

# Annex 7. David Sissons to Desmond Ball, 11 October 1993

HIROSHIMA SHUDO UNIVERSITY  
Faculty of Law  
1717 Ohtsuka, Numata-cho,  
Asaminami-ku, Hiroshima  
JAPAN 731-81  
Telephone : 81-82-848-2121  
Facsimile : 81-82-848-7788

広島修道大学  
〒731-81 広島市南区大田町1717

11 October 1993

Prof Desmond Ball  
Strategic & Defence Studies Centre  
Australian National University  
G.P.O. Box 4  
Canberra, A.C.T., 2601

Dear Des,

I'm afraid that my work on our wartime 'D' Special Intelligence Section has struck a serious snag -- unwillingness of members to talk because of their secrecy undertakings at the time.

Earlier in the year I wrote to Eric Barnes (later Professor of Pure Maths and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Adelaide). I received an enthusiastic and most informative reply in which he was able to describe each of the codes the Section were reading from the time of his arrival in January 1943. In addition to the low grade ciphers LA and GEAM these were essentially: (i) the blanked columnar transposition, FUJI (the successor to TSU?), and its successor, BA; (ii) the numerical reciphered code, NE, and its successor, 10101. He also described the cryptological problems characteristic of each. He offered to answer any further questions that I wished to put to him.

In his letter, however, Barnes asked for my assurance that he was now free to discuss such matters under what he termed the 'Official Secrets Act' (Enclosure A). I had no alternative but to indicate in my reply that I could not give such an assurance (Enclosure B). I addressed some more questions to him but received no acknowledgment. This I can interpret only as meaning that he is not prepared to talk unless authorised.

Until I encountered this set-back, my intention was next to seek information from Ronald Bond, who joined the Section virtually at the same time as Trendall (January? 1942) and succeeded him as Head in 1944. Although Bond, obviously, could provide much more information than any other member, I had reasons for leaving him until last. In 1945 he was inclined to be tense, impatient and supercilious with his more junior subordinates. While I was fairly confident that Smith, McKay and Barnes would take my enquiries seriously and go to a good deal of trouble providing answers to them, I felt it quite possible that Bond would give Pte Sissons, the lowliest of the linguists, the brush-off. I thought that the best strategy was to leave him until I could demonstrate to him that I had, as a result of patient and systematic research, amassed and digested a good deal of information about the subject and that I had, so to speak, the blessing and cooperation of the rest of the Section.

My other reason for leaving Bond until last was that, of all of us (including those who remained with the organisation after the War), I felt that he, both by temperament and life-style, was the one most likely to refuse to talk on grounds of security.

Yet it seems that both Barnes and Bond have been prepared to talk to David Jenkins. According to Barnes's letter, he gave Jenkins several long briefings. And at p 38 col 1 of his S.M.H. article Jenkins quotes Bond. I understand that you know Jenkins and that he is a frequent visitor at the Centre. I wondered whether, the next

time you see him, you could mention my problem to him and seek his advice. Am I right in thinking that Bond is going to be, at best, cagey? The only information that he attributes to Bond is comments about the examination questions that Treweek set in high-school Greek! Was this all that Bond would discuss; or was he prepared to talk about other things 'off the record'? Or has Bond (like, I hope, some of the rest of us) mellowed and become a more relaxed and more helpful person over the half-century that has passed?

In short, I don't think I can write a useful and informative article without Bond's help as an informant. I don't want to foreclose this by writing to Bond out of the blue, if Jenkins's feels that he is likely to reply with a refusal to help. If that seems likely, I might, instead, get in touch with Trendall and see whether, when I return in March, he could, perhaps, bring the two of us together over a cup of coffee in his rooms at La Trobe. In Trendall's presence Bond might, I think, adjust to regarding me as an academic and not as the Section's thick-head and odd man out.

Now, at last, as a result of the patient briefings by McKay, Smith and particularly Barnes about what the Section was doing and how it did it, I feel that with a couple of hours with Bond and Trendall, the whole thing can be brought into shape.

I've had one other set-back. Through Drea (who has been most helpful) I've managed to make contact with the Head of the Historical Section at Fort Meade (H.F.Schorreck). Unfortunately, he confirms that the only file of Australian diplomatic decrypts that they have is the 1942 volume!

Some months ago I received a letter from Stripp. He asked me if I could suggest Australian reviewers for a volume of reminiscences of Bletchley Park old-boys that Hinsley and he are editing (ISBN 0-19-820327-6; due to be published last August). I suggested Treweek, Barnes, yourself and David Horner. Stripp tells me that, like his own book, it was submitted to GCHQ before publication. It will be interesting to see whether the censorship has in the interim become less (or more?) onerous.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



(D.C.S.Sissons)

Encl: 2 ✓