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I normally start these e-mails with the dates of the next meeting of one or other of the various gatherings we hold of wartime colleagues. That is quite properly followed by any news of colleagues sadly no longer with us. This time it is an especially important item for me, seeing it involves people that I knew. So, this time my 'Sad News' has two sections. I hope you will forgive me but the 'other news' follows on later.

1. Sad News.

1.1. Royal Corps of Signals Despatch riders – our unsung heroes.

I start this Newsletter with a *long-overdue* piece about our despatch riders (DRs) in general and two in particular. From autumn 1943 to May 1945 I worked for Dennis Smith in his unit called Mobile Construction. Although we often travelled about the country, our base was in a hut just inside the exit gate of the Hall.

There was a constant flow of DRs going out with messages day and night. These could be from the Hall itself, but the vast majority would be from our Main Line wireless station in the field in front of the Hall. Most of these would be in code and taken by DR to Miss 'Monty' Montgomery in her private section of Hut 11 at Bletchley Park – mostly concerned with SIS Agent's traffic. However, messages might be from Winston Churchill when abroad, from an Embassy and a considerable volume of covert traffic was handled in Main Line as well.

In addition our despatch riders were out on runs to London every night, delivering messages to the War Office and to 'Codes' at SIS HQ at 54, Broadway. The riders would sleep at the Salvation Army Hostel in Birdcage Walk (near Buckingham Palace) before returning to Whaddon the next day. Despatch riders also did runs to Eastcote and Pinner in Middlesex, Knockholt in Kent and to Crowborough in Sussex. Some of this might be at night and during the blackout there was very little lighting on the bikes, or road signs to guide them.

I always admired our DRs – out in all weathers, rain, ice, snow, and fog. Those were the days of 'pea-soup fogs' caused by coal fires when, at times, you could hardly see five yards ahead and that is no exaggeration. I have walked in Chelsea with one hand held out in front so I do not hit a lamppost. Also remember, The DRs had no direction signs to show them the way to their destination. Road signs were all removed in 1940 so as not to aid German parachutists. It seems strange now but it shows the extent of the country's concern in those desperately dangerous times. Only those who lived through the summer of 1940 will appreciate what I mean.

Like all cars, motorbike headlamps were shielded so they had to rely on a narrow slit to see – *or be seen!* The DRs had no windscreens, no leg shields and depended upon stout boots, leather gauntlets and a heavy overcoat. Not surprisingly, they were often soaked through.

Two pictures showing the small slit under the shield on which these brave men depended for driving in the dark at night and/or fog.



In 1944, I purchased a Levis 250 cc motorbike from a local Whaddon farmer for £14, and used it to go back and forth from Whaddon Hall to our home in nearby Stony Stratford. Immediately after the war, I bought an ex-US Army 'Indian' motorbike and unlike *our* Army machines, it was fitted with a large windshield and running boards. Even so, I tried not going out if it was raining – *our DRs had to!*

This SCU-Newsletter regularly went out to two of our DRs – Jack Hunt and Lawson Mann and both have sadly died recently. I thought this was a belated opportunity to express my great admiration for them and all their DR colleagues. Those who have 'The Secret Wireless War' will find chapter 27 is about Lawson Mann.

1.2. Dennis Albert Smith.

My boss in Mobile Construction was the brilliant wireless engineer Dennis Smith and he sadly died recently in Adelaide – age 90. Dennis was my boss for most of my time at Whaddon Hall – after what might be called my ‘apprenticeship’ – in various wireless and metal workshops. When WW II broke out in 1939, Dennis was working for Eddystone and sent to Paris to set up the Free Czech and Polish Wireless Stations. When the German Blitzkrieg erupted he returned to Eddystone. From there he was personally headhunted by Richard Gambier-Parry and joined our R&D Department at Whaddon Hall – alongside such luminaries as Wilf Lilburn and ‘Alfie’ Willis (both from Philco Radio).

