Lieutenant Marcus Bloom: a Jewish hero of the SOE

MARTIN SUGARMAN

Marcus Reginald Bloom, whose code names seem to have been ‘Urbain’ and ‘Bishop’, was born in Tottenham, north London, on 24 September 1907, into an Orthodox Jewish home, the second of four brothers (Alex, Marcus, Bernard and Jenice). He was the son of Harry Pizer (Percy) Bloom, who had been born in east London in 1882, the child of poor Polish Jewish immigrants, and of Anna Sadie Davidoff, born in Russia around 1882 and brought to England the same year. Anna’s family were small shopkeepers also in the East End and Anna and Harry met and were married in the early 1900s. The newlyweds moved from a Brick Lane ‘over-the-shop address’ to a rented house in Tottenham where Alex and then Marcus were born. From a young age Harry (who died in 1940; Anna died in 1946) had been a successful small businessman, and by the time the Zeppelin raids hit the East End during the First World War had earned enough to move his family away to the safety of Hove, Sussex (13 Medina Villas), where the family lived until 1929. After attending Hove High School, Marcus often helped out at his father’s cinema in Wandsworth, south London, at their mail-order textile firm or in their restaurant business in Hove. Just before the Second World War, when Marcus’s parents separated, the family – now quite well-off – were living in various hotels in London.

Bernard Bloom describes Marcus’s sense of humour and a love of good food and the cinema. He was by far the most adventurous of the brothers and it was he whom their father sent to Paris in the 1930s to run the mail-order business, called Sterling Textiles. He took an office in the Boulevard Haussmann, learnt French and employed as his manager Baron Michel de Tavenau, who taught Marcus how to ride, play polo and shoot. As the business prospered, Marcus took an expensively furnished apartment in Clichy.

2 Telephone interview with Marcus’s brother Bernard Bloom, June 2002.
3 Much of the material on Marcus’s early life is taken from his brother’s autobiography, B. Bloom, Soon or Late (1994), published privately, a copy of which was donated to the AJEX Museum.
4 Sussex Directory 1890–1938; thanks to Philip Bye, Senior Archivist, East Sussex Records Office, Lewes.
Martin Sugarman

His life changed and he mixed with the wealthy French minor aristocracy. He owned a white Arab pony called Rajah, a Great Dane called Sphinx and a pale-blue convertible Delage car which he drove wearing a white flying helmet. With his girlfriend Germaine Février (who was from Village du Tot, Barneville-sur-Mer in Manche, Normandy), he and the baron were often seen at race meetings. He was generous to his friends in France and England and adored his mother, for whom he always bought expensive gifts. However, after five years the firm closed, following a court case in England when the News of the World questioned the morality of mail order as a means of selling to the public.

Marcus returned to London and married Germaine in March 1938 in St Marylebone Registry office, and they took a flat in northwest London. But Germaine was unhappy in England and went back and forth to France, where she happened to be when the Maginot Line collapsed before the German Blitzkrieg in 1940, trapping her there.

Marcus volunteered within forty-eight hours of the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 and was interviewed at Clapham Junction recruiting office by a staff sergeant. Marcus told him he spoke fluent French and wished to use it in the service of his country, and three weeks later was summoned to the War Office, where he went accompanied by Bernard. He was interviewed by a major, but was turned down. They had not tested his French or knowledge of France and asked only about his religion, job and the birthplaces of his parents. They said that since his mother had not been born in England he could not be recruited for the use of his French, hence the rejection. Angry but undeterred, Marcus enlisted in mid-1941 as a private in the Royal Artillery, and by December 1941 was an officer. He was soon summoned to SOE offices at Norgeby House in Baker Street, London, where he was met by Vera Atkins (the formidable assistant to Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, the leader of the French Section of SOE⁵), and was brought before the colonel who – to Marcus’s surprise – was wearing a casual sports jacket and trousers.

Marcus’s file was lying unopened on Buckmaster’s desk; he stared for a few moments at Marcus and then said, ‘Tell me fully what you were doing in France for five years’.⁷ Marcus explained in detail and the interview continued half in French, half in English. Finally Buckmaster said, ‘I must

---

⁵ Marcus’s AJEX Jewish Chaplain card (there are 60,000 Second World War cards in the AJEX Museum) states that his number was 1113627 and that he attended the 24th Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) at Llandrindod Wells.


