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SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 4-16
Friday, May 27, 2016 - my 90th birthday!

1. An apology.

In SCU-Newsletter 3-16, I referred to the 'Special Wireless Group' the SWG - whereas I know darned well that was not their title! *Geoffrey - read your own books!* In 'The Secret Wireless War' on page 78 Chapter 12 - it makes it quite plain the title is 'Special Operations Group' the SOG. I know that is correct, as my late friend Maurice Richardson and Ted Cooper were amongst those in the Group. Also, I often met SOG members in the Naffi Canteen behind Whaddon's only pub - 'The Lowndes Arms.'

2. And Now!

It is high time that Bletchley Park finally recognised - that without MI6 (Section VIII) - the code breakers work was pointless. The latest indicator is the Blue Plaque I recently presented to Whaddon Village to acknowledge the work of the Special Operations Group' (SOG) of MI6 (Section VIII). It was the SOG who sent the ULTRA traffic out to Allied military commanders in the Field - where it could be put to use. Otherwise, the code breakers work was a waste of time!



This plaque is on the Whaddon's Jubilee Hall. As you know, Whaddon was the home of Richard Gambier-Parry's MI6 (Section VIII). He was the Controller of SIS Communications and was engaged as such in 1938 - by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair who was 'C' at that time. This was before Sinclair purchased Bletchley Park later that year as his 'War Station' for his SIS and GC&CS ('Code breakers') then in Westminster - in case of a war with Germany that he was certain would happen.

He was better informed than most government departments - mostly by Fred W. Winterbotham of SIS - author of 'The Ultra Secret.' Its publication in 1974 was the first time the world outside had ever heard of Bletchley Park and ULTRA! (See below).

Several important things were happening at once it seems! Back on Sunday May 8th, I unveiled the plaque on Whaddon's Jubilee Hall as the 'finale' to a village gathering that started at noon. The original concept was to celebrate the passing of the very first message from an SOE (Special Operations Executive) flown agent after landing in France back to the UK on May 9th.

SOE was the brainchild of Winston Churchill who wanted to '*set Europe alight*' after the German army had successfully overrun the continent. Agents began to be parachuted into France but the first message sent back by wireless came from Georges Bégué on May 9th 1941. This was to be the 75th anniversary of the sending of his message - well one day early!

At that early stage in the SOE story they did not have an SOE wireless station to work to in the UK - so their traffic was received at Whaddon - hence the local celebration. However, the organiser Martyn Cox is an SOE historian who lives in France. We discussed the idea of a double celebration and the MI6 (Section VIII) plaque arose from that point. Martyn and I had earlier met some of Whaddon Village's leading 'citizens' and the whole project then finally had the full support of the village.

The design of the plaque occupied considerable correspondence but we (*The Whaddon villagers, Martyn Cox and myself*) finally settled on the words that appeared. We did not want it to be paid for by the Village, as I wanted present it as a memorial to MI6 (Section VIII) and its work. But when my family heard - they made it a 90th birthday gift to me!

The afternoon started well as Martyn had brought dozens of bottles of wine labelled with Georges Bégué's picture and the wine came from the local Valençay region. He also brought French cheeses and the ladies of the local Women's Institute and friends laid out a super buffet for those attending Whaddon Hall who eventually filled the Hall. We then were shown portions of the DVD 'The Secret Wireless War' with me in a Packard and Jane speaking about me being late for a date. I had been forewarned about it but it still brought tears to my eyes but my family - all-sitting near to me - were quite shocked to see Jane on film speaking from the drive at Whaddon Hall.



The BBC were filming the whole event and then a 12ft screen above the stage, showed a Skype connection to the village hall in Châteauroux, where a 94 year old ex-agent was sitting in front of an audience. He spoke about his work and then - and this was brilliant - some 25 members of the Whaddon Church choir - all dressed in French 1940's costume sang French Resistance songs in French. **Fantastic!**



David White (who used to have the wireless museum at Bletchley Park till it was closed down) had a number of his wartime agents sets on show and outside was a complete replica of the operation ready to make contact - live to France.

Unfortunately due to a Solar Flare - and the proximity of telephone cables probably carrying Internet the connection could not be made to the 94 old ex-agent waiting in France However, it was achieved the following day from our Windy Ridge site beside the Church. Great excitement and on the actual anniversary day - the 9th May.



