

The Commando Association (1943-2005)



“When shall their glory fade?”

Commemorative Souvenir - 18th September 2005

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to have been asked to write a foreword to this interesting and historical brochure giving a brief history of the Commando Association.

I deemed it a great honour when, in 1981, two years after the assassination of my father (Lord Mountbatten) and other family members in Ireland, I was asked to be Patron of the Commando Association.

My father had been the Association's first Patron on its formation in 1943 and remained so until his death in 1979. I well know the high regard and esteem in which he held the Commandos. During his time as Chief of Combined Operations - preparing for the D Day landings - they played an enormously important part in those preparations.

During my own three years' service in the WRNS (which was while my father was the Supreme Allied Commander in South-East Asia), I was stationed in early 1945 in the new secret Area Combined Headquarters situated in tunnels beneath Chatham Dockyard. I myself had unknowingly become one of a series of training tests for the Commandos. Somehow they had to find where I was serving and get into the heavily guarded tunnel to get a name-taped handkerchief off me as proof of a task accomplished. I soon ran out of handkerchiefs requested at intervals by some very scruffy and suspicious looking individuals who had nevertheless managed to find me and it certainly did not improve my reputation with the Administration Department!

In 1986 we had an informal Commando Reunion at my father's home of Broadlands in Hampshire (now the home of my eldest son, Lord Romsey) on the 40th anniversary of the Disbandment of the Army Commandos - a step which my father had greatly deplored in 1946. The reunion was a marvellous occasion with over six hundred members and families enjoying the day.

Finally, I would like to send my warmest wishes to all the veterans of the Association, not only to those who are here today, but to the rest who are scattered worldwide and are unable to be present, as well as their widows and families, some of whom we welcome here today.

Patricia Mountbatten of Burma

Countess Mountbatten of Burma, CBE, CD, JP, DL.
Patron of the Commando Association since 1981



Countess Mountbatten, with Lord Lovat and piper, Bill Millin, at the unveiling of a D Day plaque dedicated to 1 and 4 Special Service (Commando) Brigades at Warsash.

"WHEN SHALL THEIR GLORY FADE?" THE COMMANDOS 1940-1945

ORIGINS

The thirty-eight Battle Honours awarded to the Commando Association by Her Majesty the Queen in 1958 serve as an apt prologue to this short history of the five years of active service by the Commandos in World War II.

Look at this formidable list and one notes it is not limited to any one theatre of war, but on the contrary the actions fought were world-wide, in-as-much as the Commandos fought with great distinction in Norway, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Sicily, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, the Adriatic Islands in North Africa, Crete, Syria, Eritrea, Abyssinia, Madagascar and even further afield in Burma.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the operations and campaigns mentioned as Battle Honours recognise only those deemed to be really outstanding feats of arms. As such they represent only a fraction of the raids and battles fought by Commandos in those five years.

For example, many of the daring raids carried out by the specialist Commando units and groups on the enemy-held coastline of North-West Europe prior to D Day are covered by the single Battle Honour of "North-West Europe 1942-44"; by the same token many of the operations carried out in the Middle East by the Commandos formed out there and also those sent out there from Britain ('Layforce') are covered by the single Honour, "North Africa 1941-43".

In addition, the many decorations, British and foreign, awarded to the officers and men of the Commandos also provide an impressive record of individual bravery and courage in action. In his early 'Short History of the Commandos', Brigadier Peter Young, himself an outstanding Commando leader and prominent post-war military historian provided the following totals: eight Victoria Crosses, thirty seven Distinguished Service Orders (DSO), with nine bars, one hundred and sixty two Military Crosses (MC) with thirteen bars, thirty two Distinguished Conduct Medals (DCM) and no fewer than two hundred and eighteen Military Medals (MM).

There were, as mentioned earlier, additional foreign decorations including the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre. But one should also remember - and acknowledge - that there were many acts of bravery that went unrewarded

too.

So much for the historic legacies that bear testimony to the deeds of those who served in the Commandos, but when, why and how was this unique force raised (for no such specialised military forces existed in the British Army before World War II) and what type of men volunteered to serve in them?

It was in the dark days of 1940 when Britain's fortunes, following the fall of France and the evacuation from Dunkirk, were at their lowest ebb that the formation of the Commandos began.

At the time the Nazis occupied practically all of North West Europe and with their Fascist ally, Italy, threatened the Balkans and the Middle East. With command of the coastline from the Arctic to almost the Pyrenees, the enemy stood poised and prepared to invade these Islands.

The threat of invasion was real and completely dominated the thoughts and daily lives of all. They were grim days.

Yet in spite of the urgent need to concentrate on defence the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was not content to rely on just passive defensive measures. He boldly advocated some form of limited offensive action against the enemy's extended and vulnerable coastline of Europe.

So, with this in mind, he advocated the raising of a special service force. He suggested that, in the short term, and raised immediately, they would be available to "spring at the throat" of any enemy seaborne or parachute landings.



The Commandos owe their origins to Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, who proposed their formation in a directive dated 18 June, 1940.

These Special Service troops (or 'Commandos' as they ultimately became known) would carry out a campaign of 'hit-and-run' raids on the enemy-held coastlines and thereby create 'a reign of terror' on the enemy prior to the eventual invasion and liberation - for even in those dark days Churchill was confident of ultimate victory.



HM King George VI, seen here, was one of the VIPs who came to watch early Commando training (1940). Admiral Sir Roger Keyes is on extreme right.

It must be said here that there were already in existence some other volunteer forces raised for special service, namely the 'Independent Companies' and some of them had been engaged on the ill-fated campaign in Norway. Nevertheless when these Independent Companies were subsequently disbanded many of the officers and men volunteered for the Commandos, including such distinguished leaders as Brigadier Tod and Colonels Newman, VC, and Trevor.

In the event Commandos were formed from late June onwards and a party from one of the newly formed Commandos, No. 3, together with another party from No. 11 Independent Company carried a raid on the Channel Island of Guernsey on 5th July 1940. Unfortunately, for several reasons, it was a dismal failure, but it did provide important lessons, which were acted upon.

Going back a step, it is generally accepted that Lieut. Colonel Dudley Clarke, was the staff officer responsible for organising the formation of the Commandos on the lines of Churchill's original directive, which among other things recommended that the personnel of this new force should be drawn from all branches of the Army and, importantly, that they would all be volunteers picked by the officers who were to be their leaders into action.

This element of picked volunteers remained a fundamental principle of the Commandos throughout the War.

Another basic characteristic of the Army Commandos was the regime known as 'RTU', standing for 'Return to Unit'. Briefly it meant that anyone - officer or other rank - who for any reason whatsoever failed to measure up to the standards of discipline, training or conduct expected, or laid down by the Commanding Officer, would be sent back to his parent unit. In the course of the next five years not a few were . . .

Subsequently, during the summer of 1940, whilst Britain was increasingly under the threat of invasion and air attacks, recruiting for the Commandos went ahead with the aim to raise a total of twelve Commandos, one of which, the original No. 2 Parachute Commando, was earmarked to carry out airborne operations. However the full number was not initially raised; for example the raising of No. 10 did not materialise until 1942 when it was decided to raise an Inter-Allied commando, consisting of volunteers from our Allies, including French, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian, Polish, Yugo-Slav and - oddly enough - Germans, and as the title of No. 10 was still vacant it became the obvious choice.



Parachute pioneers - No. 2 (Para) Commando were Britain's first paratroopers; the first descents were 'pull-offs' from the tail of the aircraft.

One must also add that by the end of 1940 No. 2 (Para) Commando had become known as No. 11 Special Air Service Battalion and in the next year after a daring airborne raid on a target in Italy it became the 1st Bn The Parachute Regiment. In the meanwhile, a new No. 2 Commando had been formed with volunteers from the Independent Companies.

A further unique feature of the Commando organisation was the fact that they were not stationed in barracks. Instead they were supplied with a ration card and a subsistence allowance and made responsible for their own accommodation and feeding, with 'Civvy Billets' providing the ideal and successful outcome.

Such is a brief background of why, when and how the first Army Commandos were formed. Later eight Royal Marine Commandos were raised, as were other specialised units including training centres and a holding unit, and mention of these is to follow.



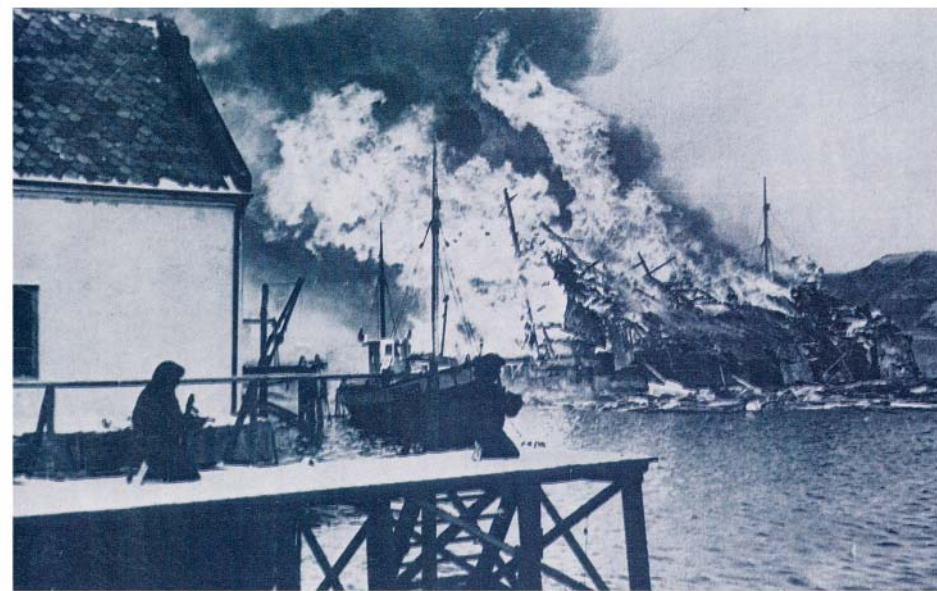
THE FIRST RAIDS

At first each Commando consisted of ten Troops of fifty all ranks, but this organisation was found to be unwieldy and was subsequently altered, in early 1941, to six Troops of sixty-five. Later after the experiences in North Africa, where the Commandos had to hold ground 'in the line' but lacked the normal heavier infantry weapons, such as 3-inch mortars and Vickers' medium machine guns, a Support Troop - with these weapons - was introduced as was a MT (motor transport) Troop.

Whilst the first Commandos were being formed in the United Kingdom three Commandos were raised in the Middle East. Their organisation was different, and furthermore they recruited Palestinians - both Arab and Jews - and some Spanish veterans of the Civil War in addition to volunteers from the British Army stationed out there. They carried out some operations on the enemy-held coastline of North Africa and also on a target in the Mediterranean, but the outcomes were disappointing. However, from December 1940 No. 51 Commando was in action in Eritrea and Abyssinia, where they made a substantial contribution to the victory and liberation of those two Italian-held countries.

During the winter of 1940 the original concept of the Commandos being mainly employed on small scale 'tip and run' raids was being amended, in-as-much as the Director of Combined Operations, Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, with the approval and support of the Prime Minister, Churchill, began to visualise and plan for larger scale operations. Indeed it was to this end that the main training on the Isle of Arran was focussed and ultimately led to the dispatch of 'Layforce' to the Middle East. Nevertheless, in spite of this development the original concept was maintained through the newly created Special Boat Section (SBS) and later the Small Scale Raiding Force (SSRF, later given the cover title of No. 62 Commando) and later still special small raiding parties for specific operations organised from personnel within a Commando.

The first big major raid was the combined Nos. 3 and 4 Commandos' raid on the Lofoten Islands on 4th March 1941. Taking the enemy completely by surprise, they struck a significant blow at the German war economy without loss to themselves. The tally of achievements was spectacular: the destruction of eleven fish oil factories processing cod oil for use in the manufacture of high explosives and other uses, together with the stock of oil, ten German and German-used ships were sunk, 215 German POW's were brought back, and equally important, although not reported at the time, a vital piece of equipment of the enemy 'Enigma' system for the researchers at Bletchley.



