

I was browsing some old editions of Practical Wireless magazine when I came across this letter from Wilf Dunell. Now, I haven't been around CDARC long enough to have known Wilf myself but I do know that, even though he passed away several years ago, amongst the longer-serving members Wilf's name is frequently mentioned, both for his ability with the morse key - he ran regular morse classes at his home for the benefit of CDARC members - and his anecdotes. Wilf, it is fondly recalled, could send or receive morse at a considerable speed while at the same time holding a normal conversation.

While not only the author but also the content of the letter were of such interest, I felt I had to share this with you. A quick e-mail to Don Field G3XTT, Editor of PW, for permission to reproduce the letter here elicited a response in the affirmative in less than two hours - how about that for service. Where else could you write to a magazine editor on a Sunday evening and get a reply in two hours? - so with grateful thanks to Don, here it is for your enjoyment.

David
MOZEB

I have taken the liberty of altering the original layout to better fit the web page.



Wartime Co-operation

Sir: The exchange, in wartime, of aircraft search and rescue information as mentioned by Douglas Byrne in April *PW*, did take place but did not involve direct communication with enemy stations. It was carried out by the maritime coast radio station of the then GPO (now BTI) and in Germany by Norddeich Radio DAN and Elbe-Weser Radio DAC.

It came about after Dunkirk in the period when shipping activity in the North Sea was very restricted and kept under Naval control, so that there was not so much call for the normal coast station services. However the stations continued, of course, to maintain a strict safety watch of 500kHz, the international distress frequency, and since all the survival radio equipment used in rubber dinghies was also on 500kHz the watch for distress calls from downed aircrew adrift in rubber dinghies was their responsibility. Probably the most active in this were Northforeland Radio GNF, Humber Radio GKZ and Cullercoats Radio GCC.

Whenever dinghy signals were heard, the coast stations took direction finder bearings and reported them to the RAF sea rescue HQ, who were responsible for any possible rescue operation. Very early on in this period, cases arose where the RAF had to say that the position indicated was out of their reach. In fact the Marconi Adcock d.f. systems of the GPO were very accurate and gave good results. Following suggestions from the civilian staff, when bearings indicated that the dinghy was out of reach from the UK, one coast station would call its neighbour on 500kHz in plain language and they would exchange the bearings obtained, knowing full well that the German stations would intercept the signals and that lives would be saved. Being taken prisoner of war was preferable to the alternative of being left to drift with little or no hope of rescue. The Germans rapidly followed suit.

Another aspect of the co-operation arose when aircraft were able to report to base that they were in trouble and likely to crash. If the position given showed that they would be out of reach of their own rescue services, the coast stations would be asked to

broadcast the details in plain language on 500kHz. For example, Norddeich Radio might be heard broadcasting a distress message about an aircraft down in the seas off the UK east coast. The UK stations would copy this and if, say, the position given was off Yorkshire or Lincolnshire, GNF would call GKZ on the same frequency and ask in plain language "Did you hear that broadcast from DAN?" GKZ would reply "Yes received OK" and the Germans would know that if at all possible their men would be picked up. Similarly if GCC made a broadcast about an aircraft down near the coast of the Netherlands, DAN would be heard asking DAC a similar question. The exchange would be reported by GCC to RAF Rescue Group, who would know that if at all possible their men would be picked up.

I only know of one occasion when there was direct contact between a UK coast station and one in occupied France. That occurred when a coast station using the callsign FFU was heard calling Northforeland Radio. The GNF operator in something of a dilemma sat tight and waited to see what developed. FFU continued to call and GNF ventured a cautious "K" without using callsigns, but this didn't satisfy FFU who continued to call. After some minutes the GNF operator, knowing that FFU had only ever been used for air/sea rescue, acknowledged the call and gave "K". FFU then sent a long message in German plain language in which the name of Douglas Bader appeared. This was acknowledged very formally and the message passed to the RAF. A few minutes later RAF came through on the telephone in great excitement and said that Bader had failed to return from a fighter sweep over Northern France that morning and that the message said he was a prisoner and safe but had smashed up his artificial legs and wanted his spare pair. The following day RAF requested GNF to send back a message giving the position in France where the legs had been dropped during the night on a parachute. Some hours later another message was received from FFU saying that the legs had been found.

The sequel came a fortnight later when the GNF operator was called on to justify his actions in communicating with the enemy in time of war. Fortunately his explanation was accepted and he is still alive to pen this tale.

Wilfred Dunell G3BYW
Cambridge