

Information and Privacy Coordinator
Washington, D.C. 20505

I sent an enquiry to the CIA via the internet and was advised to direct my information request to you by MollyHale@ucia.gov. Tried the e-mail 'default links', but they only came up as 'Page Not Found'.

I'm doing family history research and will try to briefly give some background information, followed by my questions.

My uncle, Canadian Robert Henry Niven, went to England and joined the Royal Air Force 'great expansion' in 1935. He was trained as a pilot and when his 4 year short-service officer's commission was nearly completed, he was recruited in late 1938 by Squadron Leader Fred Winterbotham (worked with the ENIGMA cipher and published the first book on the topic) with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS/MI6) and by Colonel Georges Ronin (after Germany took over France, he became an Allied spy against the pro-German French Vichy government) of the French Deuxieme Bureau, along with a wealthy Australian businessman named Sydney Cotton (had been a Royal Naval Air Service pilot in WWI).

Also involved in their recruitment were Alfred and Ignacio Miranda who owned the American Armaments Corporation based in New York. Employee Paul Koster also involved. Basically they were gunrunners and were the subjects of a Congressional investigation in the 1930's over some conflict in South America, possibly Uruguay or Paraguay.

Cotton and Niven were provided (through the Miranda's and British & French intelligence) with three Lockheed 12A Electra Junior aircraft, which they modified and installed secret camera compartments in England with the assistance of Milo Burcham from the Lockheed Aircraft company.

They had discovered a method of keeping camera lenses defrosted above 8,000' and in the first half of 1939 they flew clandestine aerial reconnaissance missions in the civilian aircraft photographing German and Italian war preparations and military establishments throughout North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Cyrenaicia, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, & Somaliland), the Middle East (Arabia and Aden), the Mediterranean (Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Crete, the Greek Islands, the Dodecanese Islands) and Europe (Germany). Cotton owned a camera film making company named 'Dufaycolor' and during the summer, the German's sent a Herr Schoene (likely a German intelligence agent) to invite Cotton to Germany. Agfa films of Germany wanted to purchase the rights to the Dufaycolor film process and market it on their film base. This gave Cotton and Niven an ideal cover.

In Germany they met Herr Traeder, who was Reichmarshall Hermann Goering's business manager. To sweeten the deal, they took photos from the ground of Goering's mansion, Karinhall on Dufaycolor film and presented them as a gift. They also took secret photos of his underground bunker system at the rear of the building, which was under construction. At the Frankfurt Air Races in August they gave courtesy flights in their Lockheed executive aircraft to various German dignitaries. On one occasion Albert Kesselring was flying the aircraft with German fighters off each wingtip along the most heavily fortified part of Germany, the Ruhr Valley. While he piloted the aircraft, Cotton worked a hidden camera switch beside his seat and my uncle worked the cameras in the back. At the request of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain

and Lord Halifax, Cotton & Niven flew to Berlin to invite Goering as Cotton's guest to England for a holiday. The real purpose of the trip was for a secret meeting so the British government could try to convince him that England would go to war if Germany invaded Poland, and Goering could hopefully convince Hitler. Goering cancelled at the last minute, all civil aircraft was grounded and Cotton & Niven barely escaped Germany days before WWII began. They kept the cameras working as they left Germany and with fighters again off each wingtip. Previously, the Gestapo had warned them to never to return to Germany or they would never be seen again.

Back in England they flew missions for Ian Fleming (of James Bond fame) of British Admiralty intelligence photographing the Irish coast looking for anti-aircraft installations and any possible construction on U-Boat pens.

Two women were also involved on some of the European flights to operate the cameras while Cotton flew the aircraft and Niven navigated. One was Cotton's cousin, Andrea Johansen, and the other was Pat Martin, Cotton's girlfriend. When the RAF took over their unit, they weren't hiring women, so Pat Martin was sent to Italy to spy on the ground and determine Italian intentions. She barely escaped Italy when Germany invaded France, then again barely escaped when the Germans took Paris. On her return to England, she was only able to get a job as an ambulance driver for the rest of the war and Andrea married Niven. Pat Martin later married U.S. Army Brigadier General Beck and still lives on their ranch on the island of Kauai in Hawaii, USA. Neither woman ever received any official recognition.

The Royal Air Force took over their little unit from intelligence, calling it variously, the Special Survey Flight, the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), the Photographic Development Unit (PDU) and 212 Squadron. They were provided with Spitfires and a Lockheed Hudson, which was modified for photo reconnaissance and was flown from French airbases. Cotton had also set up his own photo interpretation unit that the RAF also took over. Many of the other pilots who did photo reconnaissance during WWII were trained by Niven and another RAF pilot named Maurice 'Shorty' Longbottom. Part of their unit was sent to Iraq to take clandestine aerial photos of the Russian oilfields at Baku, preparatory to a raid on them. This caused quite a stir in Berlin and Moscow when the Germans recovered the intelligence documents on the operation when they took France. About two weeks after the Dunquerque evacuation, Cotton and Niven evacuated ENIGMA personnel and equipment from France just before the Germans took Paris, again escaping at the last minute.

Due to his unorthodox style and anti-bureaucratic tendencies, Cotton was given a medal and replaced. Niven was a Squadron Leader now, was given the DFC, then flew about half a dozen to a dozen sorties during the Battle of Britain in an armed Spitfire fighter, but was dropped to his substantive rank of Flight Lieutenant and sent out in his own car to drive around England measuring grass fields for emergency landing strips. Eventually he was promoted to Wing Commander and assigned as Commanding Officer of RAF 59 Squadron at North Coates, a squadron with an extremely high casualty and mortality rate. About a month and a half later (29/30 May 1942) he went missing on a sortie attacking German shipping convoys near the Dutch Frisian Islands on what was likely a diversionary mission for the first 1,000 Plane Raid Over Cologne.

Cotton has now come to be regarded as the father of modern photo reconnaissance by the British and Australians. The main aircraft they used was G-AFTL, which was in the Lexington Kentucky Air Museum until recently. It is still flying in the USA today and is referred to as "Lockheed's First Spy Plane". It's been in a number of movies, including 'The A Team', 'Doc Savage', 'The Amelia Earhart Story' and 'The Howard Hughes Story'. The other two Lockheed 12A's were in France and one may still be in service.

So far I've been able to locate 22 books that give some or parts of their experiences. If you're interested I can provide you with the list.

QUESTIONS:

I have been trying to learn if Cotton and Niven did any work for Bill Donovan and/or Sir William Stephenson (Intrepid), but am difficulty getting information other than what is published in books. Would you be able to answer the question of whether they did work for them (or even one or more missions) or not, or be able to direct me to someone who could?

Have also been having little success on finding anything about Alfred and Ignacio Miranda, or their employee Paul Koster. Can you help there? Is there a book out there somewhere that you're aware of that deals with gun runners during the period from WWI through WWII? Koster was a rather interesting character in his 70's who seems to have worked for just about everyone, including the Germans, French, British and maybe Americans, but was loyal to whoever he worked for at the time.

Again having no success in learning anything much about Herr Schoene, other than he was a pilot in Von Richtofen's (the Red Baron) Flying Circus in WWI when Herman Goering was there. After WWI he did flight training in South America and lost his leg in an air crash, then came to work for Goering in Germany. I suspect he might have been working for German intelligence. Again, any help or suggestions on him would be appreciated.

Would appreciate hearing about any information you may have on this topic, even if I haven't asked the question.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

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