



e-DEFENCE ELECTRONICS NEWSLETTER

The e-NEWSLETTER OF THE DEFENCE ELECTRONICS HISTORY SOCIETY
No 72 Part I: July 2018

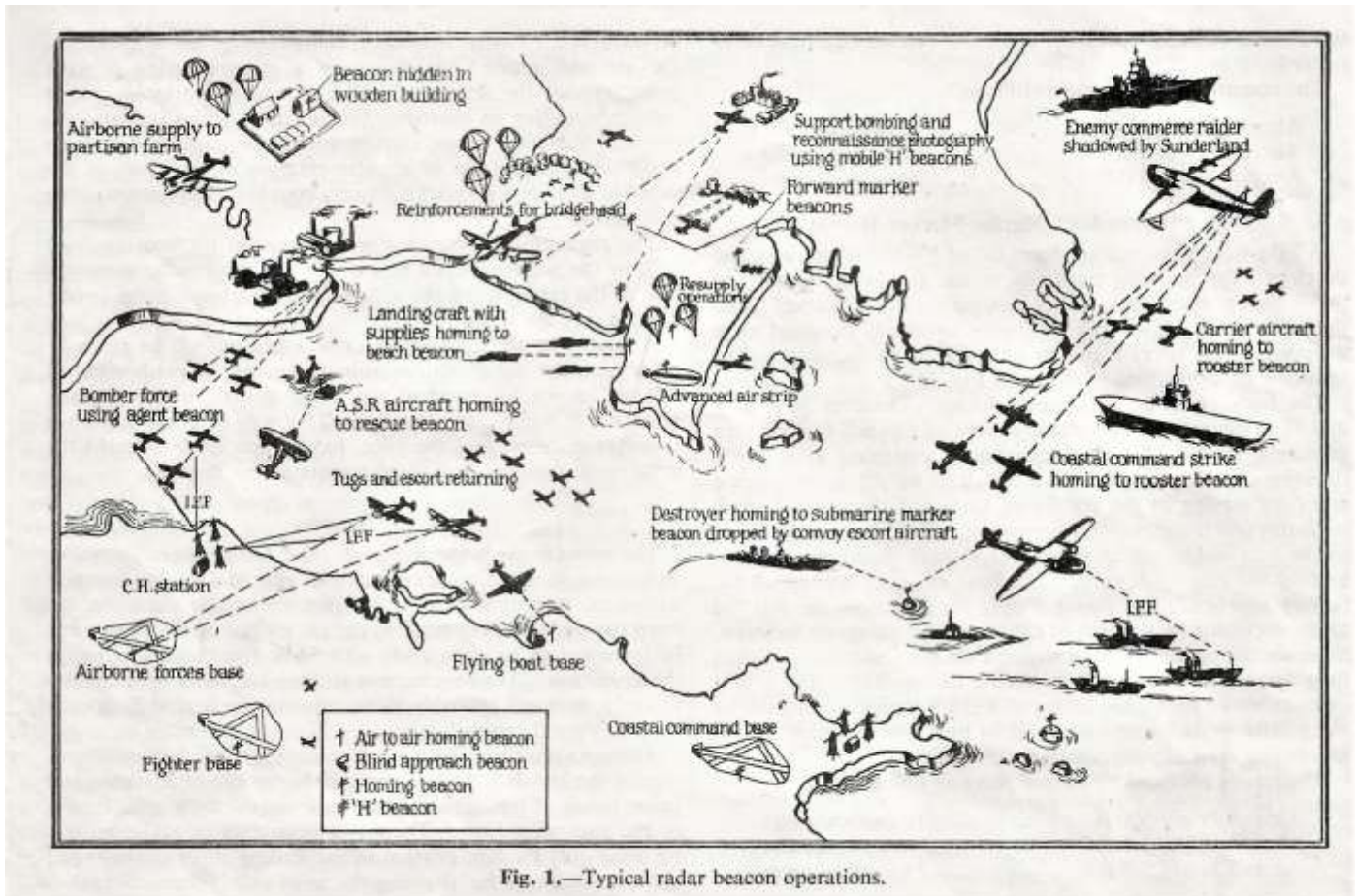


Fig. 1.—Typical radar beacon operations.

WHO IS SIPPI?

July is typically the month when thoughts turn to the opportunity for reading and musing, both on lengthier articles, and also on mysteries of various kinds, so this issue of *eDEN* aims to provide both – with an occasional foray into a couple of interesting ‘look-alikes’!

