

Service of Remembrance



A Commemoration of the
50th Anniversary of the Unveiling
of the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge

In the presence of,
HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., K.T.

9th November, 2002

“We may feel sure that nothing of which we have any knowledge or record has ever been done by mortal men which surpasses the splendour and daring of their feats of arms. Truly we may say of them, ‘When shall their glory fade?’”

Extract from a speech delivered by the Rt. Hon. Sir Winston L. S. Churchill, K.G., P.C., C.H., at the unveiling of the Commando, Airborne and Submarine Forces Memorial in Westminster Abbey on the 21st May, 1948.

Acknowledgements

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The Commando Association can be contacted on 01757 705449

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The History of The Commando Memorial

The Scottish Commando Memorial has been at Spean Bridge for fifty years but its history can be traced back to 1946. Immediately after the war, a successful appeal was held in Scotland for The Commando Benevolent Fund. Many members of the various Scottish Committees also felt that there should be some form of Memorial to the Commandos, and so a separate Memorial Fund was formed. The money was most generously subscribed by towns, villages and hamlets throughout Scotland - all of whom showed their great regard for the courage and sacrifice of the Commandos. It was decided it should be located at Spean Bridge because it was here that so many Commandos were trained - near the old Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry.

Early in 1947, a representative Committee, including The Lord Lovat, D.S.O., M.C., invited the Scottish School of Sculptors to submit designs. In all, twenty-six designs were submitted and, in October 1949, the Committee unanimously chose the design of Scott Sutherland, who was Lecturer in Arts in the College of Art, Dundee.

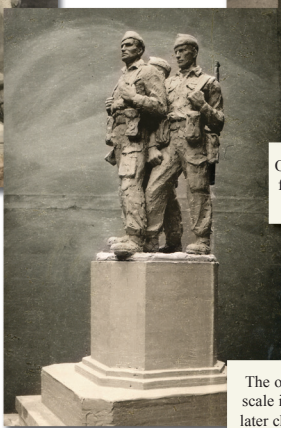
Work began in November 1949 and it took another two years of detailed and meticulous work to prepare the clay and plaster casts for the foundry. Several models of various sizes were created to ensure all the details were correct. In August of 1950 an armature mild steel was bolted and welded together to enable the clay model to be built. Then, in late 1951, came the final casting in bronze, with the Memorial, including the base, being over 17' high - the figures alone are 9' 4" in height.



Sculptor Scott Sutherland applies detail to the one-third scale clay model in March 1950.



October 1950 - Sutherland works on the final clay model, which was completed in March the following year.



The original design, seen one-eighth scale in October 1949. The base was later changed to the one we see today.



The bronze statue is carefully lowered into place on the newly built plinth.

On the afternoon of Saturday September 27 1952, at two o'clock, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, unveiled the Memorial.

The ceremony, in addition to Her Majesty's address, included the dedication by the Rev. John Armstrong, and speeches by Lord Lovat, Major General R. E. Laycock, and the President of the Scottish Commando Memorial, W. Gilmour Smith.

The guests included the Burgomaster of Flushing, Dr, Kolff, who had presided at the unveiling of the Memorial in Holland to No. 4 Commando; Brigadier General Kessinger, the American Army Attaché; M. Paul Lorion, French Consul for Scotland, and representatives from Royal Marines Commandos.



Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother addresses the audience and guests prior to the unveiling of the Memorial.

The actual ceremony, in accordance with Lord Lovat's wish, was simple. There was no parade or ceremonial drill but afterwards, Her Majesty walked through a line of Commandos to her car, and talked to widows and mothers of Commandos killed in action. It is worth noting that the ceremony took place only 6 months after the death of her husband, George VI. That she was able to fulfil her commitments at such a difficult time typified her sense of duty, and her loyalty to the men of the Commandos.

At the time it was hoped that the Scottish Commando Memorial would become a landmark in the Highlands, and that people would come from all over the world to see it. Over the last fifty years this dream has been realised.

