

**RCAF/RAF "CIVILIAN" RADAR TECHNICIANS
in
TURKEY 1943 - 1945**

Turkey 1943 -1945



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Politics in Turkey during World War II

In 1924, Kemal Atatürk, having secured the borders of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, proclaimed the foundation of the Turkish republic. The benevolent dictator dragged, pulled and pushed Turkey into the 21st century; he died 10th of November, 1938. He had, as he himself said, reversed the ill-luck that, for centuries, had dogged the steps of the Turks.(1) He was succeeded by Ismetinönü. (2) During WW II the Right was pro-German, the Left pro-Allied, and their fortunes fluctuated with the military fortunes of the two sides. Involvement in the war was what Ismetinönü and most of the Turks wanted least. In this respect Turkey was like some small European national states, most of which were dragged into the war against their will. Although Turkey had treaties and alliances with Great Britain and France, when the war started a non-aggression treaty with Germany was added. As the tide of war turned against the Nazis so Turkey's neutrality took on a pro-Allied hue, until war against Germany was declared, as a formality, in February 1945.

However, it was not Germany that most Turks feared but Soviet Russia.(3) In the middle of the war when British military equipment was sent to Turkey, partly to give the Turks the means of resisting a German onslaught, and partly as an inducement to join the Allies, much of the materiel was forwarded to the Turkish army standing guard over the frontier of Russia.

While it was one thing to give the Turks military equipment, guns and ammunition, it was quite another to allay their fears of an air attack from the Luftwaffe based in Greece, and on the Island of Rhodes. To meet this fear of attack the British decided to send in a radar screen.

Operation "LITTLE LITTLE HARDIHOOD"

"In November, 1943, I was posted to a new formation . It was the headquarters of No. 217 Group, and, at the same time, I was promoted to Squadron Leader. The operation was called Little Little Hardihood which was preparing for the movement of RAF radar stations into Turkey, if the Turks came in on our side. My job was to select sites for a radar chain along the Aegean coast.

On November 29, 1943, I went into Turkey in civilian clothes, and with a civilian passport which I managed to retain after I got back, despite the strenuous efforts of the Transport officer to relieve me of it. We went into Ankara and from there to Izmir on the regular Turkish train, which had a flat car with a jeep on it.

The jeep was to carry me and my Turkish escorts on a coastal jaunt for siting radar stations. I picked out a dozen or so sites for various types of stations. It was a great help to have two Turkish officers, Major Etem Ozyidirim and Lt. Seda Alp, who were my escorts and were not supposed to let me out of their sight. The last thirty miles of our trip was on horseback.

1.) Mango, Dr. Andrew, "Turkey" Thames and Hudson, London, England

2.) *ibid*

3.) *ibid*

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On January 29th, 1944, I was back in Cairo, and incidentally, during this time, Cy Williamson and six other ranks from 515 AMES, with all their radar equipment, had left Aleppo, Syria, for Turkey on Christmas day, 1943. In other words, when I was on the Aegean coast, they were just getting ready to go there. I never found out where Cy and his six companions and their gear spent the time. They probably got to Izmir but at that time I was not sure."

**H.W. Beall,
Ottawa, ON.**

After the breakthrough to the west, 4th of November, 1942, following the Battle of Alamein, AMES 515 moved forward and took up the position at Benina airport outside of Benghazi to cover the seaway approaches to the harbour. Shortly thereafter it moved to a more effective site at Appollonia, now known as Sûsah east of Benghazi. This mobile radar unit became static with permanent buildings and concrete shelters, at an elevation of over 5,000 feet.

On the 14th of September, 1943, orders were received from 212 Group to dismantle the 515 equipment for removal, and to make it mobile again. Leaving Appollonia on the 25th of September, the unit travelled seven hundred miles east. It arrived at No. 3 Signals Depot, RAF, Helwân, just outside of Cairo on the 1st of October. There, all vehicles and equipment were refurbished and camouflaged, battle dress was issued and deficiencies made up to scale. The radar and communications equipment were refitted, erected and given operational tests. Orders were received placing the unit on 24 hour standby.

