

Raymond Ormsby Kirra Tebble RM



Ray was born on 12th August 1922, spending most of his early life in Croydon. As a teenager he served in the sea cadets, before joining the RM Corps in February 1940, aged 17. Arriving at the Admiralty he was given a medical, sworn-in, fed and watered, then put on a train to Chatham. On arrival at Melville Barracks his first duty was in the

hayloft, filling his mattress. After a good haircut, Ray's first meal consisted of tripe - he went hungry! Joining 386 Squad - his drill instructors were QMSIs Keeble and Smith – he passed for duty in Kings Squad in August.

Then to Eastney for sea service training, where Ray qualified as a 'Quarters Rating 3rd Class'. Whilst on the range Fort Cumberland was bombed. His squad was doubled across to the fort where they were organised into assisting with the retrieval of people who were trapped. Thus he had his first experiences of death and unpleasant sights.

On completion of sea training, (April 1941), most of Ray's room were drafted to HMS *Hood*, whilst he was posted to HMS *Ramillies*. As the whole of the *Hood's* RM detachment was lost when she was sunk, this proved to be Ray's first 'near-miss' so to speak. Arriving at Greenock he found he was to take passage in HMS *Rodney* to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join *Ramillies*. His mess corporal was Albert Laver who, later, during Op. Frankton, was executed by the Germans. On passage *Rodney* was diverted to take part in the 'Bismark Action', and Ray was detailed to

augment X-Turret magazine below the water line. After closing-up the Padre, gazing upon them from the overhead hatch, gave them a blessing; then the hatch was firmly secured. All Ray knew of the subsequent action was the muffled sound of *Rodney's* 16" guns, and the thud and clatter against the ship's side from the blast of shells from the *Bismark* exploding under water. It could be said that was Ray's second 'near-miss'.

On arrival in Halifax, *Ramillies* was at sea, so Ray was sent to HMS *Repulse*. Fortunately, *Ramillies* arrived an hour or so before the *Repulse* was due to sail, so he was transferred across. This was Ray's third 'near-miss', as the *Repulse* was sunk off Malaya later that year with a large loss of life.

The 5th May 1942 saw Ray taking part in Op Ironclad, the allied invasion of Madagascar. During the first phase the advancing army units were held up by strong defences and the Royal Marines from the *Ramillies* were called upon to create a diversion. Transferring to the destroyer HMS *Anthony*, they made a 120 mile dash round the north of the island. At full speed, at night and with the danger of a mine-field, *Anthony* located the obscure entrance to the great natural harbour of Diego Suarez. Coming under fire from coastal batteries the gallant destroyer ran the gauntlet for some eight miles until she found herself in the huge and strange harbour. With a strong cross-wind, *Anthony's* captain, in a remarkable feat of seamanship, in darkness, eventually located the landing jetty, turned his ship about and went stern-on, holding his ship against the piers long enough for the marines to disembark. During this manoeuvre machine-gun fire was coming from the jetty and hills above.

After several sharp engagements and the creation of a lot of mayhem out of all proportion to the detachment's size, the Vichy commander thought that a large force had landed in his rear so he surrendered. The land forces commander, Major General Sturges, had given them chances of just four-to-one. That was Ray's fourth 'near-miss'.

A week later, whilst at anchor, *Ramillies* was torpedoed by a Japanese midget submarine. Being ordered 'up top', Ray reached the upper deck in time to see another torpedo track heading straight for his part of ship. Just then the tanker *British Loyalty* swung on her anchor cable straight into the path of the torpedo destined for *Ramillies*. Ray saw her hit, the stern flying up in the air with the screws still turning. That was Ray's fifth 'near-miss'.

He was then drafted to Combined Operations where he eventually joined the Inshore Fire Support Squadron, a fire support craft unit that had been devised after the disastrous experiences of the Dieppe Raid.

In February 1943 Ray was made A/Ty/Cpl, and later that year on 9th September he took part in Op Avalanche, the allied landings at Salerno, aboard LCG(L)2 (Landing Craft Gun (L.)) While providing close in-shore fire support, Ray's LCG took several direct hits and many of the crew were killed or wounded. During this chaotic period Ray organised medical relief and supervised the survivors to get the remaining 4.7" gun back into action.

For his calm manner and leadership Ray was awarded a well-earned Mention in Despatches. That was Ray's sixth 'near-miss'.

