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Confidential Filing

Article by Duncan Campbell in the New Statesman suggesting CIA and NSA monitoring of international telegrams and telephone calls at Menwith Hill.

SECURITY

July 1980

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
28. 7. 80							
PREM 19 / 358							

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Security ³

CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

A02741

28 July 1980

Menwith Hill

hw
28/7

I sent Paul Wright in Sir Brian Cubbon's office a copy of Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 24 July to the Prime Minister about the Home Secretary's reply to the letter which he has received from Mr Robin Cook and other MPs.

Clive Whitmore has asked me to let you know that the Prime Minister has said that she is content for the Home Secretary to reply to Mr Cook in the terms of the draft at Annex C to Sir Robert's minute (i.e. the draft reply originally prepared by the Home Office). I am sending a copy of this letter to Clive Whitmore.

D. J. WRIGHT

(D. J. Wright)

J. F. Halliday Esq

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

MENWITH HILL

The Prime Minister has seen your minute AO2719 of 24 July 1980 about the letter from Mr. Robin Cook and other MPs to the Home Secretary about last week's New Statesman article on Menwith Hill.

She is content for the Home Secretary to reply to Mr. Cook in the terms of the draft at Annex ^C to your minute. I take it that Mr. Wright will let the Home Secretary's office know.

✓ Please see comment to
Mr Wright.

JRH.

JRH.

25 July 1980

SECRET

82



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister .

mk

Sir Roberts office feel
that you should see
this tonight as you are
seeing the Home Secretary
tomorrow morning and
many wish to speak to
him about it.

I have not shown
this to any private Secretary
in No. 10.

Janis [Signature] 24/7
— Duty Clerk



The National Archives

LETTERCODE/SERIES <i>PREM 19</i>	Date and sign
PIECE/ITEM <i>358</i> (one piece/item number)	
Extract/Item details: <i>Minute from Armstrong to Prime Minister dated 24 July 1980 (A.02719)</i>	
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America's big ear on Europe

'Tinkerbell' — the national phone-tap centre which the *New Statesman* revealed in February — is only one small part of a massive exercise in spying on civil and commercial communications. A much bigger role is played by America's highly secretive National Security Agency (NSA), operating from a remarkable base at Menwith Hill, eight miles west of Harrogate in Yorkshire.

Menwith Hill — unless the KGB has something even bigger — appears to be the biggest tapping centre in the world. From its heavily guarded operations room a special high-capacity cable runs underground to the Post Office microwave tower at Hunters Stones five miles away: this provides an umbilical link into the international telephone and telex system running through Britain. A direct tap which is placed on lines to France and elsewhere in Europe has been in operation for more than 15 years.

Five year ago Congressional inquiries uncovered some traces of the NSA's wholesale interception of American and other civilian communications. But the agency has stubbornly resisted all subsequent attempts to discuss any details of its \$10-12 billion-worth of operations — so much so as to arouse judicial suspicions that they are unconstitutional. Menwith Hill, with rather more than 800 employees working round the clock to gather political, military and economic intelligence, is the largest NSA civilian listening-post — reflecting Britain's strategic position in the world communications net — but even trivial details have been kept secret from the US Congress. Here DUNCAN CAMPBELL and LINDA MELVERN begin the process of enlightenment.

THE MENWITH HILL BASE covers 562 closely-guarded acres of the Yorkshire Moors, festooned with a remarkable array of satellite-tracking aerials. Its business for more than fifteen years has been sifting the communications of private citizens, corporations and governments for information of political or economic value to the US intelligence community: and since the early 1960s its close partner in an operation of ever-growing technical sophistication has been the British Post Office.

The Post Office has built Menwith Hill into the heart of Britain's national communications system — and Britain, of course, occupies a nodal position in the communications of the world, especially those of Western Europe. It is not an exaggeration to say that the first stage of the Post Office's microwave network was constructed around Menwith Hill and its operations: at least five high-capacity networks feed into the base, from all parts of Britain, through the nearby Post Office tower at Hunters Stones (see map, and illustration).

One tap which we can anatomise in considerable detail — due to the documentary indiscretion of a Ministry of Works surveyor — connects at least 3,600 London-to-Paris phone lines to the listeners at Menwith Hill.

The Ministry of Defence said last week that the station 'exists with the full approval of the British government'. They did not deny that it intercepted international civil communications on a massive scale but a spokesman claimed that it did not listen in on calls across the Atlantic to or from Britain, 'or any domestic calls in the UK'.

