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OBITUARY

Conrad Hepworth Dixon

Unconventional Policeman and Yachting Writer

Conrad Dixon, who has died at the age of 72, was one of the most colourful characters in the world of intelligence, where he pioneered ~~the deep penetration of~~ subversive and terrorist organisations. *Specialist operations to counter the threat from*

A thinking man's policeman, Detective Chief Superintendent Dr. Conrad Dixon was the founder and leader of the Yard's "Hairy Squad", which did so much to ~~counter~~ *counter* anti-state movements in the 1960's and 1970's.

Born into an army family, he spent his formative years in India and went on to be educated at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury and St. Peter's Hall, Oxford. He joined the Royal Marines at the end of the Second World War and was commissioned. As a very young Police Constable he had the job of guarding the notice outside Buckingham Palace which announced the birth of HRH Prince Charles. He soon transferred to the Special Branch, where he carried out protection duties for visiting Heads of State, including Jomo Kenyatta and Ayub Khan. He also worked closely with the Home Secretary, Sir Henry Brooke, whom he came to admire and respect.

Promotion through the ranks of the police force followed and he became an expert in the study of anarchist, trotsky-ite and anarcho-synicalist movements; this during a time of unrest and distaste for the Vietnam War.

Upon his retirement from the Metropolitan Police, he studied at Exeter University and University College London and his Doctorate focused on The Working Conditions of Merchant Seamen in the Nineteenth Century. This area of scholarly research, including the lives of Lascars, engineers and Naval Officers, became his area of focus for many years and he wrote and presented extensively on this hitherto neglected subject.

Always a keen sailor, he spent as much time as he could sailing the coasts of Europe in his much-cherished ketch, Wavency Harrier. He published thirteen books on seamanship and navigation, the first being "Basic Coastal Navigation", which has been in print for over 30 years in many languages. His final work, "Using GPS", opened up the mysteries of the use of Global Positioning Systems to the ordinary reader.

He is survived by his wife Winifred, whom he married in 1947, his four children, and five grand-children.

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Obituary

CONRAD DIXON

Unconventional policeman and yachting writer.

Conrad Dixon, who has died aged (77?). was one of the most colourful characters in the intelligence sphere who pioneered *special operations to frustrate the threat from* ~~the deep penetration of~~ subversive and terrorist organisations. A thinking man's policeman, Detective Chief Superintendent Dr Conrad Dixon was the founder and leader of the *innovative* ~~Heist~~ Squad which did so much to counter anti-state movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

He was born into an Army family and educated at Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury and at St Peter's Hall, Oxford. He joined the Royal Marines at the end of the 1939-45 war and was commissioned. On demobilization he got a job with a football pools company, but a bizarre sequence of events brought him into the Metropolitan Police. He received a letter out of the blue saying that under the post-war Control of Engagement Order he was to leave the gambling industry forthwith and report to the Labour Exchange for more useful employment. A dour clerk gave him two alternatives. He could volunteer for the mines or join the Metropolitan Police at that time an illpaid and poorly-regarded job for the strong and not-too-bright. It seemed the lesser of two evils, and a fortnight later ^{he} found himself at the recruiting office in Beak Street. He was given a certificate of exemption from all educational tests and ushered naked into a small room. A man in a white coat came and stared at his lower half, examined his feet, and went wordlessly away. There was no enquiry about his enthusiasm or aptitude for this new career, and after basic training he reported to division. However, he soon transferred to Special

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Branch where he was to serve for the rest of his service.

Conrad Dixon specialised in a study of anarchists, Trotskyists and anarcho-syndicalists, and his moment came in 1968 when after unrest in Paris and mounting distaste for the Vietnam war a flood of telegrams reached the Foreign Office hinting that revolution was in the air and London was the next focus for discontent. There was no intelligence coming from the anti-war umbrella organisation and he was sent for by a committee of the great and the good. Could he get top-grade information about the revolutionary potential, and what would he need? His reply was concise. Twenty men, half a million pounds and a free hand.

Hairy Squad officers were moulded and shaped into a variety of convincing revolutionaries with the appropriate political knowledge and inserted into local groups. Conrad Dixon led from the front, and when the London School of Economics was occupied he was first up the steps and promptly took charge of the telephone exchange so as to control press releases. On the day of the big demonstration in October he advised the authorities that thin lines of police invited a charge while grouping in side streets fifty yards back meant that an attack on police involved a departure from the route to Grosvenor Square. This remote policy worked, and there was a slow loss of enthusiasm. A thousand anarchists skirmished with police at the American Embassy, but most of the would-be revolutionaries ate their sandwiches in Hyde Park and went home by bus. The revolt had ended with a whimper rather than a bang.

His skills were next required in Wales where the shadowy Free Wales Army was setting off numerous minor explosions and

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winning hearts and minds for the separatist cause. The nationalists were soon alarmed by the penetration of their designs and produced a poster for every telegraph pole calling attention to the danger. It showed a listening figure at a mountain crossroads and the caption "Dixon's Secret Police in Wales. Inexorably the meshes closed and when the principal bomb maker and his assistant were arrested the movement collapsed. Asked by the Home Office for the cause of the discontent his response was brutally frank. Neglect of the Principality where the prevailing view is that the Aberfan disaster would never have happened if that coal tip had been on the outskirts of Highgate.

Back in London, he headed the intelligence unit for the Angry Brigade enquiry where a mainly middle-class set of terrorists were planting bombs and preaching an anti-capitalist creed. Conrad Dixon found they had two weaknesses. They lived in communes which were natural ports of call for other revolutionaries and financed their activities by cheque and credit card fraud. He was at an East End commune when a battered German-registered car pulled up outside and a nervous girl got out and ran away. He ordered seizure of the car and had it taken to pieces. In a sealed compartment were dozens of left-luggage locker keys, and the lockers contained cheque books and organisation details. The rest was routine police work and convictions followed.

In 1973 there was strong pressure on him to conform and go to Bramshill Police College for training as an embryo Chief Constable. He argued passionately that it made no sense to transform a leader of irregulars into a garrison commander sitting behind a desk but his superiors would not give way and

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he left the service to start a new life as a writer and academic. Taking a first degree at the University of Exeter, he went on to University College for a Ph.D on the working conditions of merchant seamen. Declining the offer of a fellowship, his life thereafter had three facets. He wrote extensively on the work of lascars and engineers, crimps and naval officers, and was much in demand at maritime history conferences. Always a keen sailor, he spent three months of every year cruising the coasts of Europe in a much-cherished ketch called the Waveney Harrier and produced a dozen books for yachtsmen, chiefly on navigation and seamanship. His last ^{book} was an explanation of the Global Positioning System which opened up the mysteries of electronics to the ordinary reader, while his first one was not out of print for thirty years. He is survived by his wife, Winifred, whom he married in 1947, four children and numerous grandchildren.

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