I suppose the whole event - from the buffet and wine bar - at noon lasted three hours or so. Then we all moved outside with our chairs and the 'finale' was to be the unveiling of the plaque.

I had prepared a speech but so much had happened that I put it to one side and spoke about the day - our work - and the importance of Whaddon village. Every single ULTRA message to Allied commanders in the field - went from our wireless station on 'Windy Ridge' and by the elite wireless operators of MI6 (Section VIII) - known as the "Special Operations Group" or SOG!



I am afraid that the last few words about Richard Gambier-Parry, old colleagues and my thanks to the villagers of the time - was somewhat lost as I found it rather emotional! Fortunately, a grandson ran forward - gave me a hug and all was well!

This shows a portion of the audience of Whaddon villagers, family and friends.



On Monday 9th May the anniversary message was tried again and this time - **on Windy Ridge** - they were successful - just as our "Special Operations Group" had been so many years before. ULTRA messages went out from that very spot to General Montgomery in North Africa, to the Commanders of 'Torch' on into Sicily and then into occupied France for example to Patton's 3rd US Army, General Simpson's 9th US Army, General Dempsey (21st Army Group), General Montgomery and all the Allied Army Commanders.

So much was dependent on the skills of Richard Gambier-Parry's "Special Operations Group"!

This is the successful team from Milton Keynes Amateur Radio Society with David White to the right of the picture. The red circle on the map shows the site of their connection way down in Châteauroux.



If you wonder about the size of Whaddon - look at the cover of my book '**The Secret Wireless War**' and that is a map of the village from the 1926 Ordinance Survey. You would notice very little difference today. Perhaps a couple of dozen houses have been built since - but the village is virtually the same I worked in - all those years ago!

By the way the picture of the plaque is surrounded in red and blue velvet to hide the temporary fixings. The whole thing was filmed by the BBC but as with all these things - cut down to about three or four minutes the following day - but it went out on the BBC News channel every hour on the Monday.

Below are several versions of the film but the Youtube one is the best - so please have a look.

Buckinghamshire village discovers secret WW2 role <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36245666>

and this one is also on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG3TU53vBMI>

Whaddon: Secret life of village that helped crack WW2 code

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36248874>

My grateful thanks go to Martyn Cox the co-founder of 'The Secret WW2 Learning Network' for his enthusiastic input. It is a registered charity and bringing out the hidden stories from World War II. So if you feel - *even a little generous* - then look them up on MC@secret-ww2.net - and there is a 'donate' button to press!

2. Lots and lots of books have been written just about 'Code breaking' - but fewer on how the ULTRA arising from the brilliant 'code breakers' was put to use! I am led to believe - that in the next phase of work at Bletchley Park the Trust are going to show how the ULTRA output was disseminated and then utilised. If they intend holding true to history - that will entail telling the story of MI6 (Section VIII) at long last! Perhaps, they might now even put Richard Gambier-Parry's picture back where he was - in his rightful place - amongst the 'greats' of Bletchley Park?

Every historian interested in World War II will have read '**The Ultra Secret**' by F. W. Winterbotham published in 1974 and I devoted Item 5 to it in **SCU-Newsletter 3-16** - saying how he told the story of ULTRA to an astonished world.

However, fewer will have read his later book '**The Ultra Spy**' published in 1989. It is an autobiography but a fascinating trip back to the world before World War I - his exploits in the Royal Flying Corps, his capture by the Germans, then after the war his being recruited into SIS. He went on to meet Hitler, Hess and many other German leaders in the pre-World War II period. Some I suspect is 'being wise after the event' but nevertheless so much of it holds true. I recommend it - as a 'really good read!'

3. Another good read! Michael Smith is a well-known author, journalist and a member of the Bletchley Park Trust. I have just finished reading his book '**Foley the spy who saved 10,00 Jews.**' It turned out to be a fascinating story about a largely overlooked hero. He was an SIS agent who posed as the 'Passport Control Officer' in Germany in the 1930's. Those were the terrible years as the Nazi party took even more drastic measures against the Jews. He showed enormous bravery under the circumstances of his delicate standing - without diplomatic immunity - even entering the early concentration camps to free Jews. Back home in the UK, he became the lead in the 'Double Cross' system, was Hess's 'guard' after Hitler's deputy has flown to Britain and much more beside. Yes, another really good read!

With warm regards and best wishes,

Geoffrey

Richmond - 27th May 2016.