The second large scale raid on Norway was by No. 3 in December 1941 on Vaagso - a bitterly fought action. Seen here the destruction of fish-oil warehouse.

This successful raid was also a welcome fillip to home morale at the time of the 'Blitz'.

Later Nos. 6 and 12 Commandos carried out further raids on Norway, but undoubtedly the most important and successful of these raids was the one on Vaagso on 27th December 1941. Supported by Hampden bombers and destroyers of the Royal Navy, the raiding force consisted of No. 3 plus a strong detachment from No. 2 Commando. After bitter fighting the Commandos destroyed the occupying German garrison, a coastal defence battery, several fish factories and 18,000 tons of enemy shipping. In addition, they brought back 98 prisoners plus valuable intelligence material. But this success came at a price - twenty Commandos killed and fifty-seven wounded in the fierce street fighting.

During February 1942 the first Royal Marine Commando was formed and originally called 'A' (RM) Commando, but later designated 'No. 40 RM Commando'. In October of that same year a second RM Commando, No. 41, was formed and by the time of D Day 1944 there were eight RM Commandos in action alongside the Army Commandos.

Next came the greatest and most daring of the entire Commando raids, namely that on St. Nazaire on 28th March 1942. Under the command of Lieut. Colonel A. C. Newman, the raiding force consisted of all of No. 2 Commando plus demolition parties from Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 12 Commandos. Such was the importance and scale of this operation that whole books have been devoted to this single Commando raid.

Suffice it to add here that the main object of the raid was to put out of action the huge dry dock of St Nazaire, the largest in the world, and thus deny its use to the German navy in the crucial on-going Battle of the Atlantic.

There were also additional objectives for the raiders that included the demolition of ancillary dockyard installations. In this action, which was successful, but costly in casualties, many brave deeds were carried out and heading the list of awards were two Victoria Crosses, one to Colonel Newman, the other, posthumously, to Sgt Durrant. (see '*For Valour*', page 19)



No. 2 Commando's raid on St. Nazaire has been labelled "The great Commando Raid" - seen here HMS Campbeltown (from which Commando assault teams disembarked) before she exploded.

In May 1942 No. 5 Commando was in the vanguard of the invasion of Madagascar, an operation designed to thwart the enemy of the use of naval bases in the Indian Ocean and threatening our sea routes to the Far East. In a daring unsupported night landing, before the main assault, No. 5 neutralised two coastal batteries and captured some 300 prisoners with only light casualties to themselves. They followed up this success with actions that resulted in the capture of Diego Suarez and the seizure of both Tamatave and Tananrive, and finally a section of one Troop took part in an action mounted on requisitioned horses - reminiscent of the original Commandos of the Boer War, only then the Boer Commandos were fighting the British!



Dieppe Raid, 19 August 1942. The withdrawal, after the destruction of Hess Battery drawn by Cpl. B. Mullen (No. 4) who was there but later killed on D Day 1944.

On 19th August 1942, two Army Commandos (Nos. 3 and 4) and one RM Commando (No. 40) took part in the controversial Dieppe Raid. In support of the main Canadian assault force, the tasks of Nos. 3 and 4 were to destroy the enemy coastal batteries covering the main landing beaches, whilst No. 40 had selected tasks in the port area and was to be responsible for reinforcements as required. In the pre-dawn run-in the landing craft of No. 3 were fired upon and scattered with the result that only two small parties managed to land, one was overwhelmed, but the other successfully engaged the Berneval battery for some hours before withdrawing.

On the other flank at Varengeville No. 4, under the command of Lord Lovat, carried out what was officially hailed as a 'classic operation of war' and completely destroyed the Hess Battery, successfully withdrawing and re-embarking with prisoners. In this action, Capt Pat Porteous of No. 4 won the Victoria Cross. Unfortunately, No. 40, when committed to their landing, under well-nigh impossible conditions, suffered severe casualties including the loss of their CO, Lieut. Col. Phillips.

On the credit side of this overall costly operation, important lessons were learnt on the problems of large-scale combined operations and these were heeded and acted upon, particularly in the forward planning of Operation 'Overlord'.

In November 1942, Nos. 1 and 6 Commandos were in action in the Allied landings (operation 'Torch') in North Africa and subsequently served throughout the Tunisian campaign as part of the field force - a role they were neither armed nor equipped to carry out as they lacked not only transport but the normal heavy infantry weapons at that time.

Yet in spite of these shortcomings they fulfilled their commitments with distinction "from Fort Duperre in Algiers to the White House at Douar, the Green Gill near Sedjenane and the green plain of Goubellat" proving that although originally organised and trained for seaborne raiding, they could turn their hands to anything asked of them. They returned to England as seasoned campaigners and each in possession of a letter of gratitude from General Eisenhower.

About this time, following the establishment of the Commando Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry, a further Commando training centre was set up at Braemar in the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland for the purpose of specialised training in mountain warfare, initially christened the Commando Mountain Warfare Training Centre (CMWTC). The instructors included a whole range of experienced mountaineers, including Major John Hunt, who later organised and led the first successful ascent of Mount Everest. Later CMWTC moved to St Ives in Cornwall to instruct two RM Commandos in cliff-climbing techniques for their proposed roles on D Day. Thereafter, the unit in addition to training cliff climbers also became the centre for the planning, training and experimenting for small boat and canoe raiding, and in this role several of the instructors took part in the operations at Walcheren and the crossing of the Rhine.

Back in the Mediterranean in July 1943, Nos. 3, 41(RM) and 43(RM) Commandos were in the forefront of the landings on Sicily - the stepping-stone to the invasion of Italy.

Thereafter, destroying an Italian battery covering the beaches at Cassibile, No. 3, at very short notice, followed up by capturing a vital bridge near Agnone - (see 'Monuments, Memorials and Museums', page 32, for more details.)

A week before the subsequent invasion of Italy some 60 men of No. 3, under the command of Major Peter Young, landed on the 'toe' of the mainland to carry out raids and reconnoitre the coast defences prior to the main landings - these actions gave rise to the claim of this Commando that they were the first British troops to gain a foothold - and stay - on the continent of Europe after Dunkirk!

The next main action of the Commandos in Italy was at Salerno in September when Nos. 2 and 41 RM were engaged in bitter fighting suffering heavy casualties, but they did have notable successes. On one occasion, in a triumphant night attack, No. 2 took 136 German prisoners, which at the time was more than the whole Division, to which they were attached, had taken.



1944 - OPERATION OVERLORD

With the envisaged operational requirements in mind for Operation 'Overlord', involving large forces of Commandos and the possibility of similar commitments elsewhere, it was decided to increase the number of Commandos by raising six more RM Commandos and also to group all these Commandos into Special Service Brigades.

As a result the organisation developed - from February 1943 - into the following format and remained, except for the transfers indicated (*), until the end of the War:

1 Special Service Brigade (later 1 Commando Brigade): consisting of Nos. 3, 4(*), 6, 45 and 46(*) RM Commandos for operations in North-West Europe.

2 Special Service Brigade (later 2 Commando Brigade): consisting of Nos. 2, 9, 40 RM, 41 RM(*) and 43 RM Commandos for operations in Italy, the Adriatic, Albania and Greece.

3 Special Service Brigade (later 3 Commando Brigade): consisting of Nos. 1, 5, 42 RM and 44 RM Commandos for operations in the Far East.

4 Special Service Brigade (later 4 Commando Brigade): consisting of Nos. 41 RM, 46(*), 47, 48 and No. 4(*) Commandos for operations in North-West Europe.

In addition to the above it must be pointed out that detachments from No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando operated within all these Brigades, and in addition prior to D Day provided parties for small scale reconnaissance raids on the coasts of North-West Europe, thus supplementing those carried out by the SBS.

In the spring of 1944 both 1 and 4 SS Brigades began preparing for their respective roles in the invasion of Normandy, launched on 6th June with 1 SS Bde, under the command of 6th Airborne Division, landing on 'Sword' beach with the tasks of capturing the port of Ouistreham and then linking up with the 'Red Devils' to secure the vital bridge over the Orne and the left flank of the Allied invasion.

The Royal Marine Commandos of 4 SS Bde landed to the west of their Army comrades under the command of different Canadian and British divisions on three separate beaches, namely, 'Sword', 'Juno' and 'Gold'.



Pre-D Day briefing, one of many, here by Brig. Lord Lovat to No 1 Commando Brigade.

No. 4 Commando, with two full Troops of French Commandos under command, succeeded in capturing Ouistreham with great dash and élan, whilst the rest of that Brigade fought their way inland to link up with the airborne forces beyond Pegasus Bridge.

Throughout the days - and weeks - that followed the two Commando Brigades fought 'in the line' defending the Amfreville heights and the left flank of the invasion bridgehead, for after completing their initial tasks to the west from the three beaches mentioned above, 4 SS Bde had regrouped and moved over the Orne to the left flank too. During the ensuing period of protracted defence of this salient position, the subsequent break-out and pursuit of the enemy towards the river Seine, lasting no less than 83 days of continuous action, 1 SS Bde was commanded by Lord Lovat until he was seriously wounded on 12th June, when Brigadier Mills-Roberts took over, whilst 4 SS Bde was commanded throughout by Brigadier 'Jumbo' Leicester. Their respective battles and their parts in the liberation of French towns and villages are well marked today with memorials, mostly erected by the local citizens who still annually remember and commemorate their liberation by the Commandos.



6th June 1944 - the invasion - Commandos set off from Sword Beach to join forces with 6 Airborne Division on the left flank.

Suffice it to add that the casualties suffered by the two Brigades over the period 6th June to 30th September was high, with well over 50% of their overall numbers either killed, seriously wounded or missing. However, they were sustained by a steady trickle of reinforcements from the Holding Operational Commando (HOC) established in late 1943 at Wrexham, where fledgling Commandos, after their initial training at Achnacarry, were posted to undergo further training before drafting to an operational Commando.

However, in spite of these arrangements it was necessary to bring I SS Bde back to England for reorganising and re-equipping. Meanwhile 4 SS Bde having been placed under the command of I Corps was involved in further operations in the liberation of France, including the crossing of the Seine, at Dunkirk and in the port of Le Havre.



A special bodyguard of Commandos from Nos 4 and 6 was organised to protect Montgomery on the dramatic break-out from Falaise and the pursuit to Brussels. At the end of this tour of duty, Montgomery, now Field-Marshal, had a photograph taken of 'his Commandos bodyguard' and presented each man with a signed copy.

THE MEDITERRANEAN AND BALKANS

Returning to the Mediterranean theatre of war, 2 SS Bde (firstly under the command of Brigadier T Churchill and later under Brigadier R Tod) was kept fully occupied from late 1943 onwards in a series of widely spread operations in Italy, the Adriatic Islands and the Balkans.

In the December, No. 9 was in action on the lower reaches of the Garigliano, then these operations were followed by the Anzio landing involving both

No. 9 and 43 RM Commandos. Initially they encountered light opposition, but a few days later it was a different story when their objective was the enemy positions on Mount Ornito and although they succeeded, No. 9, in particular, suffered heavy casualties. (see reference to this operation in the section 'Monuments, Memorials and Museums', page 30)

Meanwhile to the east of mainland Italy No. 2 Commando, under the command of Lieut. Colonel 'Mad Jack' Churchill, was operating in the Adriatic, off the Dalmatian coast, where Churchill had established his HQ on the island of Vis. There his force was strengthened with the addition of not only 43 RM Commando, but also a number of Yugo-Slav partisans.

From Vis, Churchill carried out a series of raids on nearby islands, occupied by the Germans, with notable successful raids on Solta and Hvar but these successes received a serious set-back when a full scale assault on the island of Brac by No. 2 and 43 RM Commands, supported by the Heavy Weapons Troop of 40 RM Commando, resulted in substantial losses that included Lieut. Colonel



Albania July 1944 - A No 2 Commando Brigade casualty being evacuated to the beach (south of Spilje) for treatment abroad LCI before shipment to Italy.

'Pops' Manners (40 RM) killed and the capture of Colonel Jack Churchill - who awaiting the German counter-attack played his bagpipes in defiance!

