

Sir Edward Travis

1888 – 1956

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

Edward 'Jumbo' Travis was the Deputy Head of GCCS from its formation in 1919, taking over as Head from February 1942. He continued as Director of its successor body, GCHQ, retiring in April 1952. He provided strong leadership for the cryptographic activities of the UK at Bletchley Park as his team grew to about 9,000, contracting to less than 2,000 in 1946, and planned the transfer of the agency, now growing again, to Eastcote. Travis built up the Intelligence partnership with the USA.

Edward Wilfrid Harry Travis was born on 24 September 1888 at Plumstead Common, Kent. After school he joined the Royal Navy in 1906, being commissioned three years later. He was appointed on the first day of World War 1 to the staff of Admiral Jellicoe as a signals officer. He demonstrated the vulnerability of the Admiral's code by breaking it, then did the same for the improved version. He was accordingly transferred to the Admiralty, with responsibilities for the security of all naval codes.

When GCCS was formed in October 1919, Lt Cdr Travis was appointed deputy to Alastair Denniston, with responsibilities for the security of all our codes and ciphers. In October 1938, he was made responsible under Alastair Denniston, for the three service sections of GCCS, in addition to his code-construction responsibilities. Discussions with Gordon Welchman in the early days of World War 2 led to Travis obtaining funding from Whitehall for the Enigma decryption production huts, and the building of the first Bombe. Travis was given responsibility for the Enigma decryption teams in November 1939, taking a room in Hut 8. So it was to him that Gordon Welchman and Alan Turing reported through the initial growth of the Enigma teams.

When, in October 1941, the four 'wicked uncles', Welchman, Turing and their deputies, Stuart Milner-Barry and Hugh Alexander, wrote directly to Churchill complaining about the lack of human resources, they ensured that the blame did not fall on Travis: *'We do not know who or what is responsible for our difficulties, and most emphatically we do not want to be criticising Commander Travis who has all along done his utmost to help us in every way possible'*. Churchill decided in February 1942 that Edward Travis should take over from Alastair Denniston as head of the services team at Bletchley Park, reporting now directly to the head of MI6, Sir Stewart Menzies ('C'). Edward Travis was a man for whom his team felt great respect rather than love. He was always known as 'Jumbo', no doubt partly because of his rather heavy handed approach as well as his somewhat rotund figure. He has been described as *'gruff, rough, and burly'* but he also could attract considerable affection. The brown ink he always used for his memos became known as *'the Director's blood'*. He was a superb administrator, who was to guide the growth of Bletchley Park to 8,900 staff three years later.

Travis rapidly strengthened the management of Bletchley Park. An inspired appointment was that of Sqn Ldr Eric Jones to head the Hut 3 Intelligence team. Jones had not been to University, knew no German, and had run a large textile agency. He was to succeed Travis as Director of GCHQ in 1952. Travis could show remarkable insight, such as his strong encouragement of machine methods. One of his lasting achievements was the partnership with the USA. He had married Muriel Fry in 1913; one of their daughters, Valerie, worked at Bletchley Park. He was knighted (KCMG) in 1944. After the war he managed the run down in staff, GCHQ reaching 2,000 in 1946, and then expanding again.

The Travises went to live at Pirbright in Surrey, where he died on 18 April 1956. His strong leadership of GCCS had overseen *'the greatest achievement of the UK in the 20th century'*.