⁷ Bloom (see n. 3) 235ff.
Lieutenant Marcus Bloom, SOE, on being commissioned in 1941.
tell you that the people who work for us are taking on a dangerous job … and it is not for the faint hearted. You should now return to your unit and in the meantime I will consider whether we can use you. If you have second thoughts about it please advise your Commanding Officer.’

Three weeks later Marcus was again summoned to see Buckmaster, who this time was in uniform. ‘Since I have not heard from your CO, I must assume you still wish to join our organization.’ Marcus said he did. ‘I have decided that you are suitable material … you must not discuss your activities with anyone. All your work will be top secret.’ The colonel stood up and in a complete change of tone, put out his hand to Marcus and said, ‘Welcome to the Firm. I wish you every success in your training.’

Marcus was formally accepted into SOE F (French) Section on 24 February 1942 and was sent to Scotland for his initial assault-course training. This must have been particularly hard for a man of his age, thirty-five. An excerpt from his Training Report by his instructor says, ‘Hardly the build for hard work on the hills, but always gets there with a smile on his face although completely done in. He has plenty of “guts” and is an extremely able man. He has a very sound knowledge on all branches of the training, and has done exceptionally well.’ The Commandant’s report (dated 15 and 17 May 1942) went on to say, ‘MICHEL has done very well indeed. His willingness to try anything has been an excellent example to the others. Possessed of a keen sense of humour, he has been the life and soul of the party. He is a very nice fellow who has plenty of intelligence and “guts”. Company seems to stimulate him to greater efforts, so he should work very well with others. Seems very English.’

Bloom then continued to Wanborough Manor in Surrey to train as a wireless operator in morse code, decoding and the repair of equipment. After this he was sent to Ringway near Manchester for parachute training. He was then recalled by Buckmaster who told him he was needed in the field urgently. What he did not say was that SOE were losing WOs at an alarming rate.

‘Urbain’

Marcus was given a short leave; his mother was no fool and realized there was some French connection and that this meant dangerous work behind enemy lines. He consoled her with the fact that there were plenty of escape

---

5 The Commonwealth War Graves Commission entry for Marcus lists him as Lt, No. 236314.
9 Bloom’s personal SOE file at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Lieutenant Marcus Bloom: a Jewish hero of the SOE

routes if things went wrong. Back at Baker Street he was given the code name ‘Urbain’ and, like all agents, a fictitious background. Equipped with authentic all-French clothes and personal items, false papers in the name of Michel Boileau, money and a briefcase wireless set, he was embarked on a troop ship – much to his surprise – to Gibraltar in August 1942. There he was joined by another SOE agent. It was from here that he sent a telegram to his brother Bernard, who was in a military hospital in Ranchi, India, saying, ‘Many Happy returns of the day, get well soon, I salute you Marcus’. This was the last time Bernard Bloom heard from his brother.

Bernard later discovered that one morning some weeks later, Marcus was warned to prepare himself. That night he was put aboard a naval motor-torpedo boat with his colleague, and taken in darkness to a submarine lying offshore. After travelling all night, the submarine surfaced in the early morning and Marcus and his colleague, with the captain and two sailors, went onto the conning tower. They then launched a small rubber dinghy tied to the submarine and peered out to the nearby, dim coastline. Suddenly, from slightly inland, a light flashed the code letter ‘Q’, the arranged signal, and the two agents and two sailors embarked on the dinghy and rowed towards the shore.

The official version of events differs. Richards says that after an eight-day journey Marcus was inserted by the Polish SOE felucca ‘Seadog’, commanded by Captain Buchowski in operation Watchman III, Overgrow and Dubonnet, on the night of 3/4 November 1942 at Port Miou near Cassis in southern France. With him were SOE agents Lieut–Colonel George Starr, DSO, MC, Mary Herbert, Mme M. T. Le Chêne and the famous Odette Sansom, GC.

