Swords into Ploughshares - a VC, Pink Floyd and a Saint by **Simon Wilson**

"they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"

Isaiah 2: 3-4



...Have you ever sat in front of your TV watching the news and thought that you wouldn't mind collecting missiles? It's not easy. If you wanted to collect examples of the American Pershing II (*left*) and Russian SS-20 …

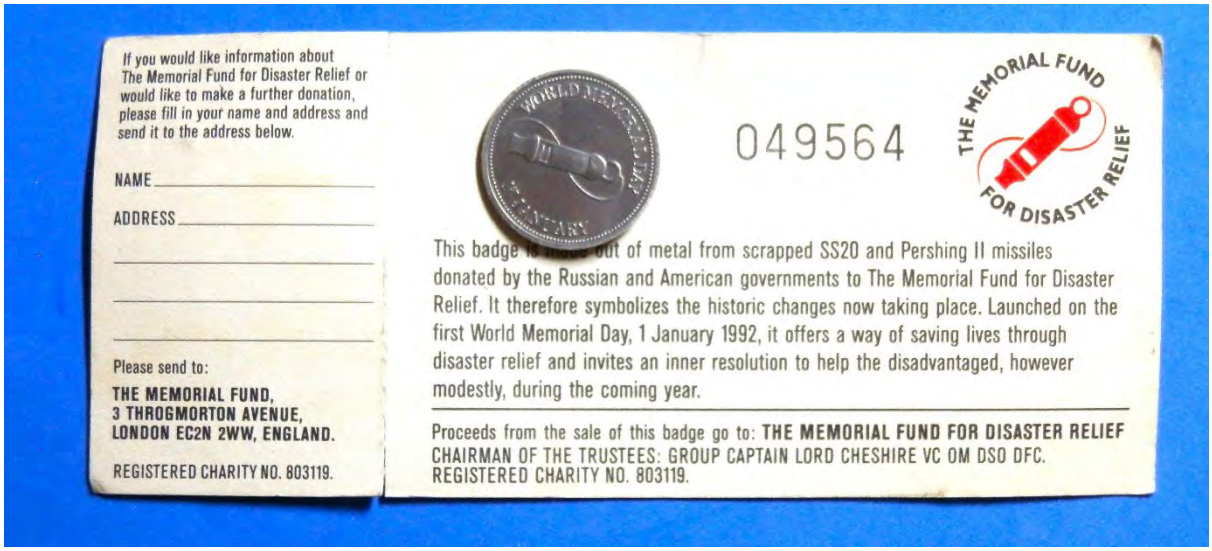
… Smithsonian had to get approval under Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement between the US and USSR. There are also likely to be planning permission issues and a certain amount of resistance from your wife.

...You are going to have trouble locating a specimen for your collection as only fifteen of these types were preserved under the terms of the treaty, making them quite difficult to find. Even if you are able to …



… the SS-20, Saber to NATO (*left*) is over 50 feet long and weighs in at 37 tons so you are going to need a fair-sized garden. Of course, other, smaller, missiles are available if you really want to start a collection.

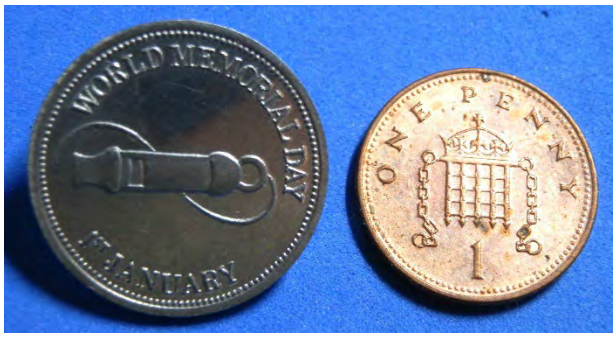
However, there is another way these two icons of the Cold War can be incorporated into your collection. At one time, the world was quite keen on peace and the USA and USSR actually went as far as withdrawing nuclear missiles from service in an attempt to make the world a safer place. The badge pictured here (*below*) comes from those days and is made using metal

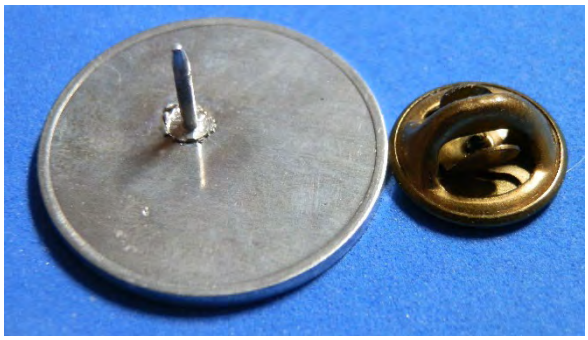




reclaimed from Russian SS20 and American Pershing II missiles. According to the wording of the card it "symbolizes the historic changes now taking place". It just goes to show what a difference a few decades can make.

