

Ken Follett

From: Daniel Starer [dstarer@researchforwriters.com]
Sent: 08 November 2000 16:04
To: Ken Follett
Subject: More responses

Mark Heckenbury.

Dear Ken,

Below are two more responses to my inquiries. Additional ones to come in the next couple of days.

Needless to say, I send a nice "thank you" email to everyone who responds.

Best,

Dan

Daniel

I have spoken to a German friend about this. His opinion is that taking out one exchange in France would make very little impact on German communications other than stopping the local chit chat between officers in billets and the local services.

|| If his scenario is not realistic, we need to know why,
 ||| and to determine how the Resistance could have disrupted communications
 ||| between Northern France and Berlin.

The scenario is not realistic.
 How to disrupt communications ? With the greatest of difficulty. There were at least three routes over land for switched telephones from major towns in France to Berlin. No single node was critical. Re routing around cut cables and out of service exchanges was routine and practised. Direct land lines (laid without going near exchanges) for speech and telegrams were in high use. Radio backed everything up. Morse encoded by enigma and other coding systems enabled radio and landline contact from Paris to Berlin with ease.

Disrupting communications in the form of transport would be more effective as repair is longer and few if any reserve routings are possible. And this was the way that the French Resistance and SOE agents helped to make the Normandy landings possible.

|||| Could you please advise which historians we should contact?
 I am
 ||| already in touch with the Director of Communications at France Telecom,
 ||| and with Stanley Swihart in the U.S.

Contact the Bletchley Park Trust in Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes England

This was the highly covert decoding operation where intercepted Axis communications were decoded.

Try the German Military Telephone Archive, used to be in Bonn in 1970, it had a small collection of records from war time signals units. The German Telephone Service may have archives or links to

other sources of information.

[KEN: I will hold off contacting these sources until you get a chance to digest everything I have sent you, and we get a chance to discuss the research.....Dan]

On a personal note,

I was in the DDR (east Germany) for three months in 1967 at the factory where the office machinery my London employers imported was manufactured. Living in rented accommodation as opposed to a supervised hotel I was able to meet and talk with the locals albeit with a serious language problem, they spoke no English and I spoke no German until after the first month.

The East German side of the war, compared to the English version, fired an interest in the history of war and propaganda . The "highly advised" trip to Buchenwald moved me enormously. Later a spell in Frankfurt am Maine gave me a third image of the war from West German history. Later Canadian and American images were added and then Israeli. Two years ago I re-visited Buchenwald with my daughter to research her A level (school final exam) history project on the concentration camp program. We stayed with the woman who, in 1967 had been my interpreter, only now we could speak openly and freely about many things.

Sorry but I have to say this and in the interests of your research it may be of value.

West Germans speak little of the war but those who do had respect for the British "tommies" who fought as men. The Americans fought as machine drivers. My then girl friend's father, (a German tank commander in North Africa, Ardennes and Normandy) would say that Americans without their toys were almost harmless. He did not mean they had no courage but they were not generally good at man to man warfare. One of his tank groups in Normandy found two Scotsmen in kilts leading a group of resistance fighters to defend a bridge. They (the Germans) were so dumfounded to that they all but gave up then. If a couple of tommies in skirts can walk down the middle of a French road that Berlin tells us is in German control then Germany has lost the war today.

The east Germans in 1967 were very outspoken about the American forces being reliant on equipment and armour. The poor record of the Americans in Vietnam was often quoted to me. Heavy machinery and air superiority did very little to combat the determined foot soldier with his bayonet and rifle. Being east Germany America was the imperialist capitalist enemy anyway.

But almost all east and west had the greatest respect for the Resistance movement and the SOE and other agents that worked and fought behind German lines. What ever happens please do not allow the story to be implausible and therefor give a poor image of those heroic people. A old gentleman I met near Aschaffenburg told me how his troops on finding SOE agents would do their utmost to keep the agents out of Gestapo hands.

Buchanwald concentration camp is a story to be looked at. It was liberated by it's own inmates using weapons made in the camp. Explosives were produced in the laundry (if memory serves me right) from everyday materials. With in its story are thousands of contributory stories.

Hope this is of value to you and Mr Follett. I have always

enjoyed his work, sometimes a little bit of tolerance to inaccuracies has to be granted, but on the whole they are well written and researched.

I look forward to a new book soon.

Best regards

Bernard Green
Sharnbrook UK

Dan Starer:

Unfortunately, our volunteer expert on antique European telephones and switching systems is in Europe visiting relatives and his friends at the

Ericsson Company. Georg is due back to Denver next week and I'll give him this challenge if you wish. Stan Swihart should be able to help you--in

fact, he may give you more help than you want.

Since Ken Follett is one of my favorite authors and I'm a student of

World War II, European Theatre, I'll give you a true story of a heretofore

unreported sabotage story involving Ohio Bell's telephone service in Cleveland, Ohio, in the late 1960s. I think the technique used in Cleveland would work just as well in France in the 1940s.

I was the media spokesperson for Ohio Bell at the time. It was a Sunday.

I got a call (I lived in Avon Lake, Ohio, outside of Ohio Bell's service area) to get downtown to handle the media on a major telephone outage--120,000 telephones on Cleveland's West side were out.

When I got to the problem site, I talked to the district plant superintendent who was in charge of the location. We had worked together a few times so I asked him for ALL of the details. He called an outside plant foreman over and told him to show me the problem. The foreman took me over to a cable vault. In the bottom of the vault was a mass of melted lead,

plastic and copper wires. According to the foreman, someone had placed several lighted railroad flares in the vault. The flares burning at several thousand degrees for several minutes melted the old lead cables and the newer

PCV wrapped cables into one big mess. Since the vault was hidden by a bridge abutment and the flares didn't make any noise, hundreds of telephones began to go out of service before anyone even reported seeing smoke coming out of the vault. It took a few days to fully restore service. Now that I think about it, would railroad flares burning bedside and melting a 1940s lead

cable even make any smoke at all?

The superintendent pleaded with me not to tell the media how easy and simple the sabotage had been. I tried, but a "Plain Dealer" reporter dug out most of the story, but it never was published as far as I know.

A few months later, a highly coordinated sabotage plan hit in Youngstown, Ohio. I was the media spokesperson on that job, too. In this one, explosives were used to knock out a central office and battery operated hack saws were used to cut all of low hanging aerial long distance cables leading out of town (the cuts were made by the ends of splice boxes)--microwave was transporting only a fraction of the LD in that part of the network at that time. AT&T Long Lines quickly rerouted the nation's LD traffic around Youngstown, but long distance-wise, the city was completely isolated for a few days. After moving to Denver and working for Mountain Bell for a few years my friends back at Ohio Bell told me the saboteurs were finally tracked down--it was a student radical group. Also, more than a year after the Youngstown event a couple of cable splicers found an unexploded bomb in a cable vault near the CO that had been bombed. Since hard evidence was lacking, the case was never prosecuted and the two sabotage cases were never officially connected. Herb Hackenburg, executive director Telecommunications History Group and U S WEST historian

[end of two messages]