

A HISTORY OF THE OLD COMRADES
ASSOCIATION OF ARMY COMMANDOS

(THE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION)

H. BROWN MBE

(GENERAL SECRETARY & TREASURER 1946 - 86)

DECEMBER 1993.

THE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION.

The Old Comrades Association of the Special Service Brigade, later amended to the Old Comrades Association of Army Commandos, was formed on 20th June 1943 at the Commando Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry by the Commandant Lt. Col. Charles Vaughan OBE, who as Founder member, was given membership Number One. Early administration was carried out by numerous available personnel at the centre until late in 1945, by which time a great drive for members in all units of the Special Service Brigade had produced some 6,000 enrolments. A committee comprising representatives of most Commando units was formed to formulate policy, and, in the light of the decision late in 1945 to disband the Army Commandos, arrangements were made through the kindness and help of the Chief of Combined Operations, Major General Robert Laycock, for the Association to occupy a room at his London Headquarters in Richmond Terrace, and close to an office which had been temporarily set up to assist with the resettlement of Army Commando soldiers on return to civilian life.

As the then Association Honorary Secretary, Sgt. Sidney Beddoe, had made it known that he would not be a candidate for selection as the peacetime Secretary, applicants were sought throughout Commando Group. During January 1946, a selection committee, headed by Brigadier John Durnford Slater DSO., appointed SQMS Henry Brown, of No. 1 Commando, who had recently been awarded the MBE for meritorious war service, and who in fact, was already assisting in the work of Commando resettlement. It must be said that his administrative capabilities and knowledge were gained mostly during his army service. In view of this and his desire not to tie the committee down to an appointment which it might later regret, he consented to take over the duties on a twelve month trial. In the event, this was an appointment which was to last for over forty years.

Unlike other Regimental Association Secretaries, who had civil service status and accompanying stipends, the Commando Association received no such assistance, and was entirely dependant on the generosity and subscriptions of the membership. The early post war years were financially stressful for all concerned and there was a period of uncertainty while it was ascertained as to how great was the desire among members to remain in contact and to give the necessary active and monetary support.

In the early stages the Association had little or no equipment of its own, but it was necessary to circulate the membership, and to this end, during a three month period, the Secretary and a number of helpful Commando comrades (awaiting release from the forces) hand wrote six thousand envelopes in which were sent the first two page Association Newsletter. It was soon evident from the excellent response to this that the membership hoped that the Association would succeed. Armed with this assurance, plans were made for the first Association Annual Reunion Dinner, and this took place at the Seymour Hall, London W.1. on Thursday 12th December, 1946 in the presence of Lord Louis Mountbatten and many Commando Brigade Commanders. A very fine attendance of close on seven hundred was achieved, but in spite of the success of the dinner, it was promptly realised that with such large numbers, a buffet type meal was preferable, and in fact the sit-down meal of the first Annual Reunion has never been repeated.

By the end of 1946, several enthusiastic members had approached the General Secretary on the question of forming Branches. Many were formed, and, although a number of these ceased to exist within a few years, largely due to the small level of support forthcoming, many thrived in the larger towns and cities, as well as some in the areas where Commando units had been stationed. These continue to provide a welcome and a beneficial social contact to this day. The Association owes a great debt to the many comrades who have so readily given of their time and effort over many years to this very vital part of the activities of the Association.

With immense pride the Association enjoyed the patronage of many famous wartime commanders including Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis and Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein. Many of the Commando Brigade Commanders and Commanding Officers became Vice Presidents of the Association, taking an added and very special interest in the work and activities of the Association during their Presidency.

Under the guidance of a very active General Committee, a policy was formulated to ensure the continued interest of the membership, coupled with the prime object of supporting any proposals which would help perpetuate the existence and exploits of wartime Commandos. So it was that during 1947, General Sir Robert Laycock, Brigadier Peter Young and the Association Secretary joined in discussions with the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey, along with officials of the Parachute and Submarine Associations for a Combined Special Services memorial, their efforts culminating in that on Friday 21st May, 1948, Sir Winston Churchill unveiled the three figures, sculptured by Gilbert Ledward R.A., of a Commando soldier, parachute soldier and submariner in the Cloisters of Westminster Abbey. Here it was that Sir Winston uttered the memorable epitaph "We may feel sure that nothing of which we have any knowledge or record has ever been done by mortal men which surpasses the splendour and daring of their feats of arms. Truly may we say of them "When shall their glory fade"".

