RAF EDLESBOROUGH – (EX DAGNALL) – SOME BACKGROUND HISTORY

Prior to WWII the powerful transmitter stations in use by May 1939 were WT stations at Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable. Control of the Dunstable transmitters was required at the Leighton buzzard control centre to serve HQ Bomber Command and HQ Coastal command communications. This was achieved by hiring remote control lines from the GPO. Leighton buzzard was the central control point and it was from here the traffic channels would be switched to control the transmitter or transmitters as required via a switchboard at Leighton Buzzard.

The limitations at the Dunstable transmitter site caused a search to be made for a new site and Dagnall was found to be an ideal location. Treasury approval for acquiring the land was obtained and tests on the site began in June 1937. Early plans for the new transmitting station at Dagnall were based on the simple reprovision of the existing services, but in 1937 the scheme had to be very considerably extended.

In addition to the commitments arising from the expansion, RAF experience during the Abyssinian campaign when operational messages were taking as much as five days to handle, had underlined the need for high speed transmitters on certain routes. Revised estimates for the wireless telegraphy building and masts, for roads, water, drainage and electrical services and the barracks, quarters, accommodation and stores were approved by the treasury in April 1938. Work started on erecting 6 x 120 foot, 7 x 180 foot, and 5 x 230 foot masts and the transmitters installed included the SWB8B, SWB11 and the M15 besides the lower power T1087 and T77, together with various amplifiers. It had been anticipated that the more concentrated radiation arising from the greater length materials possible that Dagnall would overcome any interference, but the trials proved that to overcome intentional jamming and to ensure clear and continued reception by stations abroad it was necessary to increase the strength of the transmitters. So a three phase 40KW amplifier was provided to boost the power of any transmitter who signals were affected thus increasing the overall power requirements and causing the provision of

In order to meet commitments in the post European war period, and to provide increased power on existing circuits a number of high powered transmitters and amplifiers were provisioned in 1944. Accommodation for these additional transmitters had to be found and it was decided that this could best be found by altering existing accommodation at Dagnall and providing additional accommodation and Greatworth. These two stations were expected to remain the main transmitting stations as a long-term policy (which was in fact what happened). The target date for the completion of the Works Services and the installation of some 40 additional transmitters was February 1945.

To satisfy post-war long distance communications requirements tentative plans were drawn up in July 1945. Inter-command communications would be provided by the main signal centre at Leighton buzzard (which later became RAF Stanbridge), with receiving stations at Stoke Hammond and Chicksands (Chicksands was later replaced by RAF Bampton Castle near RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire). The main transmitting stations would then be at Greatworth and Dagnall (soon to be renamed RAF Edlesborough) and by August 1945 the majority of the actions required had it being taken. Dagnall was eventually to house some 12 x SWB8, 6 of which would drive SWB10 amplifiers, 5 x SWB11 and a small number of RCA transmitters of varying power. Greatworth was to have 17 x SW8, four of which would drive SWB10 amplifiers, 13 x SWB11 and a small number of RCA type ET 4332 transmitters.

My personal involvement with the RAF Edlesborough was much later when I commanded the site with around 20 technicians and mechanics (ranks from Sgt to SAC) from November 1981 to August 1983. It was then (and had been for a long time) an outstation of No. 2 Signals Unit (2SU) RAF Stanbridge,

(Leighton Buzzard) the Defence Communications Network (DCN) Central System Control Point (SCP) and in my time operating Marconi H1200 transmitters on the long-haul overseas circuits. The other outstations were RAF Greatworth, the sister transmitter site to RAF Edlesborough and RAF Bampton Castle the main receiver site. Many years prior to this I had worked at what was then the other HF receiver site, RAF Stoke Hammond, also near Leighton Buzzard in the days when full dual and space diversity working was common.

My time at Edlesborough of course included the Falklands war in 1982 and had to give to just one brief example of how things could move very quickly when war is declared, I had a phone call from the ministry of defence at midday one Friday asking me into regarded terms whether or not I had an antenna pointing in a certain direction. I of course knew what the operations officer who had called me was trying to say without giving anything away on an open telephone line, and knowing that I had a disconnected or but serviceable set of rhombic antennas pointing in the desired direction said yes, but the 600 Ohm open wire feeders had long ago been disconnected and to reconnect them I would need about 1/3 mile of a new support posts and feeder wires running from the transmitter building to the antennas. The next day a team of civilian aerial erectors arrived on site and by Sunday we were on the air ready to transmit to ships when they headed south to the Falkland Islands.

It was a great place to work at and be the boss of. Being such a large undeveloped site apart from the masts and feeder lines it was like a farm with a crop of huge antennas and a little nature reserve with all the usual countryside wildlife, not to mention at the right time of year, huge crops of organic mushrooms. Undoubtedly one of the very best postings I ever had was serving as I did for 38 years in the RAF.

<u>18 Feb 2012 - Newest Pictures on your website, numbering down from #1 - the ADMIN BLOCK picture</u>:

#3 – My office
#4 & 5 – Cooling/extraction fan shed
#6 – Antenna feeders from the antenna switch, the baluns on some circuits were inside the building behind these 600 Ohm open wire feeder terminal posts.
#8 – Antenna anchor weight.
#10 & #14 – main tx hall, remember it well! Door on left led to admin area and drive room.