This cautious and partial denial — the Post Office, as always, declines to discuss questions of interception — fails to deal with most of the points we have put to the Ministry. No attempt is made to deny the interception of phone calls to and from Europe, including those from North America: nor is the interception of non-telephone communication, such as telex and telegram traffic, denied. Since most of the operations of the 'big ear' at Menwith Hill would presumably be concentrated on the European side of Britain's communications,

the MoD does not appear to be denying any pertinent part of our description. Given the almost total unreliability of official statements about communications interception, it is hard to know how seriously to take any part of the MoD's attempts to explain away the remarkable facilities at Menwith Hill. We have acquired some evidence suggesting that one of the base's minor roles involves the interception of phone-calls between Ireland and the UK: some gesture towards assistance with the anti-IRA campaign might make the existence of Menwith Hill more palatable to the host government. The MoD has refused to comment on suggestions that Menwith Hill could run taps on individual phone lines in Britain — such as those of people campaigning against cruise missile deployment. And a recent statement by a former USAF colonel who supervised some National Security Agency operations during the sixties reinforces the point that everything going across the Atlantic can be read by the NSA somewhere. Col. Fletcher Prouty stated in October 1979 that:

there are three satellites over the Atlantic, each capable of transmitting on about 20,000 circuits. There are eight transatlantic cables with about 5,000 circuits. NSA monitors all these circuits, collects and records the electronic information transmitted, and its computers can pick out the messages it wants by 'key words'.

Every aspect of Menwith Hill's operations is shrouded in secrecy. But we have been informed that it was specifically identified, during secret sessions of the 1975 Congressional hearings on US intelligence agencies, and described as the larger of two centres for tapping telephone lines in Europe. Three past and present US intelligence officials also confirmed the role of the base from first hand knowledge.

One ex-NSA analyst told us that he had seen a document giving the 'secret all-civilian base' authority for 'tapping the telephone lines to Europe'. A high ranking intelligence consultant, who still works for the US intelligence community, told us that he was aware of Menwith Hill's elaborate telephone and telex tapping facilities. He had inspected the station over 15 years ago, and agreed that it was still

engaged in tapping; 'I know it for sure', he said.

One former British military officer has had occasion to visit Menwith Hill's computer vaults. He discovered that 'it intercepts telephone and other communications to and from the United States and Europe. Computers file intelligence dossiers on European political and trades union leaders.'

THE BASE WAS first planned in 1954, but did not start operations until 1960. Initially, it was run by the US Army Security Agency, the military monitoring arm of the NSA. In September 1960, a US Army general inaugurated Menwith Hill as the 13th US Army Security Agency Field Station.

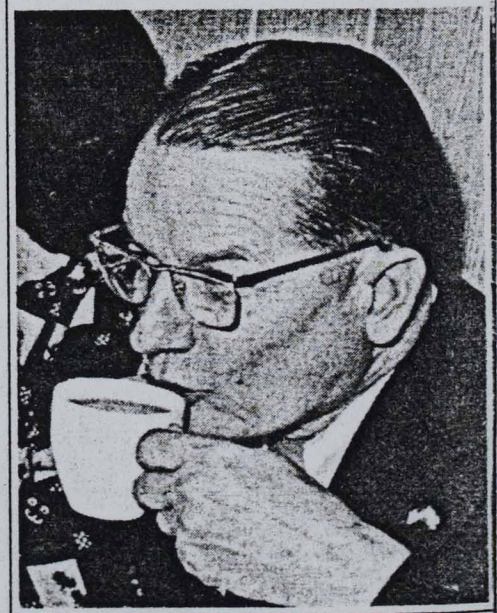
The Post Office scheme of secret links also began in 1954, and the planning and construction of both the base and its tapping network proceeded side by side until the early 1960s. The tapping network was concealed within a Post Office plan for a chain of microwave radio towers like the one in central London; this system, named 'Backbone', was supposedly going to provide emergency links if Britain was attacked. But when, after some delay, Backbone was completed, it turned out to be feeding signals into the intelligence base at Menwith Hill instead.

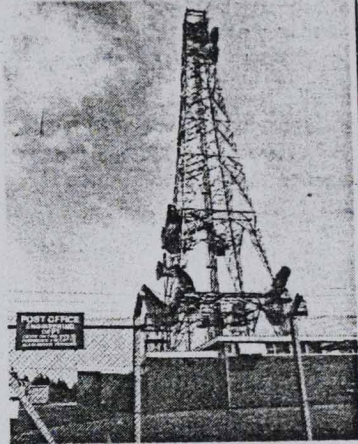
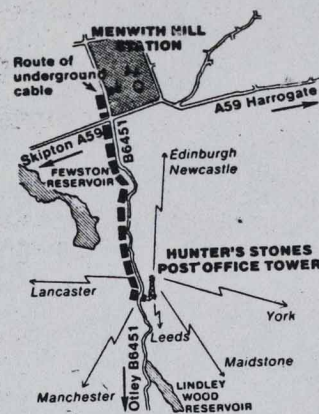
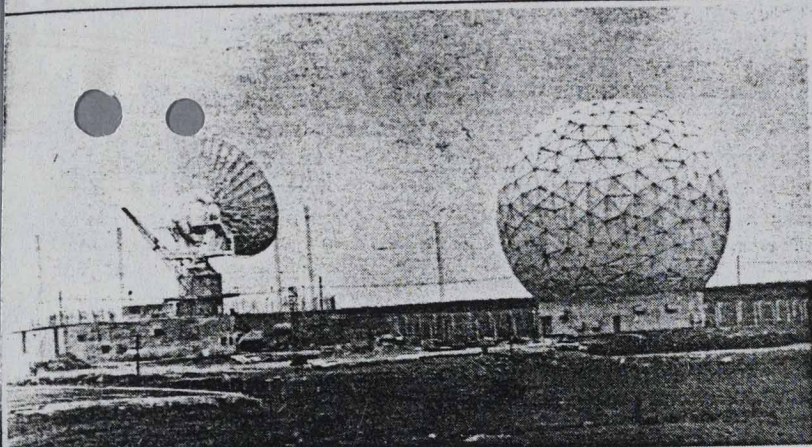
In August 1966, both the 13th ASA Field Station and a subsidiary base at Kirknewton near Edinburgh abruptly closed. Civilians from the National Security Agency took Menwith Hill over entirely, and it became, as it has remained, self-contained and ultra-secret.