Later Nos. 2 and 43 Commandos were operational in, and from, Albania, whilst No. 9 was in action in Greece for nearly five months in operations that extended from Athens (where the Commando took part in the liberation parade and Colonel Todd received the Freedom of the City) to Salonika in the north, whilst No. 43 fought in Yugoslavia from Dubrovnik. Eventually all of 2 SS Bde were recalled to the mainland of Italy to assist the 8th Army in the final stages of that campaign.



No 2 Commando Brigade on Lake Comacchio - a 'storm boat' used to ferry 3-inch mortar crew.

So it was that on 1st April 1945 a force of the Brigade

(Nos. 2, 9, 40 and 43 Commandos) plus some specialist units including the SBS and an armoured regiment, all under the command of the recently promoted Brigadier Tod, took part in the crucial but complicated amphibious operation in this final major offensive. Briefly, their task was to secure the spit of land between Lake Comacchio and the sea and in so doing tie the enemy down while the main Allied force assaulted through the Argenta Gap.

The conditions under which the Commandos had to operate were atrocious as they struggled across Lake Comacchio. Weeks of drought had lowered the water and so for hours they had to heave and drag their assault boats through the stinking and glutinous mud. Despite the inevitable confusions and delay imposed by these conditions, the outcome was a marked success, but not without cost. Many brave deeds were performed and two Victoria Crosses were awarded to Commandos. One to Corporal T. Hunter of 43 RM Commando and the other to Major A. Lassen, a Dane serving in the SBS. Both were posthumous awards. (see section 'For Valour', page 19)

WALCHEREN AND NORTHERN EUROPE

Going back in time and to the campaign in North West Europe, the next major operation involving the Commandos, after the break-out from Normandy, was the amphibious assault on the island of Walcheren, off the coast of Holland, the capture of which was essential to the opening up of Antwerp as the major Allied supply port for the final push into Germany.

The major role for the assault landings was allotted to 4 SS Bde, which had previously consisted of four RM Commandos but for this operation No. 4 (Army), whose task was to capture the port of Flushing, replaced 46 RM Commando. The three RM Commandos, with detachments from the Belgian and Norwegian Commandos from No. 10, were to land in the Westkapelle area, and had a range of sophisticated armoured amphibious vehicles in addition to the conventional landing craft.

No. 4 Commando, after a daring pre-dawn landing and nearly two days of bitter street fighting, succeeded in capturing the port and most of the town before being relieved by the 52nd Infantry Division. They were thus enabled to rejoin the rest of the Brigade, who without air or artillery support, had made a daylight assault landing at Westkapelle, in the face of heavy enemy fire from the formidable gun emplacements built into the sand dune dykes. For three days, without any room for manoeuvre due to the deliberate flooding of the island by the Germans, the RM Commandos frontally attacked and, one by one, captured the heavily defended strong points sited along the crest of the dykes, before successfully linking up with their comrades of No. 4 who had advanced from Flushing.

After eight days of continuous action, the whole island was captured and the enemy surrendered with many prisoners. Although during that time the Bde suffered a total of almost five hundred casualties they had the satisfaction of knowing that the port of Antwerp was opened and supplies were being offloaded by the end of the month.

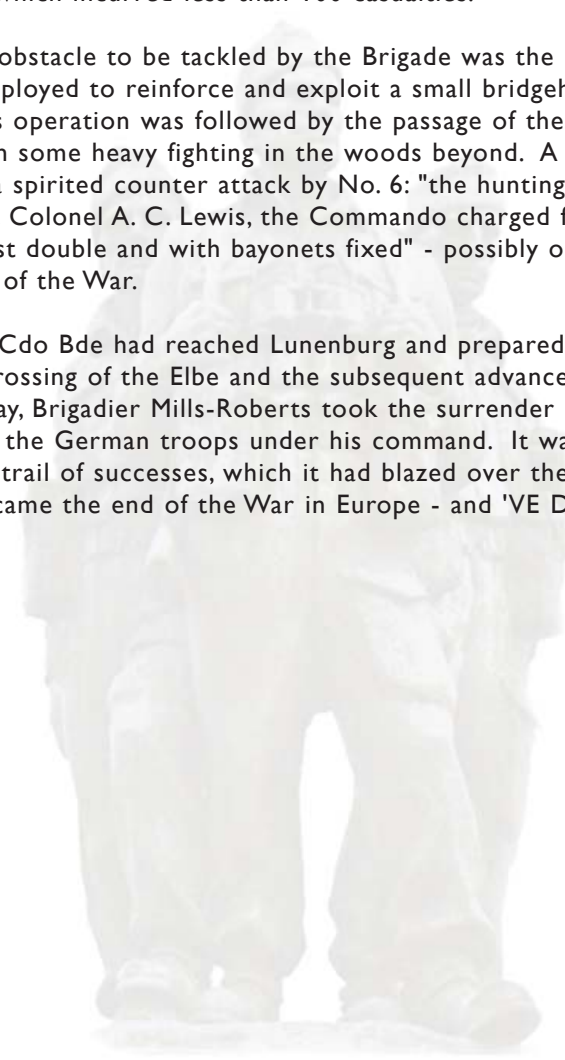
In December 1944, the Special Service Group and its four SS Brigades were all renamed to become Commando Group and Brigade, but the allotted numbers of the Commandos remained the same. About the same time there were plans to send 1 Cdo Bde to the Far East in the New Year, but due to the German counter offensive in the Ardennes over the New Year and in January, plus the appreciation that the Commandos could provide invaluable support in the foreseen river crossings in the eventual push into Germany, the plans for the

move to the Far East were cancelled and instead the Brigade returned to Europe.

On arrival its first task was to hold a stretch of the river Maas, and it was during this period of operations that Lance Corporal H. Harden, a medical orderly of the RAMC, with 45 RM Commando won the Victoria Cross - see section 'For Valour'. Subsequently, the Brigade's next large-scale operation was the crossing of the river Rhine at Wesel. Intensive training and detailed planning were the keys to the remarkable success of this Commando operation on 23rd March, which incurred less than 100 casualties.

The next water obstacle to be tackled by the Brigade was the river Weser, where it was employed to reinforce and exploit a small bridgehead already established. This operation was followed by the passage of the river Aller, which resulted in some heavy fighting in the woods beyond. A serious situation was averted by a spirited counter attack by No. 6: "the hunting horns sounded and led by Lieut. Colonel A. C. Lewis, the Commando charged forward through the trees at a fast double and with bayonets fixed" - possibly one of the last bayonet charges of the War.

By 19th April, 1 Cdo Bde had reached Lunenburg and prepared for its final operation, the crossing of the Elbe and the subsequent advance to Neustadt, where on 4th May, Brigadier Mills-Roberts took the surrender of Field Marshal Milch with all of the German troops under his command. It was a fitting climax to the Brigade's trail of successes, which it had blazed over the previous six weeks. With it came the end of the War in Europe - and 'VE Day'.



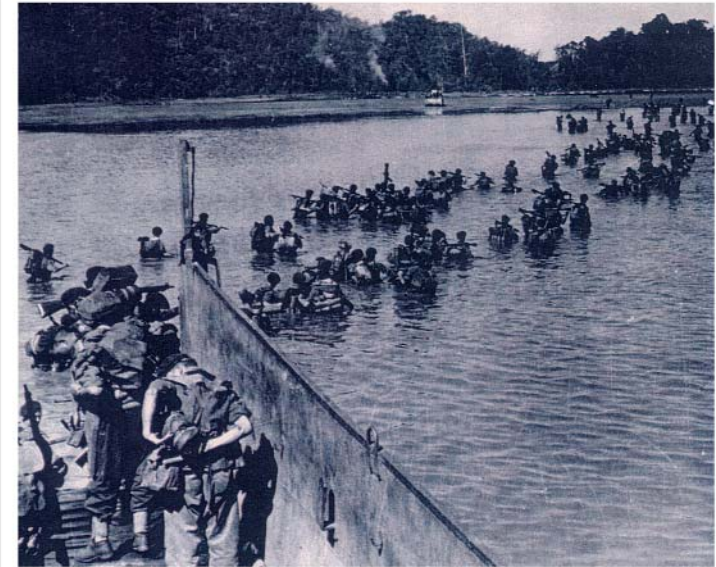
THE FAR EAST

But in the Far East the conflict was far from finished. There 3 Cdo Bde under the command of Brigadier Campbell Hardy - he later became Commandant General of the Royal Marines and a staunch Patron of the Commando Association - had to wait until January 1945 before seeing action, but when its turn came it responded nobly to fighting of a ferocity that appalled even the most seasoned and hardy veterans.

The Bde first occupied Akyab and followed this with a three-day battle for Myebon, where it destroyed a Japanese cavalry regiment before pushing up the Daingbon Chaung in LCA's in a bold tactic to take up positions astride the enemy's communications at Kangaw. The Japanese counter attacked with relentless determination (31st January), attacking *en masse* and enduring huge casualties in a way utterly strange to those soldiers accustomed to the more modern methods of European warfare.



Hill 170. Men of No 3 Commando Brigade scouring the battlefield, where 300 enemy were killed, in Kangaw.



No 3 Commando Brigade wading ashore at Myebon, Burma, in January 1945.

The battle raged all day. In the end, the vital feature, Hill 170, remained firmly in Commando hands, but the total casualties of the Commandos killed and wounded were 134 all ranks, of which nearly half were from No. 1 Commando, in contrast the Japanese lost about 450 men in their final attack.

Among the many outstanding deeds of heroism shown that day on Hill 170 was that of Lieut. G. K. Knowland, of No. 1, who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross - (see '*For Valour*', page 19) The Commander of the 15th Indian Corps issued a Special Order of the Day praising the Commandos, writing: "The battle of Kangaw has been the decisive battle of the whole Akyab campaign and that it has been won was largely due to your magnificent courage on Hill 170".

3 Cdo Bde was subsequently earmarked for operation 'Zipper', the invasion and liberation of Malaya, but this was pre-empted by the dropping of the atom bombs and the Japanese acceptance of the Allies' surrender terms on 14th August. With it came the end of the Commandos' fighting in World War II, although they all had occupational duties in their respective theatres of War.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

It has been impossible in such an abridged narrative as this to do justice to the countless actions fought by the Commandos. Furthermore, scant mention has been made of the many small, but important, raids and actions of the 'offshoots' of the major Commando units. Reference has been made of the SBS, but there were others including the short-lived Nos. 14, 30 and 62 Commandos. Readers must seek elsewhere to learn of their exploits. (For more information see 'Commando Library', page 35)

It was often supposed that the Commandos disdained such fundamentals as discipline and sound administration. Nothing could be further from the truth. Commando discipline was of the finest type, namely, self-discipline, nurtured on loyalty, trust, respect and devotion to duty. As for

administration, the Commandos were fortunate in recruiting 'admin' officers and NCO's who regarded and prided themselves as Commando soldiers first and foremost and as such underwent all the rigorous training before giving their best in all matters administrative, and were prepared to take their place alongside their comrades in action. And they frequently did...

On 25th October 1945 the final chapter of the Commandos of World War II was written with the announcement by Major General 'Bob' Laycock, who had been one of the original volunteers for the Commandos in 1940 and had subsequently been promoted to succeed Lord Louis Mountbatten as Chief of



Following the disbandment of the Commandos 'Commando Service Certificates' were issued.

Combined Operations, that his beloved green bereted Commandos were to be disbanded. Full of obvious remorse of the demise of such a splendid fighting force, the General added that the green beret would also die with the disbandment. It did for a while, but a short time after the War, thanks to the resolve of Lord Louis, it was reintroduced as the headdress of the post-war Royal Marine Commandos. Surely there can be no finer tribute to the Commandos of World War II than the acknowledgement, worldwide, that this distinctive headdress is still recognised and accepted as the hallmark of an elite fighting force.



Following VE Day the French government honoured the French and British Commandos with a parade at L'Arc de Triomphe, Paris, on 26th May 1946.

Indeed, looking back after a lapse of some sixty years it is gratifying to see that those five years of service, courage and sacrifice outlined here set standards and a tradition for others to follow and that the Commando idea, spirit and heritage has been kept alive and fostered by successive generations of young men in the Royal Marine Commandos following in the footsteps of all those who served between 1940 and 1945.

"WHEN SHALL THEIR GLORY FADE?"

