

and science allowed his restless mind to explore methods of electronic communication and, on the other side of the medal, how to decypher messages. Once acquired, a knowledge of enemy cyphers (and of enemy capacity to break British ones) would yield a further dividend in the transmission of false messages. That, incidentally, was only one aspect of deception, an art carried to a high degree by unknown men sitting in obscure offices. Because it was of special interest to Stephenson, the development of cypher-breaking occupies a substantial part of this book. For the most part it consisted of slow and patient work by men and women drawn from a variety of backgrounds but having in common a taste for solving puzzles. It was, says Stevenson, a study of German messages that made the escape from Dunkirk possible. There were other dramatic aspects, as in the attempts to secure one of the German encyphering machines.

Intelligence, too, could be combined with sabotage and the encouragement of resistance movements. These were the tasks of those who called themselves "The Baker Street Irregulars", or — more officially — Special Operations Executive. Under General C. M. Gubbins, guerrilla warfare in all its forms was practised by fearless men and women whose chances of survival were small. Dropped behind the enemy lines, they were sometimes equipped with wireless sets and sometimes with bombs. A number of the men were trained at a camp on Lake Ontario, east of Toronto. Although it was known in BSC as Camp X, to Ottawa officials it was "the country house". The curiosity of neighbours elicited various cover-stories — one, to explain explosions, being that the job was to study bomb-disposal. By a queer chance, that explanation backfired when someone nearby actually discovered a bomb and called for help. Embarrassed and nervous officers picked it up without blowing themselves up (it was a dud). Elsewhere in the book are accounts of those heroic men and women who, after elaborate training, worked in occupied territory, never for a moment safe and in too many cases subjected to torture and death.

In all these, and related, activities, whether in the planning or operational stage, Stephenson was involved. As a successful business man with interests in many countries his travels, observations and conversations afforded his own private source of intelligence.

With most of Europe occupied and to some extent hostile, Britain, virtually bankrupt financially and close to that in fighting power, looked to the United States for

aid. On both sides of the Atlantic the obstacles were formidable. For purposes of co-operation the American Ambassador, Joseph Kennedy, was a liability, being defeatist and isolationist. As one whose political influence might well be thrown against Roosevelt, he was on balance less dangerous in London, even if an embarrassment. And the fate of the world hung in no small degree on the success of the skilful manoeuvres of the President who, with Winston Churchill, was one of the two great civilians of the war period. Already enjoying the confidence of both leaders, Stephenson was instructed by Churchill to set up in New York a comprehensive intelligence agency to be known as British Security Co-ordination and given wide powers to conduct it in any way that he saw fit. In addition, he was to encourage whatever assistance could be, under the difficult circumstances, provided.

Every part of the work was delicate, for one false step might at once reveal BSC's secret moves and arouse the hostility of those who protested against interference in American affairs or regarded Stephenson as a menace to neutrality. Worst of all would be to compromise Roosevelt's delicate diplomacy. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was on the whole unco-operative or positively hostile except when he could be assured of gaining personal credit. With "Big Bill" Donovan, "Little Bill" Stephenson's relations were always close and mutually helpful; and it was BSC that drew up a plan for what became the Office of Strategic Services.

It would be impossible in a short space to tell even the outline of the story of BSC, an organization that, curiously enough, is not described as to its structure or personnel in this book. Suffice it to say that it grew in size and in its varied accomplishments. Stephenson himself shuttled between New York and London about once a month in the cold, stripped bombers, forming a human link between the President and the Prime Minister. Of another man, Harry Hopkins, who was later an additional and valuable liaison officer Stephenson makes bare mention.

Canadian connection

BCS expanded within the United States and spread to Bermuda, which grew into an important centre for intelligence gained from intercepted letters and telegrams. The fact that BSC had close co-operation with Canada too is, however, hardly mentioned, except for the facts that Canadians were employed in BSC and that secret

*Fate of world
hung on success
of President's
manoeuvres*

*Stephenson was
a human link
between President
and Prime Minister*