On 6th November, 1948, a wreath was laid on the memorial by the President, Col. Charles Newman V.C., and on Remembrance Saturday afternoon in 1949 a short wreath-laying ceremony was conducted by the Association Chaplain, the Rev. John Armstrong, who continued this annual act of Remembrance until 1963, when our present Chaplain, the Rt. Rev. Maurice Wood kindly took over this solemn duty. The Association is greatly indebted to the aforementioned for their spiritual guidance, and it is gratifying to be able to record that both were eventually enthroned as Bishops in the Anglican church, and that at one period the Association had no less than five Bishops on the membership roll.

A gradual and steady increase in the membership brought about an accompanying increase in activities, and in the amount of correspondence being dealt with, and some assistance was given to the Secretary which lasted for a number of years. Among the developments was the change of name of the Association. The Committee decided that the original title was too long and accordingly, and decreed that it would be henceforth known as "The Army Commandos Association". The value of the Association to the members was recognised in that advice and assistance

on an increasingly varied assortment of problems was sought. In the cases of financial hardship, these were adequately and promptly dealt with by the Commandos' Benevolent Fund, a separate organisation, but one with which the Association has closely worked in perfect harmony at all times.

Shortly after the end of the war, a beautifully engraved Roll of Honour Book was presented to the Association. This contained the names of all Commando Officers killed in action. During 1948, this was completed by adding the names of all the Commando war dead, totalling 1,706 names, and was possible as a result of a very generous donation by Brigadier Ronnie Tod CBE DSO. A provisional home for the book was provided by the Keeper of the Muniments in the library at Westminster Abbey.

During 1947, the Association was advised by Mr. William Gilmour Smith JP. of Glasgow, of the existence of a strong representative committee formed to invite the Scottish School of Sculptors to submit designs for a Commando memorial in Scotland, and in 1949 the design submitted by Mr. Scott Sutherland, an art teacher at Dundee College of Art, was duly selected. It took a further two years to produce the now famous Memorial at Spean Bridge. In its rugged and most suitable setting, the unveiling by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, on Saturday 27th September 1952 will be long remembered by the many comrades and relatives present, many having travelled from distant parts of the world. At Spean Bridge, as at Westminster Abbey, an annual act of Remembrance was arranged, the first being on Sunday 8th November 1953. Over the years, this ceremony has become a very important one, not only for the residents of Lochaber, but for the hundreds of Commando comrades, families and friends making the pilgrimage to the area.

In 1957, the Town Council of Fort William agreed to arrange future services at the Memorial and also to be accountable for its future care and upkeep, relieving the Association of what could have been a most worrying future responsibility. The close links between Lochaber and the Association have been maintained ever since, and in 1993, the Lochaber District Council bestowed on the Association the Freedom of Lochaber. This very great honour was received on behalf of the Association by the incumbent President, Major B.W.S. Boucher-Myers DSO on Saturday 13th November. The following day, at the customary Remembrance Service, a special plaque was unveiled, by Brigadier K.R.S. Trevor CBE DSO, on the Memorial giving a short history of the Commandos.

By 1952, the Association had received many enquiries asking whether the arrangement of pilgrimages to the scenes of Commando actions was possible. One of the most successful visits of this nature was on the 31st May 1952 when 150 former members of No.4 Commando Brigade sailed from Dover to Flushing in the fleet destroyer H.M.S. Opportune. This was one of the few post war concessions granted to the Association by the Admiralty. The men were warmly received by the citizens of Flushing and it was one of the results of this visit that one of the few presentations of Honorary Association Membership was made, to Dr. Benjamin Kollf, Burgomaster of Flushing. The future was to see many Association pilgrimages to Normandy and Holland, Italy and Yugoslavia were also visited.

In 1953, Coronation Year, the Association had the special thrill of being able to congratulate member of the Association, Colonel John Hunt, CBE DSO on his knighthood and his leadership of the first successful attempt on Mount Everest. The atmosphere that prevailed when Sir John addressed comrades at the 1954 Reunion will long be remembered - one could have heard a pin drop. It was also at this Reunion that a poll was held to determine the form that future Reunions should take. The members were almost unanimous in their wish that catering should remain a buffet style meal in preference to a sit-down dinner.

By this time, some sixteen editions of the half-yearly Newsletter had been produced and circulated to an ever increasing membership. A small number of members had requested that a publication similar to that of many Regimental associations replace the traditional Newsletter. After considering this proposal, the General Committee decided that much contact would be lost if members were asked to pay for what would have been a more expensive magazine type of publication and it was accepted that many members would be unable to bear the additional costs of such a magazine. It was therefore, agreed that the present form of Newsletter would be adhered to and that all members, irrespective of whether monetary support was given, would receive the Newsletter as long as the members' address was known. It was felt that this action would enable the greatest level of contact to be achieved. After fifty peacetime years, with the one hundredth edition almost here, it can be said that the policy adopted at that time has proved appropriate.

