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SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 2-20
Tuesday, July 7, 2020

1. Sad News: Just as I completed SCU-Newsletter 1-20 - I was given the sad news about the death of Bob King. It would be an understatement to say that he was a member of the team that kept the post-war veterans of RSS and MI6 (Section VIII) together after the war. Frankly, Bob *was* the team!

This is the 2016 Bletchley Park Veteran's Meeting with Bob and me in the middle.



Then, a close up of us both with Bob on the right of the picture.

Bob features in several parts of my book 'The Secret Wireless War' but I have just run the First Section of the DVD 'The Secret Wireless War.' Please do not confuse this DVD with my book but the producers, David and Debra Rixon, asked me if I had any objection to them using the title? Of course I agreed, as it helped spread our unit's story. I mention it here - as Bob appears in many parts of its 'First Section' - talking about his time as a 'Vi' (Volunteer Interceptor) and later with RSS/SCU. It is a worthy record of the man. *It is wireless all the way!*

I understand from colleagues that the Bletchley Park bookshop no longer stocks it - but I know it is available at Amazon. Apart from 'Our' Section - the whole DVD is of interest. The 'Second Section' is about 'Black Propaganda' - including our work on many of its vital wireless installations.

2. My boss - Dennis Smith. When I started to write 'The Secret Wireless War' in 1999/2000, one of the first colleagues I contacted was obviously my 'boss' Dennis Smith at his home in Adelaide, South Australia. Sadly, he was unable to help, due of his continued long connection, with SIS.

However, in an e-mail in December 2006 - knowing I was going to give a talk at Bletchley Park about Ascension to the RSS/SCU Veterans - he started to answer some of my questions but first adding '***Having been subjected to positive vetting a number of times, it is only now that I may speak on some subjects.***' Then over 2006 into early 2007 he gave me further information about our work on Ascension and later on other items of our work in Mobile Construction.

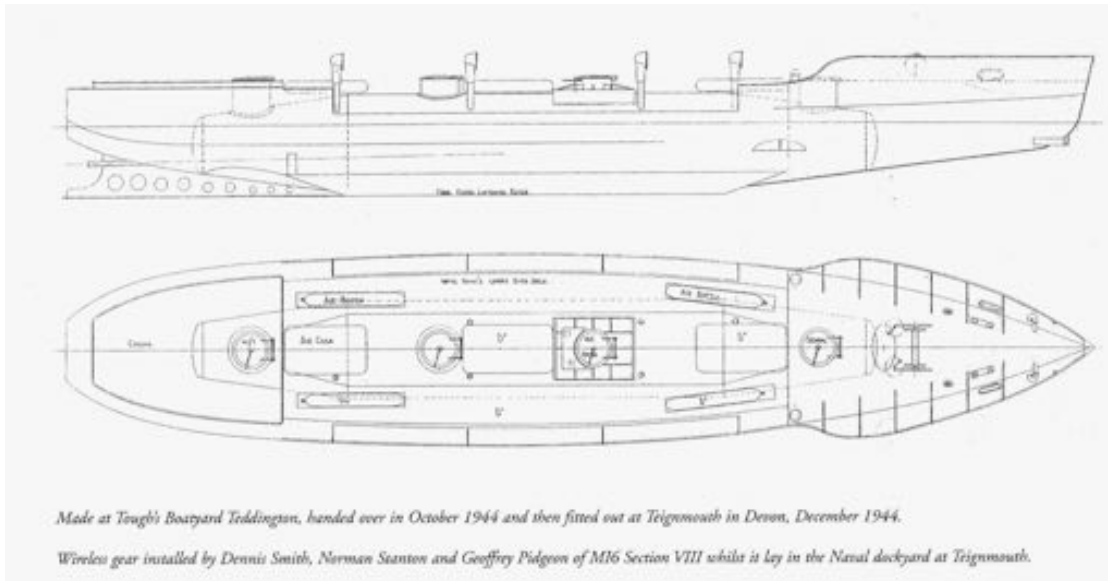
He then confirmed - what I already knew - that I was with him on several 'Ascension' operations in a B25 Mitchell from Hartford Bridge over Northern France. Nothing else seemed to be new except he reminded me of another test of his wireless/telephone carried out for Commander Slocum RN - who wanted to see it work on an actual operation. I have not mentioned it before as my night on MGB506 in the Channel - dodging a loose German mine was much more exciting - **no** - it was much more *frightening!*

This second test was carried out, again in MGB506, during an actual operation to pick up men from the coast of Brittany. I stayed out of the way - just praying that I did not have to climb the mast to adjust Dennis's aerial. It was uneventful for me down below - though no doubt 'hairy' for the skipper on the bridge. However, all seemed to go smoothly but for the return trip across the Channel - we had a number of extra men below deck.



