



## Dear Reader,

Happy New Year and welcome to my latest newsletter. As well as keeping you up to date with all my stuff, I've included the amazing true story about one of the real wartime agents with Special Ops – hope you enjoy it!

### ***But First: An Award from Her Majesty the Queen!***

If you've been reading my past newsletters, you'll know that I actively support the splendid annual International Kids Lit Quiz run by kiwi, Wayne Mills. Well, Wayne's terrific work over the past 20 years was recognised by Her Majesty in the 2011 New Year's Honours list. Awarded the **Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit**, I'd like to add my congratulations: Well done Wayne – it's well deserved.



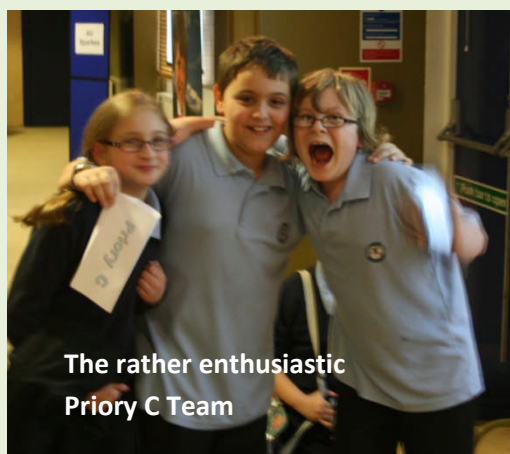
The award is made to people who, *“in any field of endeavour, have rendered meritorious service to the Crown and the nation or who have become distinguished by their eminence, talents, contributions, or other merits”*.....

Blimey! And that's not the only award he's received. Back in 2008 he received the Margaret Mahy Medal (another NZ honour). Maybe one day it'll be, *“Arise Sir Wayne!”* Anyone wanting to find out more, or if you'd like to enter a team in next year's competition – go to [www.kidslitquiz.com](http://www.kidslitquiz.com)

### ***Latest News about Special Operations***

Work is still on-going for the cover design of Book 4, so you'll have to wait a while before I can give you a sneak preview. We're also looking into some new logo designs too ..... I'll reveal all as soon as a decision has been made.

***January's Highlights:***  
***The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Portsmouth Kids Lit Quiz***



The rather enthusiastic  
Priory C Team



Quiz Champs 2011  
St Edmunds C

It's that time of year again! Teams from schools all over the Portsmouth area assembled at Fratton Park's Victory Suite, home to Portsmouth Football Club, for this year's quiz. Competition was as fierce as ever in yet another close run contest. As well as school teams, several comprised students from the university's PGCE course. And.... of course ..... there was an 'Author' team. I was joined with regulars Ali Sparks and Andy Briggs – the terrible trio!



Teams in the Victory Suite



The Terrible Trio

It was great to have the chance to catch up with fellow authors. Ali is busy churning out books by the dozen between appearances at festivals and events. She's also taken part in an episode of BBC 2s 'Eggheads' – so look out for that! Andy, probably best known for his scriptwriting and Hero and Villain.com

series of books gave me a glimpse of the cover of his forthcoming book – *Tarzan*. It's out this summer. Vanessa Curtis, author of *Zelah Green*, was also supposed to join us, but the flu kept her away – hope you're soon better!

Under quizmaster Peter Bone, the competition resulted in three teams tying for third place (City of Portsmouth Boys B, St Edmunds B, and Springfield C), with Springfield C clinching the tiebreaker. Springfield A came second, but this year's champs were St Edmunds C. Well done! In fact St Edmunds are clearly the team to beat as they comprised pairs of students who came first and second in last year's junior quiz.



### ***Amazing True Story: The Lady with the Limp***



Virginia Hall was the adventurous sort; she loved hunting, riding and hiking. Born in Baltimore, USA, she was living in Paris in 1939 when war broke out. Wanting to make herself useful she joined the French ambulance corps and helped evacuate casualties when the Germans invaded in 1940. Driving an ambulance under such conditions would be hair-raising for anyone, but for Virginia it was made even trickier because many years before she'd lost a foot in a shooting accident (a shotgun she was carrying misfired as she clambered over a fence – basically she shot herself in the foot!).

After France surrendered, Virginia was able to get to England using her American passport and she got a job with the American embassy in London. But she wanted to do more than sit behind a desk. Recruited by the real Special Operations she was trained as an agent and in the summer of 1941 found herself in Vichy France under the codename *Germaine*. For over a year she worked to organise the local Resistance, help downed airmen to reach the escape routes, and receive supplies dropped by parachute. The enemy were aware of her but as she was trained in evasion and disguise they failed to catch her – they nicknamed her *la dame qui boite*, the lady with the limp. After the Germans took full control of Vichy France, in the winter of 1942 Virginia made it back to England via Spain, trekking across the Pyrenees. Before embarking on this arduous journey it's said she sent a message to London that she, "hoped Cuthbert would not be troublesome". London replied, "If Cuthbert troublesome

eliminate him.” What London had forgotten was that Cuthbert was Virginia’s nickname for her artificial foot!

Virginia’s next assignment was in Spain where she ran a network of safe houses but she felt this was too far away from the action and so again returned to England where she received training as a wireless operator. By now, Special Operations reckoned it was too risky to send her into the field again.

Undeterred, Virginia got herself transferred to the American equivalent of Special Ops, the so-called OSS (Office of Strategic Services). Within a month, and now codenamed *Diane*, she was back in France, arriving by boat at night. Working south of Paris she relayed information on troop movements. As the enemy closed in on her, she moved further south. Then, as D-Day approached she received new orders – to organise the local Resistance. She did so and when the invasion came they set about sabotaging supply lines and attacking the enemy. All over France other SOE and OSS-led French Resistance groups were doing the same. And when Allied troops invaded the southern shores of France in August 1944, what had been clandestine work became an all out fight. Virginia and her fellow freedom fighters eventually accepted the surrender of the German Southern command at Le Chambon. Virginia was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, and after the war worked in the US for the CIA. As Virginia herself said ..... “Not bad for a girl from Baltimore!”

 <p data-bbox="683 1361 826 1473">Book Award</p>	<p data-bbox="869 1317 1332 1361"><b>Do you live in Staffordshire?</b></p> <p data-bbox="869 1361 1332 1406"><b>Did you enjoy reading</b></p> <p data-bbox="869 1406 1332 1467"><b><i>Wolf Squadron</i>?</b></p>	
<p data-bbox="188 1563 1404 1684"><b>If the answers are ‘YES’ then you might like to nominate <i>Wolf Squadron</i> for the 2011 Young Teen Fiction Award. The 6 most nominated books will form the 2011 shortlist, so every vote counts! But hurry, nominations close....</b></p> <p data-bbox="188 1684 1404 1729"><b>Go to: <a href="http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/librariesnew/lovebooks/teenscene/YTF/">www.staffordshire.gov.uk/librariesnew/lovebooks/teenscene/YTF/</a></b></p>		



**That's it for now folks.....**

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