ACHNACARRY

The Commando Basic Training Centre

No history of the Commandos in World War II, no matter how brief, is complete without some details of 'Achnacarry', as the Commando Basic Training Centre, is best known - and remembered.

Initially all volunteers for the Commandos received their specialist training within their individual Commandos, but this became increasingly unsatisfactory as the need for fully trained replacements became crucial.



The stately grounds of Achnacarry were transformed into a stark Nissen-hutted camp. The pre-war lawns were converted to a parade ground surrounded by accommodation, cooking, dining, ablutions and NAAFI huts.

Accordingly in 1942 a training centre, able to provide a steady flow of reinforcements trained to the high Commando standards, was set up in hutted camp based on Achnacarry Castle in the Western Highlands of Scotland, to meet this need.

Located on the banks of the river Arkaig in the heart of Lochaber, near Spean Bridge, this historic seat of the Chief of the Cameron Clan, was ideally sited for the rugged and realistic training.

Fortunately, already serving in the Commandos was the right man to take command of the new centre, namely Lieut. Colonel Charles Vaughan, OBE, a formidable old veteran of World War I.

He recruited a splendid and devoted staff of instructors with the result that 'Achnacarry' quickly became a byword for the most strenuous 'Battle School' of

the Allied Forces. Indeed it became the model for such training elsewhere, whilst 'Commando Training' became a new military term with a universal understanding of its meaning and implications.

Following the establishment of Achnacarry no volunteer could join a Commando unit or wear the coveted green beret without passing the six-week course.

Training was carried out in accordance with a laid-down and structured syllabus, and the programme had to be followed regardless of adverse weather conditions, because Vaughan argued there would be times on active service when Commandos would want to use such factors as poor weather or hostile terrain as an ally to achieve surprise - an important principle in operational success.



One of the many memorable experiences of trainees at Achnacarry was the 'Death Slide' and the 'Toggle Bridge' - with the inevitable 'big bang'.



Commando training - the use of live ammunition and explosives were features of training at Achnacarry as at the mock-up for street fighting and house clearing seen here.

Obviously, physical fitness was one of the first aims, and a series of progressive and infamous 'Speed Marches', starting with 5 miles and working up to 15 miles in set times and in 'battle order' i.e. carrying weapons, ammunition and full equipment, and always concluding with the assault/obstacle course or a firing practice played a prominent part.

High priority was placed on the skilled handling and firing of all weapons, British, Allied and even captured enemy weapons. Field-craft, the art of moving across all types of terrain; unseen and unheard at night, in the age-old manner of the hunter/poacher was also a basic subject.

The remoteness of the location afforded opportunities for unlimited, but strictly controlled, 'field firing' using live ammunition and explosives, thus adding realism to the training - plus a 'baptism of fire'.

The list of subjects on the training programme was lengthy, but none was so novel to the British Army in those days as the introduction of 'unarmed

combat'.

As its name implies it taught not only how to defend and attack an enemy when unarmed, but equally important it imbued that extra fighting spirit that expressed itself whenever the Commandos went into action.

Another unique feature of the Achnacarry course was the introduction of the 'Me and My Pal' principle, whereby every new Commando trainee teamed up with another; together they faced the course and its rigours as a team, albeit a team of two. Many of these friendships forged at Achnacarry even continued after the War.

So after six weeks, wearing their green berets presented on the final day of the course, the fledgling Commandos marched away from Achnacarry on the six miles to the Spean Bridge railway station to travel to the Holding Commando at Wrexham prior to being posted to an operational Commando and action overseas. Some never returned to these islands, however, they, in particular, are remembered by the magnificent Commando memorial purposely sited in the heart of the Achnacarry training area.

And for those who did survive, the words of Lord Louis Mountbatten, written after the War, provide a fitting conclusion.

"I shall never forget the impact Achnacarry made on me when I visited it in 1942, after taking over the Combined Operations Command, and I suspect that neither will those who went through the course, since many told me afterwards they found the real thing less alarming than 'the Opposed Landing Exercise' which Charles Vaughan used to finish up each course."



'FOR VALOUR'

Eight Victoria Crosses and Thirty-Eight Battle Honours

As mentioned on page 5 a total of nearly four hundred decorations were awarded to officers and men of the Commandos for bravery and devotion in action, but pride of place must surely go to the eight Commandos who were awarded the Victoria Cross.

The following brief descriptions, taken from their original citations clearly emphasise the worldwide involvement of the Commandos in World War II.

Sadly, six of the eight Commando VC's were posthumous awards.



LtCol. Geoffrey Keyes

LtCol. Geoffrey Keyes, was an original volunteer and commanded a Troop in No. 11 (Scottish) Commando, which became part of 'Layforce' sent to the Middle East in 1941. After several operations in that theatre, including an operation in Syria where he was awarded the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre, he took over command after the CO had been killed and subsequently led the daring raid described below.

"On 17/18 November 1941 at Beda Littoria, Libya, LtCol. Keyes, commanding a detachment of a force which had landed 250 miles behind enemy lines, led his men, without guides, in dangerous and precipitous country to attack the house which was believed to be General Rommel's (Commander of the German Afrika Corps) headquarters. When they reached their objective, Colonel Keyes took only one officer and one NCO with him and having evaded the guards and dealt with the sentry, he dashed into the first room he encountered and shot the occupants. He then rushed into the second room where the occupants were the first to fire and Colonel Keyes was mortally wounded."

Col Keyes, VC, MC, was buried in the Benghazi War Cemetery, Libya. He is also remembered on memorial tablets dedicated to his father, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Roger Keyes, first Chief of Combined Operations, in Westminster Abbey and in St James' church, Dover.



LtCol. Charles Newman

LtCol. Charles Newman, Commanding Officer of No. 2 Commando: On 27th March 1942 in the great raid on St Nazaire in France, "LtCol. Newman was in charge of the military forces and he was one of the first ashore and directing operations regardless of his own safety. Under his inspiring leadership the troops fought magnificently and held vastly superior numbers at bay until the demolition parties had done their work. The Colonel then attempted to fight through into open country and not until all the ammunition was spent were he and his men overwhelmed and taken prisoner."

Colonel Newman survived captivity and after the War was a staunch supporter of the Association and also served as President.



Sergeant Thomas Durrant

Sergeant Thomas Durrant, of the Royal Engineers was a member of No. 1 Commando, but was one of those drafted into No. 2 to bolster their number of demolitionists for the St Nazaire raid. He "was in charge of a Lewis gun on HM Motor Launch 306 which came under heavy enemy fire during the raid. Although he had no protection and was wounded in several places he continued firing until the launch was boarded and those who were still alive were taken prisoner. He died the next day."

Sgt Durrant, VC, was buried in Escoblac-la-Baule War Cemetery in France.

Capt. Patrick Porteous

Capt. Patrick Porteous, was a Troop leader in No. 4 Commando, but because Lord Lovat had to cut down the number of troops taken on the Dieppe raid, most of his Troop were 'left out of battle', but he, with a small detachment, had the task of acting as the liaison officer between the two assault Troops chosen to assault and destroy the enemy coastal battery. "On 19th August 1942 at Dieppe, France, during the initial assault (on the battery) Capt. Porteous was shot through the hand, but nevertheless disarmed and killed his assailant, thereby also saving the life of a Sergeant (in his detachment).

In the meanwhile the two officers of one of the main assaulting Troops were killed and the Troop Sergeant Major badly wounded, so Captain Porteous, in the face of withering fire, dashed across open ground to take command and led the men in a successful charge against the enemy, when he was severely wounded for the second time. Nevertheless, he continued on to the final objective but eventually collapsed after the last gun had been destroyed."

Later after the War Capt. Porteous was promoted to Colonel, and was a staunch supporter of the Association also serving as President.



Lance-Corporal Henry Harden

Lance-Corporal Henry Harden, Royal Army Medial Corps, was with 45 (RM) Commando in the North-West Europe campaign.

"On 23rd January 1945 at Brachterbeek, Holland, three marines of the leading section of the Troop to which Lance-Corporal Harden was attached fell, wounded. He at once ran across the 100 yards of open ground, gave first aid and, carrying one marine on his back brought him to safety. Although slightly wounded, this NCO insisted on going out again with two stretcher-bearers to rescue the others. On the next journey the second wounded marine was hit again and killed, however, the rescue party returned to collect the third man, but in so doing Lance-Corporal Harden was killed."

Lance-Corporal Harden, VC, was buried in the Nederweert War Cemetery, Holland, and his deeds are remembered on a plaque on the bridge over the Montforter at Bracherbeek.

Lieutenant George Knowland

Lieutenant George Knowland, originally in No. 3 Commando and having distinguished himself, as a Sergeant, in action in Sicily was commissioned and posted to No. 1 Commando, which was part of 3 Commando Brigade in Burma, where they were heavily involved in the crucial battle of Kangaw.

"On 31 January 1945 near Kangaw, Burma, Lieutenant Knowland, was in command of a forward section of a Troop (of No. 1 Commando) being heavily attacked - some 300 of the enemy concentrating on his 24 men. When all of the crew of one of his forward Bren guns had been wounded, Knowland manned it himself, standing up to fire at ten yards range, until the casualties had been evacuated. For twelve hours he held his ground, until he was eventually mortally wounded."

Brigadier Young later wrote: "Knowland was last seen engaging a horde of Japanese with a 2-inch mortar . . . his first bomb slew six men . . ." Lieutenant Knowland, VC, was buried in the Taukkyan War Cemetery, Burma.



Corporal Thomas Hunter

Corporal Thomas Hunter, was serving in 43 (RM) Commando, which as part of 2 Special Service Brigade was involved in the vital operation in the Lake Comacchio/Argenta (Italy) area, outlined in the 'Short History'. Hunter's heroic part in that operation is described in the citation which reads:

"On 2nd April 1945 at Lake Comacchio, Italy, Corporal Hunter, who was in charge of a Bren gun section, offered himself as a target to save his Troop. Seizing the Bren gun he charged alone across 200 yards of open ground under intense fire towards a group of houses where three Spandau machine-guns were lodged. So determined was his charge that the enemy were demoralised and six of the gunners surrendered, the rest fled. He cleared the house, changing magazines as he ran and continued to draw the enemy fire until most of the troop had reached cover and he was killed, firing accurately to the last."

Corporal Hunter, VC, was buried in the Argenta Gap War Cemetery, Italy.

Major Anders Lassen

Major Anders Lassen was a Dane who enlisted in the British Army and was commissioned in the General List, but volunteered for Special Service and carried out many operations with the SBS and also the SAS (in which he had already been awarded the Military Cross and two bars) before being attached to 2 SS Brigade for the Lake Comacchio/Argenta operation. As the following citation implies he was given a role which was very much to his liking:

"On 8th April 1945 at Lake Comacchio, Italy, Major Lassen was ordered to take a patrol and raid the north shore of the lake, causing as many casualties as possible to give the impression of a major landing. In the face of overwhelming enemy numbers he fulfilled his mission, three positions were wiped out, and when mortally wounded he refused to be evacuated so that the withdrawal should not be impeded and his men's lives endangered."

Major A. Lassen, VC, MC and two bars, was buried in the same cemetery as his fellow VC Commando, Corporal Hunter, VC, namely in the Argenta Gap War Cemetery. There is a stone memorial to Major Lassen outside St Peter's church at Praesto Fjord, Norway, whilst a forest has been named after him in Israel; he is the only non-British/Commonwealth national to have been awarded the Victoria Cross, which makes it unique.



The Commando Battle Honours Flag awarded to the Association in 1957 by HM the Queen, as previously described, provides a significant factual record and catalogue of major raids, landings and battles fought by the Commandos in World War II. It provides an impressive list of actions fought in Norway, Holland, France, Italy, Syria, Sicily, Tunisia, Libya, Greece, Crete, the Adriatic Islands, Madagascar, Germany and Burma.

One of the current tasks, at the time of writing, of the General Committee and prior to the Stand-Down of the Association is to ensure that the future custody of this Flag, together with the Commando Roll of Honour also kept in Westminster Abbey, is established in perpetuity so that future generations will be reminded of the sacrifices made by all ranks of the Commandos from 1940 to 1945.