Although there were usually six/seven chaps in Dennis's basic team - it seemed only Norman Stanton and myself were chosen for flights? Jock Denham was 'dangerous' unless supervised, 'Bob' was our carpenter and Bill King could not squeeze into anything - where space was limited! Edgar Harrison's brother Wallace was a latecomer to the team - joining us to help build the SLUs for France.

To the best of my knowledge, I have not recently mentioned the most secret work we carried out - that of the 'MFU - Mobile Flotation Unit.' I first met this when returning from a trip to one of our fitted MTBs (Motor Torpedo Boats) down at Brixham harbour in Devon. Dennis gave our driver an address on the River Thames at Teddington. This was the boatyard of Tough Brothers who were also building fast air-sea rescue craft for the RAF.



When I first saw it at Tough's boatyard only the centre core was there - really submarine shape except that it was *not* a conventional submersible! The crew remained on deck or in the control centre but there was no facility for them to submerge with it. This is page 332 of most editions of 'The Secret Wireless War' showing the steel cladding surrounds - added later to make it appear like a fishing vessel when on the surface. Dennis reminded me of our work on this strange craft.

He had designed its wireless in his office in what we then called a 'breadboard' layout. Valves, resistors and condensers all wired up but mostly laying flat. I was told to make a sketch and a chassis for it and then to make it. In my book I call it 'my finest hour!'

Then having made two chassis with holes for valve sockets, grommets etc., and having it approved by Dennis, I took one to Bert Stacey our draughtsman to make a formal drawing of it. That is working backwards of course. I then made its control panel with the necessary holes for switches and dials - all with appropriate engraved words such as 'Power On - off'.

Dennis, Norman Stanton and me went down to Teignmouth in Devon over Christmas 1944 and stayed at the 'Under Cliff Hotel' in Shaldon just across on the other side of the river Teign. The craft was being fitted out prior to testing in a corner of the Royal Naval boatyard in Teignmouth. The men involved were from the SBS (Special Boat Service) - an elite part of the Royal Navy.

Dennis was 6ft 3" and much too tall to fit the wireless into its centre section used as the chartroom and control centre. So Norman and myself were packed in side by side - to make the necessary connections.

I do not have the space to give full details in a Newsletter but what was the MFU intended for?' It was to be towed near to an enemy coast, where its own engine was started and it closed up near to the shore. The small crew unpacked 'Folbot' canoes, pressed a switch and the craft would sink. They then paddled quietly ashore and concealed the canoes. A World War II Folbot canoe is shown here.



They carried out their tasks and at a pre-set time in the night - the time switch started the compressor and up came the craft. Then they could send out the intelligence they had gleaned on Dennis's powerful transmitter. As soon as they were ready - they press the switch and the craft would again disappear below the waves - except that on our trials off 'Ness Cove' - the wretched thing did not reappear!

Only a month or two ago my interest in the MFU was triggered again, having receiving a call from the family of John 'Tommy' Tucker. They had discovered that I had worked for him in Calcutta in 1945. In my book I recall being quizzed by him and Robin Addie on arrival in Delhi about the MFU - as they plainly knew about the craft. Tommy insisted it did not come up - because it was depending on a 'Venner' time switch and not one made by his family's company!

3. In my last SCU-Newsletter I told of the discovery of a remarkable film of Whaddon Hall and its MI6 (Section VIII) staff in mid 1940. I should have mentioned that the men shown - including my father - had all been involved in the urgent work on fitting out the 50/60 Packards as mobile SLUs (Special Liaison Units). These were for use in disseminating the infant ULTRA in the *likely* event of a German invasion. Please pause now - and try to contemplate how it felt to us - thinking that the victorious German army was preparing to occupy our country? I can tell you *it was a very real feeling*. Try to imagine it yourself.

The cars were driven up from Leonard Williams Packard Showrooms in Brentford in West London. Then taken six at a time in all their gleaming colours including pale blue and lemon yellow, over to Tickfords the famous coachbuilders at nearby Newport Pagnell. There, their gleaming paintwork quickly became a drab wartime camouflage.



Anyone who could use a screwdriver was then put to work making them into mobile wireless vans - all sixty of them. My father recalled the cars arriving in all their glorious colours and being one of those roped in to fit receivers and transmitters in them - as the need for them was so very urgent.