During the autumn of 1955, another attempt was made to stimulate the interest of members, particularly those resident outside of the London and Home Counties area, through the arrangement of Area Rallies, and the first of these was held for comrades in the North West of England on 22nd October that year at Preston and proved a great success. Four similar rallies were held at Preston each year until 1959, after which the event moved to Warrington where it has been held annually ever since. One area of concern for the General Committee at the time of the introduction of the Area rallies was whether the latter would affect the attendances at the Annual Reunions in London. Happily, it was found that there was no adverse effect, and it could be said that the local rallies actually stimulated interest in the main event in London. The success of the Preston/Warrington rallies encouraged others to be arranged in other parts of the country, with Cardiff, Bristol and Leeds all soon putting on their own events within a very short time. In all these areas members have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy these events due, to a small band of enthusiastic local volunteers of members who have given up much time and effort in promoting the local rallies. In Scotland, it was as early as 1947 that such arrangements were made. From the time of the first London reunions, Scottish members desired their own rally as a means of meeting former comrades, as the cost of attendance at the main London event made it impossible for them to attend. So it was that on 10th January 1948 that the first Scottish Reunion took place in Glasgow, attended by almost 200 members and honoured by the presence of Vice President, Brigadier The Lord Lovat, DSO MC. Further Scottish Reunions took place in 1949 and 1950 when the event was held in April, to coincide with the international soccer fixture between Scotland and England at Hampden Park. From then on the event was held every two years, on the same date as the soccer international between Scotland and England at Hampden Park whenever possible. Here again, the Association owes a great deal to the small body of

members who formed a Scottish Reunions Committee which has ensured the success of many excellent Commando gatherings north of the border.

Early in 1957, during Colonel Charles Newman's second term as Association President, information came to hand that the Ministry of Defence was discussing the question of the award of Battle Honours for the 1939-45 War, and in view of the disbandment of the Army Commando wartime units, a special plea was put forward to the Ministry enquiring whether it would be possible for the Association to receive any honours due to the Army Commandos. It was very gratifying to learn that any application from the Association would be given due consideration. Later that year, it was learnt that Her Majesty The Queen had graciously approved the award of thirty-eight Battle Honours to the Association to commemorate the services of the Commandos in the Second World War. Notice of this appeared in Army Order 113 of 1957. The Newsletter of March 1958 conveyed this great honour to the membership, and the then President, Colonel Jack Churchill DSO MC., expressed the hope that all comrades would feel satisfied with the Battle Honours awarded, and that the relations of those killed in action would find in their proud and resounding names some consolation for their own tragic loss. The Battle Honours awarded are :-

"Vaagso", "Norway 1941", "St. Nazaire", "Dieppe", "Normandy Landing", "Dives Crossing", "Flushing", "Westkapelle", "Rhine", "Leese", "Aller", "North-West Europe 1942,44-45", "Litani", "Syria 1941", "Steamroller Farm", "Sedjenane 1", "Djebel Choucha", "North Africa, 1941-43", "Landing in Sicily", "Pursuit to Messina", "Sicily 1943", "Landing at Porto San Venere", "Termoli", "Salerno", "Monte Ornito", "Anzio", "Valli di Comacchio", "Argenta Gap", "Italy 1943 - 45", "Greece 1944 - 45", "Crete", "Madagascar", "Adriatic", "Middle East 1941, '42, '44", "Alethangyaw", "Myebon", "Kangaw", "Burma 1943 - 45".

With little delay, the Association General Committee discussed the possibility of producing the best flag obtainable to bear the thirty-eight Battle Honours. A Sub-Committee was formed to discuss the whole question of design, custody and display of the flag. Not being bound by official regulations, as are Regiments (of only being able to display up to ten Battle Honours of any war), the Association was able to display all thirty eight Honours on the flag. The embroidering of the flag took two years to complete.

Saturday 15th April 1961, saw some 350 relatives of the Commando fallen and 750 members and relatives at Westminster Abbey for a Thanksgiving Service, commemorating the 21st Anniversary of the formation in 1940 of the Army Commandos. During the Service, the Battle Honours Flag was dedicated by the Dean, the Very Rev. Eric S. Abbott DD., and a most moving and inspiring sermon was preached by the Bishop of Birmingham, the Right Rev. J.L. Wilson CMG DD., a former Prisoner Of War in Japanese hands. At the end of the Service, the Battle Honours Flag and Roll of Honour Book were escorted in procession to the West Cloisters, where they were placed close to the Commando memorial. Relatives of the fallen were escorted by members of the General Committee to a reception in the nearby Great Hall of Westminster School.

