Annex 14. David Sissons to Desmond Ball, 23 March 1998

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23 March 1998

Prof Desmond Ball
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Dear Des,

You were interested in whether any Section of the Australian Special Wireless Group ever intercepted Soviet Traffic during the later years of World War II. I told you that something that Bond said to me in mid-1945 indicated that one such intercept passed through his hands at some time before I joined his Special Intelligence Section (April 1945).

Last week I came upon the enclosed document in the I(x) box-file of the Assistant Director of Military Intelligence (ADMI) at Victoria Barrracks Melbourne, declassifed by the DSD last December. I wonder whether this could refer to the intercept in question.

'Box-file' usually means a file in which an office keeps an additional copy of its outwards letters irrrespective of subject. The file in question, in fact, contains only outwards memos/signals. Its date range is October 1943 to October 1945.

The initials for the signature are those of the A.D.M.I. himself, Lt-Col R.A.Little, and together with the filing instructions, are in his own handwriting.

I wonder whether the subject heading 'Red Traffic' is Little's or Clark's. 'Red' could, of course, refer to something other than Soviet. The soldiery of several nations seem to have had a penchant for colours for code-words, e.g. REDLAND v. BLUELAND in war games, ORANGE I II III for the U.S. Navy's standing defensive plans for war against Japan, the RED Machine for the Japanese diplomatic cipher machine of the 1930s, etc. (It certainly does not refer to the latter; for according to Kahn the RED cipher machine was eventually withdrawn from service during 1941). If RED here does mean Soviet, then I'm a bit surprised that, with a matter of such 'delicacy', this was blazoned unnecessarily into a letter-heading. But Clark may have felt that he had to name the file in such a manner that it could be indexed and retrieved by subject. It was after all a TOP SECRET file, which he may have felt afforded it sufficient security. The classification 'Top Secret and Personal' is rather unusual — suggesting a higher degree of confidentiality than Top Secret alone. For example, no other paper in that file has that classification. It may have been the classification imposed by Clark; and it is customary for the recipient to use the same classification as the originator. In which case it is surprisng (and perhaps savours of a rebuke to Clark) that a memo addressed to Bond 'Personal' should be replied to by Bond's superior. Either way, it is bit odd

for Little to be marking a memo as 'Personal' to Clark. This could be construed as deliberately to be witholding it from Clark's C.O., Sandford — which, I'm sure was not intended. I don't think Bond had authority to communicate with Central Bureau other than through Little or Little's Captain I(x). Hence there is nothing surprising in a memo to Bond being answered by Little (or by the I(x)).

In the symbol SRIC/P/393/44, the SRIC obviously stands for S.R.I.Clark; but the symbol seems too long for a mere typing code. The 44, no doubt stands for the year. It is probably the P/393 that is the suject category of the file; but the Index to Central Bureau's registration subjects has doubtless been destroyed.

In military communications it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the simple future tense (e.g. 'It will rain to-morrow') and the imperative (e.g. 'This correspondence will cease forthwith'). In this memo the 'will not' could be either. If the former, Clark had asked Bond not to send him such traffic in future and Little's reply amounts to WILCO. If the latter, Clark had been sending Bond such traffic and Little is instructing him to desist. I think the former is the more likely. If it were the latter, I think the instruction would have come from Sandford after discussion between Little and Sandford.

On the related question, whether any ASW Section other than our dedicated 52 Section was ever put on watch over diplomatic circuits, the answer is affirmative. In the same file, a memo from A.D.M.I. to C.O., A.S.W.Group dated 2/3/45 thanks them for succesfully covering Japanese diplomatic traffic on the Far Eastern (R75) low-power network during the preceding month when 52 Section because of atmospheric and local conditions was unable to do so. The memo continues that 'a similar arrangement regarding station RTZ [i.e. Kuibyshev] was employed early last year with considerable success'. (Interception of Japanese diplomatic traffic on the Kuibyshev-Tokyo and Berlin-Tokyo circuits was more succesful in Australia than at G.C.& C.S and its other out-stations).

Yours sincerely,

David S.

(D.C.S.Sissons)

P.S. Recently I wrote to Ralph Thomson asking if, as their former O.C., he could explain to me the techniques whereby 52 Section found the stations transmitting Japanese diplomatic traffic, watched them, and isolated that from the mass of other encoded traffic transmitted by them. I received a prompt and courteous lettter from his wife to the effect that he had died a year ago.