In R&D he was involved in a number of projects including the new transceiver – our MkVII – so much smaller and lighter than its predecessor the MKV. The MkVII was so successful that we equipped a ‘factory’ in January 1943 at nearby Little Horwood, to make it in larger quantities. Amateur wireless enthusiasts all over the world are now making reproductions of the MkVII and the later – MkVII/2 – the ‘Cashbox’ or ‘Paraset’ version.

However, easily his greatest work was designing with Wilf Lilburn, our ‘Ascension’ air-to-ground agent contact system fully described in ‘The Secret Wireless War’ Chapter 38 (Aircraft) and in Appendix 6 – ‘Agent’s sets’.

In mid-1943, Dennis was told to form what came to be called ‘Mobile Construction’ to take over the work of several different groups. They had been involved in fitting aircraft, wireless vans with our gear ready for ‘D-Day’, motor torpedo boats and motor gun boats. This all became the responsibility of Dennis and his team of eight.

I joined Dennis and worked closely with him from the early days of Mobile Construction – in the autumn of 1943 right through until in May 1945, when I was ordered to prepare to go to the Far East. They were, *without doubt*, the most exciting months of my life. I worked alongside Dennis in all these enterprises, went on test flights even out over the Channel but was never allowed to go on actual operations with him.

However, that did not stop us being in a number of scrapes – including finding ourselves in a Motor Torpedo Boat at night way out in the English Channel – with a loose mine floating around us ! He was the designer of the wireless gear for the very secret ‘MFU’ where he designed its successful wireless transceiver – it was just a pity that the submersible in which it was fitted – was not as successful !

After the war, he was ‘recruited’ into the Royal Navy for a number of years based in Malta working on radar and ‘other devices’. He later joined the Royal Australian Navy – ending as Commander Dennis Smith RAN. At all times he was involved with the latest technology and kept up his interest in amateur wireless for many years. However, he later showed great skill in making model ships that are simply superb.

*You will find a picture of Dennis as a Lieutenant in the uniform of the **Army’s Royal Corps Signals** on page 175 of my book on Edgar Harrison. He wore the uniform of the **Royal Air Force** when testing our latest ‘Ascension’ air-to-ground wireless equipment on operations. All this time he was in MI6 (Section VIII) as Head of Mobile Construction. He was also entitled to wear civilian clothes when appropriate.*

*He wore the uniform of a Lieutenant in the **Royal Navy** when he was in Malta immediately after the war but here he appears as a **Commander** in the **Royal Australian Navy** prior to his retirement.*



I am sad that I had not seen Dennis for many years but his constant help to a very young engineer during World War II, leaves me with a whole raft of wonderful memories. He was a truly great man. I am proud to have known him and to have been part of his Mobile Construction team in World War II.

2. I thought I might share with you our splendid day at Bletchley Park on Friday 15th July when HM The Queen unveiled a memorial to the Veterans of Bletchley Park and its associated units.

Pictures below.

The first picture was taken inside the Museum where about seven actual veterans were assembled close to exhibits that they worked with during World War II. I was standing in front of a row of HRO wireless receivers such as used by 'Y' station operators and just about everybody else.

The lady was supposed to speak about 'Y' Stations but was in Bletchley Park and merely wrote about their work. I was therefore asked to cover both 'Y' operations and my own field of dissemination. The man behind the Queen is Sir Francis Richards Chairman of Bletchley Park Trust. The famous Mavis Batey and I are the two Veterans on the Historic Advisory Group of the Trust concerned with the regeneration of the Museum.

HM The Queen is truly charming and showed real interest in things being said by me and the other veterans assembled nearby.

Meeting Her Majesty and behind is Sir Francis Richards Chairman of the Bletchley Park Trust and the lady is Mrs. Gwendoline Page who worked at BP.



Just after being introduced to the Queen the rest of the leading party joined in the conversation.

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh has his back to us, to the the right of Her Majesty is Sir Francis Richards and closest to the camera is Simon Greenish the CEO of Bletchley Park. (Photographs by Jane from behind a phalanx of press photographers – one in a hi-tech wheel chair – hence the knob in the first picture).