The 15th Annual Reunion took place the same evening, and as had been anticipated, was a great occasion with an attendance of 685 members, only a few short of the memorable attendance of 700 achieved in 1947. It was a most fitting ending to a memorable day.

In 1985, the Association applied to the Ministry of Defence for the consideration of further Battle Honours on behalf of the Middle East Commandos in respect of actions at Keren, Amba Alagi and Abyssinia. Sadly, the application was turned down.

In December 1960, Dr. Richard Ledward and Mrs. Patricia Simon, children of the late Mr. Gilbert Ledward OBE RA., presented to the Association the plaster statuette figure of the Commando soldier which their Father modelled prior to making the bronze figure which stands in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. It was quickly realised that a safe and permanent home had to be found for this treasured, but somewhat fragile statuette. Through the offices of the then President, Brigadier Peter Young DSO MC., the statuette was accepted by the National Army Museum at Sandhurst, and for many years it shared a display cabinet there with the battle dress tunic and beret belonging to Field Marshal Montgomery of Alamein KG GCB DSO. The statuette moved with the National Army Museum to its new Quarters in Chelsea, and many members were able to see it on display at "The Raiders" exhibition during the summer and autumn of 1986.

At this point it must be recorded that the Association was successful in obtaining registered charitable status under the Charities Act of 1960.

During the summer of 1962, the Association's Senior Patron, Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Mountbatten of Burma advised the President, Brigadier Peter Young that the Army was to reintroduce Commandos. The 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, would supply heavy artillery support to the Royal Marine Commando units. Of special interest to the Association and its members was the fact that the first Commanding Officer of the new Regiment was to be a serving member of the Association, Lt. Col. Denis O' Flaherty DSO, formerly of No.3 Commando.

As a token of the good wishes of the Association, and in memory of all who served in the wartime Army Commandos, it was decided to present the new unit with six duty trumpets, suitably engraved. These were handed over to the 29th Commando Regiment RA. by Brigadier Peter Young at a special ceremony at The Citadel in Plymouth on 6th October 1962.

Further to this gesture by the Association, a party of all ranks from the 29th Commando Regiment was invited as special guests to the Annual Reunion in London on 6th April the following year. This was a special one-off invitation. Although the role of the new Commandos was very different from that of the membership of the Association during the war, subsequent contact has been maintained by the annual attendance of the Artillery Commando Regiment at the Spean Bridge Remembrance Service.

In 1964 a marked change took place to the administration of the Association. Sixteen years of residence at service addresses came to an end with a move from the HQ Joint Welfare Staff. Previously to this the Association had been at Amphibious Warfare HQ and Combined Operations Headquarters. A new home was made available in the premises of the Royal Naval Association where the Association and the Commandos Benevolent Fund remained for a period of thirteen years. In June 1977, the tenancy came to rather an abrupt end and both the Association and the Benevolent Fund were in something of a predicament until both organisations were offered accommodation at the headquarters of the Forces Help Society, in Brompton

Road. This office proved very convenient for visitors to London, both from overseas and home to call at what was then HQ. However, again, the two organisations were requested to leave rather suddenly, this time in the spring of 1990, when another move was effected. this time further west to Hammersmith Road. There is no doubt that over the years great kindness has been shown by Service and ex-Service organisations in providing accomodation for both the Association and Benevolent Fund. This has enabled a close working relationship to be forged between the two organisations.

As a token of appreciation to the people of Ouistreham for their continued hospitality and kindness to Commando veterans attending the D-Day Anniversaries, the General Committee agreed that some permanent record be made. It was finally decided that a memorial window for the church of St. Sampson be given. An approach was made to the Royal College of Art in London, and a competition among the students there was instituted to obtain the most suitable design. The successful artist was Mr. Raymond N. Bradley, ARCA. On June 6th, 1964, during the ceremonies commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the D-Day landings, the Commando memorial window was unveiled by the Association President, Col. Charles Vaughan, OBE who headed a large deputation of comrades and relatives. It was learned later, with some satisfaction, that due to the promptness with which the Association had dealt with this matter that a great deal of French red tape had been avoided which might have seriously delayed the project.

In January 1965, Colonel Vaughan represented the Association at the funeral service in St. Paul's Cathedral for Sir Winston Churchill. A message of sympathy addressed to Lady Churchill produced a kindly response.

