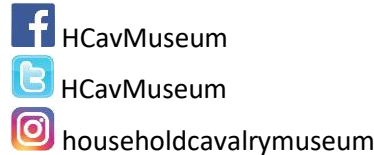




THE
HOUSEHOLD
Cavalry
MUSEUM

Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AX



Podcast 11 ~ HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY ANECDOTES

Hello. My name is Christopher Joll and I'm the Regimental Historian of the Household Cavalry.

If you have listened to any of the ten podcasts preceding this one, you will know that each week – since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown – I have been recounting stories of some of the extraordinary men who have served in the Regiments of the Household Cavalry. This week, it is the turn of Colonel David Smiley of The Blues.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Although characters in fiction are rarely if ever exact pen-portraits of real people, it is probable that James Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, who worked in Naval Intelligence during the Second World War, knew David Smiley either personally or by reputation. Whether or not Fleming drew on his exploits when he created 007, the stories of Smiley's career in and out of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service reinforce the adage that 'truth is stranger than fiction'.

David Smiley was born into an upper-class family – both his grandfathers were Baronets – and, after school at Pangbourne Nautical College and officer training at the Royal Military College Sandhurst, he was commissioned into The Blues in August 1936. This was midway through the brief reign of King Edward VIII whose rare cypher is etched on the blade of Smiley's service sword, now on display in the Household Cavalry Museum in Windsor.

From his subsequent career it would seem that war could not come too quickly for Smiley who, in early 1940, found himself in Palestine with 1HCR as part of the largely redundant British 1st Cavalry Division. The lack of front-line action with 1HCR led him to volunteer first for the Somaliland Camel Corps and then for 52 (Middle East) Commando, with which unit he saw action against the Italians in Abyssinia. Unfortunately for Smiley, 52 Commando was disbanded in early 1941 and he returned to 1HCR with whom he served in Syria, Iraq and at the Battle of el Alamein.

Shortly after this, Smiley volunteered for Special Operations Executive, the organisation set up by Churchill to 'set Europe ablaze' with guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines, and, by April 1943, Smiley was operating in Albania where, over the next eighteen months, he served



THE
HOUSEHOLD
Cavalry
MUSEUM

Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AX



two utterly hair-raising tours for each of which he was awarded a Military Cross. Whilst on Special Operations Executive operations in Albania, Smiley wore his Blues battledress to protect him, if captured, from being summarily executed as a spy. The Major's 'crowns' on this uniform were made of 24-carat gold, not for vanity but as a ready form of currency should the need arise; these are today on display with his service sword.

With the war in Europe drawing to a close following D-Day, Smiley was transferred to Special Operations Executive's Far East operation, where he was parachuted into Japanese-occupied Siam in May 1945. His mission was again to organize resistance. However, this was cut short when his briefcase, which was designed to explode when required, blew-up prematurely in his hands, causing serious burns to his face, knees, and arms. Evacuated to India to recover, he returned to Siam in August. The war was soon over but important jobs remained, and Smiley took the surrender of a Japanese Division and helped liberate four thousand allied PoW at the Japanese camp at Ubon. On British orders, he also re-armed a company of Japanese soldiers and freed one hundred and twenty women and children held hostage in Indo-China by Annamite Communists. For his work in the Far East he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

After the Second World War, the public record is coy about Smiley's employment until he assumed command of The Blues in 1951. His Army Record of Service covering the period 1946-1951 merely states that he was on the Staff of the 'British Embassy, Warsaw' in November 1946 and then 'specially employed by the War Office' from March to May 1948, although where or doing what is not disclosed.

Smiley was, in fact, working for the British Secret Intelligence Service during this period.

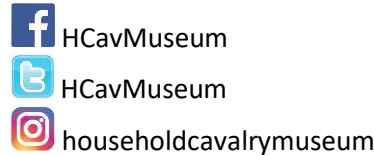
In Poland, in the guise of the Assistant Military Attaché, he was involved in subverting the Communist regime, was uncovered, beaten-up and then expelled in 1947. His 'special employment' in 1948 also involved him in Operation VALUABLE. This was an operation to train and infiltrate into Albania anti-Communist Albanian exiles with the aim of overthrowing the Communist regime of Enver Hoxha. The Operation ended in disaster when most of the infiltrators were captured and executed, following their mission's betrayal by the traitor Kim Philby. This failure affected Smiley for the rest of his life and was the last of his direct attachments to the Secret Intelligence Service.

Once more on the public record, in 1953 Smiley, then the Commanding Officer of The Blues, commanded the Sovereign's Escort on The Queen's Coronation Procession. This was followed by his successful leadership of the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces, then engaged in



THE
HOUSEHOLD
Cavalry
MUSEUM

Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AX



suppressing an insurgency which threatened to topple this important UK-friendly regime in the Middle East.

Smiley retired from the Army in 1961 but not from cloak-and-dagger operations, which he recommenced in 1963 as an adviser to the King of Saudi Arabia on the suppression of the Communist insurgency in Yemen.

Over the next five years he made thirteen trips to Yemen, often disguised as an Arab, and was involved in the Secret Intelligence Service-sanctioned deployment in support of the royalist forces of assorted mercenaries and former members of the Special Air Service. Although he hung up his *keffiyeh* in 1968, Smiley continued to advise Albania's anti-Communists in exile until the end of the regime in 1991, whilst continuing to participate in British State ceremonial as a member of Her Majesty's Body Guard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms. He died aged ninety-two in 2009.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

'NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS...'

**A weekly series of podcasts about the Regiments of the Household Cavalry
written and recorded by
Regimental Historian, Christopher Joll, formerly of The Life Guards**

**These anecdotes are drawn from
Christopher Joll's recently published books:**

***The Drum Horse in the Fountain: Tales of the Heroes & Rogues in the Guards*
&
*Spoils of War: The Treasures, Trophies & Trivia of the British Army***

**Both books are published by Nine Elms Books and are obtainable from
www.nineelmsbooks.co.uk or www.amazon.co.uk**