northamptonshire while they were waiting to fly out from nearby RAF Harrington, where the US Special Operations Group (Carpetbaggers) were based. So, the mention of Grendon Hall in connection with Whaddon Mk.VII sets doesn't indicate that SOE ever used any of them; it's just a coincidence that there are two stately homes with the same name in England, one used by OSS in

Northamptonshire and another by SOE at Grendon Underwood in Buckinghamshire.

Concluding Remarks

Lack of information, caused by the slow release of official documentation and the reluctance of those involved in war-time radio work for MI-6 to talk about what they did, have created a situation where conjecture and speculation have often gotten the better of fact and hard evidence. Unravelling the fiction can be a tedious and thankless task, and when done will probably never fully overcome the fanciful tales peddled by some authors because those stories are just too appealing compared to the boring truth of the matter. The first ever mention of "Le Paraset" appears to be in a French report prepared for the BCRA in February 1942 by Captain Pierre Julitte, and published in March. Fortunately, enough information has now been disclosed to piece together some of the facts surrounding inconsistencies in this report about problems with "Le Paraset" in the field and to query whether it really was the Whaddon Mk.VII that Captain Julitte was talking about in his report, or some other set. The fact that Geoffrey Pidgeon worked on the early batches of the Whaddon Mk.VII, and is adamant that it wasn't introduced until late in 1942, tells us it wasn't what the French called the "Le Paraset" in the first place. It didn't fit the criticisms levelled at "Le Paraset" in Julitte's report anyway, and these inconsistencies had troubled some historians for many years. The date when the Mk.VII was first introduced has been seriously in error for many years now

because it has been confused with the original earlier set through its nickname. Really, there is only one contender for the title "Le Paraset" mentioned in Captain Julitte's report and that's the Whaddon Mk.V.

It's hard to say exactly how many Mk.V sets were made, but they are extremely rare now, even in France, and the only one found by the author so far is in the "Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation" (CHRD) at Lyon. Their rarity may be due to the number captured and destroyed, rather than the number made, but it's likely that no more than a couple of hundred were made during 1941 and 1942. By 1943 the Mk.VII was in full production and when higher power was required for working longer distances a suitcase version of the Mk.VI was available. However, the little Mk.VII could still be used in occupied Norway because a special receiving station had been set up by SIS near Forfar, in Scotland, to deal with weak signals coming out of Northern Europe.

What is not clear at the present time is whether the French transferred the fond epithet of "Le Paraset" from the Whaddon Mk.V to the Whaddon Mk.VII during the war, or if this catchy appellation was assigned to it by mistake after the war because someone misidentified the set. Certainly, the Maquis and other French Resistance sabotage groups would have dealt with SOE, so they would not necessarily have come across the Mk.VII. The French groups working with SIS and gathering intelligence were smaller and far fewer in number, so the existence of the Mk.VII would not have been so

widely known back then. What is clear now, however, is the fact that once upon a time the set fondly known to the French as "Le Paraset" was actually called "The Agent Killer" by Section VIII back at Whaddon Hall. Now there's irony for you!

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