A sure sign of the continued great interest in the Association since 1946 by the membership had been the magnificent support given to the Annual Reunions. Surprising as it may seem for so comparatively small a regimental association, attendances have never been lower than four hundred, and for many years hovered in the vicinity of five hundred. The large attendance of seven hundred, achieved at the 1947 function, remained a record until 15th April 1967, when for the 21st Annual Reunion, the attendance reached 725. It was at this event that presentations were made jointly by General Sir Robert Laycock and Major General Charles Haydon to the Association Secretary, Henry Brown MBE, for his long and faithful service, to his wife, Margery and to Miss Lottie Edwards, of the Commandos Benevolent Fund. Since that time reunion attendances have often been in the region of 650. In more recent times, despite the fact that membership has sadly decreased due to comrades passing on, attendances have remained around the 450 mark. In 1993, it was decided to change the traditional evening reunion to the afternoon and this seemed to increase the attendance over that of the previous two years. These high levels of attendance are known to cause envy among other service organisations.

During 1968 members were greatly saddened by the sudden death of both General Sir Robert Laycock and the Association Founder Member Colonel Charles Vaughan.

For many years a close and friendly contact has been maintained with the U.S. Rangers Association, due to the fact that members of their First Battalion were trained

at the Commando Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry. Ranger Battalions had later served alongside Commando units in several Theatres of operations. Ranger Association officials had also been welcomed at a number of Association reunions and other functions. In August 1967, Association Secretary, Henry Brown represented the Association at the U.S. Rangers Association convention in New York, he was again the guest of the U.S. Rangers Association at their Convention in Philadelphia in August 1979. This time he took along his wife, Margery in recognition of her great support during his lifetime of service to the Association, and he wandered westward again for the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the Ranger units during June 1992. On the 1967 trip, he used the opportunity to gather together Commando comrades resident in Canada for a get-together in Montreal which was a great success.

Ever since the dedication of the Battle Honours Flag in 1961, this treasured emblem was, at the request of members, displayed at Annual Reunions and at other important events outside the capital, including Scottish Reunions. However, uppermost in the minds of the General Committee was the notion that a permanent home should be found for the flag. Discussion had taken place with a view to approaching various churches, some with a Commando connection, regarding the provision of a permanent resting place for the flag, but by 1969 no progress had been made. All concerned were thus pleased to learn from the Dean of Westminster, the Very Reverend Eric Abbott, that the Chapter was now in a position to consider the possibility of accepting the flag for a position in St. George's Chapel. It was known that the Dean had taken a particular interest in the flag since its dedication, and so, as a result, it was left in the care of the Dean for several months while the matter was under discussion. Eventually word was received that the flag could be accepted by the Abbey authorities, provided that the Association was prepared to cover the cost of an airtight frame which would have to be specially made and in keeping with other items in the Chapel. This condition was readily agreed to by the General Committee, and, over the next twelve months extensive preparations began to formulate for what was to prove the most moving occasion in the history of the Association.

A vast congregation of close on two thousand experienced a most moving service and heard a stirring and most appropriate sermon preached by Bishop John Armstrong. The singing of the eighty-three members of the BBC Choral Society (arranged by the General Secretary as the Abbey choir was unavailable), the playing of the great organ and band of the Royal Marines School of Music, all combined to make this service, in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen Mother, one never to be forgotten.

After the service, close on eighteen hundred comrades and relatives enjoyed a buffet lunch at the nearby Royal Horticultural Society's New Hall, and many comrades not returning immediately to their homes enjoyed various unit reunions in several parts of the capital. Others took the opportunity to attend a get-together organised by the London branch at their London rendezvous.

The Association Secretary and members of the organising committee were delighted to receive some days later, the congratulations of both Her Majesty the Queen Mother and Lord Mountbatten on a job well done.

As a result of the wishes of many members, the Association produced a commemorative long-playing gramophone record of the Laying-up Service, with an introduction by Lord Mountbatten. An issue of one thousand copies was taken up immediately, many copies finding their way to many different parts of the world.

Sadly, just less than one year after he had taken a prominent part in the Laying-up Service at Westminster Abbey, Colonel Charles Newman VC died on 26th April 1972. So far, he is the only President to die while in office. The Association was fortunate in that it proved convenient at short notice for the only living Commando holder of the Victoria Cross, Colonel Pat Porteous to assume the Presidency.

Happily, contact was still being maintained with many of the Belgian, Dutch, French, Norwegian and Polish comrades of No10 (Inter Allied) Commando unit, not forgetting many enthusiastic comrades from No.3 Troop. The Association moved along satisfactorily, with the accumulated membership being approximately 6,000. Apart from many annual organised activities, news was regularly forthcoming of comrades visiting the areas of former Commando actions in Italy, Sicily, Norway and Tunisia. Pilgrimage parties were also organised to Italy, Israel and Yugoslavia and the annual pilgrimages to Normandy and Holland continued.

A Caravan and Camping Club was formed and survived for several years.

In June 1977, General Secretary Henry Brown was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in recognition of his long and faithful service.