The legality of the NSA's operations in Yorkshire may be open to doubt. Under

Brady D.A. 17 Castle Clo, Killinghall	Harrogate 56467
Brady E. 10 Roseville Rd	Harrogate 884245
Brady John, 18 Park House Gln	Harrogate 55941
Brady L.G. 14 Greenfields Dv	Harrogate 887810
Brady P.J. 9 Deep Ghyll Croft	Ripon 5678
Braeuninger A.D. 111 Menwith Hill Stn	Harrogate 770912
Bralisford F. 159 Otley Rd	Harrogate 69051
Braim Paul, 11 Dale Clo, Hamsthwaite	Harrogate 7705
Braime J.L. 7 York Pl, Knaresboro	Harrogate 863F
Braime J.S. 33 Glebe Meadow, Sharow	Ripon
26a West Park	Harrogate

Albert Dale Braeuninger is the Chief of NSA's Menwith Hill Station. Although he claims to work for the US Department of Defence, his name does not appear in any of the last twenty-five years' DoD directories. Above: Harrogate telephone directory listing.





Menwith Hill Station (left) is the largest and most secret civilian overseas base of the giant US National Security Agency. Its 'dragnet' monitoring of international telephone and telex lines depends on a special Post Office network of microwave radio connections, which coverage on the tower at Hunters Stones (right), west of Harrogate, Yorks. From here, a high capacity underground cable (map, centre) runs along the B6451-road, and crosses the Skipton-Harrogate road into the base.

section 4 of the Official Secrets Act of 1920, any Secretary of State can issue a warrant for the interception of telegrams and telephone calls in and out of Britain. But the Post Office Act of 1969, which was used to justify domestic telephone tapping last year, only allows Post Office employees to intercept telephone calls for 'crown servants'. Americans are not crown servants.

The Post Office has refused to comment, and says that interception 'is dealt with by the Home Office'. Peter Archer MP, who as Solicitor General last year defended the government's orthodox tapping in criminal cases, told the *New Statesman* this week that such a massive snooping exercise 'was clearly not intended by parliament in passing the two Acts.'

Last week the MoD were 'not prepared to answer' when asked how many people worked at Menwith Hill. But a 1974 release dealing with the installation of one of its conspicuous tracking dishes said it had a staff of 800, and since then its facilities have certainly expanded considerably. All employees have to work under rigid security control. Family members are ordered never to mention 'NSA', and all, including children aged twelve and over, are instructed to report all contacts with 'foreign nationals'. Officials and their families have been quickly sent home for even minor indiscretions of teenage children.

NSA surveillance of international telephone lines was admitted officially when CIA Director William Colby appeared before the Pike Committee on Intelligence in 1975. But no details were revealed.

Since Colby's statement, NSA has faced repeated action in the Supreme Court by individuals and groups whose ordinary and legal civil communications were intercepted. NSA has repeatedly refused to disclose details of how it came to intercept their phone calls or telegrams, pleading that disclosure would damage 'vital SIGINT (signals intelligence) sources'.

Heading the list of facilities which NSA does not wish discussed in public is Menwith Hill. So far, no court has forced NSA to the point of disclosure, but some have decided that NSA's reluctance implies that they have illegally breached the US Constitution.

FIVE MILES SOUTH of Menwith Hill, a freshly painted sign marked 'Post Office Engineering Department - Private' denies access to a small patch of hilltop land. Within the woods is the Hunters Stones Post

Office Tower, 320 feet high. Although isolated in the moors and away from all Britain's major urban areas, this tower has a greater communications capacity than almost all others in the system. Hunters Stones is virtually the pivotal point of more than a million route-miles of microwave radio connections which have been installed in Britain.

The microwave network links-up Britain by sending thousands of phone-calls (or other messages) along radio-beams between towers roughly thirty miles apart. Many of the details of the system are physically observable, or can be worked-out from information which has to be routinely published for engineers and others: exhaustive analysis of this material shows at least five routes feed into the Hunters Stones tower which are not used for television, telex or even orthodox defence purposes such as links to early-warning stations. Although there are conceivably even more exotic explanations for all this surplus microwave power, the obvious one is that the 'mystery' beams are taps upon various aspects of the whole system — and, in the case of the tap on the London-Paris beam, it can be traced in detail.