Today the Memorial, and the site at Spean Bridge, is maintained by the Lochaber area of The Highland Council. It is estimated there are over 25,000 visitors annually so proper care of the Memorial is vital. The Council and its staff are to be commended for their continuing hard work.

At the time of its inception, the people responsible for the Memorial sincerely believed that the sacrifice of the Commandos transcended anything that we here can hope to perpetuate. Their memory will live forever in the hearts of the free peoples of the world.

“United We Conquer”



Her Majesty is greeted by Lord Lovat (top, centre) and meets Commandos and their relatives (left).

Call to Worship

Minister: Reverend D. A. MacQuarrie
Hon. Commando Padre - Scotland

Hymn 387 - Psalm 23

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My table thou has furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows

My soul he doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness
Even for his own Name's sake.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me:
And in God's house for ever-more
My dwelling-place shall be.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill:
For thou art with me; and thy rod
And staff me comfort still

Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever.

Amen

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11, verses 8-10 and 15-16

Address: "This country was their training ground"

Prayer

Minister: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning..."

All assembled say: "...we will remember them."

- a. O.C. Parade - Attention
- b. Last Post
- c. Short Period of Silence
- d. Lament
- e. Reveille
- f. O.C. Parade - Stand at Ease

Laying Up of Wreaths

1. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh
2. Commando Association and Royal Marines
3. Highland Council and British Legion

Prayer

All assembled shall join in prayer of personal dedication to the service of Almighty God.

Teach us, good Lord
To serve Thee as Thou deservest.
To give and not to count the cost.
To fight and not to heed the wounds.
To toil and not to seek the rest.
To labour and not seek any reward save
That of knowing that we do Thy Holy Will
And are bearing our part in Thine eternal purpose.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn 87

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me,
Save that Thou art -
Thou my best thought, By day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my battle-shield,
Sword for the fight,
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward,
O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, Nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, Now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven,
My treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys,
O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Benediction

Music provided by:

Lochaber Schools Wind Band
Lochaber Schools Pipe Band

A Brief History of The Commandos

The first Commandos - Army Commandos - were formed in June 1940, at a time when the British Empire no longer had a single ally in the field, and when the British Army had been compelled to quit the continent of Europe as a result of the disastrous campaigns in Norway and the Low Countries.

While the germ of the idea had originated in the brain of Lt. Col. Dudley Clarke R.A., as early as 4th June, 1940, it was Winston Churchill himself who, not content with a purely passive role, actually ordered their formation. In a minute of 18th June 1940, he wrote: "What are the ideas of C-in-C., H.F., about Storm Troops? We have always set our faces against this idea, but certainly the Germans gained in the last war by adopting it, and this time it has been a leading cause of their victory. There ought to be at least twenty thousand Storm Troops or "Leopards" drawn from existing units, ready to spring at the throat of any small landing or descents. These officers and men should be armed with the latest equipment, Tommy guns, grenades, etc., and should be given great facilities in motor cycles and armoured cars".

Accordingly, orders were issued to the various Army Commands for volunteers for the Commando units, both officers and men. The unique feature of the Commandos was that each man was a picked volunteer, selected by the officers who trained him and led him into battle. Those who failed for one reason or another to measure up to the exacting standard of training, discipline and conduct under fire, could be 'Returned To Unit' (RTU) without much ado. Not a few were. The process of survival of the fittest became two fold. In the early days, Commandos were selected and then weeded out. From 1942 onwards every new recruit had to pass through the Commando Depot at Achnacarry before he was posted to his unit. No one who survived it would question the practical severity of this ordeal in the days when Lt. Col. Charles Vaughan OBE., at once exacting and benevolent, ruled in Lochiel's place.

In the beginning, no fewer than twelve Commandos were raised. The very first Commando was, in fact, raised from two Independent Companies - these Companies also being of a "shock troops" nature for action in Norway. The new unit, No.11 Independent Company was redesignated as a Commando almost immediately on formation. It was intended for this Commando to be disbanded after carrying out two raids, those on Boulogne on 24th/25th June, and Guernsey on 14th/15th July. In the latter raid, one troop from the newly formed No.3 Commando also participated.

