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# DAILY ENTERPRISE



## (U) HISTORY TODAY - October 21, 2015

FROM: CCH

Run Date(s): 10/21/2015

### (U) The OSS in World War II – conducting clandestine operations and analyzing secret intelligence



(U) Early in World War II the United States established its first organization for collection and analyzing secret intelligence from all sources, and for conducting clandestine operations. It was initially named the Office of the Coordinator of Information, but the propaganda function that provided its cover soon calved off as its own organization; the intelligence component was named the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

(U) Although President Franklin Roosevelt had limited the COMINT activities of the United States to the Army, Navy, and FBI, the OSS sometimes, under one subterfuge or another, engaged in cryptologic work.

(U) Africa Project 101 was one such operation run by the OSS Radio Intelligence Division during the Second World War. Africa 101 conducted long-range direction finding (D/F) against clandestine Axis communications, primarily in the African theater of operations.

(U) This information about the project is from declassified documents in the National Archives, and was compiled by a former Scholar-in-Residence who worked in the Center for Cryptologic History.

(U) The African D/F project began in Liberia in 1942 with an experimental mission sent to Roberts Field, near the Firestone Plantation Company in Liberia. A small group of four intercept operators worked under the cover of the Firestone Company; their ostensible mission was to determine atmospheric conditions and radio propagation techniques for Firestone's communications in that region of Africa. Eight others were sent to a location known as Fisherman Lake and set up operations under the cover of Pan American Airways. Their objective was to intercept communications between German clandestine stations and U-boats operating off the West African coast. The Liberian government was not told of this operation. Liberia served as a strategic crossroads for air and sea traffic between Africa and South America.

(U) Harvey Firestone, president of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, worked with personnel from the OSS to assure the covert nature of the operation.

(U) As the project expanded, it had three long-range D/F stations and six mobile D/F teams equipped with special cars and trucks spread out across the continent. The long-range D/F stations were codenamed "Dogs." Dog 1 was located in Algiers; Dog 2 was located outside Dakar in what was then called French West Africa; and Dog 4 was located in Cairo. Several more Dogs were planned, but never built.

(U) The long-range D/F stations could generally locate enemy transmitters throughout Africa and even southern Europe -- France, Sicily, Italy, and the Balkans -- by means of triangulation. The mobile D/F units, however, were used to pinpoint the location of clandestine transmitters in Allied-controlled territory.

 (U) Historical image: The OSS apparently did not have an official seal; this patch was sometimes worn by

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-12-2019, FOIA Case # 84783

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10/26/2018

Doc ID: 6660672

(U) All OSS D/F teams in Africa eventually came to work under the cover of Pan American Airways or one of its subsidiaries based in Miami. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) trained OSS personnel in D/F procedure and provided Africa 101 units with their equipment. The cover for Dog 2 near Dakar was to operate an Emergency Location Transmitter for Pan American Airways. The OSS D/F teams actually conducted civilian aviation operations in addition to their clandestine mission.

(U) The Dog 2 team was commended for its work in guiding lost aircraft to successful landings. Africa 101 personnel wore generic uniforms with no insignias that would identify them with the US military. Their FCC prefabricated D/F equipment arrived in boxes marked Pan American Airways, preserving their cover. The Africa 101 teams were even paid directly by their cover employer.

uniformed personnel in the administration sections.

(U) *Historical image:* The OSS apparently did not have an official seal; this patch was sometimes worn by uniformed personnel in the administration sections.

(U) Africa 101 entered into a host of interagency and foreign liaison relationships. In addition to the FCC, this OSS organization coordinated its activities with British Radio Security Service (RSS), with French military security, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard was responsible for cryptanalysis of clandestine enemy communications, and it relied upon Africa 101's coverage of enemy circuits between the west coast of Africa and Brazil.

The OSS held at least two major conferences with their French counterparts, worked with them in combined mobile D/F operations, and loaned equipment to the French, including several Plymouth sedans for mobile D/F operations.

(U) Prohibited from engaging in cryptanalysis by the presidential order, Africa 101 regularly provided bearings and copies of encrypted enemy communications to Army G2 in Cairo and the Naval Communications Division. The armed service made it explicit to the OSS that Africa 101 units were not to act on the intelligence, but disseminate it to the theater commander for action. This also was one reason the Army and Navy allowed the OSS to get involved in signals intelligence in Africa: the OSS could work in the D/F field, but the Army and Navy would largely control and exploit the OSS intelligence product.

(U) Africa 101 was a small project in terms of personnel; at its height, it had only twenty-two officers and technicians working at each station. These teams were composed mainly of civilians who had been trained in D/F, but were led by military officers seconded to the OSS.

(U) Working conditions for Africa 101 were bleak. Letters from Africa 101 personnel to OSS Headquarters in Washington indicate the tediousness, isolation, and boredom inherent in Africa 101's operations. Most personnel just tried to make the best of their circumstances.

(U) Africa 101's activities appear to have been at least moderately successful. Clearly an ambitious, clandestine venture, it is still difficult to ascertain the full impact these D/F operations had on military and counterespionage operations. What is clear is that Africa 101 shared a large volume of intelligence with a variety of U.S. and foreign intelligence services. The official history of the OSS Censorship and Documents Branch -- to which Africa 101 was subordinate -- records that Africa 101's most important contribution, however, was the great experience it provided to OSS D/F operations in other theaters of operation.

(U) The Federal Communications Commission coordinated a similar D/F network in Latin America; read about it in [this History Today article from July 28, 2015](#).

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on History Today? Contact us at [DL cch](#) or

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10/26/2018

Doc ID: 6660672



Information Owner [REDACTED]  
Page Publisher [REDACTED]  
Last Modified: October 16, 2015  
Last Reviewed: October 16, 2015

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~  
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