From a small, well-protected engineering building at the base of the Hunters Stones tower, a remotely controlled television camera, installed since enquiries were first made to the PO about the station's purpose, keeps a careful watch on anyone approaching. Below ground, five cables are installed in a small tunnel which runs beside the road north to Menwith Hill. One of these cables, paid for and installed by the Americans themselves three years ago, is the principal feed to Menwith Hill. Although only about two inches in diameter, it is protected — very unusually for robust trunk cables — by being laid in an aluminium tray within the tunnel. Such a construction indicates a massive capacity — equivalent to up to 32,000 telephone lines — which is achieved by sending very high frequency radio signals along the cable.

We visited PO engineers who were working to replace a manhole cover on the cable tunnel. They described the cable but did not know its purpose. They said that if anything went wrong with the Americans' cable 'all hell would break loose'. The engineers were subsequently warned not to speak to reporters.

During March, a colleague photographed the secret US cable in its protective tray. Since then, however, a literal cover-up has taken place. When a *New Statesman* photographer

visited the area last week, new covers had been installed over the cable and padlocked down, concealing it from view. The new covers are in addition to the normal manhole covers, which are 8 inches thick and weigh several hundredweight. The sign and surveillance camera at Hunters Stones are also new.

The Menwith Hill Station Commander, Albert D Braeuninger, does not deny the existence of the link to the Post Office. In an interview, he explained:

We pass information through the UK communications system. Our line is cable . . . it is purely a communications link. We only use the Hunters Stones power as a customer of the Post Office.

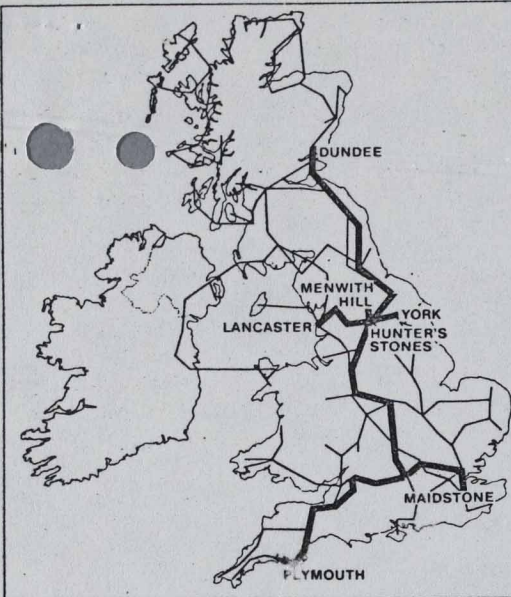
Another NSA official has acknowledged that the main cable to Hunters Stones was indeed 'high capacity'. The Post Office have refused to answer any questions, and will only say that 'Hunters Stones is one of our microwave relay stations. The details of routing of circuits over the microwave network is something we don't discuss publicly'.

MENWITH HILL is completely and carefully isolated from the local community. Many of its staff live on an estate within the base security fence, or on other specially built housing estates. All their supplies come from a duty free 'PX' shop, and the base has its own water supply, generators, sewage facilities, fire station, petrol station, restaurants and entertainment facilities. The outer perimeter is guarded by Ministry of Defence police, who have no idea as to the purpose of the base. They maintain regular patrols, which question anyone stopping in the vicinity. The heart of the base is two massive concrete operations blocks, both extending several floors below ground, housing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of computer, communications, and satellite tracking equipment. The 'ops' area is surrounded by a triple wire fence and has armed guards.

Even outside the operations area, many of offices can only be entered by means of combination lock codes. Although base commander Braeuninger claimed that the base was a joint facility, the spouse of a former senior Menwith Hill official gave a different account:

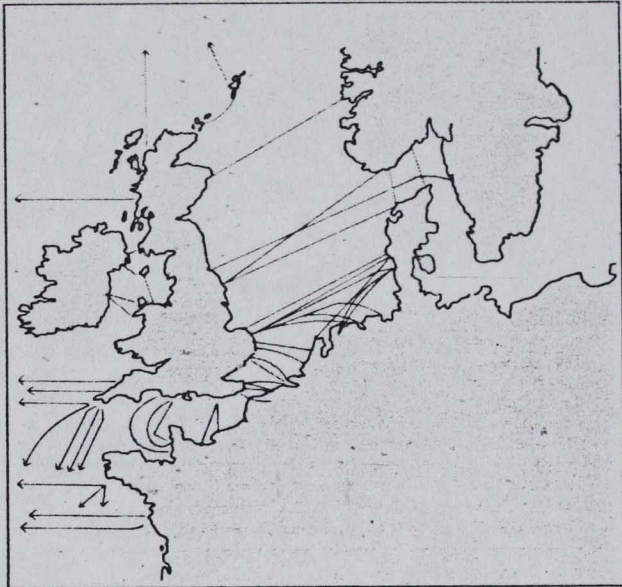
There were no high ranking Brits. They did all the menial jobs like cleaning, maintenance and electricians for the houses.

The security precautions were intense;



International connections . . . and taps

Britain is the hub of international communications to, from and within Europe. The international network (map, right) is composed of submarine cables and satellite ground stations; Britain's position means that London handles most transatlantic traffic, as well as calls to and from Scandinavia, and northern and eastern Europe. In the early 1960s, the special network of Post Office towers and links was built to feed national and international connections into Menwith Hill. Below Jim Haynes, a former analyst for NSA at the USAF station at Kirknewton, near Edinburgh.