Pausing only to ask **which member left their coat behind at STEAM (!)**, this issue’s Operations Board lists several interesting visits, the **Newcomen Society’s Teeside weekend** arranged by Newcomen and DEHS members **Fred Starr and Jonathan Ayles**, and the **RAF Cosford Conservation Centre visit** not least. Our articles begin with the answers to questions I posed about **Sir Robert Cockburn** – and who better to give those answers than our member **James Cockburn**! A view of National Service life in 1950 as a **GEE monitoring station SAC** comes from **Ellis Goodyear** in New Zealand, while Mike Dean provides us with both an interesting 1930s magazine graphic’s likeness to

Robert Watson Watt and also the ascription in an official report of ‘death ray’ status to a (relatively) inoffensive Wurzburg!

The first of our longer articles traces the developing response to an enquiry to the DEHS about the military buildings at **Garn Fawr/ Strumble Head** in Pembrokeshire – those with long memories may recall that these were the subject of enquiry in the first three issues of *eDEN* (is it really that long ago?). The owner of the buildings, **Kevin Niblett**, must be praised for his enthusiasm and commitment, for as well as himself obtaining relevant documents at Kew, he has also recorded an oral history from probably the last surviving operator of the microwave propagation trials of 1943-5 based at this site and others. For more on this intriguing site, read the article, but – there is always a but! – there are many further mysteries to this site to be unravelled, and I am calling on DEHS members to rack their brains for any memories or mentions of a series of **hydrophone trials against submarines** in the early 1950s, any recollection of the codename ‘**Corsair**’ for such trials, and anything known about **Prospero** being used as a codename for ASV trials (Prospero is well-known in satellite terms; but then again, if you have an article on it....).

Our second longer article, by **R A Smith**, introduces what will be a series of papers on the various navigational aids using radar techniques, both before, during and after WW2, and of all nations. It is interesting that Smith focusses first on **interrogator-responder beacons**, before moving to an overview of the systems which seem much more popular - **GEE, H2S, Oboe and Loran** - and lastly to **BABS** and systems for airfield control, as this provides the introduction to our Part II which concentrates on the under-discussed field of **beaconry**.

To conclude Part I, following our report of **Thales’** busy month of contracts, **Tailpiece** was stimulated by DEHS member **David Robertson** to take a second look at *eDEN* 71’s photo of the **RAF ‘binder’ at Sopley in 1940**, and muse on WW2 **Soviet infiltration**; why? Read Tailpiece!

Part II takes the field of beaconry as its theme and opens with **Keith Wood’s** 1946 article on the **development of the wide variety of beacons** in service before and during the Second World War in the UK and USA. This field does tend to be neglected in collections and displays (is this because there is no cathode-ray tube screen to look at?) but one needs only to look at the graphic which heads this Editorial to see the astonishing variety of places and roles in which beaconry was indispensable. One important class of beacon, **IFF**, is again relatively neglected by contrast with, for example, **AI** or **H2S**, and this can lead to misleading assumptions about its reliability, particularly in its early Marks; a useful timeline is provided by a National Archives paper spotted by the sharp eyes of **Mike Dean**. The major article of Part II originates in **Air Publication 1093D** which sets out the staggering complexity of the beacon systems in use by the Allies during this conflict, Army, Navy and Air Force, UK and USA, across all frequencies metric to microwave, and all functions from searchlight through submarine marker to ‘blind’ landing systems – then close your eyes and consider the challenge to designers and to allocators of frequencies! As to the question “Who is Sippi?”, read the article and discover (no, not a relative of Alexa or Cortana).

Tailpiece II was provided by **Mike Dean**, whose perusal of that estimable journal, the *Shetland Times*, identifies a new role as a spaceport for the former WW2 radar site at **Skaw!** **Mike** has once more provided huge support and help for this issue, and, as ever, my most grateful thanks.

As always, suggestions for improvements, offers of articles and all general comments to me at philjudkins@btinternet.com or info@dehs.org.uk.

Dr. Phil Judkins, DEHS Chairman.

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LT COL (RETD) MICHAEL HEWETSON OBE, DIRECTOR OF SYMPOSIA AT SHRIVENHAM.



Known to DEHS members as our Symposium contact at Shrivenham, Michael was commissioned into the Queen's Own Hussars serving in the Far East, Northern Ireland and Germany. He then qualified as a helicopter pilot and instructor with operational and instructional tours in USA, Kenya, Norway and Canada, fully qualified on four British and three US helicopter types. He commanded aviation units at squadron level in the UK, Northern Ireland, the Falklands, and in British Army of the Rhine. He was appointed OBE in 2000, and exchanged his uniform for a suit, to join Cranfield University running the Symposia programme. Michael was among the kindest and most gentle of people, with a ready wit and infectious laugh, and will be greatly missed by DEHS colleagues.