

3, Arundel House,  
Courtlands,  
Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey  
TW10 5AS.  
Telephone: 020 8940 3223  
email: geoffrey.pidgeon@virgin.net

**SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1/10 – BUMPER EDITION**  
**Thursday, March 18, 2010**

**1. Why a ‘Bumper Edition’ ?**

The Patton story hinges on our SCU/SLUs and the supply of ULTRA they provided to him and other Military Commanders. Two articles have come to hand and both deal with the provision of this precious intelligence out to Commanders in the Field. One is by Ray Small and another about our fleet of Packards as SCU/SLUs in the early days. Both should be of interest to those wishing to learn about our units work.

**2. The next DWS/SCU Meeting** takes place at the Conservative Club, Stony Stratford on **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2010**. If you are attending, will those involved (as SCU or DWS) and wanting lunch, please let Phillip Canale know. Telephone: **01908 511 164**. Please telephone Phil in the *evening* – but book early.

**3. Patton, and his use of ULTRA.**

You will have seen the article about Patton and his use of ULTRA in the 3/09 ‘Special Edition’ SCU-Newsletter. I am delighted to tell you it is going to be published in the prime journal we chose, and I now have a provisional date. As soon as this is confirmed I will circulate you with all the details.

**4. The ‘Chief Petty Officers’ of MI6 (Section VIII).**

I have mentioned Major ‘Jack’ Saunders a number of times but he was just one of several Chief Petty Officers of the Royal Navy who joined the fledgling Section VIII in 1938/9. These men then played a big part in the development and running of the organization called ‘Special Communication Units’ under Richard Gambier-Parry. Besides Jack Saunders, other CPOs included Charlie Bradford, Claude Herbert, Jan Ware, Syd Cole and Harry Tricker. All were formidable wireless operators and skilled engineers – as you would expect from Royal Navy training. Some like Jack – even helped in its development of WT.

These men were all wireless specialists in the Navy – operators & engineers – based at the RN Wireless Establishment known as Flowerdown, near Portsmouth and nearing the end of their service. Several started work as operators in our Embassies abroad. Others moved to homes in Bletchley and were employed in building the wireless station for SIS in the Mansion water tower – known as ‘Station X.’

Whilst that was going on, several helped in the fitting out and manning of ‘Hut 1’ as a wireless station, again for SIS. **Note:** Neither station had anything whatever to do with the GC&CS – the ‘Codebreakers’ who appeared at Bletchley Park on the outbreak of the war in 1939.

Hut 1 now quite appropriately, contains David White’s remarkable collection of wireless equipment. These ex-CPO’s – rapidly became an important part of what Gambier-Parry called his ‘Team.’ All of them became Captains or Majors in the Royal Corps of Signals – though they were paid from MI6 funds.

In passing, one might add that Richard Gambier-Parry was considered a fine leader, a great judge of men and universally highly regarded by those who worked for him.

### **5. King George VI and Major Jack Saunders of the Royal Corps of Signals.**

One of my favourite stories about Jack Saunders concerns his attending an investiture during the war at Buckingham Palace to receive his MBE. Remember that Jack – like a number of the other ex-Chief Petty Officers – had served for many years in the Royal Navy. One or two like Jack – had even been a wireless operator on a ship in the First World War.

Naturally, Jack was now dressed in his best uniform as a Major in the Royal Corps of Signals but when it was his turn receive his award – the King noticed Jack's Naval Long Service medal. He leaned forward pointed to the medal ribbon and asked – *'So what was wrong with my Navy Saunders?'*

Sadly, Jack's response to His Majesty has not been recorded.

### **6. Ray 'Jackson' Small.**

When I started to research for my book 'The Secret Wireless War' there were a number of wartime colleagues I wanted to trace. I was lucky in locating Steve Dorman back in 1997. He and Lesley lived in Looe in Cornwall and Jane and I spent a happy couple of days down there talking to him. Gradually, I found more of those who worked in the various organizations – as one connection led to another – and *'the word got around'* – that I was writing a book about our activities.