Anyone over 12 going abroad is briefed first. I was taken to Fort Meade (NSA headquarters near Washington) and had a session with a security officer on my own. (No-one else) was allowed to be present. I was told that if I made friends with 'foreign nationals' — that included Brits — I was to tell my security officer assigned to me . . . We were never to mention NSA.

Such secrecy extends to US Congressional Committees, to whom Menwith Hill is a 'classified location' whose operations cannot be divulged. During a March 1976 appropriations hearing, NSA's Assistant Director for Installations and Logistics, Brigadier General Charles Knudson, asked for appropriations to lease 274 family houses for 'a classified location overseas'. In fact, NSA only has one overseas civilian installation of any size — Menwith Hill. More housing was required 'due to relocation of overseas missions and assumption of a new mission'. The secret station's work, he said, required 47 dwellings at various locations and, revealingly, 'two . . . leases (for) our senior representatives at London, England'.

THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE of Menwith Hill, to the casual visitor, is the array of satellite communications aerials, tracking dishes and protective 'radomes', which amply fill its skyline. Menwith Hill's space communications facilities have boomed since the first two dishes were installed in 1974. There are now eight, forming part of NSA's worldwide network linking Fort Meade with bases in Germany and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean — and making Menwith Hill perhaps the largest known satellite communications terminal in the world.

The purpose of this massive capacity is not entirely apparent. According to one US government communications official, it includes ground stations for top secret CIA and NSA satellites designed to monitor civil communications from countries whose telecommunications administrations are less obliging than the British Post Office. These satellites, colloquially known as 'Sigint birds', include CIA projects RHYOLITE and ARGUS, whose existence was only revealed recently during a spy trial in Los Angeles. (Rhyolite is a dull volcanic rock containing colourful bits of quartz and feldspar — an apt label for a programme which is concerned with hosing-up via satellite masses of communications and using computer power to select items of interest.)

CIA officials, as well as those of NSA, work at Menwith Hill. One of them, Larry Schott (now returned to the US), was indiscreet enough to produce his identity card — clearly marked 'Central Intelligence Agency' — to a respected Harrogate journalist a few years ago during a particularly lively party.

Despite such slips, the worst that Harrogate has ever heard about Menwith Hill was a rumour in the early 1970s that the operations blocks were a centre for breeding 'killer flies'. This rumour was, very reasonably, denied.

THE WORLD HAD little idea of the scale of this operation until 6 August 1975, when CIA Director William Colby faced determined questioning from Democrat Les Aspin, on the Pike Congressional Committee, about NSA monitoring of 'telephone calls between American citizens and foreigners abroad'. Colby replied that:

The Agency does monitor foreign communications . . . that go abroad or are abroad. (Traffic with a US citizen at one end) cannot be separated from the traffic that is being monitored.

Neither he nor NSA Director General Lew Allen would go further in open session.

We have, however, obtained copies of both the secret Pike report (which was later leaked to the *Village Voice* newspaper) and further details of the secret testimony on the monitoring of all foreign communications traffic. In 1976, the Pike Committee reported that:

NSA systematically intercepts international communications, both voice and cable. Messages to and from American citizens have been picked up in the course of gathering foreign intelligence.

During the secret hearing of the Pike Committee, NSA Director Allen gave a more detailed account of how this occurred. According to one firsthand source, Allen did identify two principal British sites for this project — one in the Harrogate area and the other in 'southern England'.

But the operation which could be partially glimpsed in post-Watergate inquiries into the intelligence-agencies' operations had been quietly growing ever since 1945 — it represents, as in Britain, a determination by secret bureaucracies to hold onto powers acquired during the Second World War, and expand them into new technological environments. Four days after VJ day, the Army Security Agency told the American commercial communications corporations that they

must continue to hand over copies of all overseas telegrams.

The companies were uneasy, for to do so in peacetime was illegal, but the procedure became institutionalised under the title SHAMROCK, being taken over by the NSA when it succeeded to the Army Security Agency's operations in the fifties.

By spring 1975 the Senate Intelligence Committee under Senator Frank Church finally got wind of SHAMROCK, and in May it was abruptly dropped as being of no further value as 'a source of foreign intelligence'. Although SHAMROCK was no doubt obsolete by comparison with the facilities at Menwith Hill and elsewhere, the NSA fought bitterly to prevent any discussion of it.

They denied access to papers, and tried — after Colby's admission about the scale of NSA trawling — to entice the committee into deeply secret briefings. When Congresswoman Bella Abzug summoned NSA officials and papers, the NSA tried to invoke 'executive privilege', and, angered, the Church Committee called public hearings of SHAMROCK and other NSA operations spying on international civil communications. Church himself led off with a bold description of NSA:

The name (of NSA) is unknown to most Americans. (Yet it) is an immense installation. In its task of collecting intelligence by intercepting foreign communications, the NSA employs thousands of people and operates with an enormous budget. Its expansive computer facilities comprise some of the most complex and sophisticated machinery in the world.