Into France

Whatever the truth, on reaching the beach near Cassis, two men appeared from behind a hut and told the SOE agents to follow them. According to Tickell, the reception party was headed by Resistance leader Marsac, of the nearby Marseilles Group. After a night in a safe house nearby, they

12 Public Record Office, Kew, London (PRO) HS6/472 shows that he was given the address of the British Consul at 35 Passeo de Gracia, Barcelona, if ever he had to escape to Spain.
13 There is some confusion over this name. M. R. D. Foot, SOE in France (London 1966) 219 also uses the code name ‘Bishop’; but it is not clear whether this is the name of a local Resistance Circuit, agent code name or his transmitter code name (see also PRO HS6/422).
14 PRO HS6/423.
16 Ibid. 677.
17 The FCO file says 8 Nov.
continued their journey next day by train to Toulouse, where the other agents left Marcus for different assignments. Marcus was to work with the Resistance Circuit named ‘Pimento’.

M. R. D. Foot (SOE’s official historian) describes Marcus’s arrival less flatteringly. He alleges that Marcus arrived at Toulouse railway station wearing a conspicuous, loud check coat and smoking a pipe. He made contact in a warehouse – as arranged – with his control, Major Anthony M. Brooks, MC, code named ‘Alphonse’. When they met, Marcus held out his hand and with a broad grin in his Cockney voice reportedly said, ‘Ow are yer, mate?’ Brooks thought this a breach of security – using English in a place where informers might be listening. In addition, Marcus had already spent twenty-four hours in Toulouse chatting in the flat of Maurice Pertschuck (he and Lieut Pertschuck, MBE – another Jewish agent – had trained together in England and again, allegedly, had even – against all security rules – made this rendezvous arrangement in England before they left for France. As a result, Brooks passed Marcus on to Pertschuck, whose WO he then became. However, Foot gives his source for this information as ‘private’, so it is impossible either to confirm or deny, especially as Marcus and Pertschuck did not survive to give their own version of events.

Opposed to this view is that of the French SOE agent Robert Martin, in his debrief in London. He described Marcus as ‘willing and courageous if temperamental, and anxious to do more important work than being a W/O’.  

From 8 January 1943 Marcus worked successfully, sending and receiving many messages to and from London (estimated at more than fifty) and keeping constantly on the move to avoid German radio-detection vans. He also assisted in sending and receiving messages for Starr in Circuit Wheelwright. A favourite ploy was to sit on a river bank pretending to fish while using the rod as an aerial. Another fellow agent described how Marcus transmitted in open country using a long forked pole to tap the current from overhead cables. Although cars were often stopped by the Germans and Vichy French and searched for black-market goods, Marcus persisted bravely in using his permis de circuler in the service of his Resistance group. He also organized the receipt of four drops of stores for his Circuit, which

19 Foot (see n. 13) 274–5.
20 Ibid. 219
21 PRO HS6/423.
22 His original wireless set did not work, hence the delay until it was repaired (PRO HS6/422).
23 Records of the FANY (First Aid Nursing Yoemanry) at Chelsea Barracks, London; thanks to Captain Decia Stephenson.
24 PRO HS6/423.
25 Foot (see n. 13) 274.
Lieutenant Marcus Bloom: a Jewish hero of the SOE

included arms and explosives for the Resistance,\textsuperscript{26} assisted RAF evaders to get to Spain on at least one occasion,\textsuperscript{27} and helped carry out repeated acts of sabotage on telecommunications and railways.\textsuperscript{28} In late spring Pertschuck had to visit Marcus to repair his radio for him. Occasionally, Germaine would visit from Normandy.

Marcus, then working comfortably in Circuit ‘Prunus’ with Pertschuck, (code named Martin Perkins, Gerard, Martial and Eugene), received instructions from London to plan to destroy the Toulouse explosives factory that Pertschuk had been investigating. For this Marcus was Mentioned in Despatches. Born in France, Maurice Pertschuck was brought up in England – a younger brother was also in the SOE – worked with Odette and Peter Churchill, famous SOE agents, but was betrayed and sent to Buchenwald where he was hanged on 29 March 1945, hours before the American Liberation of the camp.

