



e-DEFENCE ELECTRONICS NEWSLETTER

The e-NEWSLETTER OF THE DEFENCE ELECTRONICS HISTORY SOCIETY
No 106: May 2021 Part I



#MISSINGMUSEUMS?

The hashtag query - #MissingMuseums? - is the tag of an initiative being run by the Imperial War Museum website to remind us of the importance of museums in projecting our heritage, in particular to younger generations, and how museums have been missed here in the UK during our lockdown. A worthy initiative indeed – but let us pause to consider the fact that some Museums are not going to reopen after lockdown, or perhaps even ever again. Clive Kidd has advised us that the HMS Collingwood Collection has closed. The Collection and its archive are to be moved off site at the earliest opportunity to store in a new location, perhaps Yeovilton; at this future location it will come under the management of the National Museum of the Royal Navy. The collection is being moved so that the space it occupies can be used as “... a Centre of Excellence, which will be used by trainees and trainers alike working closely with the training provider [Fisher Training Ltd]”. The Centre of Excellence has a ready for use date of 31 August 2021; Clive received the notice to quit on 28 March 2021, leaving little opportunity for careful packing of the valuable artefacts, including the radar from the Graf Spee and the only known Type 271 radar, the first operational centimetric radar in the world. This blow follows the IWM’s separate notice to the Duxford Radio Society to quit its Duxford home, and we now understand from *Air-Britain News* that Duxford’s Land Warfare Hall is also to be repurposed and its exhibits dispersed. Does Duxford’s Giant Wurzberg disappear next?

It is our understanding that Duxford Radio Society plan to join forces with the RAF collection at Henlow, and we wish both bodies well in establishing a permanent home there, albeit little in the way of military bases seems to be able to be taken as permanent these days and some large items such as the AA 3 Mk 7 from Sean Swords and the Irish Defence Forces via Graham Winbolt may not easily fit an RAF collection. We hope also for the National Museum of the Royal Navy to take a positive and active interest in the preservation of the Collingwood artefacts showing the Royal Navy's very positive adoption of new technology, and we will keep a watchful eye on developments.

At least **eDEN #106** tries its modest best to be constant in its coverage of Army, Navy, Air Force and clandestine applications of military electronics of all vintages, and this month we present the articles we promised last month, opening Part 1, after marking the sad death of our distinguished member **Ralph Erskine**, and 'Feedback' from **Alan Hartley-Smith**, **Phil Racher** and **Andy Young**, with two articles on **infra-red**, the first from **Barry Chambers** on his own experiments, and the second from **Mike Dean** on **German WW2 equipment for ship detection**. **Clive Kidd** then provides us with photos and details of early **WW1 Naval wireless equipment** – the prices are especially interesting – and **Robert Soek** brings us right up to date with his work on his **F-111 crew compartment restoration**, with a focus on its **power systems** to complement our series on **generators for use in aircraft**. As promised last month, we reprint the Air Publication to show the operation of the **RAF's Syko coding system**, with thanks to **Roger Scott**, of the **Solway Aviation Museum**, and then **Tony Waller**, with considerable support from **Mike Blom**, takes us into Part 14 of his series '**To Restore or Not to Restore**' with the second part of his article on **British and American Rotating Homing Beacon Receiving and Transmitting Equipment for Naval Aircraft**, focussing here on the **ARR-1 and -2 airborne receivers** and the rarely-seen **ship-borne YG transmitter**.

Mike Dean next tells how **SIGESO** investigated the **German WW2 precursor of the railgun** followed by a series of articles and websites on the modern equivalent – with one site detailing how to build an embryonic railgun at home! **Mike Diprose** then provides a find from his files – the manual for the little-known **Metropolitan Vickers 950 Computer**, with its design deriving originally from plans for a **dekatron**-based device (remember dekatrons?). Next, the **Tizard Mission's visits to USA research groups** are rarely described; here, from an Admiralty file preserved by **Mike Dean**, come a sample of their visit notes which are well worth reading (and to note American openness). **Tailpiece** concludes Part I with, fittingly, **Clive Kidd** providing **Mac MacNelis'** photo of the plaque in the garden of the **Chicksands Y-station** to round off our article in last month's issue.

In Part II, a series of articles on and around **ASV Radar**, beginning with **Simon Watts** on '**ASV Mk. II In Flying Boats of the US Navy**'. We then celebrate the early career of our own **Air Commodore John Clements**, now 99 years young and very much active, who has kindly allowed **eDEN** to reprint three chapters of his memoir '**Electronic Airborne Goldfish**' – get a copy on Abebooks or Amazon if you can, a great read! Next, a find from MRATHS's assiduous archivist, **Hugh Williams**, in the form of the previously unpublished transcript of a **National Trust, Orfordness, interview with Robert Hanbury Brown and Keith Wood**, which goes into both early work at Orford and Bawdsey, and also **Keith Wood's** later work on nuclear weapons at Orford. **Simon Watts** then rounds off with his article on **Generators for use in Aircraft – ASV**, and **Tony Waller** closes with a short maritime quiz in **Tailpiece 2: 'Now we can go down to the sea again'**, where and what are these historic places?

Particular thanks, as always, to **Mike Dean**. More next month, and meanwhile, suggestions for improvements, offers of articles and all general comments to me please at philjudkins@btinternet.com or info@dehs.org.uk.

Warmest regards all, and keep safe,

Phil

Phil Judkins, DEHS Chairman.

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RALPH ERSKINE

We record with great sadness the death of our distinguished member Ralph Erskine, CB, former permanent secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, and assiduous historian of code-breaking at Bletchley Park, who passed away peacefully in his sleep on 9th April. A graduate of Queen's University in Belfast, and a long-time member of Ulster Gliding Club, Ralph is best known to DEHS members as the author of a series of excellent papers in *Cryptologia* and other journals on the breaking of the Enigma and related codes during the Second World War, and as the editor of 'Action This Day', a compendium of 22 articles later revised as 'The Bletchley Park Codebreakers', (most recently re-released in a co-edited version with Michael Smith), and described by the editor of *Cryptologia* in his 2002 review as "Absolutely, the best book ever written about code-breaking at Bletchley Park". Ralph's work maintained this high standard throughout his life, and we salute the passing of a giant in the field of cryptological history.