The new C.O., F/Lt Williamson, RCAF, took over on the 8th of November. On the 9th, along with AMES 843, and AMES 8029, they started loading the vehicles, after separating the bodies from the chassis, onto railway flat cars. The personnel were sent to clothing outfitters in Cairo to obtain civilian clothing.

On the 8th of December, F/Lt Williamson with nine other ranks (now referred to as the "A" Party) and similar parties from AMES 843 and AMES 8029 left for Tel Aviv for the purpose of kitting with special clothing. On 13th of September, all secret and confidential publications were forwarded to Headquarters, RAF, Middle East. All Air Ministry marking, lettering vehicles and equipment were erased.

Civilian passports were received on the 15th of December and on the 16th the "A" party left for transit camp with all vehicles and technical equipment, except for one Crossley and one Chevrolet 3-tonner. On the 18th, the "A" Party changed into civilian clothes, and service clothes, belongings and personal equipment were sealed in boxes. The vehicles were again loaded onto railway flat cars, 19th and 20th, and the train of loaded vehicles and technical equipment left Aleppo for Turkey, accompanied by guards supplied by the RAF Regiment, and was turned over to Turkish authorities after crossing the border. On Christmas Day, 1943, the "A" party left for Turkey, by train, from Aleppo, now called Halab, fifty kilometers south of the Syrian/Turkish border. (1.)

1.) Operations Record Book AMES 515, AIR/180 Public Records Office (PRO) Kew, Richmond, U.K.

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Cos, Léros and Sámos.

The Greek islands of Cos, Léros and Sámos in the Aegean Sea lie just off the coast of Turkey. Under the German occupation the islands were garrisoned mainly with Italian troops. After Italy joined the Allies, in September, 1943, the British 234th Infantry Brigade was sent to the Aegean with one battalion to each of the islands, arriving September 17 - 22. The occupation was carried out without any interference by either the Italian garrison, or any German forces.

The German reaction was swift, and they mounted an airborne and paratrooper attack. Cos was assaulted and occupied by the Germans on October 2 and with that the Allies lost the only landing grounds that they had held in the Aegean, whereas the Luftwaffe could provide fighter cover from the airfields in Rhodes. The Germans then turned their attention to Léros and after gallant resistance with heavy losses, the British Brigadier surrendered on the 14th of November.(1)

MUIR, F/L Gilbert Alexander (C5645) -

Distinguished Flying Cross -

46 Squadron RAF, 252 Wing, 202 Group, Middle East Command - Award effective 12 May 1944 as per **London Gazette** dated 19 May 1944 and AFRO 1380/44 dated 30 June 1944. Born in Winnipeg, 1912; home there; enlisted there 13 June 1941. Commissioned 1941. Medal presented 9 April 1949.

This officer has taken part in night intruder operations over Rhodes, Cos and Crete. On one occasion he was observer in an aircraft when at least two enemy aircraft were destroyed and others damaged. Flight Lieutenant Muir's technical knowledge and experience have been invaluable to his squadron, while his keenness and devotion to duty have been an inspiring example to all.

* * * * *

Editor's note: S/L C.W.L. Hulke, RCAF, the senior Radar Officer on the Cos expeditionary force, was reported missing in action, presumed dead (later confirmed) October 3, 1943.

With the Allied failure to establish a presence off the coast of Turkey, the Turks then changed their mind about receiving the British radar, or British personnel but F/L Williamson and his nine airmen, "A" Party, stayed with the AMES 515 equipment in Turkey over the winter. F/L Art Grant, RCAF, the officer i/c of one of the light warning units recalled, "*On Christmas Day we went to Turkey as civilians with, I think, three small units, one of them being mine and about four larger units. We*

1.) Léros 12 -16 November, 1943, CAB 106/765, PRO

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were in number approximately 280 men. A small group was going in to Izmir and the rest to Istanbul. My unit was finally set up on the Turkish coast near the Dodecanese island of Mitilini (Lesbos). In a couple of months this operation turned sour and we were literally kicked out of the country."

