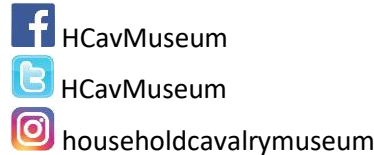




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HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY MUSEUM COLLECTION

No: 6

MENZIES' WEDDING PRESENT

Hello, and welcome back to the Household Cavalry Museum's video podcasts. In last week's video I told you about a couple of our horses. This week, I'm staying with the equestrian theme, although the object that I am going to show you is made of precious metal rather than flesh and blood.

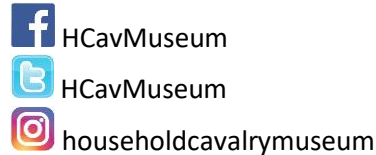
The piece in question is a silver-gilt equestrian statue of an officer of the 2nd Life Guards in Mounted Review Order made by Carrington & Co. It was given to Major Stewart Menzies as a wedding present by his brother officers when he married Lady Avice Sackville, youngest daughter of the 8th Earl de la Warr, on 28th November 1918. Of itself, this statuette is not very remarkable, but there are aspects of it and its owner that I think you will find interesting.

For a start, there is the fact that, although much of the gilding has now worn off, when it was given this wedding present would have looked like gold. This was not because Stewart Menzies or his wife had a



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liking for bling, but because it was a tradition in the 2nd Life Guards that all their Mess silver was gilded. This was one of the many peculiarities that the 2nd shared with the regiment to which they were closest. This was not the 1st Life Guards, but the Tenth Royal Hussars, with whom the 2nd shared the same Regimental March (Men of Harlech), frequently exchanged officers, including Colonels of the Regiment, and referred to each other as the ‘Second Battalion’.

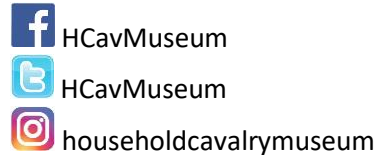
Even more interesting that the statuette itself, however, is its recipient. The younger of two brothers, Stewart Menzies – on the right – was born into a family whose wealth was derived, on his father’s side, from whisky and, on his mother’s side, from shipping. Menzies’ parents were friends of The Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, shown here as Colonel of the Tenth Hussars. There was even a rumour that the Prince was Stewart’s real father.

True or not, Menzies, whose step-father was the courtier Lieutenant Colonel Sir George Holford of the 1st Life Guards, was educated at Eton and commissioned in 1910 into the Grenadier Guards, although he transferred to the 2nd Life Guards after only a year where he joined his elder brother, Keith.



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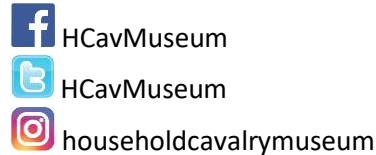
Menzies' service in the First World War as a 2nd Life Guard included action in 1914 at Zandvoorde, where he was wounded, and the First Battle of Ypres, in the course of which – as only a subaltern – he earned a DSO. His time in the trenches came to an end in 1915 after being severely gassed during the Second Battle of Ypres, during which he was awarded an MC. For the remainder of the war, Menzies worked on Field Marshal Haig's Staff, where he started his career in Intelligence. In 1919, as a recently promoted Lieutenant Colonel, Menzies was posted to MI1(c), later re-designated the Secret Intelligence Service.

Once installed in the Foreign Office, Menzies' first job in SIS was as Assistant Director for Special Intelligence. In this role he almost certainly played a part in the publication, just four days before the 1924 General Election, of the notorious Zinoviev Letter. This was a document which was purported to have been sent by the Head of the Communist International to the Head of the Britain's Communist Party, urging closer ties between the USSR and the UK as a means of advancing the Communists' revolutionary agenda in this country. The disclosure of the Letter in the *Daily Mail* was intended to discredit the first Labour Government, which was at the time of the General Election engaged – with the support of Liberal MPs – in



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trying to obtain Parliamentary ratification of a trade deal with the Soviets. Although the Letter did not impact on the Labour vote, the prospect of Red revolution on Britain's streets caused the Liberals' electoral support to collapse and thereby delivered a landslide victory to the Conservatives. It is now generally agreed that the Zinoviev Letter was a forgery, with fingers pointed at, amongst others, SIS and MI5. Menzies was promoted to Deputy Director of SIS in 1929 and advanced to the rank of a Colonel on half-pay. He continued in this role until two months after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 when the Head of SIS, Admiral Sir Hugh 'Quex' Sinclair, unexpectedly died and Menzies was appointed 'C' in his place.

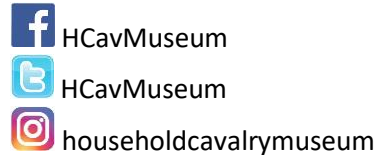
Unfortunately, the war did not start well for Menzies with the capture by the Germans at Venlo, in then-neutral Holland, of two SIS officers who had gone there to meet contacts who were actually SS officers masquerading as members of an underground opposition in Germany.

Undismayed by this set back, Menzies demanded additional funding for SIS and that all code-breaking should be under his department's supervision. Because of the incredibly important information decoded at Bletchley Park, Menzies' access to and influence with the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was considerable: he met with Churchill



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over 1,500 times between 1940 and 1945 and rarely left London during the war.

Menzies was promoted to Major General in 1944 and remained in post as 'C' until mid-1952. This was a period during which the Soviet Union successfully penetrated SIS, a fact which some historians blame on Menzies for his habit of recruiting people with whom he felt at ease socially, such as Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt. That said, any post-war short-sightedness in Menzies' recruitment policy at SIS must be more than offset by his pivotal role in the defeat of Germany and her allies in 1945.

In a neat piece of historical irony, Menzies – the putative son of King Edward VII – died on 29th May 1968 in King Edward VII Hospital for Officers and – for reasons that are unrecorded – the widow of his third marriage presented the wedding present Menzies had been given on the occasion of his first marriage to the Household Cavalry Museum, where it can be seen today in the reserve collection display at Combermere Barracks, Windsor.

I hope that you have found interesting this look at a piece of silver-gilt that once belonged one of our most distinguished alumni. Next week I



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am going to be taking a look at an even more famous Life Guard whose reputation is currently the target of much vicious and ill-informed mudslinging. In the meantime, stay safe...