Late in 1979, members learned of the tragic death of the Association's Senior Patron, Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, and a deputation of General Committee members and Branch officials represented the Association at the memorial service for the Admiral at Westminster Abbey.

In September 1980, a message was received from the National Commander of the American Legion in Indianapolis stating that Henry Brown was to receive its International Amity Award, the highest award the American Legion could bestow on a fellow veteran of the Allied services, recognising his efforts in promoting understanding and goodwill among veterans and in particular between Rangers and Commandos.

Shortly after, on 1st October, 1980, the Association sadly lost another of its esteemed Patrons in the person of Brigadier Derek Mills-Roberts CBE DSO MC., a most stalwart supporter of the Association cause over many years.

During March 1981 the Association had the honour and pleasure of welcoming a new Patron in the person of Countess Mountbatten of Burma CD JP DL., who stated that she was very surprised by the invitation, but most honoured to become a Patron of the Association in succession to her late father. The Countess very kindly laid the wreath at the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Westminster Abbey the same year.

The actions of the Falklands Task Force did not go unnoticed. A message in the name of the President and members of the Association was sent to the General

Officer Commanding, Commando Forces. In a moving acknowledgement of our message, General Jeremy Moore stated "It is a good, especially good, to hear that our efforts are approved by our illustrious forbears - you chaps who made the name "Commando" what it is".

During the autumn and winter of 1982 the Association Secretary dealt with an even greater level of sales of goods available to the membership. He reported, in March 1982 a credit balance of just over £4,000 on the years workings. This was to prove a record. Annual credit balances were often reported, but they were usually quite small, but illustrated that annual expenditure was being covered.

A message from the Association President, Colonel Arthur Komrower DSO TD., in the March 1983 Newsletter, informed members that General Secretary Henry Brown would reach the age of maturity on the 14th November next, and that he (the General Secretary) had agreed, health permitting, to continue as General Secretary & Treasurer for the time being, but hopefully, only on a three day a week basis from 1st April 1984. The General Committee discussed the possibility of appointing an assistant who perhaps in the long term could take over the Secretaryship, but it was agreed that the immediate preference was for a part-time assistant with good typing experience. Members were requested to seek out suitable candidates.

The Association sustained another great loss with the death of General Sir Campbell Hardy KCB CBE DSO., who, as a Patron, had shown a very deep and active interest over many years of Association affairs. A Commandant General of the Royal Marines, he thought a great deal of the Army Commandos.

Generally during the eighties, many commemorative events took place and Association representation was evident at almost all of them. The return to St. Nazaire in the Royal Yacht "Britannia", the opening of the Dieppe Museum at Newhaven, the opening of the Merville Battery Museum site in Normandy, the Belgian Forces 40th Anniversary in Namur, the unveiling of Lord Mountbatten's statue near Horse Guards Parade, all these come readily to mind and were fully reported in the Newsletters of the time.

During 1985, the Association was delighted to welcome a new Patron in the person of Major General Jim Moulton CB DSO OBE RM., and also welcomed assistance for the General Secretary from Fred Gauntlett formerly of No.4 Cdo. Unfortunately, although not yet close to retirement age, Fred was not interested in permanent secretarial duties. By this time Henry Brown had advised the General Committee that he would like to relinquish his appointment on 31st March 1986, by which time he would have passed his 67th birthday and completed 40 years as General Secretary.

The year 1986 proved to be a special year as this was the 40th Anniversary of the disbanding of the Army Commandos. This was celebrated in the form of a family reunion at "Broadlands", Romsey, Hampshire on the 17th June. In the presence of Countess Mountbatten and Brigadier Kenneth Trevor CBE DSO, the latter having finished his term of office as President, but who had been asked to act as Senior Host for this special occasion. This was a very happy and successful event. Well over six

hundred comrades, families and friends made this a day to remember, and many had the pleasure of seeing the coverage of this event on local television that evening.

Some weeks later, on July 29th, the Countess kindly opened a special Commando Exhibition entitled "The Raiders - The story of the Army Commandos 1940 - 46" at the National Army Museum in London. This remained open to the public until 15th March 1987. The National Army Museum Authority expressed its gratitude to the Association Secretary and to the many members for their co-operation and help in making the exhibition a great success.

During 1985 an offer of administrative help was received for Mr. Ron youngman, the son of an Army Commando killed in action on 6th June 1944. This the General Committee was pleased to accept, Mr. Fred Gauntlett having by this time having had to relinquish his assistance to the General Secretary. By March 1986, the General Secretary was able to assure the General Committee that Mr. Youngman was proving a great help to him, so much so, that he had decided to hold his appointment for a year or so longer in a part time capacity. The membership generally welcomed this announcement and wished the partnership every success.

