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SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-20
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1. Sad News: From the very beginning of my writing SCU-Newsletters back in 1997 - if we lost a wartime colleague - I have invariably started it with a section entitled 'Sad News.'

So sadly, I have to report the death of **John McCafferty** who was a member of MI6 (Section VIII). His 'army' number was issued later than mine as he joined the Firm after me in 1944. It was long a source of friendly banter between us. At all the veterans meetings he was very good company and my late wife Jane Christened him 'John le Trews' since he invariably wore tartan Trews at our gatherings. John had been at a Merchant Navy college where he studied wireless and Morse. After being recruited into MI6 (Section VIII) he had a period at Arkley near Barnet then went to our SCU3 base at Hanslope. He eventually ended up working at GCHQ from where he retired in 1987.

Though not in the wartime units - I want to record the sad death of **Margaret Sale** widow of the late Tony Sale. He was one of '**The Triumvirate**' who formed the Bletchley Park Trust and saved Bletchley Park from being demolished. Everything since has come about from their actions in 1992. Margaret Sale was right behind them and an outstanding member of the initial Volunteer team. When my late wife Jane and I first visited Bletchley Park - Margaret was on the gate selling tickets - I think they were £3 including parking? I believe Bletchley Park was then only open once a fortnight on Sundays? Margaret was everywhere - running the bar - selling books and much else. Bletchley Park owes her a great debt.

More recently she and Tony were instrumental in creating the **National Museum of Computing** in the old Block 'H' that houses the '**Colossus**' rebuild by Tony. It now also contains the rebuild of the Turing/Welchman '**Bombe**' previously in 'B' Block of Bletchley Park. The Museum is a must for anyone visiting Bletchley Park - or on its own.

2. The discovery of a remarkable film of Whaddon Hall and its staff in mid 1940. My youngest son John drove me to the 2019 Bletchley Park Veteran's Annual gathering - along with two of my grandsons. Arun (17) was very interested to talk to John McCafferty an established pilot, as he was still gathering entries into his own Pilot's Log - while in the ATC. However, Peronel Craddock - the Director of Exhibitions and Collections at Bletchley Park came and asked if I would go to her office to try to identify faces on a film they had received. So we duly followed her and were joined by David Kenyon the Bletchley Park Historian.

The film was almost entirely in black and white and depicted a number of men - most in uniform. I recognized several as the film rolled and suddenly there was my father on the screen! It was a very emotional moment for me. We agreed the film would have been taken in circa July/August/September 1940. Peronel then sent me shots of each of the men to see whom I could identify. However, I had already spotted some more obvious ones!



Earlier this year, Peronel asked if I would attend at Bletchley Park to be part of a film about this remarkable discovery. My son Michael drove me there and one of the rooms of the Mansion at Bletchley Park was festooned with film making equipment. And yes - they even used a clapperboard! There, supervising was Rosie Burke in charge of Bletchley Park's Media and Publications.

The interview ended up being shown across the world! I was to be interviewed by the BBC's flagship radio 'Today' programme at 7.20 am but before doing so I already had an e-mail from Australia about the film!

Some of the men in the film are already in uniform but - *whether in uniform or not* - they had all been transferred into MI6 after Dunkirk and the obvious threat of invasion by the all-conquering German Forces. Their cover was ostensibly to be members of the Royal Corps of Signals. You can just read that on my father's first and ill-fitting uniform.

There has been a large response from across the world - a wireless buff in California sent me an e-mail as he had seen it on CNN. Most UK newspapers ran articles about it and had varying links. There are literally dozens of versions out there including YouTube. The first is the first sent to me by Bletchley Park and the second is one of those from youtube. This starts off with the famous Whaddon Hunt!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-52136986/mi6-world-war-two-workers-in-rare-forbidden-footage>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvVaFE5O3eY&feature=youtu.be>

3. My award of Chevalier de L'Ordre de Légion d'Honneur. I have hesitated in including mentioning it in detail 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 SCU-Newsletter 2-16. After 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 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 organization 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.



Martyn 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.*"

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 of our three services present.

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.

Then we moved into the main room where there were many from the press corps and TV Company's from both UK and France.

