

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 5-19
Tuesday, October 1, 2019

1. Ian Fleming and Goldeneye in SCU-Newsletter 4-19.

In my last Newsletter, I wrote about Ian Fleming's Operation 'Golden Eye' and its connection with our unit MI6 (Section VIII). Since then I have rediscovered a booklet by my friend Mavis Batey. She was a leading code breaker and one of Dilly Knox 'Girls' at Bletchley Park.

I have also just found this rather hazy picture of HRH Prince Charles and The Duchess of Cornwall opening the Ian Fleming Exhibition at Bletchley Park in 2008.

It shows left to right Camilla, Prince Charles, Simon Greenish (then Bletchley Park CEO), Keith and Mavis Batey. They are looking at a German Enigma machine.



The booklet was entitled 'From Bletchley With Love' - as it says on the cover - '*An accompaniment to the 'From Bletchley With Love Exhibition' at Bletchley Park.* - I treasure this slim volume '*From Bletchley With Love*' - as Mavis sent me a copy and wrote a dedication inside - in her tiny handwriting '*...from Mavis Batey with love.*'

2. Some personal news!

A few weeks ago, I was made aware that some of my wartime work had been reported to the Ministry of Defence in London and I was to be made **Chevalier de L'Ordre de Legion d'Honneur**. This was a total surprise and I then traced how it had come about - and who instigated it! The MOD has given me permission to print this portion of the official notice for my friends and so here it is -

'On the 70th anniversary of D-Day in June 2014, the (then) French President announced that the Chevalier de L'Ordre d'Legion d'Honneur (Legion d'Honneur) would be awarded to all British veterans who fought for the liberation of France during the Second World War. The Legion d'Honneur is France's highest, most prestigious award. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) undertook the administration of applications in support of the French authorities, working closely with the French Embassy and facilitating the attendance of Seniors at awards ceremonies held by the Ambassador.

Since then some 6000 veterans have applied to the MOD and received the medal. Having reached a new milestone of the 6000th veteran to be awarded, we will mark the occasion with a joint Anglo/French presentation at Lancaster House on 28th October 2019 recalling the Lancaster House Treaties of 2010.

Legion d'Honneur presentations routinely attract very positive coverage, with news channels covering it in prime time. Given that opportunities in this field are becoming increasingly rare, as the number of Legion d'Honneur applicants decreases, this truly will be a special event.

The reception will involve speeches by the Secretary of State for Defence and French Ambassador, along with the formal presentation of the Legion d'Honneur to the 6000th Veteran, Mr Geoffrey Pidgeon.'



Naturally the majority of recipients have been members of the Army, Navy and Air force but I am aware that several have been bestowed on members of the wartime SOE (Special Operations Executive).

I certainly know of two awards connected with our unit. These were to Wilf Neal, and Len Digby wireless operators in France receiving ULTRA traffic arising at Bletchley Park - via our wireless station on 'Windy Ridge' in Whaddon Village.

Wilf Neal was with General Patton's 3rd US Army and Len Digby with General Simpson's 9th US Army. I have written about their awards in earlier SCU-Newsletters. Neither was actually in MI6 (Section VIII) (SIS) and they remained paid by the Army. However, both were told that several pounds per week would be paid into their Post Office savings accounts from SIS funds. I am not sure that it actually happened!

Here is an interesting picture of Mavis Batey - the famous code breaker taken at Bletchley Park after she gave a talk about the US contribution and the dissemination of ULTRA via our SLUs.

Standing behind Mavis left to right - Len Digby, me, then Wilf Neal

This has appeared in an earlier SCU-Newsletter but it is relevant to material here. We three became good friends after they attended various talks I had given to veterans and later at the launch of my book 'The Secret Wireless War' in 2003.



3. Members of my family have been invited to attend the event. I trust their mobile phones will be fully charged to ensure I have some pictures for you in a later SCU-Newsletter. I am given to understand that the media will be in attendance so pictures may also arise from that source as well?

4. Dennis Smith - an appreciation! Whilst I am to receive this prestigious award - I realise how much I owe to my late boss and friend - Dennis Smith. At Whaddon Hall (HQ of MI6 (Section VIII)), he was tasked by its Controller Richard Gambier-Parry with forming Mobile Construction to bring together a number of ad-hoc departments. These were individually handling wireless installations in ships, mobile wireless stations and the new concept of contacting agents on the ground from aircraft - Ascension.

He brought together a mixed bunch of chaps from various departments but who had one thing in common - adaptability and multi-skills. Fortunately for me, I was included - no doubt after Dennis spoke to men I had worked for earlier? When I started to write 'The Secret Wireless War' in 1997, one of the first colleagues I contacted was Dennis at his home in Adelaide, South Australia. Sadly he was unable to help, due of his continued connection with SIS.

However, in an e-mail on 3rd December 2006 - and knowing I was going to give a talk about Ascension at Bletchley Park - 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**'. He then gave me significant further information about our work on Ascension and later on fresh details of our work in Mobile Construction.

Our work ranged from Lockheed Hudson and Ventura aircraft at RAF Tempsford and B25 Mitchells at RAF Hartford Bridge, MGBs (Motor Gunboats) based in Dartmouth, MTBs (Motor Torpedo Boats) down in Brixham, constructing all the mobile SCU/SLUs (wireless vans) for D-Day, the mysterious MFUs at Teignmouth in Devon, and more besides



Left to right - Lockheed Hudson - B25 North American Mitchell - MGB 502 of 15th MGB Flotilla.

These might indicate the varied work we carried out while I was with Mobile Construction but perhaps a bigger task was the building of the mobile wireless vans used for the Allied armies on an after D Day. All the vital ULTRA traffic arising from the code breakers at Bletchley Park went out to these vans in Morse - via our wireless station on Windy Ridge in Whaddon Village - to Allied Generals in France.

For the US Army Commanders we used stripped out WC-54 Dodge Ambulances. For the British and Canadian Army Commanders we used British Army Guy 15cwt wireless vans stripped of Army Wireless equipment and fitted with our MI6 (Section VIII) gear instead.

Dodge ambulance as they arrived at Whaddon. I found they were a pig to drive!



On the right - fitting out the Guy 15cwt vans. I am leaning out of the window of the right hand van. Most of the others are wireless operators having a look at the vehicles they will use on and after D Day.

I really must rewrite parts of my own story in 'The Secret Wireless War' to include corrected or additional material from Dennis. However, to save cost to readers, I will deal with the relevant areas in later SCU-Newsletters. Nevertheless, at some stage I will have to produce a fully up-to-date-edition.

I shall always be grateful to Dennis for the opportunity of working with such a skilled engineer, the kindness he showed me then, and with his help many years later, with my presentation on Ascension to veterans at Bletchley Park.

Most of the Mobile Construction team - both army and those in MI6 (Section VIII) - like Dennis Smith here in civvies, Norman Stanton at the wheel, me sitting on the running board and our carpenter. This was a Pontiac shooting brake issued to Dennis for some of our work.

It is parked close to our workshop hut near the exit gate of Whaddon Hall. All the Signals Liaison wireless vans for D Day were fitted out here.



For several years I have attended the Armistice Day Service held by the Tempsford Veterans and Relatives Association. I lay a cross in memory of Dennis Smith who flew a number of times from there. Also one in memory of Jack Saunders, a senior colleague returning from newly liberated Paris. He was in a Lysander aircraft lost in bad weather over the English Channel on his return to Tempsford. I know their families are pleased that they are remembered in this way.

With kind regards and best wishes,
Geoffrey