

SIR WILLIAM SAMUEL STEPHENSON



Sir William Samuel Stephenson was a Canadian soldier, airman, businessman, inventor, spymaster, and the senior representative of British intelligence for the entire western hemisphere during World War II. Stephenson is best-known by his wartime intelligence codename of "Intrepid".

Early Life

Born January 11, 1896 at Point Douglas near Winnipeg, Manitoba, he attended high school in Winnipeg, leaving to volunteer for the 101st Regiment of the Canadian Army Engineers at the outbreak of World War I and earning a field promotion to Sergeant in the trenches before he turned 19. While recovering from being gassed in 1916, Stephenson learned to fly and then transferred to the British Royal Flying Corps on August 16, 1917. Posted to 73 Squadron on February 9, 1918, Stephenson flew the British Sopwith Camel fighter biplane and scored 12 victories before he was shot down and captured by the Germans on July 28, 1918.

By the end of World War I he had achieved the rank of Captain and earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Military Cross, the Croix de Guerre avec Palmes and the Legion d'Honneur. His medal citations perhaps foreshadow his later achievements, and read:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When flying low and observing an open staff car on a road, he attacked it with such success that later it was seen lying in the ditch upside down. During the same flight he caused a stampede amongst some enemy transport horses on a road. Previous to this he had destroyed a hostile scout and a two-seater plane. His work has been of the highest order, and he has shown the greatest courage and energy in engaging every kind of target." - Military Cross citation, Supplement to the London Gazette, June 22, 1918

"This officer has shown conspicuous gallantry and skill in attacking enemy troops and transports from low altitudes, causing heavy casualties. His reports, also, have contained valuable and accurate information. He has further proved himself a keen antagonist in the air, having, during recent operations, accounted for six enemy aeroplanes." - Distinguished Flying Cross citation, Supplement to the London Gazette, September 21 1918

Between the Wars

After the war, he became a wealthy industrialist with business contacts in many countries. In 1924, he married Mary French Simmons of Springfield, Tennessee, and celebrated their marriage by transmitting her photograph across the Atlantic by radio. This was the very first time a photograph had ever been transmitted across an ocean; Stephenson had invented the process.

As early as April 1936, Stephenson was voluntarily providing confidential information to the British, passing on detailed information to British opposition MP Winston Churchill about how Hitler's Nazi government was building up its armed forces and hiding military expenditures of eight hundred million pounds sterling. This was a clear violation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and showed the growing Nazi threat to European and international security; Churchill used Stephenson's information in Parliament to warn against the appeasement policies of the government of Neville Chamberlain.

World War II

After World War II began (and over the objections of Sir Stewart Menzies, wartime head of British intelligence) now-Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent Stephenson to the United States on June 21, 1940, to covertly open and run the British Security Co-Ordination Service (BSC) in New York City, over a year prior to the US entering the war.

The BSC office, headquartered in room 3603 in Rockefeller Center, became an umbrella organization that by the end of the war represented the British intelligence agencies MI5, MI6 (SIS or Secret Intelligence Service), SOE (Special Operations Executive) and PWE (Political Warfare Executive) throughout North America, South America and the Caribbean.

Stephenson's initial directives for BSC were 1) to investigate enemy activities, 2) institute security measures against the threat of sabotage to British property, and 3) organize American public opinion in favor of aid to Britain. Later this was expanded to include "the assurance of American participation in secret activities throughout the world in the closest possible collaboration with the British."

Stephenson's official title was British Passport Control Officer. His unofficial mission was to create a secret British intelligence network throughout the western hemisphere, and to operate covertly and very broadly on behalf of the British government and the Allies in aid of winning the war. He also became Churchill's personal representative to [US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#).

Stephenson was soon a very close advisor to President Roosevelt, and suggested to Roosevelt that he put Stephenson's good friend William J. 'Wild Bill' Donovan in charge of all US intelligence services. Donovan founded the US

wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which eventually became the Central Intelligence Agency.