NSA, 'the largest and least known' intelligence agency was also the 'most reticent':

While it sweeps in messages from around the world, it gives out precious little information about itself . . . no statute establishes the NSA or defines the permissible scope of its activities



Church concluded triumphantly:

We will bring the agency from behind closed doors.

THE CHURCH COMMITTEE didn't quite do that. While they exposed SHAMROCK and other illegal NSA operations, they gave no public indication whether similar activities were continuing. In fact, SHAMROCK had started becoming obsolete in 1962, when NSA was able to sort electronically the information wanted . . . against its selection criteria.'

Few specific details of these electronic searches are known. We have however pieced together details of HARVEST, a massive NSA computer purpose-built by IBM, which was delivered to NSA headquarters in 1962.

HARVEST was the biggest computer built until the late 60s. At its centre was an IBM processor known as STRETCH, coupled to HARVEST units which were capable of sifting intercepted communications at phenomenal speed. HARVEST could look for words of intelligence significance while working at a rate of 4 million characters a second — roughly equivalent to reading, sorting and filing everything in a large daily newspaper in less than a second. (It was also specially designed for codebreaking).

Menwith Hill we have learnt, received a similar but smaller IBM computer at about the same time, based on an IBM 7094 processor.

These computers, and manual analysts elsewhere, used then and still use a procedure called 'watch lists' for sorting information. The watch lists contain names of political figures, businesses, and other topics of interest.

The extent of NSA surveillance of targets unrelated to 'national security' is breathtaking. From published articles, and private information from more than half a dozen former NSA employees, we have compiled an extensive list of organisations or individuals whose calls and telegrams were intercepted, or who were on 'watch lists'. They include:

Former US Attorneys-General Ramsay Clark and Robert F Kennedy; Texas Governor John Connally; civil rights and black activists Jane Fonda, Dr Benjamin Spock, Tom Hayden, Rev Ralph Abernathy (who succeeded Martin Luther King), Eldridge Cleaver, Abbie Hoffman, Stokely Carmichael; foreign leaders Holden Roberto and Robert Mugabe; Detroit attorney Abdeen Jabara, who defended Robert Kennedy's alleged killer; Occidental Oil Corporation; the Scientology organisation; and so on

Messages referring to these and others, including 75,000 US citizens, had been compiled by NSA computers and analysts up to 1974. Naturally, the US names featuring in NSA files are a small proportion of the Agency's output. The Church Committee noted that 'the great majority of names on the watch list have always been foreign citizens and organisations.' Their composition would be similar to that of the US list:

members of radical political groups, from celebrities to ordinary citizens involved in protests against their government.

During 1974, the NSA collection of hundreds of thousands of files on foreign citizens and organisations was transferred to a new computer databank, called COINS (Community Online Intelligence System), which is used by NSA, CIA and the Defence Intelligence Agency, DIA. NSA is, according to one COINS analyst, by far the largest user. COINS is now used to file much of the information

originating from bases like Menwith Hill. Its scope is broad, according to one report. By 1974, its spread of US citizens under surveillance included:

prominent Americans in business, the performing arts and politics, including members of Congress.

It is worth noting, of course, that over the same period the British signals-intelligence agency, GCHQ, has conducted — without quite such lavish technical support — a very similar operation monitoring telegram traffic in Britain. Details were exposed in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Sketch* during 1967.

THE HISTORIES of Menwith Hill, Hunters Stones and the NSA itself have been closely — if very privately — intertwined for 25 years. NSA was formed in 1952, and ordered to monitor foreign communications under a top secret and still classified directive called NSCID-6. In October 1952, NSA took control of the interception operations of the US armed forces, including ASA and the US Air Force Security Service, which had just started two bases at Chicksands, near Bedford, and Kirknewton, a few miles west of Edinburgh.

Recently declassified files in the United States National Archives indicate that a critical and secret meeting to plan Anglo-American communications and electronic activities was due to take place two years later, between two civil service committees. These were the British Joint Communications Electronics Board (part of the Cabinet Office), and its US equivalent. Declassified correspondence shows that the NSA's forerunner, the ASA, was involved in this planning.

The meeting was scheduled for 11 October 1954, but no record of the actual meeting or its agenda can now be found in the archives. Inquiries of official archivists have elicited a response that the meeting never, in the end, took place as 'joint objectives had already been agreed'.

By the end of October 1954, War Office surveyors were on site at Menwith Hill. The Post Office simultaneously began plans for its 'Backbone' microwave tower chain, and these were described in the February 1955 White Paper:

The Post Office are planning . . . a special network both by cable and by radio, designed to maintain long distance communication in the event of attack.

This was mostly misleading flannel. In April 1955, local MP James Ramsden was told that the site was to become a 'US Army radio station'. Construction began in April 1956 and an initial seven US army personnel set up on 1 May 1956. The following year, it was retitled the 13th US Army Security Agency Field Station. But then nothing happened until June 1959.

Precisely the same delays afflicted the Post Office's plans, which were first laid in detail during 1955. We have obtained 'confidential' copies of most of these early plans, which were supplied by the PO at the time to the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE). A detailed map, dated June 1956, shows a chain of 14 towers running roughly from London to Carlisle, via Manchester and Birmingham. The new stations would provide Britain with its first long distance radio microwave network — until then, such systems had only been used in an isolated and *ad hoc* way for carrying television.