\textbf{Betrayal}

Marcus was hiding at the Chateau d’Equerre at Fonsorbs with the Vicomte d’Aligny when at dawn one day in April 1943 (certainly before 15 April\textsuperscript{29}) their villa hideout\textsuperscript{30} was betrayed and surrounded by SS troops. Marcus and a Spanish member of his group ran into the surrounding wood, firing pistols at the pursuing Germans and made it to a local Gendarmerie, but the French police handed them over to the Germans. According to one version the French police gave away their hideout, but another blames a local SOE double agent. Foot claims it may have been the Franco-German double agent Roger Bardet, known as ‘Le Boiteau’. Later that day Marcus was seen being escorted to the military prison in Toulouse, his face covered in blood.\textsuperscript{31}

Foot argues that Marcus and Pertschuck had previously held a meeting, in defiance of security training, at a black-market restaurant where all seven leaders of ‘Prunus’ sat at a single table, chattering in English over dinner. But Foot’s assertion that security among ‘Prunus’ agents was lax was challenged after the War (according to Bernard Bloom), and some SOE agents successfully sued Foot for giving a misleading picture. Marcus himself could not speak out.

When the SD (Sicherheitsdienst or German security service) arrested Marcus they found among his belongings a photo of Pertschuck in British

\textsuperscript{26} PRO HS6/422.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} FANY Records (see n. 23).
\textsuperscript{29} The exact date is thought to be 12 April, that of his last message to London (PRO HS6/422).
\textsuperscript{30} PRO HS6/423.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. and Foot (see n. 13) 275.
uniform, which had somehow escaped detection in England before he was inserted into France. This not only blew Pertschuck’s cover but could be used against other captured agents who knew Pertschuck and even to encourage captured agents to confess by suggesting that the Germans had a spy in Baker Street.

Josef Goetz, the SD Section IV Paris wireless expert, was sent immediately to Toulouse to try to ‘play’ Bloom’s captured wireless and codes to the British (that is, to pretend he was Bloom). But Bloom gave no information to his torturers, so the British thus knew at once from Goetz’s faulty messages that Marcus had been captured. Goetz did not know Marcus’s security check and Baker Street sent one particular set of messages asking Marcus to meet them at ‘the Green pub’. Only Marcus would know about this since it was the Manchester Arms in Baker Street, frequented by SOE personnel when at HQ, and Goetz’s puzzled replies to this request revealed that it was not Marcus who was controlling the wireless.32

Taken to Paris, Marcus was imprisoned at the notorious Fresnes prison in the suburbs, host to many SOE agents during the ‘silent war’. In his cell were two French Resistance workers, one Spanish passeur and a third Frenchman, named Leopold Turcan. He was a railway controller at Montparnasse, accused of passing information on railway movement to the Allies.33 All were demoralized and unkempt, but Marcus struck up a friendship with Turcan who also knew Paris well.

**Interrogation**

The day after his arrival Marcus was taken in manacles to the Gestapo HQ in Avenue Foch, central Paris, where he was questioned about his Resistance Circuit, codes and comrades as well his superiors in London. When he refused to give anything but his name, rank and number, he was marched down a corridor to another room, shoved violently inside and pushed into a chair in the middle of the room by two men in suits. One man stood in front of him and again asked Marcus for information, and, when Marcus refused, struck him fiercely in the face with the back of his hand. The second man came from behind and pointed a revolver at Marcus’s temple, but again he refused to answer and was struck on the head with the butt of the gun. He fell to the floor, blood running down his face, and one of the men kicked

---

32 PRO HS6/422 contains a long correspondence about this matter before Baker Street decided Marcus must have been captured. An SOE officer at HQ criticizes the way Marcus had been sent into the field without a ‘slip in’ phrase to indicate that he was compromised. (An example would be ‘Tell the parents I am OK’ to indicate that ‘I am not OK’.)

Lieutenant Marcus Bloom: a Jewish hero of the SOE

him. The interrogators left the room and another guard helped Marcus up. He was driven back to Fresnes.

In the cell, Turcan bathed Marcus’s wounds with water and he slowly recovered, helped by his anger at those who had beaten him. To keep up morale, Marcus persuaded the others to keep clean, exercise, wash their clothes, shave and have daily discussions. Through his strength of character, he welded their resolve to resist.