My book was published in 2003. Then in early 2004 I heard from Ray Small who I had known in Calcutta in 1945 and later in Singapore. I knew that Ray had earlier worked in North Africa and Italy and I had little first hand information about our work in Italy for the book, but had been unable to trace him. When he did finally contact me, he offered me his complete diary as a Signaller operator and a member of SIS. I told him how much I regretted not to have had his input for the book in the first place. I suggested an edited version of his diary could be included in a later edition. Ray was pleased and accepted the idea.

At that time I planned to write a shorter, second edition of the book, to include his story and others that had come to hand. At 84, I now recognize that with so many things to be done, it is unlikely to see the light of day. Therefore, I have decided to send Ray Small's most interesting story out to you as an attachment. It covers SCU/SLUs operating in North Africa and Italy and his receiving 5 Z messages. He also talks about being sent to Bletchley railway station – **'where you will be met !'**

Those wanting to add to their knowledge of our operations can print it out for themselves. It is in two columns and it occupies eight pages of A4 – so put lots of paper in the printer. It is an interesting tale so I truly think it is worth the effort.

### **7. SCU/TA – the Special Communications Units in the Territorial Army.**

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1947 our Boss – Richard Gambier-Parry – gave instructions for the formation of Territorial SCU/SLUs to handle SIGINT in the event of another war. Its first C.O. was Bill Sharpe who had been in charge of us in Calcutta and in Singapore. His credentials for the task are nothing less than 'immaculate !' He was, after all, the wireless operator in one of the two SLUs – Richard Gambier-Parry sent to France before the Blitzkrieg and the following miracle of Dunkirk. So far as I aware, the operator in the second car was 'Spuggy' Newton.

### **8. OSCAR ! What is Oscar I hear you ask ?**

In May 2002, the Special Communications (TA) Association was established for former members of the Territorial reserve forces who had a Special Communications role. I am proud to be an Honorary Member. The Secretary Ros Hicks started a Newsletter and invited suggestions for a name – resulting in it being known as 'OSCAR' – **Old Special Communications Association Review.'** It is a thriving Association.

### **9. OSCAR and Section VIII's fleet of PACKARDS.**

In a recent edition of OSCAR they included hitherto unpublished details of the formation of our wartime unit from the National Archives in Kew.

These included the story of the purchase of the 60 Packards used by MI6 (Section VIII) as the follow-up to the success of the two cars sent to the BEF. In view of the increasing interest in our SCU/SLUs (Patton's story, etc.), I thought I should offer OSCAR a more detailed (*and better ?*) report on the actual use of the Packards – than I wrote in 'The Secret Wireless War.' It is in the latest edition of OSCAR and is an attachment to this Newsletter – by the kind permission of Ros Hicks and David Smith.

Our fleet of Packard SCU/SLUs was made ready in mid-1940 in the event of a invasion by the German Army under their code name '**Operation Sealion**' already massing on the French coast. It entailed turning about 50 of the Packard luxury saloons into wireless vehicles to be used as SLUs across the country. They were fitted with a receiver (possibly the RCA AR77 the forerunner of the famous AR88), a National HRO or in some cases the Hallicrafters.

Bear in mind that supplies of these receivers (all from the U.S.), were then in short supply. My father arrived to take over the wireless stores at Whaddon Hall in mid-1940 – just as this work was getting under way. Knowing its vital importance, the huge task was carried out at Whaddon Hall in a few weeks by the wireless engineers – and by anyone who had even a limited knowledge of wireless – but who could use a soldering iron and screwdriver.

I am not sure if the transmitters installed in the Packards were our MkII or early versions of the MkIII – but more on that in a later edition. They had batteries and a charger in the boot (or trunk !) but I wonder if supplies of the Tiny Tim battery charger had yet arrived from the U.S. or even the Onan AC generator ? Possibly, they used British made versions at the time but certainly the Tiny Tim and Onan became standard gear very shortly afterwards.