The badge is a small (22mm) stamped aluminium badge with a clutch pin fastening on the back and is still on its original card. The specimen shown on the Imperial War Museum website is on its original numbered card and is number 192,956 (one on eBay had the number 195,315) so it's fair to say they weren't rare at the time, though I suspect many have been thrown away over the years. At the time of writing there were four on eBay – the two without cards being misidentified, but that, to be honest, is what I expect from eBay. I will come back to this later.





It was issued by The Memorial Fund For Disaster Relief which lists a London address, and says its Chairman was Group Captain Lord Cheshire VC, OM, DSO, DFC. He was, in fact, not just the Chairman, but the founder. He is probably better known in charitable circles, as Leonard Cheshire, founder of the Cheshire Homes, an organisation to allow disabled people to live in safety and in dignity. In military circles he is probably best known as the CO of 617 Squadron in the latter stages of the war, and a British observer at the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945. He one of a select band of only four people to be awarded both the Victoria Cross and the Order of Merit, He is also one of only two people to have the Order of Merit and to have been nominated for elevation to sainthood (Mother Theresa being the other) and the nomination for sainthood in 2017 (the centenary of his birth) by the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia, makes him unique being the only holder of a VC to be so nominated. However, achieving the status of saint takes a long time, and it may be 100 years before we know the outcome of that.

The Memorial Fund For Disaster Relief was launched in 1990, and partly funded by a rock concert – *The Wall – Live in Berlin* - on the site of the former Berlin Wall, on January 1 1992. This was produced by Roger Waters, formerly of Pink Floyd, and featured many well known musicians. Like Leonard Cheshire, it is too big a subject to cover here, but both of them have their own Wikipedia pages if you are interested.

The concert started when Leonard Cheshire blew a whistle variously reported as being WW1 or WW2. That is why the whistle is used on the badge. It could be a WW1 trench whistle, but the pattern was

used by many people in WW2, including RAF aircrew, so we may never know. However, the whistle was described in one article as a call to battle (and whistle and WW1 imagery is used on one of their early adverts) so it is likely the intended symbolism is of a WW1 trench whistle.

The badge itself is an example of the pitfalls of historical research, even if it only goes back 34 years. There are currently four examples of this badge on eBay. Two have cards and are correctly described, two have no cards and are attributed to Police World Memorial Day. The actual date for the INTERPOL police memorial day is 7 March, not 1 January. The misunderstanding comes, I imagine, from the whistle used on the badge – the type widely known as the "Metropolitan" due to its use by the Metropolitan Police.

I'm not sure about the exact provenance of the whistle used at the concert, or what sort of whistle Leonard Cheshire carried during the war, but this type of tube whistle was also widely used by the RAF during the war (along with many other organisations, the police and ARP service being two prolific users) and should not automatically be attributed to the police. Once again, the world of military whistles is a large one and includes the tube types, the snail types (ACME Thunderer, often known as "ditching whistles") and American versions, which had larger mouthpieces. I will allow you a moment to make your own jokes at this point. However, the official reason Americans needed bigger mouthpieces is because they were easier to use with gloves.

The badge is 22mm in diameter with the wording "WORLD MEMORIAL DAY/1st JANUARY" around the edge. In the centre is a tube whistle and lanyard. The reverse is plain apart from a single clutch pin fastening. The card is 140mm x 60 mm and gives details of the work of the organisation and source of the metal used in the badge. The cards are individually numbered.

There are other reminders of these missiles. Also available on eBay, if you want to spend a lot of money on a pen. Specially made Parker pens have been made since the 1950s and in 1991 they were commissioned to make a World Memorial Missile Disaster Relief pen. The metal from the missiles was unsuitable for making complete pens so they settled on inserting a fund logo disc into the cap, using the whistle logo. Fountain pens and ballpoints were offered in cherry wood boxes with numbered certificates and a plaque of missile metal was fixed to the top. They also made pens with plaques fixed to the clips but I have not seen a photograph of this.



Finally, there is the sculpture Good Defeats Evil (*left*), made by Zurab Tsereteli, a sculptor from the Republic of Georgia. It was donated to the UN by the Russian government. At 39 feet high and 40 tons, it is, like the missiles, unlikely to fit in the average garden. It shows St. George slaying a dragon, which is made from Pershing and SS20 missile parts.