By 27th July the fledgling No.1 Commando had been disbanded with its troops being sent back to the Independent Companies. No.2 Commando was originally a parachute Commando but did not remain within the Commando concept for long, the unit being redesignated as 11 Special Air Service Battalion early in 1941. Nos. 3 to 11 Commandos were formed from volunteers from various Commandos within the British Army, all having 23rd June 1940 as the official date of their forming. No.12 Commando, came into being on 5th August, 1940 and was, unusually, formed in Northern Ireland. From their inception, some of these Commandos had great difficulty in obtaining sufficient volunteers to make up the agreed complement of each Commando, and as a result No.10 quickly disappeared from the Commando establishment.

This Commando was later (in the summer of 1942) to be re-formed from troops from the occupied countries and would include troops from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and a small contingent from Yugoslavia. There was also a troop of exiles from Germany (mainly Sudetenland) and Austria. A great number of these were of the Jewish faith. Unlike the other Commandos, No.10 Commando never fought as an individual unit, its troops were usually used in a complementary manner to other Commandos.

In addition, three locally formed Commandos were constituted in the Middle East under the command of GHQ in Cairo. Numbered 50, 51 and 52 Commandos, 50 Commando had among its ranks a contingent of Spanish volunteers who had fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War but who had escaped to France at the conclusion of that conflict. No.51 Commando was formed mainly from Palestinian and Jewish volunteers (although British officered).

At first, each Commando consisted of ten troops, each of fifty men. In the United Kingdom, the Commandos were under the command of Headquarters, Special Service Brigade, located at Sulhamstead House, Theale in Berkshire. The new organisation did not remain intact for long, with the Commandos soon reorganised into Special Service Battalions in November 1940, although No.12 Commando remained outside of this set-up. A further re-organisation took place in March 1941 when the Special Service Battalions were abolished and the individual Commandos returned to their original format except they were now to be formed into six troops rather than the original ten. No. 1 and No. 2 Commandos re-formed at this time.

During 1942, there were three interesting developments in Commando history. Firstly, the Commando role was complemented by men of the Royal Marines' Commandos. Next came the formation of the Small Scale Raiding Force. This small unit was unique in that although it was raised and controlled by Combined Operations, it was financed by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and accordingly, the latter was able to strongly influence its operations. Thirdly, there was a large intake of civilian policemen into Commandos during the summer of 1942. These volunteers had to pass the Achnacarry course in the same way as other volunteers. On being allocated to various Commando units, these men attained a great reputation as fighting soldiers.

From 1943, by which time the plans were being formulated for the invasion of Normandy, a further seven Royal Marines' Commando units had been formed from various battalions of Royal Marines units. This enabled reorganisation of Commandos to take place, and accordingly, the Commandos were re-formed into four Commando Brigades. No 1 Commando Brigade, consisting of Nos. 3, 4 and 6 Army Commandos plus 45 RM Commandos were to operate in North-Western Europe. No.4 Commando Brigade, consisting of Nos. 41, 46, 47 and 48 RM Commandos was also destined for this theatre. No.2 Commando Brigade, consisting of Nos. 2 and 9 (Army) and 40 RM and 43 RM Commandos, operated in Italy and Yugoslavia. No 3 Commando Brigade, 1 and 5 (Army) and 42 RM and 44 RM Commandos would eventually operate in Burma. At the end of the war, it was decided that the Army Commandos should be disbanded and the Commando role assumed by the Royal Marines, which continues to this day.

The thirty-eight Battle Honours awarded to Commandos (see next page) were not the most peaceable operations of the Second World War and were only the most famous of countless fights in which these units played their part. In addition, the list of awards to officers and men gives some indication of the prowess of these soldiers. Eight won the Victoria Cross, thirty-seven the Distinguished Service Order, over one hundred and sixty Military Crosses (with thirteen bars), over thirty Distinguished Conduct medals and well over two hundred Military medals. Only the most fortunate, the most outstanding, won these distinctions, chosen from a host whose bravery and devotion was no less marked for not being rewarded.