Bernard Bloom met Turcan many times after the War, who testified to the way Marcus had helped him stay alive. He too was taken and beaten at Avenue Foch, and in return Marcus nursed him back to health. When Germaine heard he had been caught and was in Fresnes, she moved to Paris and had food parcels smuggled to him – at great risk to herself – which he always shared with his cell mates.

On a second occasion, Marcus was taken to Avenue Foch and severely beaten about his body. Again he said nothing. Much of the time at Fresnes he spent talking to Turcan about his work before he was captured. He attempted to escape by trying to convince the Germans that if they moved him to a camp, he would be more cooperative. His idea was that while in transit he would find it easier to make his getaway than from a high-security prison like Fresnes. Turcan advised against this, but eventually Marcus succeeded and bade farewell to his fellow prisoners.34

Mauthausen

Bernard Bloom has been unable to find any information about the next fifteen months of Marcus’s imprisonment in Germany. But the personal archive of the late Vera Atkins at the Imperial War Museum,35 recording her immediate postwar research and interviews with German war criminals and eye witnesses in many camps and prisons,36 contains a letter written by a Captain Rouset (probably French), dated 14 September 1945. He says he had been a POW at Ravitsch, a fortress-style camp on the Polish–Silesian border, northeast of Breslau, from 18 April 1944, and that he saw Allied SOE prisoners dressed in blue prison uniform, with a white triangle marked with ‘I’ on the back. They were all kept together in the same wing of the Camp. It appears Marcus had arrived there in May 1944.37 But he left some time in August 1944 when, owing to the rapid Soviet advance, they were marched west by the Germans towards Dresden and then taken to

34 Testimony from Turcan to Bernard Bloom.
35 Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum, London, VA files, Box 1, Mauthausen folder.
36 See n. 23 above.
37 PRO WO 311/607.
Gusen,38 a satellite camp of Mauthausen, near Linz in Austria.39 At Gusen Marcus may have met other Dutch and British SOE agents and one American (see below), although they may all have come from Ravitsch together. They formed a cohesive group, kept themselves separate and as well fed as they could, and were much admired by the other prisoners.

Following the failed attempt on Hitler’s life on 30 July 1944, orders reached various Nazi camp commanders from General Keitel on 18 August that terrorists and saboteurs should be severely dealt with. Marcus and his comrades realized that this was a death sentence. On 2 September 1944 the group were taken by lorry from Gusen, through the village of Mauthausen and up the hill to the dark, granite fortress which was the notorious death and labour camp. In front of two high double gates, a guard telephoned and, when the gates slowly opened, they were driven into a large cobbled courtyard. To the left stood the main prison wall, to the right were arches each with green double doors. Ahead was a house with a long stone balcony and in front stood the SS Commandant of the camp, looking at them. Some archway doors were opened and the men were shoved through these. In the camp records it is recorded in Section 16 ‘arrivals Sept. 2nd ... 47 Allied soldiers; 39 Dutch; 7 Britons; 1 USA’. Eyewitness accounts of Marcus’s time at Mauthausen were given as personal testimony to Bernard Bloom by Yugoslav prisoners who survived and who met Bernard at two postwar commemoration events at Mauthausen. The following narrative summarizes this evidence.

The archway cavern in which these forty-seven SOE men were placed was usually a transport depot, and was cold and dank. There was no food that night and only thin gruel and black bread the next day. On the third afternoon, each man was ordered to open his shirt and numbers from 1 to 47 were painted on their chests. This was the order in which they were to be shot.

The end

The day of 6 September was warm and sunny. The doors were thrown open and the men ordered outside to form up in twos facing the Commandant’s house in the courtyard. Witnesses believe Marcus was number 3, although a list in the Atkins archive shows him as number 29 with a prison number 96529.

