

Marine Alexander Francis McDonald Harland



Wartime buddies (from left): Fred Fletcher, Alfie Knight and Alexander Harland

War memories of a dead colleague

FRED Fletcher's heart skipped a beat when he read an appeal in the Gazette to help find the family of a war hero killed in Holland.

That young war hero, Alexander Francis Harland, was his best mate in the Royal Marine Commandos during the Second World War.

Memories came flooding back when Fred, from Church Road, Hanwell, read in the Gazette in April that a British Legion member from Lancashire had spotted Alexander's grave in the British War Cemetery at Venray, Holland.

The British Legion member took photographs of the well-tended grave and invited Alexander's relatives to write to him for copies of the picture.

Fred, who served alongside Alexander - Tosh to his friends - from 1943 until 1945, said: "It was such a shock for me to see this after all those years. I could not believe my eyes."

"He was full of guts. I remember once he drove hell for leather to get an injured corporal to medical help. There were explosions everywhere but he just kept going as fast as he could to get this man some help."

Alexander became a driver in the Royal Commandos after marrying Fred's cousin Dorothy during a two week leave in West Ealing just two months before he died.

The sweethearts met in 1944 when Fred took his pal home to see West Ealing. Dorothy and Tosh started writing to each other regularly and love blossomed.

Fred said: "Tosh thought it would be safer to have a driving job. He was a married man and was more concerned about his safety."

Sadly the young marine, just 24, died in a tragic road accident in February 1945 as the Royal Marine Commandos drove through Holland.

Fred recalls: "He drove up to me in the convoy and asked if I wanted an apple. He threw me one up and then drove further on down the convoy."

"The next minute the convoy stopped. Someone came up and told me my mate had been killed. I was still eating the apple he had given me."

Tosh's jeep, carrying ammunition and supplies, had overturned in a water-filled ditch.

He was trapped under the weight of the supplies and drowned.

Tosh was first buried in a front garden in the Dutch village of Meeloo. His body was later moved to Venray and is now carefully tended by Dutch Marines.

Now Fred and Tosh's brother Derek Harland, from Portslade, plan to visit the grave in September.

Fred said: "Seeing that grave will bring back lots of sad and happy memories. We had our laughs, me and Tosh. It will be nice to look at his grave and remember him again."



Fred Fletcher today with his war souvenirs

Marine Alexander Harland

46 RM Commando

died on active service

20 February 1945

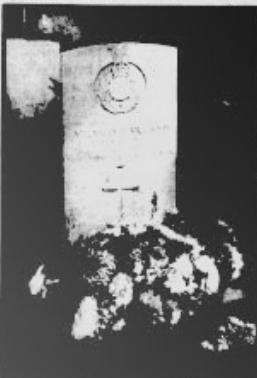
aged 24.

Remembered with honour

Venray War Cemetery.

Greenford and Northolt Gazette

14 June 1991



Fred next to Alexander's grave in Meeloo



Alexander's new grave in Venray

COMMANDO
VETERANS ARCHIVE