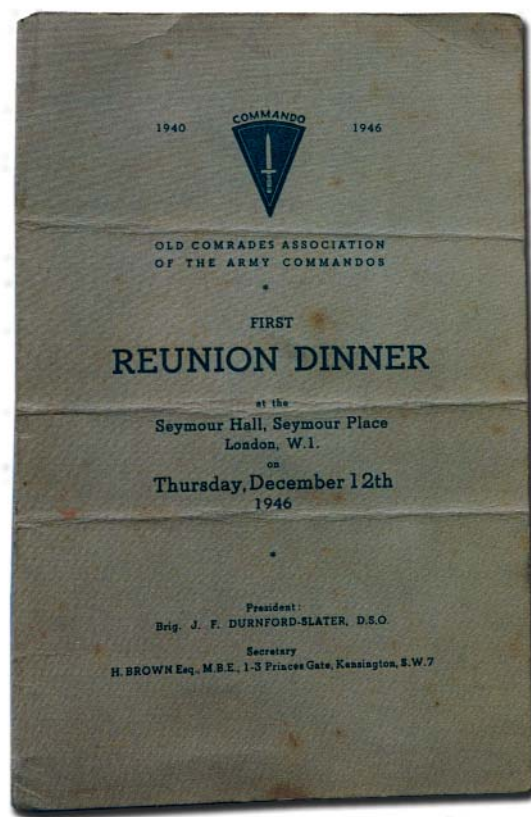
The Battle Honours Flag of the Commando Association
Westminster Abbey

THE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

The Old Comrades Association of the Special Service Brigade, a title later amended to the current one of 'The Commando Association', was the brainchild of Lieut. Col. C. Vaughan, the formidable Commandant of the Commando Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry, who as an Old Contemptible of the Retreat from Mons in the First World War appreciated and valued the comradeship forged between men who had served together in action.

Accordingly, he initiated and founded the Association as early as 1943, during the War, and rightfully was given the membership number One. The HQ was established at Achnacarry and the early administration was carried out by a succession of staff there, but by late 1945, thanks to a great recruitment drive within all units of the Commando Group, membership was just over 6,000. However, with the disbandment of the Commandos and the closing down of the Centre at Achnacarry arrangements were made by Major General Sir Robert Laycock, himself one of the original Commandos if 1940, for the Association to use a room in his London Headquarters of Combined Operations.

During 1946 a select committee, chaired by Brigadier Durnford-Slater appointed SQMS Henry Brown, who had served from the outset in No. 1 and had also been awarded the MBE for his military service in that unit, as General Secretary. Initially the appointment was for twelve months, but in the event was to last for forty years...



Nearly seven hundred comrades attended the first Reunion on 12th December 1946. Among the distinguished guests was Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Henry recalls the many problems of those early days - not least were those of raising funds and the lack of office equipment. Indeed, during a three-month period in 1946 Henry with the assistance of a number of commando comrades, who were awaiting their 'demob', addressed, by hand, over six thousand envelopes in which were sent the very first Association Newsletter. The response to this mail-shot was most encouraging and as a result the very first reunion was held in Seymour Hall, London, in December 1946 with almost seven hundred comrades attending.

Support for the new Association came not only from those who had served in Commandos but also from several famous wartime commanders, including Earl Mountbatten, Field Marshals Alexander and Montgomery, and Generals Laycock, Dempsey, Campbell Hardy and Sturges, who all agreed to serve as Patrons of the Association.

At the same time many of the Commando leaders including General Churchill, Brigadiers Durnford-Slater, Lord Lovat, Mills-Roberts, Tod, Young and Colonels Churchill, Trevor, Newman, Vaughan and Dawson agreed to be Vice Presidents and subsequently, in turn, served as Presidents.

It was during this early period with the unstinted support of many of those listed above and members of the general committee that the initiative was taken to perpetuate the wartime deeds and exploits of the Commandos.



The statue of a Commando soldier in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey was unveiled by Sir Winston Churchill and has been the scene of an annual wreath-laying service.

So it was during 1947 Association representatives joined in discussions with the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey along with officials of the Parachute Regiment and Submariners Associations for a joint Memorial. Their efforts came to fruition on Friday, 21st May 1948, when Sir Winston Churchill unveiled the three figures, sculptured by Gilbert Ledward, R.A., of a Commando soldier, a parachute soldier and a submariner in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

On 6th November 1948, a wreath was laid on this new Commando Memorial by the President, Col. Newman, VC. This was the first of the annual wreath laying services held on the Saturday of the Remembrance Weekend and which for some 15 years was conducted by the Association's Chaplain, the Rev. John Armstrong, then in 1963 the Right Reverend Maurice Wood, who had served in the Commandos, took over this duty.

Meanwhile in Scotland the initiative had been taken in 1947 to erect a memorial to the Commandos, advisedly in the wartime training area of Achnacarry. A brief history of how this project came to fruition and the historic occasion when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother unveiled this world famous memorial of ours on 27th September 1952 is told elsewhere in this brochure.

Shortly after the end of the War a beautifully engraved Roll of Honour, containing the names of Commando officers killed in action had been handed over to the Association, and this was completed during 1948 with the names of all of the Commandos who were killed in action. This addition was made possible through a generous donation from Brigadier Tod. Fortunately, when completed a provisional home for this unique book was kindly provided by the Keeper of Muniments in the library of Westminster Abbey.

Early in 1957 it came to the notice of the General Committee that the Ministry of Defence was discussing the question of awards of the Battle Honours for the 1939 - 45 War, and, in view of the disbandment of the wartime Commandos, enquiries were made to the Ministry to ask whether it would be possible for the Association to receive any due honours on behalf of all their wartime comrades.

Later that year the good news was received that Her Majesty the Queen had graciously approved the award of thirty-eight Battle Honours to the Association to commemorate the more notable actions fought in the War. It was a considerable honour for all who had served in the War and also for the surviving members of the Association.

On Saturday 15th April 1961, 350 relatives of our fallen comrades and 750 members and relatives attended a Thanksgiving Service in Westminster Abbey commemorating the 21st anniversary of the formation of the Commandos. During this service the newly commissioned Battle Honours Flag of the Association was dedicated by the Dean of the Abbey, and an inspiring sermon was given by the Bishop of Birmingham. At the conclusion of this memorable service the Battle Honours Flag and the Roll of Honour were escorted in a ceremonial procession to the cloisters where they were placed near the Commando Memorial.



The unveiling of the Commando Memorial by HM the Queen Mother seen here with (left to right) Lord Lovat, Reverend John Armstrong, General Sir Robert Laycock and Mr Gilmour Smith (Benefactor of the Memorial Appeal).

In 1963 the Association decided that an appropriate token of appreciation should be shown to the people of Ouistreham for their ongoing kindness to Commando veterans returning each year for the annual D-Day commemorations.

Accordingly a special memorial window was installed in the town church of St Sampson and it was unveiled by the Association's founder and then current President, LtCol. C. Vaughan, who headed a large contingent of comrades and relatives to Normandy.

Ever since the dedication of the Battle Honours Flag the question of where best it should be displayed permanently had been a matter of concern, but happily this problem was resolved when the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey advised the Association that they were in a position to hang the flag in St George's Chapel by the west door, near the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. This great and unique honour was, of course, gratefully accepted and the Association must consider itself favoured to have our treasured flag housed in such a prestigious national location.

Accordingly, over the next few months plans and preparations were made to commemorate this honour with a suitable and fitting service, for it was to be undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the history of the Association, when on 1st May 1971 in the presence of HM Queen Elizabeth the



The founder of the Association, LtCol. Vaughan, led the Association's party to Ouistreham for the unveiling of the stained glass window in St Sampson church, Ouistreham, dedicated to the Commandos who took part in the invasion and liberation of Normandy.

Queen Mother a congregation of nearly two thousand members, relatives and honoured guests experienced a most moving Service of Thanksgiving for the laying up of the Battle Honours Flag in St George's Chapel - where it can still be seen. The sermon was preached by John Armstrong, who was by this time a Bishop, whilst the full band of the Royal Marines and the BBC Choral Society (of some eighty singers) made this a memorable service, captured for all time with a special gramophone recording, introduced by Earl Mountbatten. An issue of one thousand copies of the recording was quickly sold out, many finding their way to comrades overseas.

In June 1977 Henry Brown's 31 years service was officially recognised with the award of the Queen's Silver Jubilee medal.

In 1979 members were shocked by the news of the tragic death of the Association's senior patron, Earl Mountbatten, and a deputation of General Committee members and Branch officials represented the Association at the Admiral's memorial service in Westminster Abbey.

In May 1980 a special plaque, commemorating the departure of the Commandos from the pier area of the Rising Sun, Warsash, for the beaches of Normandy on D Day was unveiled by Countess Mountbatten, in the presence of Lord Lovat and his piper Bill Millin (see photograph on 'Foreword' page). This was most opportune for in the following year the Association had the honour and pleasure of welcoming the Countess as a patron.

1986 will be remembered, the 40th anniversary of the disbandment of the Army Commandos, when a very happy and successful 'family' reunion was held at Broadlands, Romsey, the family home of the Mountbattens. On a lovely summer day over 600 comrades, relatives and friends, enjoyed a relaxing and informal reunion in the splendid riverside setting of this famous house, with the Countess being present and Brigadier Ken Trevor acted as our senior host. As with many other notable occasions over the years, members had the pleasure of seeing themselves on the 'little screen' and reliving the event through the television coverage of this reunion.

A few weeks later on 29th July the Countess was on duty with us once again when she opened the special Commando Exhibition, entitled 'The Raiders - the story of the Army Commandos - 1940-46' at the National Army Museum at Chelsea. A highly successful exhibition it remained opened to the public for almost a year. It was one of the many links the Association has forged with the museum over the years, indeed, the Association has been instrumental in providing the museum with several artefacts (including the wartime green beret

of one of our VC's, Colonel Pat Porteous, an original F & S Commando fighting knife, and a toggle rope) plus photographs and documents for display and also for safe keeping in the archives to enable study by researchers. Members have also recorded some of their wartime experiences for the museum's 'Library of Living History'; incidentally similar recordings have also been made by members for the Imperial War Museum for their archives too.

Not only has the Association endeavoured to preserve and perpetuate the deeds of the 1940-46 Commandos in the above ways, but it has over the years established and maintained links with today's 'Green Berets' as exemplified by just two examples, firstly the presentation by the Association of six duty bugles - suitably engraved - to the then - newly formed 29th Commando Regiment, RA, in 1962, whose first commanding officer was none other than LtCol. Dennis O'Flaherty, DSO, formerly of No. 3 Commando, and secondly, with a different slant of emphasis, was the message sent to those Commandos serving in the successful Falklands Task Force. In a moving acknowledgement of that message, General Jeremy Moore stated, "It is good, especially good, to hear that our efforts are approved by our illustrious forbears - you chaps who made the name 'Commando' what it is."

Over the years branches have also established such links and in particular must be mentioned that the London Branch still annually visits the RM Commando Training Centre at Lympstone in Devon, regarding it as an important and worthwhile liaison with today's Commandos.

The late seventies and eighties was a very active time for a large number of Association members. Incidentally, at this time the membership was in the order of some 7000 worldwide and included the Belgian, Dutch, French, Norwegian and even Polish members of No. 10 Commando. Happily, there was also a steady income, including that from the sales of Association merchandise to help in the administrative costs of organising and arranging the many annual organised activities and pilgrimages. Besides the centrally organised annual visits, mainly to Scotland, France and Holland and the 'one-off' pilgrimages to Italy, Israel and Yugoslavia, news was forthcoming of comrades visiting the sites of wartime Commando actions in Italy, Sicily, Norway and Tunisia. One of the more unusual activities of the Association at this time was the formation of a Caravan and Camping Club, which was organised and run by Bill Storer from 1973 to 1978.

1986 was a watershed in the history of the Association for it marked the retirement of Henry Brown as General Secretary and Treasurer, and members rewarded him with a handsome cheque as a token of appreciation for his

devoted and unstinted service over forty years. Having worked with Henry on a part-time basis for a year or so, Ron Youngman, himself the son of one of those No. 4 Commando killed on the beaches of Normandy on D Day, was appointed as Henry's successor, and has continued with success since that time. The Association must consider itself fortunate that these two have provided, between them, almost sixty years of unbroken service for which members are truly grateful.