From the courtyard it appears the men were taken to the right up some steps. But instead of going into the main camp they were turned, heavily

---

38 For detail on this camp see PRO HS6/630.
39 The Mauthausen Museum booklet (1970) 5, includes the three camps at Gusen among its forty-eight sub-camps.
Lieutenant Marcus Bloom – a Jewish hero of the SOE

guarded, down a narrow path away from the prison, partly earth and partly covered in irregularly laid stone slabs. Eventually they came to a vast, deep granite quarry, with a sheer drop from the path on which they were walking. A bluff jutted out into a platform feature overlooking the quarry, which the Germans called ‘The Jew Jump’. Here many Jews were pushed to their deaths. The prisoners were marched to the notorious 180-step staircase leading down into the quarry, built of uneven granite slabs and difficult to negotiate. Looking down they could see that the other emaciated camp inmates had been assembled below and were peering up at them. The SOE men scrambled down the steps; they were in better condition than the other prisoners. They were then lined up with their backs to the quarry wall. Armed SS and a mounted machine gun faced them.

Then an SS officer moved forward and screamed at the first man (a Dutchman) in English, ‘You will go over there and pick up a big stone and put it on your shoulder. You then run up the stairs.’ The Dutchman started to move, pushed by a guard. He put a heavy rock on his shoulder as the officer yelled ‘Schnell! Schnell!’ The Dutchman started to climb the stairs, the armed guard behind him. After about fourteen steps, the officer shouted ‘Feuer!’; the guard shot and the Dutchman fell dead. This horrific charade was meant to comply with Keitel’s order that the SOE men were to be shot trying to escape.

The second man was murdered in the same way and then Marcus came forward. He ran up the steps with a rock, but suddenly turned and threw his rock at the guard striking him fully in the chest; he fell tumbling to the bottom of the steps. Marcus then made a defiant run for it up the stairway, but the machine gun cut him down. It took two days to shoot the whole group, an operation witnessed by hundreds of prisoners. They never forgot the courage of Marcus Bloom and his comrades.

Atkins’s archive contains an until-now unknown letter from Professor Karel Neuwirt (of 11 Zborovska Mor, Otsrava, Czechoslovakia) to Vaclav Pistora (of Prague 1, c. 1944), dated 19 December 1945. In this he says he witnessed the Allied soldiers being dragged into the camp by Chief of SS Obersturmführer Schulz (Kommandant Ziereis was in overall command, however). They were wearing their army uniforms (contradicting Rousset) and they then had their heads crudely shaven with blunt razors. Then a particularly brutal Blockführer called Farkas (a German Slovak from Bratislava) was called to march the men away towards the infamous quarry. Allegedly it was SS Hauptscharführer Spatzenger and Kapo Paul Beck who murdered the first group of prisoners that afternoon of 6 September. The rest were taken the next morning. Neuwirt also named SS Oberscharführer Karl Schulz, Werner Fassel and Prellberg and SS men Diehl, Klerner and Roth, as well as Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Muller (Chief of the
Martin Sugarman

Crematorium) as particular participants in the war crime. Neuwirt went on to name another surviving witness as Casimir Clement (of 11 Avenue Marceau, Solidarité Catalène, 16e, Paris).

Another letter, dated 12 December 1945, is from Victor Pistora (almost certainly the Vaclav Pistora just mentioned, another eyewitness to the executions). It is addressed to Lieut-Commander Pat O’Leary (at 4 Rue de Valois, 1er, Paris), a famous and much decorated member of SOE who was also at Mauthausen.40 His testimony adds that the SOE men arrived at 1 pm that September day, but that they were given a shower and prison garb before having a number inscribed on their chests in indelible pencil. They were registered by a prisoner clerk, a Czech friend of Pistora, a P. Dobias. The first twenty-one were murdered that afternoon. At about 5 pm the remaining twenty-six were returned under heavy SS armed guard, carrying the bodies of their comrades on carts, into the main camp where the others spent the night. The following day the surviving group were marched to the quarry and machine gunned at about 7.30 am. He ends his letter by stating that Professor Neuwirt was his good friend and that as a clerk he knew all the men and their home addresses.

