

# Dit Dit Dah Dit Dit Dit Dah Dit Dit Dit Dah Dit Dit Dit Dah Dit

By Eddie Hunter

No, I haven't finally gone off my rocker, I've been to Bletchley Park Code Breaking Centre and it has affected me like that...

They are all Fs by the way, for the benefit of my fellow Bilge Rats or any of you who know Morse as a Detective in the Oxfordshire Constabulary or were brought up in the age of the radio telephone and the sat nav. (. . . . . etc would have looked even more peculiar.)

Two days before the visit to Bletchley Park I finished a fascinating biography called "Agent Zigzag," by Ben Macintyre, which told of the exploits of Eddie Chapman, a minor crook who was to become "Fritz" to the Abwehr and later "Agent Zigzag" to MI5. (According to our Guide the Germans had spies - we had agents!)

Chapman was in prison on Jersey in 1941 when the Germans invaded the Channel Islands. After several misadventures, including a time in a Nazi concentration camp in France, Chapman convinced the Germans that he wanted to spy for them against the British. He was released into the care of the Abwehr who trained him in sabotage and wireless communication at a villa in Nantes. His Morse traffic between Nantes and an Abwehr station in Paris was monitored by the British Y Stations and decoded at Bletchley. They monitored much more about the Englishman turned German spy. They knew his Abwehr code name "Fritz," and they knew his real name.



So, when Fritz was parachuted by his German masters into Cambridgeshire the British MI5 knew all about him and were laying traps to capture him. They needn't have bothered. Chapman had always intended to give himself up immediately. He dragged his German radio and all his sabotage equipment to a Cambridgeshire farmhouse and told the farmer and his wife that the Police and British Intelligence would want to know about him. They did, of course - the Y Stations and Bletchley Park had seen to that!

Under the direction and control of "double cross" Officers from MI5, Fritz kept his radio schedules with the Abwehr, including the all-important "I am free and not under control" signal at the beginning of his transmissions. Through the Y Stations and Bletchley code breakers MI5 knew that the Germans had fallen for the double cross hook line and proverbial sinker.

On one occasion Fritz and his MI5 case handler, Major Ronnie Reed, forgot to transmit the "not under control" prefix , FFFFFFF at the beginning of his transmission..

Panic! Was Fritz blown? Had he been captured by the British? Had he been turned? But MI5 managed to pull the fat out of the fire. Chapman transmitted a message next morning which said, "Sorry. Drunk last night. Forgot to send the F'ing Fs."

Bletchley was able to verify that the Abwehr had swallowed the excuse and all was well.

One of Chapman's targets set by the Abwehr was the Mosquito production at the Hatfield factory belonging to the DeHavilland Aircraft Company, the Mosquito being a particular thorn in the sides of ReichtsMarshall Goering and the Luftwaffe. So the Double Cross Team called on the services of a stage illusionist to mastermind the "destruction" of three power transformers and an electricity substation at the factory. The "damage," which had to look convincing from the air, was photographed on the ground and reported briefly with the ground photographs in the "Daily Mail" and "The Daily Express"- the "Times" and "The Telegraph" both having refused point blank to publish the false information!

"Fritz" radioed an account of his "successful sabotage" to the delighted Abwehr who picked up the newspapers with the corroborating evidence in Lisbon. Fatty was over the moon as well.

Fritz also requested an immediate recall on the grounds that things were getting too hot for him in England. He asked for a pick-up by U-boat from the North East coast. The Germans did not appear to be at all eager to comply - U-boats were having a bad time by then. Eventually they radioed and suggested that Chapman should make his own way back, via Lisbon, on a British Merchant Ship on which he was told to leave an ingenious coal bomb in the bunkers before he disembarked and absconded in the Portuguese port.

So Chapman, now Agent Zigzag, was given false Seaman's documents by MI5, and set sail from Liverpool aboard the *City of Lancaster* commanded by Captain Reginald Kearon. The ship joined a convoy bound for Lisbon. Of necessity Captain Kearon was party to the double cross plot.

Several ships of the convoy were sunk on passage by U-boats. Chapman was a brave man to undertake the voyage voluntarily. After all, he didn't need to. I mean, he had it made in England.

The coal bomb order from the Abwehr to "Fritz" presented a neat problem to the M15 double cross Officers — how could they convince the Germans to accept Chapman's claims without blowing up a British ship? They seemed to manage. But did they? Chapman made his way back to Nantes - where he promptly disappeared. For months the Y- Stations and Bletchley looked out for word from "Zigzag" in vain. What had happened to Chapman? Had he gone over to the Germans? Had the Gestapo broken him under torture? Had the coal bomb ruse not worked after all? Was he dead?

In fact "Fritz" had been welcomed back like the Prodigal Son. He had actually been awarded the Iron Cross, the only British subject ever to be thus honoured!

HUT 12 BletchleyPark  
The "Double Cross" Hut.

While José (my wife - at least until her request for a divorce comes through) went to the Gift Shop and the others in the visiting party did whatever they did during the free hour between the end of the tour and tea time, I asked about Agent Zigzag and was directed to the fascinating Hut 12. There I read about the wartime MI6 exploits of Ian Fleming, better known of course for his James Bond novels;

"The Man Who Never Was" - the dead Welsh tramp whose body was used in an elaborate plot by MI6 to convince Hitler that the Allies intended to invade the Balkans rather than Sicily;

and, of course, the exploits of Eddie Chapman, rogue, thief and double agent and one of the bravest men I have ever read about.

Oh, yes, it was fascinating to hear from our Guide about the breaking of Enigma and it was really interesting to see the Enigma machines on display, the Bombe machines invented at Bletchley Park and the world's first programmable computer - it was amusing as well as incredible to hear about the security and secrecy and the phenomenal stories about the thirty year rule of total silence - but my personal highlight of the day was verification in Hut 12 of the unforgettable biography I had so recently finished reading.

But I left Bletchley somewhat saddened by the knowledge of the ultimate fate of that greatest of all the code-breakers, Alan Turing who felt compelled to take his own life because he couldn't fit into so called normal society - after all that he had done to save so very many lives...



PS ... You can read the full story of Eddie Chapman for yourselves if you want to in the biography "Agent Zigzag" by Ben Macintyre, ISBN 978-1-4088-1149-8 published in 2010 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

## Book Review

“You saved the land, or died to try to save” (Masefield)

“**Merchantmen in Action**” is variously described as “a valuable addition to the historiography of the immense wartime contribution and sacrifices of our merchant seafarers” and “an exceptional read for anyone interested in the lesser-known role played by the merchantmen during WW1”.

Listing the involvement of some 800 merchantmen and naval vessels, the author (a Master Mariner and later a Senior Executive in the Marine Salvage Industry) has spared no effort in researching this book and his attention to detail is painstaking and commendable. Many of the personalities featuring in Cachalot Roy Martin’s book will be remembered by those Club members of a “certain age” and few will disagree with his final analysis of the decline of our once-great Merchant Navy”

The book “aims to honour the seamen of the Merchant Navy for their colossal sacrifice” and, undoubtedly, the author achieves his intent.

“Merchantmen in Action” by Roy V. Martin is published by Fonthill Media Ltd.  
([www.fonthillmedia.com](http://www.fonthillmedia.com))

ISBN No.978-1-78155-045-8.

It is also obtainable from the author.