In 1988 at a special service in the little Woolverton church of Seaford College a special plaque was unveiled commemorating the presence of Headquarters of Commando Group in the grounds during the War, and subsequently an annual service was held there on Advent Sunday until 2001 when due to falling support it was mutually decided to discontinue the service.

1990 saw the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Army Commandos in 1940 and although many suggestions had been forthcoming on how it might be commemorated the most feasible came from committee member, John Quarrie, that a full festival celebration be held in Blackpool over the weekend 31st August - 2nd September to coincide with the traditional switch-on of the famous Blackpool illuminations. John Quarrie and his sub-committee did a marvellous job organising a full programme that included functions at the renowned Empress Ballroom, a Thanksgiving Service at the Holy Trinity Church and a March - past through the town centre culminating with a Farewell Band Concert in the Winter Gardens.

And for good measure this special Anniversary was marked with the production of special commemoration medallion, which received the unanimous approval of the 1,288 comrades, relations and friends who attended. John Quarrie and his team of organisers were rightly congratulated for organising such a splendid and memorable anniversary.

In 1992 the first of the 50th anniversaries of the actions fought by the Commandos in World War 2 were held.

The first of these pilgrimages was for the St Nazaire Raid and although this was organised by the separate St Nazaire Society and involved the Royal Yacht 'Britannia', it was naturally attended by those of our surviving members who had been on the Raid.

The second pilgrimage was made by the members of No. 3, 4 and 40 RM Commandos of the fateful Dieppe Raid. The actual ceremonies in France were preceded by the opening of a new Dieppe Museum in Newhaven by

HRH Prince Phillip, before sailing across to France for the anniversary which covered three days, 18-20th August, when the Commando veterans, including our then only surviving Victoria Cross holder, Col. Porteous, were well and truly hosted and feted by the civic authorities and citizens of that French port.

Members of the Association was pleasantly surprised to learn in 1992 that the Lochaber District Council, based in Fort William, had decided to confer the Freedom of The District of Lochaber on them. This was indeed a unique and very special honour, and the General Committee lost no time in accepting, with the grateful thanks of all members.

After much consideration and deliberations on when the ceremony should be held it was agreed that the largest representation would best be realised by combining this special occasion with the annual November act of remembrance at the Commando Memorial.

Once again John Quarrie, who was, at that time, the representative on Association affairs in Scotland, became prominent in the organising of this celebration. The centrepiece of this special event was the presentation of the Freedom Scroll and Casket by the Chairman of the Council, Councillor Neil Clark to the Association President, Major B. W. S. Boucher-Myers, who in turn then handed back the scroll and casket, at least for the time being, for safe keeping. He followed this with a presentation to the people of Lochaber, on behalf of the Association, a special commemorative Commando fighting knife. Finally, a Commemorative Bowl was presented to the Association by the Chairman of the Fort William Royal British Legion.

These official ceremonies were followed by an excellent concert by the band of the Royal Marines, Rosyth, who had earlier led a parade of Association members through the town of Fort William to the Aird Hall for the official ceremonies, described above.

When the news of the Freedom was first received, the General Committee decided that it would be appropriate and fitting to mark the civic honour with a bronze plaque, to be affixed to the Commando Memorial, outlining, briefly, the Commando story of the years 1940-45 plus the significance of the Memorial on that location. As a result Brigadier Ken Trevor duly unveiled this plaque at the end of the Remembrance Service on the Sunday, just prior to the final Blessing by the Rev. Donald MacQuarrie, who has for many years kindly taken this service on the Association's behalf, and they are most grateful to him for so doing.

1993 also saw the Reunion held in St Ives to commemorate the move of The Commando Mountain Warfare Training Centre from Scotland and North Wales to prepare two of the RM Commandos for their then, proposed cliff climbing assault on D Day, in the event the unit, under different names, continued to carry on this specialised training in the St Ives area for many years after the War. The reunion was well supported and a huge success, thanks to the works of the Secretary of the St Ives Branch, 'Slim' Sutherland. It is appropriate, to mention here, that the St Ives Branch made an annual presentation, 'The Commando Award' - a silver statuette, consisting of a bronze figure climbing a silver pinnacle of rock, in memory of the Commandos who trained in the St Ives area, but were subsequently killed in action - to a local boy or girl who had shown bravery or fortitude in overcoming disability or psychological handicaps. Initiated in 1965 the award was made annually for some twenty-five years when it lapsed and the trophy was placed in the local museum.

The Association was well represented in Normandy for the 50th anniversary of D Day with the official ceremonies attended by HM The Queen, the President of the USA, Mr Clinton, the president of France, M. Chirac and a host of other dignitaries. One of the main centres for the Army Commandos was Ouistreham, where since the end of the War the civic authorities and individuals, such as Bernard Saulnier of Amfreville, have been most generous in their hospitality. At this anniversary those present were presented with a specially struck 'Normandy' medal by courtesy of the French Government. Later in that year a representative group of veterans attended the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Walcheren and among the many wreaths laid was one at the striking No. 4 Commando Memorial at Flushing, a photograph of which is elsewhere in this brochure.

In May 1995 a party of members represented I Commando Brigade at the liberation commemorations in Massbracht, Holland and were warmly hosted by the civic officials and local citizens.

On Sunday 13th August 1995 those comrades who had fought in Burma had the rare opportunity of commemorating one of their famous actions, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Kangaw, plus the end of hostilities in the South-East Theatre of Operations. Some 230 veterans of 3 Commando Brigade plus over 400 family and friends attended a Parade, Review and Service of Remembrance (for which the Band of HM Royal Marines, Portsmouth played) on the parade ground of the Royal Marines at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth. These ceremonies were followed by a reception and lunch after which was a musical concert by the Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas, who also Beat Retreat after the tea interval.

It was a most successful commemoration for those of our comrades whose actions were fought so far away - and are so often forgotten. . .

The Association was represented by Henry Brown, Major J. Dunning and Capt. Wilson at the special 50th anniversary Thanksgiving Service for the end of World War 2 in St Paul's Cathedral in the presence of HM The Queen and the Heads of State of the wartime Allies and the Commonwealth, and later that day they attended a Celebratory Review in Hyde Park.

In September ex-members of No. 1 Commando held a two days reunion in the city of Winchester, where they had been billeted on return from North Africa in 1943 and from whence they went to the Far East later that year. A feature of this well-attended reunion was a most moving Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance in Winchester Cathedral.

Our patron the Countess of Mountbatten was the guest of honour at the annual dinner of the London Branch in March 1998.

A simple service that brought back memories of our wartime leader, Winston Churchill, was held in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey on 21st May 1998 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his unveiling of the Commando statue. In response to suggestions from members to hold the Annual General Meetings outside London, those of 1995, 1996 and 1997 were held in Nottingham and these were followed by subsequent AGM's in Coventry, but for various reasons the subsequent meetings returned to venues in London.

Many of the overseas members from No. 10 (Inter Allied) Commando attended a two days' reunion at Aberdovey in May 1999, during which a memorial, honouring those of 3 Troop, unveiled.

Sadly, as the days passed by, the Secretary's post bag became increasingly dominated by letters informing him of the death of members, this steady but inevitable decline in membership brought with it problems of funding and although the Chairman appealed for contributions to offset this situation, the response was disappointing and inadequate to provide any long term solution. Faced with this unhappy situation the General Committee called for an Emergency General Meeting (EGM), to proceed the customary AGM, to discuss dissolution. However, after much debate a majority voted to carry on and try to solve the financial problem with another appeal.

The New Year's Honours List for 2002 contained the award of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for Henry Brown in recognition of his life-long service to the Association, forty years of General Secretary/Treasurer and two years as President (1998-2000). Currently he is the last President of the Association.

The annual Remembrance and wreath laying at the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge in November 2002 was a very special event, in-as-much it was the fiftieth anniversary of the unveiling of the Memorial and it was graced by the presence of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh (*below*), while to mark the occasion a special commemorative brochure was presented to all those who attended.



Unfortunately, the finances of the Association did not improve and another EGM was held in 2004 with the proposal to dissolve the Association in 2005. This was duly passed by those attending with the necessary statutory majority and subsequently plans were made to hold a dignified Stand Down Parade with a Drumhead Service and a final Reunion in Portsmouth in September 2005.

However, in spite of this sad decision, it did not affect the return of many comrades to Normandy on 6th June 2004 to commemorate the special 60th anniversary, which was widely reported in the world's press and television, being attended by HM the Queen, the Presidents of both France and USA as well as the heads of other states. One of the features of the Commando pilgrimage was a civic reception at Ouistreham at which our President, Lieut. Col. Sir Tommy Macpherson made a presentation, on behalf of the Association, to the Mayor. The Commando veterans present were honoured by the French Government with a special commemorative medal to mark the 60th anniversary.

The Remembrance Services and wreath laying at the Commando Memorials at Spean Bridge and in Westminster Abbey were well supported officially for the last time by Association members in the November, but there is no doubt that comrades and their families will, as individuals or in Branch parties (as some Branches plan to carry on after the 'Stand Down'), be attending these Armistice services in the years ahead. At the time of writing preparations are going ahead for the annual pilgrimage to Normandy and also for a party to Linne in Holland.

Finally, mention must be made of a memorable 'Heroes Return' party of 3 Cdo Bde in this last March to Burma. Consisting of seventeen veterans of Nos. 1, 5, 42 RM and 44 RM Commandos plus carers, the party took part in remembrance services at Rangoon and Htauktan War Cemeteries, where 127 Commandos were buried, before flying on to the Akyab and hence to Hill 170, where their epic stand, already recorded, took place. There crosses were planted and due respects were paid in an emotional tribute: "remembering those young friends who died here sixty years ago, but are not forgotten."

Surely that last apt quotation sums up the sentiments of most comrades who over the last sixty years have revisited their old battlefields. Albeit, on a happier note all members have cherished the strong fellowship and happy reunions that have been enjoyed over these past years too.

In writing this review of the Association's activities the author is acutely aware of many omissions and the fact that so many members who have contributed to its success as officials, committee members, branch secretaries and in a host of other ways have not been mentioned by name. By the same token it has not been practical to list all the distinguished Patrons who have honoured our Association nor our worthy Presidents over this period too. This is regretted, but to pay tribute to all of them and also list all the activities over the years would have warranted a whole book.

Notwithstanding without their advice, help and contributions the Association would not have enjoyed the success outlined here and, furthermore, it is a result of their foresight and drive that the Association is able to leave a treasured legacy of memorials, artefacts and records that will forever bear testimony, and remind future generations, of the courage and deeds of the Commandos in World War II.

A collective vote of thanks is, therefore, due and readily afforded, to each and every one of them.

Certainly our founder, Colonel 'Charlie' Vaughan would have been proud of the record of achievements of the Association that he initiated at Achnacarry, way back in 1943, and doubtless in his own bluff and inimitable style have commented, "Well done, chaps..."





The Commando Memorial - Spean Bridge.

"WE WILL REMEMBER THEM . . ."

MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS AND MUSEUMS

Mention has already been made of the impressive Commando monuments at Spean Bridge and the equally impressive albeit much smaller Commando figure memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, but there are others and they too merit mention in this souvenir brochure. However, before listing these others it is pertinent to briefly outline the background to the two special memorials.

The one at Spean Bridge is sited in a magnificent highland setting with the main figure looking out towards Ben Nevis. The monument was erected in this location because of the area's links with Achnacarry and Commando training. At the end of the War the people of Scotland, who had great regard and respect for the Commandos and, of course, where they had been based and billeted, decided to honour them with a memorial, so a fund was initiated for this purpose with money being generously donated by towns, villages and hamlets throughout Scotland.

The monument was designed by Mr Scott Sutherland, who at the time was a Lecturer at the College of Art, Dundee. Work began in November 1949 and it took another two years to prepare the clay and plaster casts for the foundry plus the final casting in bronze. The actual figures are just over 9 feet high and the overall height of the monument is approximately 17 feet. It is now in the care of the Lochaber District Council to whom the Commando veterans and the families of all fallen comrades are greatly indebted. The historic unveiling ceremony by HM The Queen Mother in 1952 and the special 50th anniversary, attended by HRH Prince Phillip were undisputedly two of the most important events in the history of the Association.

