

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 3-21
Saturday, June 12, 2021

1. How good things happened to me - by mishap! Regular readers might recall that in 1943 - I went from helping to make the hugely successful MkVII at the Little Horwood 'Factory' - into the newly formed Mobile Construction team of seven back at Whaddon Hall.

Before we even asked the reason for the name, Dennis Smith our new boss, told us it was because - *'If it is mobile - Mobile Construction will fit it with wireless!'* So after settling in, I started to help fitting our wireless gear into wireless trucks to take ULTRA right into Military Commanders HQ in the Field, fitting 'Ascension' air-to-agent wireless into aircraft and also our gear into Motor Gun Boats down at Dartmouth. All that is covered in earlier SCU-Newsletters and in 'The Secret Wireless War.'

But *surely* MI6 (Section VIII) had already been doing these tasks? Well yes, of course, but on an ad-hoc basis using anyone available for each job. **UNTIL** one day at Little Horwood when three chaps from its workshops were fitting our gear into a '**Phantom**' armoured car on the road outside. In completing the work, one of them (and I *do* remember his name) had tested the 'Tiny Tim' battery charger. He realised it was low on petrol and began to top it up - without switching it off!

In quickly dropping the petrol can - it fell under the vehicle setting it alight and it became a complete write-off. Hearing the noise we ran outside to watch just as the SCU7's fire tender appeared - pulled by one of our fleet of Packards!

So from then - it was decided to form a dedicated team called - Mobile Construction.



On the left is a Daimler Dingo armoured scout car as used by **Phantom** - and as burnt out at Little Horwood!

To the right is a US Army M3 Scout Car manufactured by the White Motor Company. It was used widely in World War II as a scout vehicle and by **Phantom** patrols as its base vehicle. Its main weakness was its canvas tilt cover. The usual wireless fitted into **Phantom**s M3 Scout Cars and Daimler Dingos, was standard British Army wireless gear 107 Receiver, 52 and 19 sets. That is - except for the 'several' that were fitted at Little Horwood - the last of which was almost incinerated!

So why did Phantom need vehicles with MI6 (Section VIII) gear?

Apart from unwittingly being the reason for the formation of Mobile Construction - what was the role of **Phantom** in World War II? Firstly, its official title was 'GHQ Liaison Regiment' and it started life in France during the German drive across Belgium and just before Dunkirk. It was intended to provide current information about the situation on the front line by wireless directly back to GHQ.

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Back in Britain it was expanded and rapidly developed into 'Squadrons' and extended out from that base were 'Patrols.' Each of these had an officer, an NCO and about ten other ranks. They were very mobile with Dingo Scout armoured cars, Jeeps, motorcycles and an M3 White Scout Car. The men were all specialists including, linguists, drivers, wireless operators and ciphers.

The Regimental Headquarters were the Richmond Gate Hotel, so named as it is opposite the Richmond Gate of Richmond Park! This extends over 2,400 acres and is surrounded by a brick wall eight miles long and up to 9 feet high. It contains about 600 deer and is about a mile from my home here in Courtlands.

The Officers mess and billets were in Pembroke Lodge inside the Park and now a popular restaurant, tearooms and wedding venue. **Phantom** had many famous officers - among the best known was David Niven. He had been at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, passing out in the late 20s' as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry.



On the left is Second Lieutenant David Niven in the late 20's. On becoming bored with the peacetime army, he resigned his commission in 1933, relocated to New York then travelled to Hollywood - where he won fame and fortune - pictured in the middle. On the right is Lieutenant Colonel David Niven - a very successful commander of a **Phantom** Squadron in France after D Day.

Now I come to a most extraordinary picture taken in Richmond Park with the **HRH Duke of Kent** inspecting a squadron of **Phantom** accompanied by their commanding officer **Major David Niven**.

Note: The Daimler Dingo armoured Scout cars lined up.

One can date the photograph as the Duke of Kent died in the crash of a Short Sunderland plane in Scotland in August 1942, while on route to Reykjavik - so it is *likely* to have been shortly before then judging by the dry grass. Is that St Matthias Church spire on the left horizon?



Throughout researching this article, my overriding interest was why on earth an army unit - already equipped with British Army wireless sets - should send several **Phantom** vehicles to be fitted with MI6 (Section VIII) wireless sets at Little Horwood?

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Then I found an article about **Phantom** on the web and took a piece from it. However hard I tried since - I cannot now find its source. So my apologies to the author(s) for using this extract but it was so illuminating I reproduce it as follows:

*“Phantom was a unit born as No 3 British Air Mission during the Battle of France [1940] Its job was to stay in forward positions and send back information about the movements of “bomb lines,” areas devoid of Allied troops and thus safe to bomb. The task was later expanded:[1944] patrols of up to 11 men stayed at the front (and sometimes behind enemy lines) monitoring troop movements and listening in on Allied tank radio communications. **They then used small, specially-made radios** to report back to Corps HQ, giving them clear and up-to-date information on the battle faster than the information could filter through any other line of command.”*

*“**They then used small, specially-made radios...!**”* The article is surely referring to those we manufactured at Little Horwood! So is this the reason for the Scout Car being at Little Horwood that led to the formation of Mobile Construction?



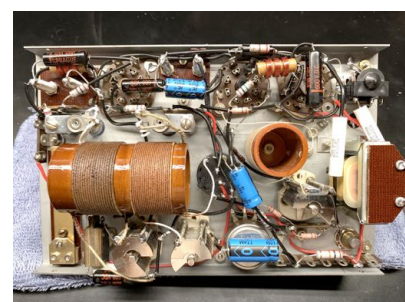
Whatever the reason, I am grateful to **Phantom** for the beneficial change to my future in MI6 (Section VIII) - leading to the exciting and fulfilling life that followed for me with Dennis Smith and his team.

The Phantom badge.

2. Congratulations to Gary Poland - W8PU of Midland, Ohio, USA. I am fortunate in so many ways but in the context of MI6 (Section VIII) - of the increasing number of chaps who tell me they are reproducing our MkVII and MkVII/2 wireless sets. I mentioned Hiroki Kato in an earlier SCU-Newsletter and his new book ‘The Paraset Radio’ with a picture of a MkVII on the cover. Please note: the MkVIIs were entirely created and produced by MI6 (Section VIII).

However, to meet the demand, I understand later they were made in larger quantities by one of the manufacturers of pre-war radio sets? They were originally intended for the exclusive use of SIS agents and to replace our heavy MkV but I am told that later many were used by SOE agents.

Gary’s set looks very authentic but I was particularly impressed with the picture of the wiring underneath.



Gary’s power pack leads me neatly onto an item for the next SCU-Newsletter - Jock Denham and a 2 inch long drill!

With kind regards and best wishes to you and yours.

Geoffrey