



COMMANDO

MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTRE

ST. IVES, 1943-1945

Maj. G. R. REES JONES
Maj. J. G. FRASER
Maj. N. K. EASTON, M.C.

Capt. E. L. FOTHERGILL	Capt. A. Y. GREENHALGH	
Capt. C. R. STEVEN	Capt. J. D. S. SIMPSON (killed on active service)	
Capt. J. B. WILLIAMS	Capt. J. F. BARRY	
Capt. T. C. PAYNTER	Capt. G. BRETT, M.C.	
Capt. V. A. BARNES	Capt. A. WARDLE, M.C.	
Capt. J. E. DUNNING	Capt. J. N. MORTON	
Capt. C. E. B. FLETCHER	Lt. S. RICHARDSON (killed in action)	
Lt. A. F. BAIRD	Lt. R. F. BAXTER	
Lt. P. F. DIETZ	Lt. I. J. POOK	
Lt. P. A. T. WOOD		
T.S.M. S. HEWLETT	Sjt. L. W. SHIPP	Pte. E. BROWN
T.S.M. E. CULLERTON	" T. R. WALKER	" R. A. BROWN
T.S.M. G. DICKS	" A. J. H. WALTERS	" H. CATCHPOLE
C.Q.M.S. J. R. HALL	" C. WOOLLEY	" J. W. CHALMERS
C.Q.M.S. J. R. WILSON	Cpl. R. ALSEY	Tpr. A. CHAPMAN
C.Q.M.S. L. A. PURDY	" K. ANDERSON	Fus. F. DEAN
Sjt. R. ALEXANDER	" D. BARRINGTON	Pte. R. M. DEY
" L. T. BALL	" C. T. W. BARLEGS	" A. S. DUNCAN
" R. CALF	" W. CHERRY	" J. DUNCAN
" J. R. CHARLESWORTH	Bdr. B. K. DAVIES	" R. H. GAUNT
" M. CLARK	Cpl. T. DUCKWORTH	" R. HIDDLESTON
" H. DENTON	" G. HART	" J. HINDMARCH
(killed in action)	" A. HENDERSON	Cfmm. F. JARRATT
" V. G. A. FREEMAN	" A. HORNE	Mne. W. A. H. KEATS
" B. HAMILTON	Bdr. J. JAMES	Pte. N. F. MCGHEE
" F. N. W. HAM	Cpl. A. C. S. McNICKLE	" W. McINTOSH
" J. HARDIE	" R. J. MURDOCH	" P. McKENZIE
" S. HAYWOOD	" C. NISBET	" P. G. McLEAN
" C. E. HILL	" E. PARR	Dvr. R. MASON
" E. JEFFERIES	" S. WEBB	Mne. N. L. MOXHAM
" R. JOHN, M.M.	L.Cpl. J. E. D. CALDERWOOD	" R. V. REYNOLDS
" S. D. I. JOHNSON	" J. W. FARNABY	Pte. F. ROBINSON
" B. G. L. LEE	" A. B. HOOD	" J. SAWYER
" W. LENNOX	" J. D. HOWARD, M.M.	" A. SHINE
" P. F. McCARTHY, M.M.	" B. MORGAN	" T. W. STAMP
" G. PORTER	" W. J. TRESIDDER	" H. STOUT
" R. RADFORD	Pte. A. AGRAS	" R. I. WALKER
" D. M. REID	" N. ALLAN	" F. WOOD
" E. G. ROWE	" W. E. ANDERSON	" D. F. YULE
(killed in action)	Mne. W. R. BARCLAY	
" R. SHAW	" J. M. BEATTIE	

THE COMMANDO MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTRE was formed in December 1942, to train Commando Troops to fight in high snow covered mountain country. The first Commanding Officer was Squadron Leader F. S. Smythe, the well-known Everest Climber, and all the Instructors were skilled mountaineers, several with experience in the Himalayas and the Alps. The Permanent Staff was formed of men from Scottish Command, and the Unit was originally based at Braemar in the Cairngorms. After six months hard training, in which Nos. 1, 4 and 12 Commandos took part, the decision was taken not to use Commando Troops in this role, and the Unit was lent to the War Office to train the Lovat Scouts as a Mountaineer Battalion.

This training was done entirely in North Wales, the Unit being now commanded by Major G. R. Rees Jones; and during the last four months of 1943 over 700 men were trained in Rock Climbing and Elementary Mountaineering. At the end of this period the Lovat Scouts went out to the Canadian Rockies for snow training, and eventually on to Italy, where they fought very successfully. The members of this Unit all requested to be allowed to go with them, but all who had had previous Commando experience were forbidden to leave the Unit and only those who had not served in a Commando were allowed to go.