A Service of Remembrance and Wreath Laying ceremony is held annually on Remembrance Sunday in November starting at 3.00pm and, although the Association is standing down, this ceremony will continue and it is hoped that members and families will be able to support it in the years ahead.

It was most fitting that the Commando memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey should be unveiled by our great wartime leader, Winston Churchill in 1948. (Incidentally, it is not generally known that his son, Randolph, was an original volunteer for No. 8 Commando and served with

Layforce in the Middle East). The memorial was the work of Mr Gilbert Ledward, RA and the original plaster cast is in the care of the National Army museum. In the past an annual short service and wreath laying has been held but this year as an act of thanksgiving the Association, will join in the main Evensong Service in the Abbey on Saturday 12th November, which will follow an informal wreath laying at the memorial in the cloisters.

Also in the Abbey is the splendid Commando Roll of Honour with the names of 1706 Commandos - Army and Royal Marines - who lost their lives during the War. Relatives of those fallen Commandos wishing to inspect the Roll of Honour may do so by applying to the Dean's Verger.

There are many memorials scattered throughout this country and overseas to the Commandos of World War II; understandably by far the majority of those overseas are in France.

No. 1 Special Service Brigade (later titled No. 1 Commando Brigade)

1. Warsash, Hampshire. Plaque mounted on the wall of the 'Rising Sun', Warsash, commemorating the departure of both this Brigade and No. 4 SS Bde, from the nearby pier, for the Normandy D Day landings (*see the picture with the Foreword*).
2. Amfreville, Normandy. The monument is on the green at Amfreville in front of the church.
3. Barent, Normandy. A covered memorial commemorating the liberation of Barent. Also in Barent cemetery were scattered the ashes of the late Brigadier D. Mills-Roberts and there is a plaque erected to his memory.
4. Goustranville, Criqueville-En-Auge, Le Plein Gruchet and Dozule, Normandy. There is a series of memorials and plaques along the route taken by the Brigade after the breakout from the Le Plein position on 18th August commemorating the liberation of these places.
5. Ouistreham, Normandy. Stained glass window in the town church of St Sampson monument commemorating the liberation of the town by units of the Brigade.
6. Linne, Holland. Memorial, Plaque mounted on wall of St Martin's Church, which reads in English and Dutch, "In memory of the members of 1st Commando Brigade who died in the liberation of Maasbracht, Brachtorbeck and Linne, January/February 1945".

No. 4 Special Service Brigade (later titled No. 4 Commando Brigade)

1. Warsash, Hampshire. See No. 1 SS Bde above.
2. Sallenelles, Normandy. Memorial to the four RM Commandos involved in operations in the area from June to August 1944.
3. Westkapelle, Walcheren, Holland. Impressive monument, with a plaque mounted on a recovered tank, sited on the dyke overlooking the town, and dedicated to the RM Commandos who landed at Westkapelle, November 1944.



Sited on the dyke overlooking the beaches at Westkapelle, Walcheren, is the monument dedicated to No 4 Commando Brigade.

No. 1 Commando

1. Dartmouth, Devon. A memorial plaque in Guildhall and a sundial in the public gardens commemorating the Commando's stay in the town 1940-41.
2. Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland. A memorial plaque in the Town Hall commemorating the stay of the Commando in that town in 1941-42.
3. Luc-sur-Mer. A memorial commemorating one of the first raids on the Normandy coastline.

4. Alreswas, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Tree and plaque in the National Arboretum.

No. 2 Commando

1. St Nazaire, France. On the sea front is a memorial to all those who took part in the Raid in 1942.
2. Falmouth, Devon. On the fish quay, a memorial cairn dedicated to all those who took part on the St Nazaire Raid whilst in the church of King Charles the Martyr is a Roll of Honour for all those who lost their lives on the Raid.
3. Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, Germany. A memorial to the seven Commandos of No. 2 Commando, who were captured following the raid on the power station at Glomfjord, south of Narvik, Norway, on 20th and 21st September 1942 and brought to the camp where they were shot on Hitler's notorious orders to shoot all captured Commandos.



On the seafront at St. Nazaire is the memorial to all those who took part in 'The Great Commando Raid' - alongside is the only preserved part of HMS Campbelltown, namely a 12 pdr gun.

4. Glomfjord, Norway. Memorial to the Commando raiders outside the present power station there.

No. 3 Commando

1. Vaagso, Norway. On the adjacent island of Maaloy is a stone memorial to all those who lost their lives on the Vaagso Raid in December 1942.
2. Agnone, Italy.

No. 3
Commando
Bridge
(formerly
named 'Punta
dei Malati')
over the river
Leonardi.
General
Montgomery
ordered that
this bridge be
renamed after
the operation
by No. 3
Commando in
which they
prevented the
Germans



No 3 Commando Bridge, Sicily, renamed on orders of General Montgomery.

- demolishing it and also cut off their withdrawal from Lentini. The new name 'No. 3 Commando Bridge' was carved into the stonework, but at the time of writing its present state is not known.
3. Berneval, near Dieppe, France. Monument on the cliff top commemorating No. 3 Commando's part in the Dieppe Raid on 19th August 1942.
 4. Douville, Normandy. Plaque mounted at the foot of the War Memorial commemorating the liberation of the village by Nos. 3 and 6 Commandos.
 5. Petiville, Normandy. Small red granite memorial to No. 3 Commando, commanded by LtCol. Peter Young, commemorating the liberation of the village on 17th August 1944.
 6. Varaville, Normandy. Grey granite memorial in the 'Place du No. 3 Commando' commemorating the liberation of the village.



The 'action' monument erected by the citizens of Flushing to commemorate their liberation by No. 4 Commando, November 1944.

7. Alrewas, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. In the National Arboretum tree and plaque dedicated to No. 3.

No. 4 Commando

1. Weymouth, Dorset. Pictorial history display of the Commando and a plaque commemorating the founding of the Commando in the town in July 1940.
2. St Margarite, near Dieppe, France. In the village centre, mounted on the wall of the old Town Hall two memorials, one describing the action of No. 4 on the Dieppe Raid 19th August 1942, and the other a Roll of Honour. The square was renamed 'No. 4 Commando Square' in 1992. On the beach of St Margarite is a further memorial to the Commando and another on the site of the German battery destroyed in the Raid. Plus a small plaque on the wall of a building in the square of nearby Varengeville.

3. Ouistreham, Normandy. A large and impressive stone memorial in a modern style on the beachfront, Le Breche, commemorating the landing of the Anglo-French No. 4 Commando on D Day. On the site of the old 'Casino' strongpoint there are memorials to all the French Commandos who lost their lives.
4. Ouistreham, Normandy. Opposite the site of the strongpoint has been established the 'No. 4 Commando Museum', which is open throughout the summer months and has a comprehensive display of artefacts, weapons and pictures related to the Anglo-French Commando's actions in Normandy 1944.
5. Hauger, Normandy. A simple stone monument in this hamlet where the Commando fought from D Day until it moved to Breville in July 1944
6. Danestal, Normandy. A small plaque mounted on the front wall of the Town Hall commemorating their liberation by No. 4 on 21st August 1944.
7. Flushing Holland. On the site of No. 4's pre-dawn landing on 1st November is the striking 'action' monument.

No. 5 Commando

Alrewas, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Tree and plaque in the National Arboretum.

No. 6 Commando

1. Amfreville, Normandy. One of the first monuments erected; initiated by Sgt. Mitchell of the Commando in July 1944; opposite Bernard's Farm.
2. Douville, Normandy. Marble plaque inscribed, "Homage aux liberateurs de Douville, Nos. 3 et 6 Commandos Britannique, Colonels P.Young et W. Coade. Operation Paddle; la Poursuite. 21 Aout 1944." It is mounted at the foot of the existing French War memorial.

No. 9 Commando.

Ornito, Italy. A simple stone cairn with the Roll of Honour to the thirty-five officers and men of the Commando who lost their lives in the actions fought on the mountains of Ornito and Faito between 1st and 4th February 1944. There is also a small plaque to the Belgian Troop of No. 10, who were attached, at the foot of the cairn.



Mount Ornito, Italy. Stone cairn honouring the fallen of No. 9 Commando - 1st to 4th February 1944.

No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando

1. Aberdovey, North Wales. Large stone monument to 3 Troop in the Penhelyg Park, whilst on a plaque located on the nearby sea wall is a brief history of this unique Troop of anti-Nazi German Commandos, sometimes, referred to as 'X' Troop, who were billeted in this town 1942-43.
2. Gravelines, France. Stone monument in beach area commemorating the raid by the French Commandos on the night 24th and 25th December 1943, one of a number of small raids carried out during the winter of 1943/44.
3. Dieppe and Ouistreham, France. Monuments to members of the French Troops attached to No. 4 for operations - see No. 4 above.
4. Ornito, Italy. Plaque to No. 10 (Belgian) Troop - see No. 9 above.

No. 12 Commando

Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, Germany. On the memorial mentioned

under No. 2 above, there is also the name of Sgt. J. Cox of No. 12 Commando, a member of a Commando raiding party on shipping at Haugesund in Norway on 29th April 1943; he was captured and brought to this camp where he was shot. There is no trace of the other members of this raiding party.

Nos. 40-48 RM Commandos

All these eight Commandos have individual monuments at Southsea in the Garden of Remembrance of the Royal Marines Museum, and in some cases they list the actions fought by the Commando. In the National Arboretum at Alrewas a tree has been planted, with a plaque, dedicated to each of these Commandos, whilst at the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre at Lymington, Devon, is the impressive Commando figure/monument dedicated to "all those who served in and with the RM Commandos in World War II".

In addition to the RM Commando memorials mentioned above there are the following ones:

41 RM Commando

1. Lion-sur-Mer, Normandy. Impressive memorial in the form of a huge sundial commemorating the Commando's landing and action on D Day. The square outside the Town Hall has been renamed 'Place du 41 Commando'.
2. Sallenelles and Sannerville, Normandy. Plaques installed in both villages in honour of the Commando.
3. Barentin, Normandy. Plaque on wall of the Town Hall commemorating the liberation of the town on 31st August 1944.
4. Westkapelle, Holland. A plaque in the local church dedicated to the Commando.

46 RM Commando

1. Shanklin, Isle of Wight. Plaque on wall of former Upper Chine School, commemorating the Commando's stay there prior to D Day.
2. Rots, Normandy. Memorial commemorating liberation by the Commando.
3. Dichoek, Walcheren, Holland. A plaque in the local church.

48 RM Commando

1. Langrune-sur-Mer. Granite memorial on seafront commemorating the Commando's actions on D Day.
2. St Aubin, Normandy. Stone memorial to the Commando on seafront.
3. Serooskerke, Walcheren, Holland. Plaque commemorating the town's liberation by the Commando on 8th November 1944.

4. Zoutelande, Walcheren, Holland. Plaque on wall of the local church.
5. Gravesend, Kent. Plaque and Roll of Honour in local Christ Church.

Special Boat Section (SBS)

In the Ingledene Hotel, Sannox, on the Isle of Arran is a plaque commemorating the foundation of this special unit in 1940 by Capt. R. Courtney, also includes a brief résumé of the unit's history.

Commando Mountain Warfare Training Centre (CMWTC)

St Ives, Cornwall. Plaque on harbour wall with details of the unit's stay and their training in the area, whilst in the local St Ives Museum are pictures and memorabilia connected with this training. On the nearby rocky coastline, where the bulk of the cliff climbing took place the main ridge was officially renamed 'Commando Ridge' and a commemorative plaque installed thereon in 1945.

Holding Operational Commando (HOC)

Wrexham, North Wales. Plaque on seat in the grounds of Acton Park School commemorating HOC's stay in the town 1943-45.

Commando Basic Training Centre, (CBTC)

1. Achnacarry. The Cameron Museum a collection of photographs and memorabilia relating to CBTC. It is open in summer months.
2. Spean Bridge, Spean Bridge Hotel. An exhibition based on CBTC with other items of Commando memorabilia.

