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SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-20
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1. My award of Chevalier de L'Ordre de Légion d'Honneur. I have hesitated in writing about it fully in a Newsletter. However, I note that I covered - *as item 1* - similar awards to two Army wireless operator colleagues - attached to MI6 (Section VIII) - in the persons of Len Digby and Wilf Neal in my SCU-Newsletter 2-16. So after much thought and talking to friends, I have decided that I could share my pleasure with the award of the Chevalier de L'Ordre de Légion d'Honneur - with the SCU-Newsletter readers. So here goes - first of all - how did this arise in the first place?

My friend Martyn Cox lives in France and is a co-founder of 'The Secret WW2 Learning Network.' It is a growing organisation telling of various aspects of SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) and SOE (Special Operations Executive) activities in France during World War II. Its website covers its recent activities and news.



Completely unknown to me, Martyn prepared a draft and with the help of my youngest son John - advised the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in London and through them the French authorities, of some of my work in World War II. The MoD wrote and thanked me for 'my application' that I knew nothing about - so replied accordingly. Then I found out that Martyn and John were responsible.

The upshot of all that and exchanges that followed - I was told I would be the 6000th recipient of this most prestigious award. **Wow!** This took place on Monday October 28th at Lancaster House. It is alongside St. James Palace and near Buckingham Palace. This is a quite splendid building and Queen Victoria is said to have remarked to the then owner on visiting - "*I have come from my house to your Palace.*"

I was delighted to see three senior executives from Bletchley Park there in the persons of Iain Standen its CEO, David Kenyon BP's Historian and Peronel Craddock, Head of Exhibitions and Collections.

The joint hosts were the Ambassador of France Christine Colonna and Ben Wallace our Minister of Defence. We were shown into an ante room where there were something like 15 or so senior French Army, Air Force and Naval officers - including Generals and Admirals as well as a number of senior British Officers from all three services present. Then we moved into the main room where there were many from the press corps and TV Company's from both UK and France.

On the right is my actual medal of a Chevalier L'Ordre de Légion d'Honneur.



Far right is a French Naval Officer with a cushion with my award. She is waiting to approach the French Ambassador prior to the ceremony.

The citation on the cushion reads:
'Geoffrey Pidgeon,
au nom du Président de la République et en
vertu des pouvoirs qui sont conférés nous vous
faisons Chevalier de L'Ordre de Légion
d'Honneur.'



(Geoffrey Pidgeon, in the name of the President of the Republic and by virtue of the powers that are conferred we make you Knight of the Order of Légion of Honour.)



The French Ambassador Christine Colonna actually awarding the Chevalier de L'Ordre de Légion d'Honneur watched by Ben Wallace the British Minister of Defence. Then a picture of all three with one slightly overwhelmed Geoffrey in the middle! **Please note:** I am *not* kissing the Ambassador's hand!

It was wonderful to have ten of my family there including my three sons and their wives and some of my grandchildren - sitting immediately in front of us. I spoke after the French Ambassador and Ben Wallace - but only attempted a sentence or two in French! I then presented them both with dedicated copies of 'The Secret Wireless War.'

This was followed by a buffet with wine but sadly I was whipped away to another room to be grilled by the British and French press and filmed by two TV Companies. Afterwards my party went along to the Chelsea Arts Club and - after having a glass or two of Champagne at the bar had dinner - completing a special and very splendid day!

However, it did not end there, as I was then offered a tour of No.10 Downing Street for ten members of my family and me. Therefore, on December 4th we turned up at the security gates at the end of Downing Street where we were checked in against the list of names I had submitted earlier. Then bags were searched and we had to go through a scanner. Before going in, we took pictures and here is the one of me standing by that world famous door.



Then we went inside through that door - where we had to deposit cameras and mobile phones. We were then taken on an hour's tour of No.10. Room after room was impressive but obviously the Cabinet Room was full of history and our guide 'Olly' had many anecdotes about it.

The Prime Minister's chair is the one pulled out on the left. Apparently all other chairs are left right up to the table but for more than a hundred years that chair is left at an angle - as you can see. Needless to say I sat in it - mostly because it was the most comfortable - complete with arms. The family took other chairs while 'Olly' told us the room's history.



(This is of course a stock picture, as we did not have our mobile phones with us.)

Then after collecting our coats and mobile phones we said our goodbyes to the splendid staff and those in charge of opening the door. ***A secret!*** They have a TV screen so they know who is outside!

2. **‘Secret World War II Learning Network.’** As I said earlier - my friend Martyn Cox is the co-founder of this organisation that does so much to research and document the story of SOE and SIS (MI6) in France during World War II.

2.1 AND IMPORTANT. Now Martyn and his colleagues have very kindly given me permission to include their latest web page. The web page opens on revelations in Paris but the award is on the right.

<https://www.secret-ww2.net/single-post/More-Secret-WW2-revelations-in-Paris>

I copied it and opened up with the aid of Google. The Award is dealt with by clicking on the picture of the Légion d’Honneur dated 16th November 2019. It is very detailed, well illustrated and worth a read.

3. **A story of two vehicles!** It has been my long held wish to shine more light on the two American motor vehicles that hold such an important place in the history of Bletchley Park. Perhaps someone will finally recognise the great part they played in the prosecution of the secret wireless war?