The Various Insignia of The British Commandos, 1940-1945

Based on a painting by Maurice Chauvet, No. 10 I.A. Commando

Members of The Commandos Awarded The Victoria Cross

Lieutenant-Colonel G. C. T. Keyes, M.C., Royal Scots Greys, No.11 Commando
November 18th, 1941. Rommel's H.Q. (Posthumous Award)

Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Newman, Essex Regiment, No. 2 Commando.
March 28th, 1942. St. Nazaire.

Sergeant T. F. Durrant, Royal Engineers, No. 1 Commando
March 28th, 1942. St. Nazaire. (Posthumous Award)

Major P. A. Porteous, R.A., No. 4 Commando
August 19th, 1942. Dieppe.

L./Cpl H. E. Harden, R.A.M.C., No. 45 R.M. Commando
January 23rd, 1945. Holland (Posthumous Award)

Lieutenant G. A. Knowland, Royal Norfolk Regt., No. 1 Commando.
January 31st, 1945. Burma (Posthumous Award)

Cpl T. P. Hunter, Royal Marines, No. 43 R.M. Commando.
April 2nd, 1945. Italy (Posthumous Award)

Major A. F. E. V. S. Lassen, M.C., General List, No. 2 Commando Brigade.
April 9th, 1945. Italy (Posthumous Award)



Battle Honours



On the 16th September, 1957, Her Majesty the Queen approved the award of the following battle honours to the Commando Association in recognition of the services of the Commandos in the Second World War:

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

The Commando Association Battle Honours Flag dedicated on the 15th April 1961 and laid up in St. George's Chapel, Westminster Abbey during a special service on the 1st May, 1971 in the gracious presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

The Commandos' Benevolent Fund

The Commandos' Benevolent Fund (CBF) was inaugurated by Lord Louis Mountbatten, when he was Chief of Combined Operations, as a Charity by a Declaration of Trust in 1943.

From the outset the Trustees consisted of Army Commandos and also civilians interested in the welfare of ex-Army Commandos, their widows, parents and dependent children. Throughout the 59 years of its existence the CBF has retained this important blend of service and civilian trustees.

Practically all the initial funding of the CBF came from a "one off" public appeal in 1946, popularly labelled as "The Last Great Raid", which raised £100,000 - an enormous amount at that time.

Under the terms of the constitution, the money raised by the Appeal, and known as the "capital", had to be invested to provide the "income" for the intended financial assistance to ex-army Commandos, their widows, parents and dependent children. Thanks to the expert advice of mainly the civilian trustees, the capital was wisely invested and has continued to provide the income needed for all the financial help and grants during these past 59 years.

The composition of the original trustees under the Chairmanship of Major General Robert Laycock was clearly laid down with, as stated earlier, a blend of ex-Army Commandos and civilians. This has continued and under the Constitution, the trustees have been authorised to appoint successors and replacements as have been necessary. The Chairman of the Trustees has always been an ex-Army Commando, and has, over the years, included the following distinguished Commando leaders: Major Gen. T. Churchill, CB, MC; Lt. Col. P. Bartholemew DSO; Lt. Col. A. D. Lewis DSO and, of course, the late Col. Pat Porteous VC.

Since 1946, the CBF has helped many hundreds of ex-Army Commandos and/or their dependents with grants amounting to many thousands of pounds. Last year alone, the Fund successfully dealt with some 68 cases, and in addition made Christmas grants. In all, a total of £20,900 was dispensed in financial help during the year, such was the extent of aid given: but, of course, in the years ahead the cost of financial help per case could greatly increase.

It should be made clear that the CBF - being a separate and independent charity - will continue its work, indeed the CBF has already taken the necessary steps to ensure that there will be adequate help for any ex-army Commando and/or his dependents until the very last comrade is left.

Any ex-Army Commando, or his dependents, who has a problem or needs help should contact:

**The Secretary
The Commandos' Benevolent Fund
190 Hammersmith Road
London
W6 7DL**



"United We Conquer"