London. Imperial War Museum and National Army Museum, also Southsea, Royal Marines Museum

In the archives of all three museums are documents and photographs relating to the Commandos of World War II, which are available for viewing on application. In addition, the first two museums have recordings of ex-Commandos recalling their wartime experiences and visitors can also apply to hear these tapes.

Kew, Middlesex. The Public Records Office (PRO)

In the archives are the wartime unit diaries of the Commandos and reports of operations and other details connected with the Commandos of World War II. These are available for inspection by members of the public on application. Best to check beforehand or telephone 020 8392 5200 for Reader's Ticket.

COMMANDO LIBRARY

There have been a great number of books published recounting the exploits of the Commandos - and their 'offshoots', including the SBS and SAS - in the years 1940 to 1945. Some deal exclusively with Commando operations, while others incorporate the actions of the Commandos within the wider field of larger operations or campaigns. The following selective list, although not by any means a full one, is, however, mainly devoted to books that are wholly on Commando operations, and in not a few cases, the author was himself a combatant Commando.

Unfortunately, some of these books are now out of print, but probably available through the national Library Services or obtainable from second-hand booksellers, in which case searching through Amazon online may be worthwhile.

Barnes, 'Tag', 'Commando Diary', Spellmount Ltd, 1991.

A personal account of the author's service in No. 1 Commando, in eight countries, from October 1942 to March 1946.

Byrne, J.V. 'The General Salutes A Soldier'. Robert Hale Ltd. 1986.

The story of a founder member of No. 11 Commando, his exploits in Layforce and the original SAS before capture in North Africa, subsequent escape from POW camp, return to UK, retraining at Achnacarry and then active service in No. 6 Commando from D Day onwards.

Churchill, Thomas, Commando Crusade, William Kimber & Co. Ltd, 1987.

An autobiography, which includes the author's role as commander of No. 2 Special Service Brigade with accounts of Commando operations in Italy and the Adriatic.

Courtney, G.B. 'SBS in World War Two'. Grafton Books, 1985.

The story of Nos. 1 and 2 Special Boat Sections of the Army Commandos, told by the brother of the founder of SBS, himself a member of SBS from 1942 to 1945.

Dear, Ian, 'Ten Commando 1942-1945'. Leo Cooper Ltd, 1987.

ISBN 0-85052-1211. A detailed account of some of the actions by members of this unique Commando unit of many nationalities.

Dorrian, James. 'Storming St Nazaire'. Leo Cooper, 1998. ISBN 0-85052419-9. A very full and detailed history of the Raid in which five VC's were won

including two to Commandos.

Dunning, James, 'It Had To Be Tough'. Pentland Press Ltd, 2000.

ISBN 1-85821-748-2. The story of the origins of the Commandos and their special training in World War II - a well reviewed book with illustrations.

Dunning, James, 'The Fighting Fourth'. Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2003.

ISBN 0-7509-3095-0. The story of No. 4 Commando from its formation in 1940 to its disbandment in early 1946.

Durnford - Slater, John, 'Commando'. William Kimber & Co. Ltd, 1985.

First-hand account of Commando service by the first commanding officer of No. 3 Commando, recently republished by Greenhill Books, London. ISBN 1-85367-479-6.

Ford, Ken, 'St Nazaire - 1942, The Great Commando Raid'.

Osprey Publishing, 2001. The latest book on this subject with coloured artwork, 3-dimensional maps and photographs.

Ford, Ken, 'Dieppe 1942 - Prelude to D Day'. Osprey Publishing, 2003.

A comprehensive little book with pictures, maps etc. on this highly controversial operation.

Ford, Ken, 'D Day Commando'. Sutton Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0-7509-3023-3.

An account of No. 48 (RM) Commando's campaign from Normandy to the Maas.

Forfar, John, 'From Omaha to the Scheldt'.

The story of No. 47 (RM) Commando in WW2, in which the author not only served, but was decorated for his part in the Walcheren campaign.

Fowler, Will, 'The Commandos at Dieppe. Rehearsal for D Day'. Harper Collins Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0-00-711125-8.

This well researched book deals almost exclusively with Lord Lovat's No. 4 Commando's training and participation in the Raid, plus the German's comments on that Commando's action.

Gilchrist, Donald, 'Castle Commando'. Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1960.

Due to be reprinted, enquiries to West Highland Museum, Fort William. An account of the training at Achnacarry.

Gilchrist, Donald, 'Don't Cry For Me'. Robert Hale Ltd, 1982.
ISBN 0-7091-9148-0. A collection of stories about No. 4 Commando in training and action, including the assault and capture of Flushing.

Jenkins, W.G., 'Commando Subaltern at War'. Greenhill Books, 1996.
ISBN 1-85367-231-9. No 43 (RM) Commando's operations in Italy and Yugoslavia in which the author won the DSO as a subaltern.

Keyes, Elizabeth, 'Geoffrey Keyes, VC'. George Newnes Ltd, 1956.
The biography of the Commando's first VC and covers the formation of No. 11 Commando, the exploits of 'Layforce' and the raid on 'Rommel's Headquarters' in North Africa.

Lovat, Lord, 'March Past'. Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1978.
ISBN 0-297-77456-5. The autobiography of one of the Commandos' most outstanding leaders and his account of his involvement from 1941 until he was badly wounded in Normandy in 1944.

Masters, Peter, 'Striking Back'. Presideo Press (USA) 1997.
ISBN 0-89141-629-3. One of the Austrian Jews who served in 3 Troop, No. 10 Commando from D Day to VE Day.

Messenger, Charles. 'The Commandos - 1940-1946'. William Kimber, London, 1985. ISBN 0-7183-0553-1. A most comprehensive and definitive history of the Commandos of World War 2.

Messenger, Charles. 'The Middle East Commandos'. William Kimber, London, 1988. ISBN 0-7183-0645-7. Provides a fascinating insight to the lesser known exploits - and frustrations - of Nos. 50, 51 and 52 (ME) Commandos.

Mills-Roberts, Derek, 'Clash by Night'. William Kimber & Co. Ltd, 1956.
An account by another of the most outstanding Commando leaders recording his part in the Dieppe Raid, as CO of No. 6 Commando in North Africa and on D Day, finally as the Brigade Commander in Normandy, at the crossing of the Rhine and on to the Elbe and final victory.

Mitchell, Raymond, 'They Did What Was Asked Of Them'.
An excellent history of No. 41 (RM) Commando covering operations in Sicily/Italy plus North West Europe.

Moulton, J.L., 'Haste to Battle'. Cassell & Co. 1963.
An account by the CO of No. 48 (RM) Commando of that Commando's background and its campaign in North West Europe. General Moulton will also be remembered as one of the Association's patrons.

Neillands, Robin. 'The Raiders'. George Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1989.
A collection of personal accounts of Commando service in World War 2 contributed by comrades of the Association.

Samain, Brian. 'Commando Men'.
A paperback by publishers, Pen and Sword, a recently reprinted account of 45 (RM) Commando in WWII written by the I.O..

Saunders, Hilary St George, 'The Green Beret'. Michael Joseph, 1949.
The very first book written about the Commandos, now a collector's item!

Young, Peter, 'Storm From The Sea'. Greenhill Books, 1989. ISBN 1-85367-03-6.
A reprint of the excellent book Peter Young wrote in 1958 about his service in the Commandos including his part in action at Lofoten, Vaagso, Dieppe, Sicily, Italy, Normandy and finally in Burma. A worthy book on which to end this summary . . .

'A HELPING HAND TO THOSE IN NEED' - THE COMMANDOS' BENEVOLENT FUND

The Commando's Benevolent Fund (CBF) was set up sixty two years ago in 1943, whilst the War was still being waged, and inaugurated by Lord Louis Mountbatten as a Charity by a Declaration of Trust. It has not always been recognised that it is a separate and independent charity from the Commando Association, although there has always been close cooperation between the CBF and our Association.

From the outset the trustees of the CBF have been a combination of ex-Army Commandos and civilians, all concerned with the welfare of ex-Army Commandos of World War II plus their widows and dependents. Throughout its existence the CBF has maintained - and benefited from - this blend of service and civilian trustees. Over the years the CBF has also been most fortunate to have had the dedicated service of several ladies to fulfil the essential secretarial and liaison duties, none more so than Mrs Desiree Roderick, who after some years is still the CBF's Secretary.

Practically all the initial funding of the CBF came from a 'one-off' public appeal, spearheaded by a sponsored Dinner at the historic Mansion House in London, labelled as 'The Last Great Raid'. The public response was magnificent and over £100,000, an enormous amount at the time, equivalent to excess of one million pounds today, was raised.

Under the regulations laid down in the constitution of the CBF this considerable sum plus other contributions, known as the 'capital' had to be invested to provide the 'income' for the intended financial assistance. Thanks to the expert advice, of mainly the civilian trustees, the capital was wisely invested and the income has continued to provide financial help and grants these past sixty two years, although small amounts have been drawn in the last two years to meet the demands made on the Fund. Since 1945 many thousands of pounds from the CBF have helped hundreds of ex-Army Commando veterans and their widows/dependents with grants to meet a wide range of needs. One should also add CBF has also been grateful to various other organisations such as SSAFA, the Royal British Legion and Regimental Associations for their assistance too.

Finally, it must be emphasised that the CBF, being a separate and independent charity and not part of the Commando Association, will continue its work even when the Association stands down, and with this in mind it has been a policy of the trustees during the last decade to recruit a new generation of trustees, invariably the sons or daughters of Commando veterans, as replacements for the inevitable loss of older trustees. This policy will ensure continuity and mean that the Fund will be there with adequate help available for any ex-Army Commando and/or his dependent until the very last comrade is left. It is a comforting and reassuring thought

Any ex-Army Commando or his dependents who has a problem now or in the future should contact:

The Secretary
The Commando's Benevolent Fund
PO Box 104
Selby
YO8 5YY

POSTSCRIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When the arrangements for the 'Stand Down' were being finalised the General Committee agreed that a special Commemorative Souvenir Brochure, something that could be treasured, should be produced, not only for those comrades attending but also for those who, for a variety of reasons were unable.

It was also decided that the brochure should include more than just the obvious résumé of the history of the Commandos in World War II and a review of the Association's activities and achievements over the past six decades, but also tributes to our eight Victoria Cross heroes, plus additional and relevant information that would help to perpetuate the memory of the Commandos 1940-45. Hence, the inclusion of 'The Commando Library', 'Monuments, Memorials and Museums' and a word or two about the future of The Commando Benevolent Fund, which will carry on until the demise of the last comrade or relative.

This being decided the problem posed was a familiar one facing all writers, namely, what to put in and what to leave out, especially with the added quandary of 'trying to put a quart into a pint pot!'

It hasn't been easy; there was so much to record it would have justified a whole book, but that was not a viable proposition.

Notwithstanding, it is sincerely hoped that realising the overall aim and purpose of this special brochure, and bearing in mind the limitations of funds available to produce it, that it all will meet the approval of comrades and their families for whom it is basically intended - although as pointed out above it also will aim to inform and enlighten future generations of our history. It is with this last aim in mind that copies will be donated to the museums most concerned with our history, namely, The Imperial War Museum, The National Army Museum, The Royal Marines Museum and the library of The Royal Marines Commando Training Centre.

Finally, I wish to place on record my appreciation and thanks to the many comrades who have kindly contributed in one-way or another. For the reasons already mentioned it was not possible to include all their contributions, especially their photographs. So many sent in contributions that one cannot mention them all by name, but nevertheless I am most grateful for their help, 'Thank You...'

However, there are some I must mention by name for their particular advice and encouragement. Firstly to Henry Brown, the acknowledged 'font of all knowledge' when it comes to the Commandos...

Also to Ron Youngman and Andrew Milne who had the unenviable task of moulding the text and pictures into the format for publication.

I am also grateful to the following for their specific help, the Imperial War Museum and others for permission to reproduce their photographs, Derek Dighton for collating information of the many Commando memorials in Normandy and to the Secretary of the Royal Marines Historical Society for help in listing the RM Commando memorials etc..

James Dunning

The Commando Association (1943-2005)



“United We Conquer”