Two further documents in the Atkins files, both dated 6 June 1945, touch on this affair. One is from AMX (American Intelligence) to Vera Atkins at Field Intelligence in the British Occupation Zone of Germany, and lists the forty-seven men ‘shot whilst trying to escape’. The details were obtained from a captured German corporal who witnessed the killings and was in US custody. Remarkably, it contains the name of Captain Isidore Newman, MBE (mistakenly named as Mattheo or Matthieu Newman and corrected in her own hand by Vera Atkins), code named ‘Julian’. Newman was a graduate in French of Newcastle University who, after joining the Royal Signals, was recruited by SOE and served as WO to the famous Odette and Captain Peter Churchill. He was betrayed in Normandy just before D-Day on his second drop into France. Until now it was not known that he and Marcus Bloom died together at Mauthausen.

The second document, a follow-up to the first, states that ‘Josef Pelzer, a German Kapo of the Strafkompanie at Mauthausen witnessed the executions and named specifically SS man Gockel (a German) and Kisch (a Yugoslav) as the murderers’. In his deathbed confession of 24 May 1945, after being fatally wounded in a fire fight with American troops, Kommandant Ziereis never mentioned the murders of the Allied SOE men in his camp, even though he had detailed many other atrocities of which he was guilty.

40 VA files (see n. 35).
Lieutenant Marcus Bloom – a Jewish hero of the SOE

Remembered

Marcus is remembered at the Brookwood memorial in Surrey to SOE agents with no known grave, where his name appears on Panel 21, Column 3. He is also named at the SOE French Section Memorial at Valency near Paris and on a plaque on his mother’s grave at Edmonton Federation Synagogue cemetery, Montague Road (London) in Block X, Row 10, grave 33. As SOE did not officially exist and was not widely known until the 1950s, this 1946 inscription says Marcus was in British Intelligence, a formulation probably unique in a British Jewish cemetery. He is mentioned in addition on the war memorial of the St John’s Wood Synagogue in Grove End Road, London, where it was transferred from the earlier building in Abbey Road, and on a memorial at Mauthausen camp itself together with Isidore Newman. Marcus’s family also erected a private obelisk at Mauthausen, inscribed with his name, soon after the war.

Perhaps the most moving tribute was written on 1 May 1945 in an unsigned testimonial report in French from his comrades in Circuit Prunus:

Designated as a radio controller for the Pimento Circuit, and to train circuit members in the use of the ‘S’ phone, Marcus was sent on to work for Prunus. Due to technical difficulties, he was unable to transmit for some five months, but he passed his time usefully helping with the accumulation of important stocks of munitions, and in several acts of sabotage, notably the destruction of an enemy train around January 1943. He made important contacts with local postal workers which later allowed us to carry out important tasks. He began transmitting in March 1943 and sent and received many important messages until his arrest in April 1943. He was probably denounced by one of his contacts and sent to Fresnes, where he was kept until March 1944. In spite of his accent and British appearance, he never hesitated to accept dangerous missions. When ordered to do the demanding job of radio controller, he accepted although he knew full well that he was not particularly well qualified for it. His great courage and composure inspired all those who knew him. We mourn the loss of this congenial and courageous officer. He fought a gun battle with the Gestapo, although heavily outnumbered, until running out of ammunition, killing several of them. He is remembered here by us all with enormous respect.

41 Photograph in H. Morris, We Will Remember Them (London 1989) 24. PRO FO 120/1185 contains a letter showing that Alexander, Bernard and Jenice Bloom were co-chairs of the British Mauthausen Memorial Committee.

42 FCO file.
Martin Sugarman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank sincerely Bernard Bloom, brother of 'Urbain', without whose wholehearted support this article could not have been written. It was Gerry Bean of AJEX whose survey of Jewish service in the Second World War first put me in contact with Bernard, whose own distinguished war service in North Africa, Burma, the Middle East and Italy is itself an extraordinary story.

The staff of the Imperial War Museum Reading Room were most helpful, as was Mark Seaman – an SOE expert – of the Government Cabinet Office. The Readers’ Advisers and Librarians at the Public Record Office were also of great assistance. I would additionally like to thank Gill Bennett, Chief Historian of the Records and Historical Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Whitehall; Louise Pilley of Brighton and Hove Sixth Form College; Hadira Elkadi for her French-translation skills; Philip Bye of the East Sussex Records Office; and Captain Decia Stephenson of the FANY Records Office, Chelsea Barracks, London.