**Art Grant,
Winnipeg, MB**

Operation Little Little Hardihood was cancelled, February 16, 1944.

A convoy of 47 vehicles, the remainder of 515 and 634 and various other AMES that were being assembled for Turkey left Aleppo, Syria, on the 17th of February, and arrived back in No.3 Signals Depot, Helwân, Egypt, on the 2nd of March.

On the 13th of April, AMES 515 was reduced to number only basis. Barracks stores, technical equipment, MT spares and vehicles were taken off strength and returned to the Depot. With the exception of the "A" party, under F/Lt Williamson, all personnel were posted to radar units in the Mediterranean Allied Air Force, (MAAF) in Italy. The "A" party, in Turkey, was brought on the strength (detached) of No. 3 Signals Depot .(1)

August 1, 1944: The Russian Armies were approaching Warsaw, Poland, on the Eastern Front. General George Patton's U.S. Army had stormed the Avranches and six of his divisions had poured through the gap at Avranches and sealed the fate of France.

August 2, 1944: The Turkish government broke off diplomatic relations with the Third Reich.

Operation SUPERCHARGE

"From August 8th, to September 3, 1944, I found myself back in Turkey. I was overdue for my term overseas posting, and was due to go back to Canada. I would have got back about then, but again the Turkey situation flared up, and a new, yet another operation, was developed - this time called "Supercharge". I was supposed to go in because I was the only one who knew where these sites for radar stations were along the Aegean. So, my homecoming was cancelled suddenly, and I was sent back to Aleppo. There I picked up the personnel of 515 AMES, left behind by Cy Williamson when he went into Aleppo.

There was a Wing Commander who was supposed to be OC troops on the train. It was not just 515; there were two or three other units of different kinds. There must have been several hundred troops

1.) Operations Record Book AMES 515

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on the train. However, the Wing-Co at Aleppo said the medical officer at Aleppo was an old chum of his, and they spent the night, far into the night, I guess, and the next morning it was reported that the Wing-Co had the mumps, and would have to go back to Cairo. He did not want to go into Turkey at all, so I was next in line and became OC troops.

It was quite a hectic ride by train from there to Izmir, but we made it. The most difficult part was getting on board, because, when I first got on, the whole thing was infested with lice.

I told the Transport Officer that I would not let my men go on board until it was disinfected. That took another day or so, but it finally got done. When we got to Izmir, and practically every station on the way, the locals turned out to cheer us and cried out "Inglesi" meaning "English", of course. Despite our being in civilian clothes, and supposed security arrangements, the locals knew what was going on.

When we got to Izmir we were met by Cy Williamson, and Cy put me up in a very comfortable pensione that he had been staying at for quite sometime. I think I slept for about a day for it had been a very hectic trip. I stayed there until we got 515 AMES set up near Izmir. There were two other light warning sets a little further down the coast. I stayed to get all these things set up, and then back again, once more, to Cairo".

H.W. Beall

"On the second trip in (to Turkey) again we were fitted out with identical civilian clothes; grey flannel trousers, same coloured sports coats, fedoras and top coats, all the same material and colour. We had merely changed from one uniform to another. On the second trip no effort was made to change the war markings on the transport. We were, of course, attached to the British consulate and were known as "British construction party". We were required, on occasion, to live for a day or two in the consulate compound; life there was another story."

