

Group Captain Sir Eric Jones

1907 – 1986

A brief biography, based on that formerly displayed in the 'Hall of Fame' in Bletchley Park mansion.

Hut 3 had been set up in early 1940 to translate the raw Luftwaffe and Army decrypts, and to prepare the outgoing messages to Whitehall. By the second half of 1941 it was clear that some of these messages must go directly to the Service Commands in the field, both in the interests of speed, and because Hut 3 was excelling at clarifying the Intelligence in the decrypts. Inevitably this led to friction. In March 1942 the rather junior Sqn Ldr Eric Jones from the Air Ministry was asked to report on the problems, doing this so well that he was appointed to run the Hut. This he did with consummate success for the rest of the war, remaining with GCHQ after the war, becoming Director from 1952 until 1960.

Eric Malcolm Jones was born in April 1907. He went to King's School, Macclesfield, and left at 15 to join the family business. In 1925, he launched his own textile agency. In 1940 he enlisted and became a member of the Air Intelligence branch in the Air Ministry. In 1942, as a young squadron leader, he was asked to visit Bletchley Park to report on the conflict in the management of Hut 3. Friction within the team and with Whitehall grew when it was seen to be essential to send the outgoing Intelligence direct to the Commands in the Field, by-passing the Service Intelligence teams in Whitehall.

The choice of Eric Jones to examine the management problems was certainly remarkable, since he lacked experience of Intelligence work, of the Services, of the academic world, of translation of military terms, or indeed of any relevant qualification except industrial experience. He soon proved the ideal choice to douse the flames of conflict and get the teams working harmoniously together. His advice was accepted, and in July 1942 Travis appointed Eric Jones as head of Hut 3.

Peter Calvocoressi, who worked for him in the Air Section of Hut 3, recorded: *'He did not at first sight seem the right man for the job but very emphatically was. He was unlike other senior people in the Hut, neither don nor schoolmaster, neither professional man nor intellectual. He respected and probably admired the mental qualities of his subordinates but was not intimidated by them and showed that since, whether they approved or not, he had been appointed to govern them, he would do so. He was a man of firm good sense, he delegated responsibility with generous assurance and most people in the Hut quickly saw how lucky they were to have him'*.

The reputation of Hut 3 rose as the war progressed, handling at least 2,000 messages every day for the last years of the war. At the peak, some 545 staff worked in Hut 3, mixed civilian and military working together in remarkable harmony. Though rightly renowned for its astonishing cryptographic work, it was the quality of Intelligence provided by Bletchley Park, based on an accumulated mass of information, which earned the respect of Whitehall and the Commands.

Eric Jones was a genuinely modest man in the midst of what he saw as clever boffins, but in fact he was a brilliant administrator. Promoted to Group Captain, towards the end of the war Jones was much involved in the planning for GCHQ, leading the Intelligence delegation to Washington in November 1945. He returned the following year to GCHQ, taking over the leadership from Edward Travis in the spring of 1952. He was knighted in 1957 and retired in 1960, aged 53, for as he said: *'Eight years as Director is quite long enough'*. He died in

Gloucester in 1986. A more difficult and exposed position than that of the head of Hut 3 it is difficult to imagine.