Both have been mentioned in earlier SCU-Newsletters but I think it is important to see if we can move forward to having them fully detailed and displayed at Bletchley Park? These are, after all, some of the much-vaunted SLUs - which Winterbottom wrote so glowingly about in his famous book ‘The Ultra Secret’! The book had a huge impact, as it was the first time the full story of Bletchley Park was told to a stunned world audience. And, it was being told, with Government approval.

First is the US Army Dodge Ambulance. These were used to convey the ULTRA intelligence emanating from Bletchley Park - sent on via our wireless station in Whaddon Village (five miles west of Bletchley Park) in Morse - to US Army Commanders on and after D Day. Without them - the US Armies would be working without the vital ULTRA material that Eisenhower said ‘...has saved thousands of British and American lives.’ Their interiors and equipment were designed built and fitted out by MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon Hall in Whaddon Village. The team of seven who did the conversions - included me!



Second is the Packard Sedan (‘Saloon’ to you and me). Actually, there is already one at Bletchley Park, but tucked away in one of the wartime garages behind the Mansion. It is gathering dust and its story almost completely ignored. I once heard a Bletchley Park Guide describe it as a car used by Bletchley Park executives!



The truth is that shortly after Dunkirk it was realized that the all-conquering German forces, having seized most of Western Europe, were then planning to invade England - landing on the coast in Sussex and Kent - then advancing gradually northwards to occupy London on the way.

I have dealt with the story of our Packard’s twice before but most fully in SCU-Newsletter No. 2-13 dated April 5th 2013. You will find that as a pdf attachment to this e-mail. It is well to remember how vitally important these Packard’s would have been in the event of the likely invasion. They would have been the only way of disseminating ULTRA to Military Commanders and vital organisations like the Admiralty - as they vacated London in the face of the advancing German forces. One should not be gathering dust in a remote part of Bletchley Park. Its role in disseminating the infant ULTRA in 1940 would have been crucial. In other words, it would have acted as a mobile SLU - a *Signals Liaison Unit*.

4. Dennis Smith. He 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 WWII broke out in 1939, Dennis was working for the Eddystone Radio Company and sent to Paris to set up the Free Czech and Polish Wireless Stations. When the German Blitzkrieg erupted in 1940, 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).

His brilliance shone through with the design of ‘Ascension’ in the Whaddon Hall R&D department. This was the air-to-agent contact wireless that was such a success. It was the result of a concept by the Head of MI6 (Section VIII) - Richard Gambier-Parry.

In late 1943, I was hugely pleased to be told I would be part of the new Mobile Construction Unit formed to install our wireless gear in Motor Gun Boats (MGBs), Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs) down in Devon, in Lockheed Hudsons at Tempsford airfield and B25 Mitchells at Hartford Bridge near Camberley and of course the SLUs. Why ‘*Mobile Construction*’ - if it *moved* it was our job to fit out with our gear! QED.

5. The other SLUs in France after D Day were the Guy wireless vans. As well as the Dodge Ambulance for the US Forces - we in Mobile Construction fitted out six or seven British Army 15cwt wireless trucks for the British and Canadian Forces. Having first stripped out the Army wireless gear we then fitted them with our own equipment.

This picture was taken in 1944 at Whaddon Hall beside the walled kitchen garden and our own Hut just out of shot to the right. Only five of those shown are in MI6 (Section VIII) the rest are Army wireless operators from our SCU7 seeing the vehicles they will take to France after D Day. I am the chap leaning out to the truck to the right of the shot - my pal Norman Stanton is in the door of the left one.



Early books overlooked the great part played by MI6 (Section VIII) - ‘The Ultra Secret’ is a case in point. Written by Group Captain Fred Winterbotham Head of MI6 Section IV (Air) during the War. He seemed to break ranks with senior SIS officers in writing the book back in 1974, when Bletchley Park and the word ‘ULTRA’ were still unknown to the public. He constantly refers to ‘Special Liaison Units’, in fact they appear in the index over thirty times. Yet although he takes a proprietary approach to the whole SLU network, not once does he mention that the wireless units were designed, built and run by MI6 (Section VIII). Furthermore, there is no mention of Brigadier [Sir] Richard Gambier-Parry, his equal as the Head of an MI6 department, of Whaddon from where ULTRA was disseminated, or even of MI6 Section VIII!

Writing about the Special Liaison Unit staff at the headquarters of General ‘Pete’ Quesada’s 9th US Tactical Air Command, he says ‘*I had put an American officer in charge of the SLU unit here, with the usual complement of RAF cypher sergeants and W/T personnel.*’ He omits to say that the ‘*W/T personnel*’, were not RAF but from our unit, and all their equipment, was provided entirely by Gambier-Parry’s SCU organisations. One of them was Bernard Gildersleve of SCU8, in our Dodge wireless vehicle, attached to the 9th US TAC. (See Chapter 36 of ‘The Secret Wireless War’).

Someone somewhere - will surely see the importance of reproducing one at least of our SLUs for future generations. They would then know how MI6 (Section VIII) helped to win the secret wireless war!

With kind regards and best wishes,
Geoffrey