In May 1987, the Association organised a holiday visit to the Lochaber District. This included visits to Achnacarry House and Lochailort Castle, a service of Remembrance at Duncansburgh Church in Fort William, the unveiling of a special commemorative Commando panel at the local Tourist Centre in Fort William, a civic reception at the Lochaber District Council Offices and trips to Mallaig and Oban. While the holiday visit was voted a great success, it was felt that the expense of such a holiday during Lochaber's comparatively short summer season was the reason for just over fifty members and relatives taking part. Some proof of this view was confirmed a year later when a proposal by the local Tourist Board to organise a Forces Week was cancelled, not due to lack of interest but because of the rather high cost of this type of holiday. There was a feeling of regret on the part of some members of the Association that the Lochaber holiday idea had not originated many years sooner.

At the fortieth Annual Reunion in London, a record number of 775 comrades turned up. Apart from being a special Anniversary occasion for the Association, it was at this Reunion that the President handed over a handsome cheque to Henry Brown as reward for forty years faithful service. The sum was the total of contributions from the membership.

Yet another opportunity to perpetuate the memory of wartime Commandos became manifest when contact was made with the Headmaster and Precentor of the Seaford College, which had moved some years previously to Lavington House, Petworth in Sussex. The adjacent Woolvington Church had been renamed Seaford College Chapel, and it was here on Sunday morning 27th November, 1988 that a special plaque, incorporating a small plaque presented to the church at the end of the war, was unveiled to record the fact that personnel of HQ Commando Group had worshipped in the Chapel during the period 1944 - 46. Much interest in the buildings' wartime Commando connection has been shown by the College staff and pupils, and an annual service commemorating this fact has been held in recent years on Advent Sunday.

Not surprisingly, the Association had since 1946, gathered a very large collection of interesting Commando documents, photographs and books. Most of these had survived the many office moves. It was then, with some relief that the General Secretary was able to announce that after discussions with Mr. David Smurthwaite, Keeper of Books and Archives, that the National Army Museum at Chelsea had agreed to offer the Commando items a permanent home as part of the collections at the Museum. These would be preserved for the nation and at the same time be available for consultation in the Museum Reading Room.

Newsletter No.84 dated March, 1987, proved to be the last bearing Henry Brown's signature as General Secretary and Treasurer. The process of taking over by Ron Youngman was continuing satisfactorily, although the former was continuing to pay weekly visits to the office and was still, by agreement, looking after the Association's finances. This arrangement was to continue until the Spring of 1991 when Henry had completed a forty-five year involvement in Association affairs.

In the late summer of 1989, the Association General Committee commenced discussions as to how best in 1990 the members could celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the formation in 1940 of the Army Commandos. Many suggestions were made, but the most feasible came through enquiries made by General Committee member Mr. John Quarrie BEM, to hold the celebration in Blackpool, Lancashire. Although not a town with any Commando connection, Blackpool could provide all the necessary facilities, and was prepared to offer all possible help and a warm welcome to the Commandos. Consequently, Mr. Quarrie, as Festival Chairman, was requested to proceed with all the arrangements, and a full programme of events was planned for the weekend of 31st August - 2nd September 1990, coinciding with the switch-on of the renowned Blackpool Illuminations.

Much thought and effort was given to what proved a very large undertaking, but the sterling work of John Quarrie and his small Anniversary Sub-Committee overcame all obstacles. The success of the weekend was just reward for their untiring efforts. The functions at the famous Empress Ballroom, a most memorable Thanksgiving Service at the Holy Trinity Church and the March-Past through the town centre, all passed off successfully. Ceremonies came to a close with a farewell Band Concert at the Winter Gardens.

This special Anniversary was marked still further by the introduction of an excellent commemorative medallion which received the unanimous approval of the membership. A total of 1,286 comrades, relatives and friends attended, and John Quarrie and the comrades comprising his Sub-Committee were rightly congratulated on a job well done.

During 1992 what could prove to be our final accolade was the news received from Fort William that the Lochaber District Council had decided to confer the Freedom of the District of Lochaber upon all of the members of the Association. This was, without any doubt, a quite unique honour, and the Thanks of all members were immediately conveyed through the Association General Committee to the Lochaber Council.

While first thoughts on the matter seemed to point to a spring or summer ceremony, it was realised and finally agreed that the largest representation could best be achieved by combining this special celebration with the annual November act of remembrance, and the date mutually agreed was Saturday 13th November 1993, to be followed by the service at Spean Bridge the following day.

Once again, the Association General Committee was fortunate in being able to enlist the services of John Quarrie B.E.M., its representative on Association affairs in Scotland, and it must be recorded that the success of the Association's part in the celebrations was mainly due to his untiring efforts.