The 1956 plan and subsequent

developments show that the Hunters Stones tower was, unacknowledged, at the centre of the system. This emerges in various ways:

- The Post Office had already built a microwave system from Manchester to Scotland, which ran through Leeds. But when the new system was built, it was routed also through an additional and technically wholly unnecessary tower just ten miles from Leeds, at Hunters Stones.
- The Hunter's Stones tower came under intense environmental pressure, like many others. The Post Office shifted the two towers just north of Hunters Stones and the one immediately south, back to existing sites. But they refused to move the new site at Hunters Stones.
- Resiting the other towers meant that Hunters Stones would have to be built a costly 200 feet taller to take special links. They still refused to move it.
- The system was eventually built through Hunters Stones as planned. Soon after, east-west links were added to the system, running to York and Lancaster. Four separate links then joined up at Hunters Stones.

LATE IN 1956, EVERYTHING came to a halt. Both Post Office and Menwith Hill plans went into suspended animation until early in 1959. In the meantime, the Post Office dried up; a letter to CPRE, in December 1956, refers to 'misgivings . . . we have been very closely examining the whole scheme again'.

The sudden silence is not difficult to explain. Anglo-American secret intelligence relationships had suffered their most serious fracture during the Suez invasion, and the US was accused in parliament of cracking British military and diplomatic cyphers. It was small wonder that Menwith Hill went into abeyance.

A recently declassified NSA 'Telecommunications Support Plan' of May 1956 shows that Menwith Hill had by then been included in its worldwide listening operations. The plan gives details of a 'COMINT Communications Relay Centre' which was built at Chicksands, Bedfordshire. Chicksands was linked to NSA, GCHQ, Kirknewton, and other British and American listening stations and headquarters.

Post Office plans were reactivated during 1959, and construction of the Backbone chain began early in 1960. Menwith Hill began to build up to strength; 32 new personnel arrived to start operations during June 1959, and the station officially opened fifteen months later. It eventually had an authorised staff of 506. By 1961, construction costs had exceeded \$6 million.

THE RELIGION OF TRUTH

Truth is that which is. Our being aware more fully of this reality is a matter of the development of the relevant but normally dormant faculties. We can know much more about the inner and spiritual realms of nature than is generally realised. The religion of truth is a matter of direct experience rather than adherence to dogma and belief.

For information write to:

THE BLAVATSKY TRUST (B)
P.O. Box 16 London W3 6HS

Because of environmental difficulties, Hunters' Stones was completed later than other towers, during the winter of 1961 and was commissioned in 1962. At first, a cable was directed to the base, in a cross-country ditch. Using the CPRE files, and several years prior research on the contemporary PO tower network, it is possible to portray the subsequent development of the network that fed Hunters Stones:

- The first link went south from Harrogate to London. But soon after a special new route bypassed London and finished up at a tower at Fairseat, near Maidstone.
- A Ministry of Works surveyor in June 1962 inadvertently sent the CPRE a letter showing that the radio links from Fairseat would go three ways: London, Paris, and Harrogate. The third connection from Fairseat — across England to Hunters Stones — could play no sensible part in a communications circuit between London and Paris. Nor, evidently, are Harrogate and Maidstone such centres of commercial activity as to merit their own hot-line. The surveyor's letter showed clearly that the northward link was to be installed simultaneously as part of the *London-Paris* connection. It could only be a tap.
- In 1963, new links were added: east to a tower at The Stonebow in the centre of York; west, to Quernmore near Lancaster; and north to Craigowl Hill near Dundee.
- The claim that the new system was for use 'in the event of attack' was untrue. Such a system, linking radar stations and control centres, was built by the Post Office and added to the microwave network. But it was designed and built two years *after* the other links. It follows different routes.
- Since 1963, other connections have been fed into Hunters' Stones. One line branches off from near Oxford towards Plymouth. Currently, there are two other connections which stop at Hunters Stones; from Manchester, and from London.

A MAP PUBLISHED by the Post Office in 1973 provides a quantitative measure of Menwith Hill's capacity. The map shows that the four original links had each a capacity for 3600 simultaneous telephone calls in and out. This gives a total of 14,400 lines.

But the *International Frequency List*, a voluminous international directory compiled in Geneva, contains additional information. The entries in the 1979 list based entirely on information supplied by the Post Office itself, show that Hunters Stones besides relaying roughly 10,000 ordinary telephone calls, several TV channels, and data from northern early warning radar stations, has additional connections. According to this official source 5,400 additional *inward only* circuits feed into Hunters Stones, mostly from Leeds, and ultimately London.

The link to London has access to the international exchanges, and thus the whole panoply of international connections. The link to York is well placed to connect to submarine cables to Scandinavia and north west Europe, some of which leave from Scarborough. The link to Lancaster can access transatlantic cables, and connections to Ireland.

Although every section of the Menwith Hill network cannot be exactly traced, its purpose is clear. As the international communications network has boomed over the past three

decades, Menwith Hill has been able to scoop up each new link abroad.

