

# "Phantom" The Signals Regiment in Richmond Park.

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As most of you who have worked G4BXM "mobile on AM" may have noticed, I make many transmissions from Richmond Park in Surrey (despite the fact that, as a Royal Park, the signs all say -"No Playing of Radios". (I am sure this refers to Radio 1 etc. and not 3.625 MHz.). There are several reasons for this love of the green space, firstly the (largely) QRM free high sites that are reached by the through road and secondly, I pass through daily on my way to work (no more - I've just retired). So it's purely dog walking now.

The other thing that grabs me about the park is the memory of the presence of an army camp that I used to pass on my bike, in the early fifties. It is long since gone and I have tried in vain to find some details about it. However, whilst searching, I did stumble upon something else by a co-incidental chance meeting with a historian who writes for the local paper. She put me on to the restoration going on at "Pembroke Lodge" and thought it would interest me.

There are three main properties in the Park, "White Lodge" - the home of the Royal Ballet School, another is the home of Angus Ogilvy etc. (and other sundry Royals) and the third is Pembroke Lodge.



**Fig.1 Pembroke lodge as it is today**

It has a chequered career. In 1754 it was originally a cottage for the resident molecatcher, but was bought in 1847 by Queen Victoria to house Lord John Russel and became an entertainment venue for such dignitaries as Prince Albert and other great political figures of the day.

Another occupant was Lord Russel's grandson, Bertrand. But, in 1939 or thereabouts, it was requisitioned by the army to become the Regimental Headquarters Of "GHQ Liaison Regiment" (*Phantom*) under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel "Hoppy" Hopkinson. Among other noteables was one David Niven the actor (Major Niven, commander of A Squadron). The initial task of *Phantom* (the regiment was classified as "secret" for no real reason it seems) was to provide, at risk of life and limb, on-the-spot ground information of the movement of troops (friend and foe) and relay this information back direct to a central HQ. Although the personnel of "*Phantom*" did at one point, include 500 pigeons, most of the communication and the establishment of information links was done by radio, and that is where we start to take an interest.

Richmond Park provided an ideal training ground for charging around on motor bikes, armoured cars etc. whilst billeted at (or at least near) Pembroke Lodge.

So, ok, - the question I immediately had was - what equipment did they use for all this - mobile to a base unit? 18/38 sets to a 12 set/R107 fixed set-up sort of thing? I know in 1941 they had a "Marconi Transmitter" circuit between Cairo and Richmond to secure a "rapid and secure link from the battle zone direct to HQ", bypassing (to their chagrin), "many in the chain of command". Certainly, all the pictures I have seen at the



**Fig.2 "Phantom" was not a Royal Signals unit as such, (it was classed as a "Royal Armoured Corps Reconnaissance unit") and there was a cross section of cap badges, but the wireless operators were all Royal Signals. This chap, carefully adjusting the BFO of his R107, wears the regimental patch of the white P against a black background on his right shoulder, the only distinguishing mark of the "secret" Phantom unit.**

Pembroke Lodge archive show sets such as rows of R107's for monitoring enemy transmissions in the field etc. and 52 set combinations mounted in vehicles. But interestingly, the initial reports from the period mention the use of "No 1 sets, No. 11 sets, and No. 9 sets." (before being superseded I presume, by the ubiquitous 19 and 52 sets etc.) I have no great experience of these - never seen one in the army surplus



**Fig.3 This is the lamentable state of the model I have to restore for Richmond and you can see someone has attempted to remove all traces of the military. I will have to remove those sixties knobs that look like "gas taps"**



**Fig.4 The Duke of Kent surveys the "Phantom" A Squadron in Richmond Park, escorted by a helmeted Major David Niven with "Hoppy" Hopkinson doing an impersonation of Kenneth Connor just behind.**

heydays of the fifties and certainly never heard anyone currently talking about them. (G4GEN excepted)

They obviously disappeared pretty quick and didn't make it to the end of the war, when, had they survived, they would have come on the market, and there would have been a glut of them in Lisle street.

However, back at the Lodge, after the war, it became a "Ministry of Works" property and housed a rather depressing cafeteria for park visitors who sat amidst the crumbling pile to eat tea and buns etc. That was until ten years ago when it was due to be sold to private developers for "exclusive luxury housing". This caused the predictable uproar and a saviour by the name of Daniel Hearsom stepped in and the restoration has been his life ever since.

He has restored most of the building and renewed the cafeteria and in the process discovered much archive about the past inhabitants. Eventually, he plans to have various rooms open to the public with relevant permanent exhibitions. Naturally

there will be a "Phantom" room and I find myself as his technical adviser and hopefully AM operator on special occasions at the Lodge.

My first task, it would seem (failing any discovery of 1 sets or 11 sets on the market!) is to restore his R107 (illustrated). I asked him where he obtained it as he is not a "radio" type (I spent some happy hours trying to explain the meaning of "short wave" but to no avail) and he replied rather vaguely "Ebay -I think." I decided to curtail any further enquiries, as I had been quite offensive earlier on, about the "modernised" state of the set.

This R107 is now being married to one offered by G0JXX and between them they should prove a pretty complete working restoration - apart from the watch and a 12 set.

In order to work proper AM from the site, the correct transmitter would be a 12 set but having enquired about the feasibility of obtaining one of these beasts, I am still recoiling at the prices they seem to be fetching (G3LEQ mentioned on air the

four figure sum he received for his three he had for sale recently). And what about *that* valve?

So- I jumped at the chance to make a cheaper (and lighter) alternative and consequently an aluminium "replica" is on the way and will form another article. The only snag in all this, is that when I visited the other day and had the mobile on AM, there was a terrible band - wide noise that reached S9 as I approached the Lodge - that will have to be investigated before I can work from there - could be dishwashing equipment from his new cafeteria. or his battery of modems and internet paraphernalia, not the sort of thing "Phantom" had to deal with.

I leave you with the memories of some phantom RF activities in the form of a letter written to us by a prominent member of the unit in response to a request by Daniel Hearsom at Pembroke Lodge. I think it makes interesting reading.

*The adventure will continue.*