I explained that, whilst everyone talks about Bletchley Park's code breakers, it was actually a three-part operation. Firstly the 'Y' Stations collecting the Enigma messages, secondly the code breakers brilliant work and finally MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon who disseminated the intelligence to Allied Commanders in the Field.

I said Mavis Batey could not be present but was in the Bletchley Park team that broke the Italian code indicating that the Italian Fleet was putting to sea. Then, in a break from protocol that required all Naval intelligence to go out via the Admiralty, our unit MI6 (Section VIII) sent the ULTRA message to Admiral Cunningham from our Windy Ridge wireless station in Whaddon Village. That ULTRA message led to our naval victory known as the Battle of Cape Matapan. The Italian fleet never again put to sea. HRH told us – he was in the Battle of Matapan – ‘...but I was only a Midshipman!’

[In fact HRH the Duke of Edinburgh served on the Battleship HMS Valiant during the Battle of Cape Matapan and later Winston Churchill described it as the greatest Royal Navy victory since the Battle of Trafalgar]

I sent an e-mail about the Royal visit out to family and a number of friends but if you would like a copy with the four pictures and comments (now updated) then please send me an e-mail and merely say on it 'Royal Visit to Bletchley Park' and I will send it on.

3. Over zealous ?

One of the reasons for concern about the Admiralty is that they sometimes used the information selectively. For example, the First Sea Lord was Admiral Sir Dudley Pound. He was of course party to the ULTRA Secret. However, at times he was a little overzealous in protecting its source. On being told on May 20th that German Paratroops were about to attack Crete (and he was even supplied with the number of parachutists, planes involved and the landing areas) sent a message to Admiral Cunningham the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet to this effect: *'We learn from secret sources that the Germans are about to launch an attack on Malta, Crete or Cyprus.'* These are hundreds of miles apart whilst *he knew* the landings were to take place in Crete !

Something similar happened on Crete itself when the New Zealand General Freyburg V.C. was put in charge of the defence of the island following the Allied evacuation from Greece via Kalamata. He was told by General Wavell C. in C. Middle East of the forthcoming German onslaught but given the impression that the information came from a 'Secret Source.' Therefore, he assumed that meant 'Agents' so did not take the very specific messages as seriously as if he had known they were actually authentic information – taken from German military wireless traffic.

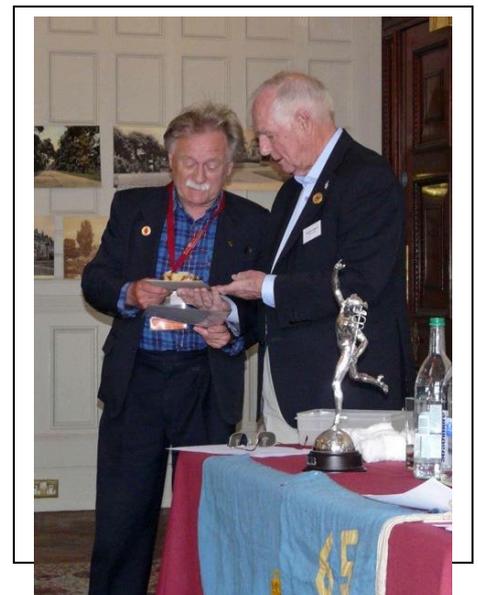
4. The SOAP !

I was unable to attend the annual meeting of the SCU/RSS at Bletchley Park on 17th April when I had intended to hand over the SOAP to David White, Curator of the Bletchley Park Wireless Museum. However, a perfect opportunity arose on 21st May when the SCU/TA had their annual meeting – again at Bletchley Park. The SCU/TA SCU - Territorial units were formed after World War II to carry on the work of our mobile wireless vans – in the case of war. It is an active association with over a hundred members – many of whom turn up to their meetings. I am proud to be an Honorary Member of the **Special Communications Unit / Territorial Army Association.**

The first Colonel-in-Chief of the SCU/TA was the boss of MI6 (Section VIII) Brigadier [Sir] Richard Gambier-Parry and its first Commanding officer was Lt. Col. Bill Sharpe – a long time member of the unit and in charge of SCU11/12 in Calcutta when I arrived there in July 1945.