The critical phase came in 1966 when NSA took over. A USAF unit at Kirknewton (the 6952nd Radio Security Mobile) and the ASA Field Station closed on the same day — 1 August 1966. The change had been anticipated; the local paper printed a report that civilians were to take over during January 1966. US spokesmen said the story was untrue. But, by July, 70 NSA personnel were esconced in Harrogate's Grand Hotel, and the takeover had begun. Personnel and tasks were transferred from Kirknewton down to Harrogate.

One of the Kirknewton analysts who left USAFSS before the move south was a young conscript to the USAF. Jim Haynes is well known in British arts circles for his role in starting the Edinburgh Traverse Theatre, the London Arts Lab, and the *International Times* (IT). He is not well known for having worked for NSA when he first came to Scotland. He told us about Kirknewton's tasks:

I monitored commercial telegram networks . . . between London, Paris, Moscow, Beograd, Cairo. . . Machines in intercept rooms, tuned to transmission channels, would spew out 8-ply paper. I worked on one of the plies. . .

Watch lists were used at Kirknewton. Many of the items looked for concerned commodities or financial information.

Since the early '60s, communications have increasingly been sent by cable or satellite. Thus centres for radio monitoring like Kirknewton have become outdated. In contrast, Menwith Hill's taps on international links provided the ideal input from cables.

By last year, international communications to and from Britain had built up to considerable proportions, including 13 million telegrams and 184 million telephone calls — some merely 'transiting' through Britain.

But such vast volumes are well within NSA's reach. In 1974 alone, according to the Church Committee report and other sources, NSA's HARVEST facility and others like it were, in the US alone, sifting through 75 million telegrams in one year — 1.8 million were the sorted out for subsequent human analysis. The information gained is processed according to the requirements of Key Intelligence Questions which are political, military and economic. Commercial intelligence, after being 'sanitised', is available to large US corporations through NSA Special Security Officers attached to the companies. Much the same happens at GCHQ in Britain.

The Pike Committee report gave a useful insight into the commercial targets of US monitoring; they found:

at least one new area of non-political and non military emphasis in international intercept — economic intelligence. Communications interception in this area has developed rapidly since 1972, partly in reaction to the Arab oil embargo and the failure to obtain good information on Russian grain production and negotiations for purchase with American corporations'.

Once again Menwith Hill, straddling the main US communications routes to Eastern Europe and the Middle East, is NSA's prime source.

Menwith Hill, according to a former British military officer and several other locally employed personnel, went on high alert at unusual times. One such occasion was when

the NSA's spy ship *Pueblo* was captured off North Korea. More interestingly, however, all say that the base works overtime immediately *after* an IRA bomb incident or other terrorist activity in Britain.

The timing is revealing. It is not the base guards who go on overtime. The agents' job, one official who has worked with NSA explained in Washington, is to sift through *already recorded* communications to find a message between Britain and Ireland and elsewhere concerning the forthcoming attack. 'Tape is cheap', the official explained, 'storing an hour's call on a 1,000 line link is simple' and would use less than \$100 worth of tape.

The Hunters Stones tower has direct microwave links to other towers at Lancaster and Manchester which, between them could provide access to all the lines between Britain and Ireland, as well as many transatlantic circuits. Such taps would also facilitate keeping watch after an explosion, in case of further communication by returning bombers. The inclusion of the terrorists and their ilk as NSA targets may be an inexpensive gesture made to the British government for the extraordinary facility that the Post Office has provided for NSA to spy on British communications.

THIS ACCOUNT of Menwith Hill's operations has been put, in some detail, to the Post Office, the Ministry of Defence, NSA base Chief Braueninger, NSA itself, and its Special US Liaison Officer, who is former NSA Deputy Director Benson Buffham (now billed as a 'Political Attaché' at the US Embassy).

NSA would only say that its British operation was classified, and this covered any computers there. The Post Office has had equally little to say. Albert Dale Braeuninger, Menwith Hill Chief, was initially quite forthcoming on what he claimed the base didn't do; suggestions that they monitored national and international communications were, he said 'rubbish'. Pressed for a specific explanation of its facilities, however, he resorted to waffle:

We do radio relays [a standard euphemism for signal] — material comes in from a variety of places and is rerouted. It is a switching operation. We route it sometimes to the UK and sometimes to the US.

Although he made Menwith Hill sound like a central London exchange, the above description scarcely refutes our revelations. Asked specifically about NSA, he retreated:

It is not pertinent for me to discuss our organisational relationships within the UK or outside. You cannot really expect me to answer what kind of work goes on here either in a technical or operational sense.

When these and similar questions were repeated to the NSA office in London last week, and also to the Ministry of Defence, they too retreated behind familiar covers. Menwith Hill, they said, is a "communications relay centre for the (US) Department of Defence."

We then resubmitted detailed questions to the Ministry of Defence and the American Embassy, and asked for interviews. We also asked the Home Office and the Foreign Office if they had issued any warrants for the interception of international communications. No information whatsoever was forthcoming from any of them. Whitehall, it appears, is ready to join in protecting NSA from British as well as American inspection.