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On the 6th June 1944 Ray took part in Op Neptune, the naval element of Op Overlord. As a member of LCG(L)18 he joined Support Squadron Eastern Flank (SSEF) on the 'Trout Line', an area of sea to the east of the beaches, designed to prevent incursion from German E-Boats and mini submarines.

Returning to Eastney in August, he then attended the NCO (non commissioned officers) course at Deal, being promoted Corporal in October 1944.

On 31st October he was sent to Ostend where he joined LCS(L)252 (Landing Craft Support Large). He sailed for Walcheren that night and next day during the landings of Op Infatuate Ray's LCS received a direct hit some 50 yards from the shore. Of the 25 crew it is believed Ray was the only survivor. That was Ray's seventh 'near-miss'.

On his return to England Ray applied for the Commandos. After training at Towyn and Achnacarry he joined X-Troop 44 Commando at Pashan Camp, Poona. During January 1945 he took part in the Myebon and Kangaw operations, the latter of which was described as '*the decisive battle of the whole Arakan campaign.*' At 20:00 hrs on the 23rd Japanese enemy artillery opened fire on '44' who had dug-in on a hill named Pinner. Just before midnight a further rain of fire fell upon the defenders, which had the effect of sending thousands of sharp wood splinters flying, as rounds exploded in the tree-tops. This barrage was followed by an assault by the enemy infantry, making relentless attack after attack, wave after wave, and took a hard-fought fight to beat off. Just before dawn '44' were subjected to further attacks, during which the marines were

forced into hand-to-hand combat before the assaults were repulsed. At dawn the evidence of the night's events became apparent, with the dead and wounded littering the slopes and hilltop.

Brigadier Hardy visited '44's positions and congratulated them on their performance, however it had been at the cost of 20 killed and 40 wounded. That was Ray's eighth 'near-miss'.

Following the Japanese surrender Ray, still with '44', moved to Hong Kong. In 1946 he was made A/Ty Sgt and moved to Imtafa Barracks, Malta; '-44' was now renamed '40'. In 1948 he returned to Eastney via Palestine, where he applied for his release.

In 1951, having spent the years since his discharge in the merchant navy, Ray migrated to Australia, living first in Queensland for eight years, and then moving to Melbourne some years later. Here he met Wendy; they were married at St Thomas Aquinas Church, South Yarra, Melbourne. Two children followed, Nick and Adam. A family man Ray certainly was, but he was a warrior also, and so he joined the Royal Victorian Regiment at Ripponlea. He also excelled at sport, joining a rowing club and spending week-ends rock climbing in the Victorian hills. He was also a keen wrestler and advocate of Rugby League; he had also boxed in the Corps. It was during an exhibition wrestling match in 1959 that he injured his knee, which only caught up with him in recent years. He also took flying lessons in a Tiger Moth. Even in his later years he was active, being a regular swimmer and runner, and never a day went by that he did not get up and do his PT and weights before work.

Moving back to the UK in 1978 Wendy and Ray started visiting areas where he had seen service.

In 1992 Wendy began researching an MPhil in the Department of War Studies at King's College, in which she was seeking to establish the history of inshore fire support craft; copies of her thesis were lodged at the RM Museum and the Imperial War Museum. During the course of her research she visited the archives of the Grenadier Guards, and was offered a position working as a volunteer in the archive at Wellington Barracks. Ray also started working there with Wendy in 1994; two days each week for the next six years.

Ray was diagnosed with lung cancer in July 2013, and prostate cancer in March 2015. He was still mobile when it was arranged for him to take part in an ITV interview aboard HMS *Bulwark* in June 2014, as part of the Normandy commemorations. Ray was admitted to hospital on 29th June 2015, finally 'crossing the bar' on the 12th July. Ray's funeral was on 22nd July; a Requiem Mass at the Brompton Oratory, Knightsbridge, was followed by a Committal at the SW Middlesex Crematorium. The RMA City of London branch was represented at both venues, providing a bugler and a standard bearer at the Crematorium. To Wendy and the family, we extend our deepest sympathy.

Ray was an active member of the City of London RMA (Royal Marines Association) and he was incredibly proud to have been part of a Corps that coloured his entire life. Indeed, Ray epitomised all the qualities of a Royal Marine, living to the full the motto *Grace under Pressure*.

[Obituary by Mike Pinchen].