Here I am presenting the SOAP to David White at the meeting of the SCU/TA. I put the SOAP in a clear box with a brief description with a longer one in a laminated sheet to go alongside for his display cabinet. That description follows below.

In the forefront is a statue of 'Jimmy' the badge of the Royal Corps of Signals. (Picture by Julian Webster of SCU/TA)



The 1939 'Soap Box Mystery'

Several colleagues from our wartime unit MI6 (Section VIII) have examined the components that were originally contained hidden within the soap. They are wireless technicians and confirm that the fittings could, in various ways, be used to relay Morse over relatively short distances.

They also agree that other components, perhaps hidden in similar containers by a companion, could be assembled to make a set capable of reaching the UK. This may also have been an exercise simply to test the possibility of smuggling parts into countries, where the importation of wireless transmitters were banned.

Jack Saunders was one of the seven ex-Royal Navy Chief Petty Officers who joined Richard Gambier-Parry's infant MI6 (Section VIII) in 1938 and one of several who lived in Bletchley in late 1938 and early 1939. They had all been wireless engineer/telegraphists with long experience indeed they were all 'time-expired' men whose service contracts had finished. Rather than sign on for another period of service they all accepted Gambier-Parry's offer to join his unit.

Their early tasks included constructing the wireless station in the tower of the Mansion at Bletchley Park that was later called 'Station X'. They also built the wireless station in Hut 1 together with a small workshop. This was all in line with Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair's 'War Station' concept of duplicating all of the SIS facilities in London, including his existing wireless stations at Barnes in West London and Woldingham in Surrey.

However, the presence of such senior members of SIS – our Secret Intelligence Service – would indicate that such a test would have been very secondary to the main reason for their presence in two Baltic States in August 1939. It is known that nearby Finland were supplying GC&CS with Russian Codebooks and intercepts at this time. Frank Foley of SIS was in charge of its Scandinavian theatre of operations, and it seems he supplied wireless sets to an agent in Latvia, who had made wireless contact with Section VIII. Possibly, the top-level visit by Richard Gambier-Parry and the separate trip by 'Ted' Maltby were to establish better contacts in the Baltic but the rapidly worsening situation meant that was cut short.

In August 1939, the Nazi-Soviet Pact contained secret provisions for the take-over of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia by Germany and the USSR finally implemented in 1940 after the ending of the winter war between Finland and the USSR.



The soapbox came to me from Celia Buis (née Saunders) who lives in the United States. Celia and her sister Tess worked at Whaddon Hall at the same time as me. Tess Saunders was Secretary to Ewart Holden, my father's boss. We kept in continuous touch with Tess and later corresponded with Celia. It was then that I discovered from her that Mavis Batey, the famous cryptographer, was billeted with the family in Bletchley during the war. Celia told me of the soapbox that her mother had looked after so carefully, following the loss of her husband in an RAF Lysander over the English Channel. Jack was returning from the still dangerous – newly liberated Paris.

I wish to thank wartime colleagues in MI6 (Section VIII), Bob King and Pat Hawker for their most valuable contribution. David White, Curator of the Wireless Museum at Bletchley Park for his input and Eddie Wilson who runs the wireless museum at Newhaven Fort in Sussex. But, most especially to Celia Buis for sending us this most intriguing relic of our work in World War II – for the Bletchley Park Museum.

I apologise for the length of this SCU-Newsletter but there seemed to be much to report this time. If you have any comments about the length of the Newsletters – *or anything else* – please do send me an e-mail. I have already drafted SCU-Newsletter 5-11 and hope to get that away from Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife where we shall be from mid-September for about six weeks.

Meantime, warm regards and best wishes to you all from Jane and from me.

Geoffrey

Geoffrey Pidgeon