

## Stanley 'Sonnie' Bissell BEM

WW2 - Staff Sgt Instructor at the Commando Basic Training Centre, Achnacarry.

Pre and post WW2 - Metropolitan Police final rank Police Inspector.

1960 - 1<sup>st</sup> Director of Physical Training Metropolitan Police Cadet Corps.

*[Copy of a speech he made to the Army Physical Training Corps © Denis Bissell*



**Sergt. S. J. BISSELL**

(Self Defence Instructor Metro. Police.)

National C. as C. C. Champion.

Middleweight 1930-34. Lightweight 1934. Heavyweight 1932-33.  
Runner up British Empire Games 1930-34 (Canada and Wembley.)

AMATEUR WRESTLING (FREESTYLE)

I have been attending the Army School of Physical Training at Queen's Avenue, Aldershot, Hants, since approximately, the Year 1930/31. The school is therefore not strange to me, neither was it when I came on to the Corps during the last war from the Commando Basic Training Centre at Achnacarry nr. Fort William in Invernesshire, Scotland, where I was already on the staff as an instructor. It was a great thrill to me, as I had always held the Army School of Physical Training in high esteem and if my home circumstances had been different, I would have undoubtedly finished up by joining the army with the hope of making the School of P.T. As it was, in 1926 on the 1st March, I joined the Metropolitan Police and was sent to Peel House, the recruit training centre at Regency Street, Westminster. After passing out from the school and serving as a police constable in 'N' and 'P' divisions, I applied for the post of 'self defence' instructor for attachment to the staff at Peel House. Competition for the post was keen and one of my chief opponents was a 1st Dan (Black belt) judo exponent. I knew nothing of self defence and my only claim to fame was that I had just returned from the Canadian British Empire Games where I had managed to obtain a silver medal in the middleweight freestyle wrestling event. This fact, must have suitably impressed the interviewing board and I obtained the post of 'self defence' instructor. I was left in no doubt by the then Superintendent George Abbiss (Late Sir George Abbiss, Assistant Commissioner 'D' Dept.) that a condition of my appointment was that I must earn my judo black belt 1st Dan, which was considered in those days as being the instructors qualification and that I must also pass my sergeants examination. No police constable had apparently ever been appointed as an instructor at the training school. This I promised to do.

The post proved to be one where I was also expected to 'stand in' for physical training and foot drill classes when other instructors were away sick. Because of this required qualification I was sent to the Army School of P.T. for a two weeks initial P.T. course and I was housed at the old Hammersley Barracks in one of the staff bedrooms at the end of the dormitory. This was my initial course and the primary purpose of the instructor was to see that I got enough P.T. Leadership training and theory. Every evening I attended voluntary gymnastics and recreation.

After attending this first course I realised that two weeks was all too short to consider myself a physical training instructor. The impression that this first course had on me was a very lasting one and has never been forgotten. I was no newcomer to gymnastics at this time as I ran three youth clubs and was also a member of the Orion Gymnastic Club. I was also a member of the Herne Hill Warriors after having won my first



novices one mile and being presented with the News of the World silver medal by Joe Binks. On looking back over the years I think that I was probably better qualified in the physical training field than I was in that of 'self defence'. After two years of hard work at the Budokwai I further qualified as a 1st Dan (Black belt) under the late G.Koizumi of the Budokwai Judo Club and of whom I was a member. I also passed my sergeants examination.

After the initial course at Aldershot, I felt that there should be some follow-up in the shape of refresher courses. On my return to Peel House I discussed the matter with the Physical Training Instructor, who was then the late Harry Mallin (twice Olympic middleweight boxing champion). We both agreed that there should be regular refresher courses held at the Army School of P.T. for instructors at Peel House. With this in mind, we worked towards this end and it was agreed in principle that refresher courses should be held for instructors every two to three years. That is how I kept in touch over the years with the A.P.T.S and kept abreast of changes in the physical education system and also was able to make and renew friendships made whilst on courses. I remember with affection my old friend 'Dusty' Miller and the martinets of those days who maintained discipline of the highest order. The School of P.T. was never the home of weaklings. I determined that when the opportunity arose I would recommend the assistant instructors short and long course for police officers responsible for the physical training and recreation at our Metropolitan Police Training Schools. This, I am glad to say now happens. In 1945, I returned from Achnacarry where I was with Commandos at the Commando Basic Training Centre and helped open up the recruit training school at Peel House. After a short while I was promoted to Inspector i/c of physical training at both Peel House and the Hendon recruit training schools.

It was during this time that a very strong liasion was formed between Major (Retd.) T.I. Fletcher. This liasion was carried on when Lieut.-Colonel (Retd.) B.M. Consitt, M.B.E., took over secretary of the A.P.T.C. Association and now continues with Major D.B.McBain M.B.E.