It was an almighty achievement by those at Whaddon Hall under enormous pressure – with a German invasion likely at almost any time. These vehicles were then the only way to ensure the delivery of Bletchley SIGINT & SIS HUMINT out to Military Commands. They were also to be to a mobile link to such as the Admiralty, War Office, Cabinet Office and Air Ministry – in the event that these organizations had to move out of London – in the face of an invasion coming up through Sussex, Kent and Surrey and threatening the Capital.

We should not forget the people involved in this amazing achievement who worked round the clock so very aware of its vital importance to the country. Nor should we forget the men who then manned the Packards – like Edgar Harrison.

### **10. SCU/RSS Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> April at Bletchley Park – starting at 11 am.**

Once again Bob and Jean King have organized a good programme for us. Stan Ames is going to speak about the material he has unearthed about RSS at the National Archive in Kew. George Busby is visiting from across the water in Northern Ireland to speak about the Gilnahirk wireless station. By the way, Bob sends a reminder to 'old hands' to wear a name label.

### **11. These SCU-Newsletters started in 1999.**

At the beginning, we were posting something around 150 Newsletters each time with the remainder going by e-mail. Gradually, more and more have either obtained an e-mail address or have 'discovered' a relative or friend who will receive the Newsletter and print it out for them.

We still have quite a list of those we send mail to and perhaps the time has come for us to say it needs to come to an end. If you wish to receive the Newsletter in future will you please find a friend/relative who will receive this for you ? Ask them to send their e-mail address to us, together with the name of the eventual recipient – **that is you !**

### **12. Perhaps ?**

As the list of recipients developed over the years, I may well have added names that now have little interest in the work of these most secret wartime units. If your first response is to transfer the SCU-Newsletter to the Trash – then please let me know and I will take your name off the list. Do not let them be a nuisance.

### **13. A cautionary tale.**

We have just returned from a three-month holiday in Tenerife and missed all the bad weather in the UK. However, on our penultimate night in Puerto de la Cruz, we had a burglar in our apartment.

He stole my laptop and mobile phone. Nothing else was missing - our credit cards, passports and main cash were in the safe in our bedroom but I lost all the e-mails sent in those three months. Also, much chasing around to ensure bank and building society accounts are safe. Fortunately, I had copied everything (around 97,000 items using 27Gbs) onto a 100Gbs Firewire hard disk – **the night before** – so the moral is – **always back up !**

### **14. SCU & RSS.**

Bob King has kindly been sending out Minutes of ‘SCU3 Senior Officers Conferences’ held at Barnet and at Hanslope. They are part of the material recently discovered at the National Archives. These documents give further proof that RSS had become a component part of MI6 (Section VIII) back in May 1941. Its first Controller was Ted Maltby (of Section VIII) at SCU3 at Hanslope. He in turn, was Deputy Head of SCU1 under Richard Gambier-Parry. It is interesting to see names of chaps from Whaddon Hall in the Minutes and I have written some notes on this – as an attachment.

### **15. SIS or MI6 – What’s in a name ?**

One often mixes these two up and I plead guilty. However, in the main I have described our unit as being MI6 (Section VIII) and tried to be consistent. I can do no better than quote from the SIS own website that says:

*'MI6' has become an almost interchangeable title for SIS, at least in the minds of those outside the Service. The origins of the use of this other title are to be found in the late 1930s when it was adopted as a flag of convenience for SIS. It was used extensively during the Second World War, especially if an organisational link needed to be made with MI5 (the Security Service). Although 'MI6' fell into official disuse years ago, many writers and journalists continue to use it to describe SIS.*

As you can see, MI6 was in use from the late 1930s onwards and therefore I shall continue to use MI6 (Section VIII) when describing the unit headed by Richard Gambier-Parry – and try to avoid slipping into writing ‘SIS !’

### **16. And finally !**

Sadly, we shall miss the meeting at Stony Stratford on 12<sup>th</sup> April as we are taking two small grandchildren to see the trains at the Crewe Heritage Site. However, we shall be at the Bletchley Park meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> April and look forward to seeing you there.

**With warmest regards to you all from Jane and from me,**

**Geoffrey Pidgeon**