Far right is a French Naval Officer with a cushion with my award on it. 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!



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 but only attempted a sentence or two in French - I had no wish to be the one to destroy the Entente Cordiale!

I then presented them both with a dedicated copy 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 three 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 rather special and splendid day!

4. No. 10 Downing Street. However, the celebrations 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.

Then along the street to No.10 but 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 we were shown were 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!

5. A story of two vehicles! It has been my long held desire to shine more light on the two American motor vehicles that hold 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 for me to see if we can move forward to having them fully detailed and displayed at Bletchley Park?

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. To my horror 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 quickly realised that the all-conquering German forces, having taken over all of Western Europe, were then planning to invade England. First landing in the South in Sussex and Kent then advancing gradually northwards to London on the way.

I have dealt with the story of our Packards twice before but most fully in SCU-Newsletter No. 2-13 dated April 5th 2013. It is well to remember how *vital* important these motorcars would have been in the event of the likely invasion. One should not be gathering dust in a remote part of Bletchley Park. Its role in disseminating the infant ULTRA to our forces in the event of a German invasion would have been crucial.

6. In February I gave a talk to the Windsor and Eton Society in the Guildhall Windsor. This was a black tie dinner for 80+ in this ancient building - close to the gate to Windsor Castle.

Its Secretary had told me that a number of Society members had recently been on a trip to Bletchley Park and would I give a talk on Signals Liaison units (SLUs)? *Wow! Of all subjects -* I did not need asking twice! So in early February my son Michael drove his wife Linda and me to the splendid Windsor Guildhall. I sat next to the Mayor of Windsor and after dinner I happily spoke about SLUs.



I also took the opportunity of reporting that my boss Richard Gambier-Parry had been to Eton College following his father and brother Michael (later Major-General Michael Gambier-Parry) but Richard left after only one term - he simply did not fit into an establishment concerned with the Classics. Just as well as it turned out for the world of intelligence.

7. 'The Ultra Secret.' This is the book by retired RAF Officer - Group Captain F. W. Winterbotham - launched on an astonished world in 1974. It was the first inkling of the brilliant work by the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. I mentioned it in my book 'The Secret Wireless War' in a somewhat disparaging way due to his insistence on referring to Signals Liaison units (SLUs) umpteen times without once mentioning the part played in them by my colleagues in MI6 (Section VIII). He even gave the impression that the SLU wireless operators were RAF personnel!

I have just finished reading it again taking notes as I went, and frankly it is a 'must read' for those really interested in the background. However, every time he mentions SLUs - **please remember** - the output of ULTRA for Military Commanders in the field - went from Bletchley Park by teleprinter to **our** wireless station on Windy ridge in Whaddon Village. Then by Morse to **our** wireless vans manned by **our** MI6 (Section VIII) wireless operators. Moreover, the wireless vans were fitted out at Whaddon Hall by **our** Mobile Construction team where I was one of its team of seven. **Our** wireless operators also manned some of the fixed SLUs - such as Cairo.



Many of you will know that MI6 was divided into 10 Sections. Winterbotham Chief of MI6 (Section IV - *Air*) was on an equal standing with our boss Richard Gambier-Parry - Chief of MI6 (Section VIII - *Communications*).

The book is well out of print but I am starting the search through a myriad of take-overs in the publishing industry to see if it could be printed again. With my caveats - it is still a good read! You might still find a copy via Amazon or Abe Books, even the original version, showing a black and white picture of Bletchley Park on the wrapper.

His other books: '**The ULTRA Spy**' written in 1989 is an autobiography of a very varied and exciting life. Right from his education, an account of a slightly racy tour of the Far East, on into his joining the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot in World War I - being shot down and a prisoner of war and then later his meeting with Nazi leaders - a good yarn!

Then '**The Nazi Connection**' of 1978. This gives the reader a deeper examination of his knowledge of the Nazi leaders and connection after earlier joining MI6 in 1929. Sometimes one thinks parts are written with hindsight - like his comments on the concept of the Stuka - but again worthwhile!

With my kind regards and best wishes,
Geoffrey