It was at this time that the Unit moved to St. Ives. In addition to a permanent staff, it consisted of 6 Captains and 8 Serjeant Instructors, who had come from the various Commandos. The reason for the move to St. Ives, and for the retention of all ex Commando Instructors, was that in the original plan for D Day two of the then new Marine Commandos were to assault the French Coast by way of cliffs, and the St. Ives Unit was to split into two, each half to lead a Commando to the Cliff top. Major Rees Jones was made responsible for the planning of the cliff part of both operations, and for the training of the men concerned. Although the Unit had now left the mountains entirely, it was decided to retain the words "Mountain Warfare" in the Unit's title as a security measure. It was hoped that the enemy would not find out that Commando Troops were being intensively trained for cliff assault. Troops of Nos. 45, 46 and 47 R.M. Commandos came to St. Ives, and from December 1943 to April 1944 all members of the Unit were busily engaged in their training. Nos. 46 and 47 Commandos were to assault the cliffs, No. 45 being held in reserve. Besides individual rock climbing on the cliffs of the Lands End peninsula, the tactics of cliff assault were thoroughly practised by day and by night, and landings on rocky coasts were made from craft based at Penzance. By April 1944, the training was complete. Each Commando was allotted two Captains and four Serjeants from this Unit, and Major Rees Jones, Captain Fothergill (M.O.) and Captain Greenhalgh (Equipment Officer) were available for either. Then came a disappointment. The operation for which 47 Commando were training was cancelled; for the objective—a coastal defence battery—had been put out of action by the R.A.F. Two of the Serjeants allotted to 47 were transferred to 46, the others were left behind cursing their luck. Major Rees Jones and a party of eight joined 46 Commando early in April, completed in the Isle of Wight the planning and final rehearsal for their operation, and on D Day set sail for the French Coast. The objective—another coastal defence battery—was to be attacked in darkness on the night of D Day. The ships in which No. 46 were embarked sailed in daylight to within 4 miles off the battery which was to be attacked that night. To our amazement nothing happened—here too the splendid work of the R.A.F. the night before had made our Commando task unnecessary. The members of this Unit were ordered to return to England but Captain Easton and Captain (then Serjeant) Barry went ashore and fought with No. 46 Commando till D plus 50, when they reluctantly obeyed yet another summons to return.

From D Day onwards the Unit became a planning, training and experimental Centre for many different types of small scale Commando operations. In their turn various types of dories, canoes and surf boats were tested, and the tactical handling of the successful models duly became part of the Unit's training programme. The Command of the Unit passed to Major J. G. Fraser in August, and Commando Troops of many different nationalities (Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian and French, as well as British Troops) passed through St. Ives to learn special methods before going on raids. Also the members of this Unit took a very active part in the operations of B.L.A. Between D Day and VE Day every single member of the Instructing Staff went over at least once on Commando operations, all of which were successfully carried out. There were several small though dangerous operations, on the French coast, in the Scheldt, and on the Dutch river and canals. From October 1944 onwards there were members of the Unit almost continuously in the area of the Scheldt and Maas, planning and leading small raids across the rivers.

There were also two larger operations. The first was the preliminary reconnaissance of the Walcheren beaches, followed by the leading in of the assault. This was done by a body of men known as "Keep Force," the majority of whom came from this Unit. During the reconnaissance stages every one did excellent

work, and especially Captain Steven, Serjeant Barry and Serjeant (then Corporal) John. After one reconnaissance when the parent ship failed to pick them up, these three, undaunted, set course in their 18 foot Dory for Ostend—more than 50 miles away. They had to navigate along an enemy held coast line through shallow coastal waters—without charts and in complete darkness. The wind rose to gale force but they carried on. Serjeant Barry was at the helm for 10 hours unrelieved, Captain Steven worked out the course and looked after the craft and its instruments, and Corporal John kept the small engine going in spite of mountainous waves which were continually drenching it. They well knew that not only was the information which they were bringing back of vital importance to Higher Command, but also that if they or their Dory had been washed ashore and had fallen into enemy hands, the success of the whole Walcheren operation would be jeopardised, and many lives lost in a landing against a forewarned enemy. After many hours of buffeting by the huge waves they reached Ostend and friendly waters just as dawn broke. For their gallantry and superb seamanship all three were recommended. During the assault on Walcheren the leading Commando to attack Flushing was led in by Lieutenant Richardson, Serjeant Barry and Corporal John. After they had completed their dangerous task, as they were drawing out, an undetected enemy machine gun brought murderous fire to bear on their craft. Lieutenant Richardson was killed at once. The craft began to drift out of control. Corporal John although already wounded, made his way through the machine gun fire to the engines and brought the craft safely back. For this gallant action Corporal John was awarded the Military Medal; Lieutenant Richardson and Serjeant Barry, once again, were recommended.

The second operation was the Rhine crossing. For this operation, members of the Unit were sent for at very short notice, and rushed across to Germany. Their task was to crew a fleet of dories which were to patrol a stretch of river where the crossing was to be made, to pick up anyone in the water, and to prevent any broken-down craft from drifting towards the enemy. They entered the river with the first assault craft and patrolled it for several hours till the last troops were across. As soon as the enemy detected the crossing place, the river and both its banks became a target for concentrated shelling and machine gun fire. Troops who were crossing dashed through it and on, but the dory crews calmly carried on hour after hour in the thick of it. Several of the dories were holed by bullets, but all survivors were picked up, and all broken-down craft were safely towed home. Every man performed splendidly, and Captain Steven and Serjeant Calf were specially recommended for their calm courage and resolute efficiency that night.

Major (then Capt.) Easton who had originally gone over to Holland to instruct the Commandos there in the use of various boats for this crossing, had become once more a Troop Commander in No. 46 Commando. He remained with the leading troops for the whole push up to the Baltic, crossing the Rhine, Weser, Aller, and Elbe, and collecting among other loot a Military Cross. He returned after VE Day and, on Major Fraser's demobilisation became the final C.O. of the Unit.

After VE Day the Unit's attention was focussed on the Far East war. Active preparations were made to go out East; and the problem of surf, a particularly difficult one out there, was given special attention. Fortunately, with the arrival of VJ Day, this work proved unnecessary. It was during this period that Capt. Brett joined the Unit. He had been taken prisoner in the Commando raid on St. Nazaire in 1942, and had won the Military Cross for his action in carrying out the demolition of an important lock gate, although wounded and in the face of heavy fire. Soon after VJ Day the disbanding of the Army Commandos was announced, and the COMMANDO MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTRE as we have known it, will therefore cease to exist. But much valuable knowledge has been gained during the three years of its existence, and before it is finally disbanded arrangements are being made to hand this on to members of the ROYAL MARINES.