Art Grant

"We left Cairo and we drove all the way through Israel, Palestine, of course, it was called at that time. Through Lebanon, and, as a matter of fact, spent overnight in Beirut, on one of the nights that we were on the road. From there we went up through Syria, and somewhere along the road we were taken to a camp, and, at this point, we were issued some civilian clothes. We had all of ours, anything that might have been indicative of Service, remove marks of identification, bracelets, writing kits and anything like that, and we were issued passports. The strange thing about this is that we were sent to school, I can't recall for how long, to be taught to be civilians. The teachers, who were permanent RAF instructors, spent all of their lives, from the time they were "boy-entrants" in the RAF. They proceeded to tell us how to behave in civilian life completely ignoring the fact that 99.9% of us had been civilians sometime in the few years preceding this time".

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"Somewhere along the line we were loaded on flat cars with the equipment, and given box car type places to sleep in. Well, as one of the vehicle drivers, we all felt that we were better off on the flat cars with the vehicles, and we could sleep on the seats at night because the box cars were nothing more than jam-full of people".

**Robert D. Cooper,
Brantford, ON**

AMES 515 RAF. Operations Record Book

27 July, 1944

No 515 AMES was re-formed at No. Signals depot, Helwân, with F/Lt S. Blackburn in command. One officer, four NCO's and thirty-two other ranks. One senior NCO, one corporal and one a/c radar mechanic to join the unit at the final destination. Personnel went by train to Aleppo where final inoculations were carried out. Equipment was issued and instructions given regarding anti-malarial precautions.

10 August, 1944

A meeting was called by S/Ldr Beall OC of No. 2 train, on which he and the personnel would travel.

12 August 02:30 hours

Units constituting train No. 2 left 219 Group camp by road transport to Baghdad railway station, Aleppo. At 06:00 hours the train left Aleppo and travelled across Syria and the Turkish frontier, the same day arriving at Adana.

15 August, 10:00 hours

Arrived Izmir district and de-trained.

19 August

Levelling of the ground for the final positioning of the technical equipment, began by Turkish soldiers.

22 August

S/Ldr Beall of HQ, RAF, Middle East, made final check of the serviceability of the technical gear.

5 September

Unit fully operational. Sergeant Smith, senior NCO i/c 636 AMES, arrived on his periodical visit.

9 September

Work commenced on barbed wiring of the technical compound.

27 September.

A visit of F/Lt. Williamson, radar officer, 17th radio detachment. The units stopped operating and prepared to pack ready to move on further instructions.

"On the 6th of October, 1944, Cy (F/Lt. Williamson), RCAF, was ordered to return to Port Said, and was issued a collective passport, valid for 149 persons for a single journey from Izmir to Syria,

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overland. All radio gear was to stay in Turkey. The airmen and officers were given shelter and food at various military camps en route to Egypt, and arrived at their destination without incident. I have the original collective passport number 2, listing all the names of the officers and men of AMES numbers that follow:

No. 515, No. 633, No. 634, No. 6018, No. 638, No.636, No.8037, No. 17 Radar Detachment, No. 67 Lines Section, attached to 69 AFS. Included are the names, places and date of birth and nationality. Most of the men were British , five were Canadian and two South African."

**Mrs Ethel Williamson,
St Catharines, ON**

Other personnel from Izmir returning to No. 3 Signals Depot, Helwân, Egypt, were not so well organized as Williamson's group.

"In Izmir, the winter was starting to come on, and obviously we couldn't live in the tents. We were into a rainy season and everything was muddy and sloppy. The officer in charge of the area came to the unit and told the CO to go into town and pick out a house that we could use and it would be commandeered for us. We could come back to the radar unit and teach the Turkish personnel in the school. We were all in civilian clothes, and we all had passports. Incidentally, the best passport of the whole lot was our general duties guy who looked after the latrines, because he was down as a "sanitary engineer". People like myself were just put down as radio mechanics, or whatever. We were paid, as I recall, in Turkish money, and out of this money a percentage had to go to the cooking staff who bought the food locally. What was left was ours to buy clothing or anything else we needed. Our service pay was not touched, so that when we finally got back we got our full service pay. This was extra money over and above our service pay...where it came from I have no idea, but I do recall that we were rather well-paid.