In his role as the senior representative of British intelligence in the western hemisphere, Stephenson was one of the few people in the hemisphere authorized to view raw Ultra transcripts from the British Bletchley Park codebreaking of German Enigma ciphers. He was trusted by Churchill to decide what Ultra information to pass along to various branches of the US and Canadian governments.

Under Stephenson, the BSC directly influenced US media (including the writing of American newspaper columnists Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson) and other media in the hemisphere towards pro-British and anti-Axis viewpoints. Once the US had entered the war, BSC then went on to train US propagandists from the American Office of War Information in Canada from 1941-1944. BSC covert intelligence and propaganda efforts directly affected wartime developments in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Mexico, the Central American countries, Bermuda, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Not least in Stephenson's accomplishments and contributions to the war effort was the setting up by BSC of Camp X in Whitby, Ontario, the first training school for clandestine wartime operations in North America. Around 2,000 British, Canadian and American covert operators were trained here from 1941 through 1945, including students from the ISO, OSS, FBI, RCMP, US Navy and US Military Intelligence services, and the Office of War Information.

Graduates of Camp X operated in Europe in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and the Balkans as well as in Africa, Australia, India, and the Pacific. They included Ian Fleming, later the author of the popular James Bond books. It has been said Goldfinger's fictional raid on Fort Knox was inspired by a Stephenson plan (never carried out) to steal \$2,883,000,000 in Vichy French gold reserves from the French Caribbean colony of Martinique.

BSC purchased a ten-kilowatt transmitter from Philadelphia radio station WCAU and installed the transmitter at Camp X. By mid-1944, Hydra was transmitting 30,000 and receiving 9,000 message groups daily, much of the secret Allied intelligence traffic across the Atlantic.

Recognition and honors

In 1989, Sir William Stephenson died in Paget, Bermuda at the age of 93. While there has since been at times some dispute over the exact nature and extent of his wartime efforts, there is no doubt his contributions were many, and extraordinary.

For his wartime work, Stephenson was knighted by the British in the 1945 New Year's Honours List. In 1946, he received the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award of the United States. He was the first non-US citizen to receive the medal. General Donovan presented Stephenson with the award and the citation paid tribute to his "invaluable assistance to America in the fields of intelligence and special operations".

"The Quiet Canadian" was formally recognized by his home and native land late in his life; William Stephenson was made a Companion of the Order of Canada on December 17, 1979 and invested in the Order on February 5, 1980.

On May 2, 2000 CIA Executive Director David W. Carey, representing DCI George Tenet and DDCI John Gordon, accepted a bronze maquette (replica) statute of Sir William Stephenson, which was given to the CIA by the Intrepid Society of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In his remarks, Carey said:

"Sir William Stephenson played a key role in the creation of the CIA. He realized early on that America needed a strong intelligence organization and lobbied contacts close to President Roosevelt to appoint a US "coordinator" to oversee FBI and military intelligence. He urged that the job be given to William J. 'Wild Bill' Donovan, who had recently toured British defenses and gained the confidence of Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Although Roosevelt didn't establish exactly what Sir William had in mind, the organization created represented a revolutionary step in the history of American intelligence. Donovan's Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was the first 'central' US intelligence service. OSS worked closely with and learned from Sir William and other Canadian and British officials during the war. A little later, these OSS officers formed the core of the CIA. Intrepid may not have technically been the father of CIA, but he's certainly in our lineage someplace."

In recommending Stephenson for knighthood, Winston Churchill wrote "This One is Dear to My Heart."

Links

- The Intrepid Society of Winnipeg, Manitoba (<http://www.mts.net/~syddavy/index.htm>)
- Article on Stephenson from *Finest Hour*, a publication of The Churchill Centre (<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=751>)
- Camp X Historical Society (<http://www.campxhistoricalsociety.ca/index1.htm>)
- Camp-X Official Site (<http://webhome.idirect.com/~lhodgson/campx.htm>)
- Room 3603, by H. Montgomery Hyde, with a foreword by Ian Fleming (1962)

This biography from: <http://www.medaloffreedom.com/WilliamStephenson.htm>