When I retired from the Metropolitan Police in December 1955 I was offered a post with the Y.M.-Y.W.H.A. as an Assistant Director of P.E. at their headquarters on Westbury Avenue, Montreal. During the time I was there, it was possible for me to build up the various sections. This included wrestling, boxing, judo, golf, tennis and athletics. The most popular activities that I was able to develop was in the keep fit area for all ages, and sexes. The free movement exercise was to piano music. There were morning afternoon and evening classes for men, women and teenagers. Childrens' classes were usually on Sunday mornings. The 'Y' had a very large membership of families so that one became quite involved and close to each family. Housewives attended mornings and afternoon. Husbands, who were mainly professional engineers, architects and business men attended at 2.00.p.m. Numbers in the class varied from 30 to 80 and every effort was made to

encourage them to the playing of badminton and volleyball.

During the time I was in Montreal, I was able to stimulate a mountain activities group for hill walking/scrambling and camping in the Laurentians and Adirondacks. Regular cross country runs were held over The Mount in Montreal. Gymnastics and athletics were not very popular activities at the 'Y', but one must remember that there is plenty of skiing and skating in the winter which was very popular. The health club, sauna/steam and swimming facilities were exceptional. Whilst in Canada I became a member of the Canadian Black Belt Association as a 2nd Dan and competed for the Seido Khan Judo Club.

In 1960 (July) having returned from Canada and been offered the post of Director of Physical Training to the newly formed Cadet Corps, my life started all over again with my old comrades of the Metropolitan Police. As a founder member of the Cadet Corps, together with our Commandant Colonel N.A.C. Croft D.S.O. O.B.E. and the Director of Academic Studies Kenneth Patterson, there was a great deal to do. The cadets joined at 16 plus and remained in a boarding school type of establishment until they were 19 years of age. They were then eligible to join the regular force after undergoing a further three months of adult training. Temporary accommodation had to be built at Hendon Police Training Estate until more permanent buildings could be constructed. Physical programmes had to be developed and staff trained for this work. I was also responsible for the adventure training, which included camping, basic rock climbing, expedition work and canoeing. In addition there was also the normal recreational or games activities to be planned. I naturally turned to my old friend Tom Fletcher who assisted me in many ways, particularly in the liaison matters concerning P.T. (Police) staff training. During the last fifteen years and until my retirement on the 31st January 1975, this liaison has been carried on. The liaison has not been just a one way affair and whenever possible I did everything in my power to advance the cause of the A.P.T.C. with the police authority throughout the British Isles. In the early days salary scales for ex-A.P.T.C. instructors were deplorable. Fortunately this matter is gradually being put right, thanks to the hard work of Tom Fletcher and Jack Consitt.

It would take too long to describe the work and progress made in the formation of a cadet corps, but at the present time in the Metropolitan Police we have a training establishment capable of housing over 600 cadets, four training centres within the Metropolis and able to accommodate 125 cadets. Each of these centres has a small gymnasium whilst the cadet training school has a large gymnasium, judo/wrestling room and swimming pool. In addition there is a hatted camp at Lippitts Hill, Loughton, Essex, a mountain centre capable of accommodating 36 cadets in Betwys-co-Ed and an advance centre at



at Pen-Y-Gwaith, North Wales. Lippitts Hill camp has five obstacle courses which are designed on a progressive ability/skill basis. The initial obstacle course at Hendon together with a trainasium has similar skill/aids as at the Army School of P.T.

It may be of interest to many Corps Instructors that our adventure training sectional staff are all policemen. They are headed by a Chief Inspector and are all specialists to a degree. There are eight in number including an Inspector and Sergeant. All are carefully selected for their experience in the field. They must also pass the necessary Mountain Leadership Certificates (Winter & Summer) and Canoeing Instructors Certificate. The staff are selected for a two to three years tour of duty and there must always be other instructors in the pipeline to succeed them when they leave the section and go back to division. In other words such relief instructors must be trained before they take over.

One very important aspect of training that has occurred since I retired in January 1975, is the introduction of girl cadets. My successor Ron Skinner (Loughborough College) who I introduced to Jack Consitt before I left the Hendon Cadet School has already made contact and organised a police womens' P.T. Instructors course at the Army School of P.T. From all accounts our police women stood the test extremely well, which augers well for future liasion. There will be a testing time for Ron Skinner in the years to come and I do not envy him his task. I am certain however, that our old friend and corps member John Bromley(W.O.1) will back him to the hilt. For those on the Corps who remember John, they are sure to be pleased to hear that he has taken up race walking since he took up his post with the Cadet Corps at Hendon. He is well up in the prizes and is doing excellent times over varying distances. He has a responsible job and is in charge of all gymnasium and recreational activities also swimming. He has put on some excellent P.T. displays at Wembley, Stadium White City and Albert Hall. Since 1962 Reg Marks (Ex.A.P.T.C.) W.O.1 has also been with the Cadet Corps and is the Officer in Charge at Lippitts Hill Camp. He is in good health and still looks after cadet boxing.

I had intended to talk about wrestling, but felt that this liasion and working arrangement between the Corps and the Police needed to be told. I for one, have always wanted to express my thanks to the Aldershot School of P.T. for the very willing help and co-operation they have always given to me in my official capacity as Director of P.T. to the Metropolitan Police Cadet Corps. Yes, and I remember the Saturday mornings that I have swept up the leaves around the gymnasium, scrubbed Fox Gymnasium and run around the two mile course of the playing fields. I have no regrets and enjoyed every minute.

S.J. Bissell.