With the fall coming on, and looking for this housing, and sort of getting prepared to move in there, we were surprised one day when a British attache came to the unit. He said that the unit was to be turned over to the Turkish authorities and, apart from a skeleton staff, we were to travel independently back to No. 3 Signals Depot. The skeleton staff would require a radar mechanic. The other corporal, an Englishman named Norm Flude, and I, at the CO's suggestion drew straws, and I got the long one, so he had to stay. We were told to find our own way back and to be sure not to carry too much money with us. Another fellow and I decided that we would go on alone. On our way through the little town of Izmir I spent the money on the purchase of an expensive watch which, if I had to, I could have traded. I wore the watch for many years afterwards.

Anyway, we managed to keep enough money to get on trains, and with our passports and so on, eventually wound our way back over the Turkish border. We had to go by rail through all the little towns and tunnels back into Syria. Now , at this point you must remember that we were in civilian

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clothes, and we had nothing to indicate that we belonged to the services. All we had was our passports. So when we approached a service unit, whether it was Army, Navy or Air Force, they were all kind and did feed us, and gave us blankets but they wouldn't let us in because they did not entirely believe our story. We met up with some of the other boys, there were about twelve of us, and we hitched rides on service trucks, and ate at service establishments. Eventually we arrived in Cairo, from where we had started out. Of course they knew all about us, and we were given back our uniforms and personal effects that they had been holding for us. We were once again Service people."

Robert D. Cooper
Brantford, ON

"When we returned to Aleppo the second time our stay was mercifully short. There was a good deal of paper work, and issuing civilian dress before we boarded another train for Turkey. I wish I had a picture of the outfits which did nothing for our morale, already pretty low. Our appearance: a UK officer snorted that we looked like "a third-rate touring football team". I can only remember the overcoat which fit like a tent, and felt like a horse blanket. The civvies had some compensation for the other ranks, for it pretty well wiped out rank identification.

In February, 1945, there was a major alert and the remaining RAF personnel took over the Ops station, by then largely manned by Turks. There was a flight of Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his entourage on their way to the Yalta conference. I remember the radar tube at that time... a huge blob of signals, all throbbing with IFF. These IFF signals usually caused the Turks great concern and led to frequent scrambles. They meant, on other occasions, Russian aircraft, and the Turks did not care for their appearance on the Black sea coast. Shortly after that the "Turkish expeditionary force" started to disband as more and more of its members were posted home. I may be wrong but I think that I was the last technical (radar) officer left in the country and it certainly wasn't by choice.

My last assignment was to arrange the translation of the secret documents related to the equipment into Turkish. I was not a very good choice, but it was possible because a number of the Turkish officers and NCOs with some experience did most of the work. I was sort of a referee, a court of last resort. There were a lot of technical terms for which there was not any Turkish equivalent. I and my principal interpreter, a smart young officer named Munci Giz, would worry over these. Munci had attended university in the United States and he usually chose the answer, but sometimes he would be stumped and then I could only decree the English term. I wonder if "flip-flop oscillator" is still used in Turkish technical literature? In July, 1945, I left Turkey for Cairo and onward repatriation to England and, in October, to Canada."

John B. McKay,
Corunna, ON,

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Editor's note:

It was fortuitous that the fortunes of war prevailed. Had it been otherwise they would have had no protection as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention. Their uniforms were in locked storage miles away in Cairo. The signators of the Geneva Convention of 1929, both on the Axis and Allied side, agreed to the humane treatment of only genuine prisoners of war.

Geneva Convention

Convention Concluded at Geneva on July 27th. 1929, Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.
(When taken prisoner of war)

- 1. They must be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates.**
- 2. They must have a fixed distinctive sign recognisable at a distance.**
- 3. They must carry arms openly; and**
- 4. They must conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war.**