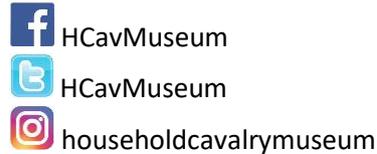




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Podcast 12 ~ HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY ANECDOTES

THE MAN WHO WAS M

“Good evening, Mr Bond”. With those four words, spoken by The Queen during the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympic Games, Her Majesty not only took centre stage with the 007-of-the-moment, actor Daniel Craig, but echoed the words of arch-villain, Karl Stromberg, in the 1977 Bond film, *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

The addition of the Household Cavalry’s Colonel-in-Chief to the pantheon of characters in the spy film series was even more appropriate than the Opening Ceremony’s Director, Danny Boyle, could possibly have imagined given that two of the most celebrated members of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service in the twentieth-century were Household Cavalrymen: Colonel David Smiley of The Blues, who was the subject of last week’s podcast and Major General Sir Stewart Menzies of the 2nd Life Guards, who is my subject this week.

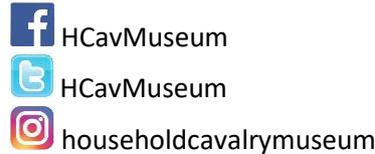
Stewart Menzies was born in 1890 into a family whose wealth was derived, on his father’s side, from whisky and, on his mother’s side, from shipping. Despite the unfortunate Royal Baccarat Scandal in the year of his birth which took place at Tranby Croft, Menzies’s mother’s home in Yorkshire, Menzies’ parents were friends of The Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII; 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 quickly saw the light and after only a year transferred to the 2nd Life Guards where he joined his elder brother, Keith.

Menzies’ service in the First World War as a 2nd Life Guard included action in 1914 at the massacre of the Household Cavalry at Zandvoorde, where he was wounded, and the First



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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. Menzies remained badged to the Regiment until 1929 although, for the remainder of the war, he worked on Field Marshal Haig's Staff, where he started his career in Intelligence.

In 1919, as a Lieutenant Colonel, Menzies was posted to MI 1(c), later re-designated the Secret Intelligence Service or MI6. 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 Zinoviev Letter'.

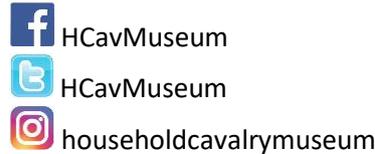
This was a document which was purported to have been sent by the Head of the Executive Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist International to the Head of the Britain's Communist Party, urging closer ties between the USSR and the UK as a means of advancing the Communists' revolutionary agenda in this 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 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, inheriting the leadership of a service that had been starved of funds since its inception.



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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, Menzies not only demanded adequate funding for SIS but also insisted that all code-breaking should be under his department's supervision.

During the Second World War, virtually all German Army, Navy and Air Force signals were encrypted using the ENIGMA machine, an electro-mechanical enciphering and deciphering device which was so sophisticated that the Germans believed it safe even if captured. The story of how the German codes were routinely broken from the end of 1940 was to remain a closely guarded secret until the late 1960s. So too was the code-breakers' crucial role in the defeat of the German Navy's 1943 submarine campaign to cut Britain's supply chain with North America and their vital contribution to the success of D-Day in 1944.

More recently, thanks to numerous books and several Hollywood films, the role of the Bletchley Park code-breakers (and Alan Turing in particular) are now widely recognised, as is that of Menzies, following the 2014 film, *The Imitation Game* in which Mark Strong portrays the former Life Guard.

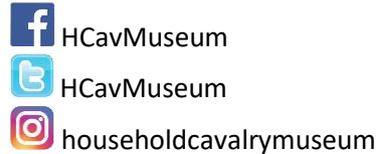
Because of the incredibly important information under his control, Menzies' access to and influence with the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was considerable: he met with Churchill over 1,500 times between 1940 and 1945 and rarely left London during the war. In addition to the many high honours with which he was rewarded for his wartime work, Menzies was promoted to Major General in 1944, despite being 'on the books' of the Foreign Office.

After the war, Menzies 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-



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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 symmetry, Menzies – the putative son of King Edward VII – died on 29th May 1968 in King Edward VII Hospital for Officers.

This, and other stories that I have been recounting in these podcasts are drawn from my book, *The Drum Horse in the Fountain*, which is available on Amazon. Next week, I'm going to introduce you to a collection of rather pious Household Cavalrymen

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'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***

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