The presentation of the Freedom Scroll and casket was duly made at An Aird Hall, Fort William by Chairman of the Lochaber District Council, Councillor Neil M. Clark to major B.W.S. Boucher-Myers DSO., President of The Commando Association, whom in turn handed back the scroll, at least for the time being, for safe keeping. The latter then presented to the people of Lochaber, on behalf of all members of the Commando Association, a commemorative Commando fighting knife. A Commemorative Bowl was then presented to the Association by the Chairman of the Fort William Branch of the Royal British Legion. The official proceedings were followed by a most excellent concert by the Band of H.M. Royal Marines, who had earlier led a Parade of Association members through the streets of Fort William to the An Aird Hall prior to the official ceremony.

When the news of the Freedom was first received, the Association General Committee decided that it would be appropriate to mark the weekend by producing a bronze plaque, clearly outlining for the benefit of future generations, the wartime Commando story. Permission was granted for this to be affixed on the back panel of the Commando memorial's stone plinth. The plaque was duly unveiled by former Association President, Brigadier K.R.S. Trevor CBE DSO., at the end of the annual remembrance service on the Sunday afternoon, just prior to the final Blessing by the officiating Minister, the Rev. Donald MacQuarrie, whose spiritual guidance in recent years has been deeply appreciated.

At the end of this narrative, due tribute must be paid to the comrades who have so willingly given of their time and effort as members of the Association General Committee, each of them representing their own Commando unit, so ably presided over for many years by Chairman, also past President, Major Laurence MacCallum MC, to whom the Association owes a great debt of gratitude. Those privileged to know him closely will know just how much the Association has meant, and still means to him.

In recent years the ever increasing number of comrades passing on has brought about the realisation, even to a large number of comrades who it is known have tried to refrain from thinking about this inevitable phase, that the Association has entered its twilight years. While this naturally is tinged with some sadness, it should cause no surprise. Members have known, and have lived, for close on fifty years, in the knowledge that the decision was made very soon after the war ended that the Association should remain for wartime Commandos only. Families and friends will certainly play their part in perpetuating the memory of the wartime Commandos, but

only the men to whom it personally belongs can determine how long the Association remains a worthwhile entity.

Hopefully those who still survive, fortified by countless wonderful memories of both their wartime special service, and peacetime Association activities, will continue, as long as they are able, to enjoy that special atmosphere which is ever present whenever wartime Commandos foregather. Noting its present standing, the Association should, with due care, last for as long as the surviving members have the need for its fellowship and services. The majority have, it is felt sure, been proud and privileged to enjoy the benefits of belonging to a unique wartime brotherhood, bound together in a natural pride in having started something rather different and having seen it through.

December 1993.

H.B.

PRESIDENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION.

Lieut. Colonel P.I. Bartholomew, DSO. 1966-68.

Major B.W.S. Boucher-Myers, DSO. 1983-84 & 1993-94.

Major L.S. Callf, MC. 1986-87.

Colonel J.M.T.F. Churchill, DSO, MC. 1957-58 & 1968-70.

Maj-Gen. T.B.L. Churchill, CB CBE MC. 1950-51 & 1976-78.

Lieut. Colonel R.W.P. Dawson, CBE DSO 1959-61 & 1978-79.

Major J.E. Dunning 1992-93.

Brigadier J.F. Durnford-Slater, DSO. 1946-47.

Lieut. Colonel A.G. Komrower, DSO TD. 1981-83.

Colonel A.D. Lewis, DSO MBE. 1979-81 & 1988-89.

Brigadier The Lord Lovat, DSO MC TD LL.D DL JP 1974-76.

Major L.E. MacCallum, MC 1984-85 & 1990-91.

Brigadier D. Mills-Roberts, CBE DSO MC. 1949-50 & 1958-59.

Colonel A.C. Newman, VC OBE TD 1948-49, 1955-57
& 1970-72.

Colonel P.A. Porteous, VC. 1972-74 & 1987-88.

Colonel J.D. Reynolds, MC. 1991-92.

Brigadier R.J.F. Tod, CBE DSO. 1952-53.

Brigadier K.R.S. Trevor, CBE DSO. 1965-66, 1985-86
& 1989-90.

Lieut. Colonel C.E. Vaughan, OBE. 1947-48, 1953-55
& 1963-65.

Brigadier P. Young, DSO MC MA FSA., 1951-52 & 1961-63

VICE PRESIDENTS

Henry Brown MBE.

Lieut. Colonel A.R. Evill.

Sir Ronald Swayne, MC.

Colonel G.A.D. Young, DSO.

During the existence of the Commando Association, over 10,000 enrolments have been made.

In 1993, the number of active members on the distribution list for the Association Newsletter is 3,400.

Last