They were then dispersed across the country alongside major military units and vital organisations such as the Admiralty, the Air Ministry, the War Office, Fighter Command and so on. If any of these had to move in face of the German invasion - they would still be able to receive intelligence and the infant ULTRA by the wireless gear these chaps fitted.

This remarkable film, contained pictures of 25 men and I was asked to put names to as many as possible. I have only managed about 9 positives including my father (!) and Wilf Lilburn * who lived with us at Caterham before the war, while supervising the building of 'Funny Neuk' the transmission station at nearby Woldingham - handling the outgoing traffic from the original SIS 'Station X' beside the Thames at Barnes.

A 'War Station' (or 'bolthole!') copy of the Barnes station was built at Bletchley Park by Richard Gambier-Parry's team. The team included Jack Saunders and the other highly skilled ex-Chief Petty Officers Telegraphists from the Royal Navy - before the MI6 (Section VIII) was finally settled in Whaddon Village in early 1940 - some five miles west of Bletchley Park.

* Wilf Lilburn was one of our most talented wireless engineers who had worked for Philco before being 'pinched' by Richard Gambier-Parry knowing his undoubted talent. He had a distinguished career in wireless and some of his work is mentioned on pages 305 and 306 of 'The Secret Wireless War.' It includes being a member of the team who designed 'Ascension' with Dennis Smith and Alfie Willis.



Also I must mention his journey to Holland to replace the wireless stolen from our gullible Head of SIS in Holland, by the German Abwehr at Venlo in November 1939 on the German Dutch border. Worse still - they captured our two SIS officers in Holland - Best and Stevens. **See Wikipedia - 'Venlo Incident.'**

The picture of Wilf is just one of the twenty-five on the film. Naturally he was an easy one for me to name. By the way, I have just posted A4 glossy pages showing the twenty-five portraits marked A - Z in white ink - to David Kenyon the Bletchley Park Historian, Peronel Craddock Head of Collections and Rosie Burke its Media Manager. They are important members the excellent team at Bletchley Park.

3. My third Book? I am not sure if I have ever mentioned my third book? It was launched in 2014 at the Science Museum in Kensington. It is entitled **'Busted Flush! The Thomas Crapper Myth'** and sub-titled **'My Family's Five Generations in the Bathroom Industry.'**

If you ask almost anyone - who designed the world's first WC pan - *as we know it today* - the answer would most likely be Thomas Crapper but that is wrong. It was my great-uncle Frederick Humpherson in 1884. He called it 'The Beaufort' as his showroom office showrooms and workshops were in Beaufort Street Chelsea, on the corner of Fulham Road. He also used my great-grandfathers showrooms in nearby 331 Kings Road Chelsea.



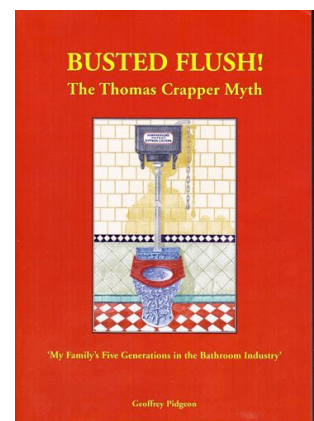
Frederick Humpherson - was apprenticed for four years to Thomas Crapper in 1871. His father, my great-grandfather Edward, then lived in Marlborough Road Chelsea - nearly opposite Crapper's offices and workshop. In turn his other sons, my grandfather Alfred and the youngest William were his apprentices. Crapper later moved to the Kings Road, Chelsea.

Frederick died in 1919 and left the business to his brother Alfred who in 1945 - left it in turn to his daughter my mother who, at the time, was a Nurse in the Bletchley Park clinic. At the end of 1945 whilst I was in India - the family moved into the mansion flat above the Fulham Road showrooms. They were at the end of a cul-de-sac we owned known as Holmes Place.

Father left MI6 to help run the business and when I came home in 1947 I joined the company - the fourth generation. The premises were rather large and when I sold them in 1973 they became the first of the Holmes Place Health Clubs. It is now a European wide organisation, with other branches but our original property in Holmes Place - is still a health club but of Virgin Active!

The book contains the story of bathrooms through the ages - the giants of the Victorian era, our own history and the ups and downs of my business life having taken over at 29 on the premature death of my father. In turn my three sons joined me - the fifth generation. It mentions my work on Churchill's bathroom, supplying 7,300 hotel bathrooms in 30 months and much more beside. There are 300 A4 pages with many illustrations in colour throughout!

Covid-19 has meant dark days for us all but let us pray that the continued reduction in reported deaths is sustained and it is fading from our shores.



With my kind regards and best wishes,
Geoffrey