The Memories of Sergeant John Huntington

'E' Troop - No. 12 Commando

'3' Troop - No. 1 Commando

(1940 – 1945)

The Memories of Sergeant John Huntington as related to John Mewett

Front Page Photo:
John at 50th Anniversary of the unveiling of the Commando Memorial (Spean Bridge) 2003

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Foreward

I met John some 5 years ago in Fort William whilst on a visit to the Commando memorial at Spean Bridge. After the service at the memorial my-self and my wife were at a loss. We had been in Fort William all week-end and had still not met anybody who had been in my Fathers war time Commando Units

We turned to leave and start the journey back home, when we came across a contemplative figure smoking a small cigar and who was obviously reflecting upon something.

In desperation I interrupted his thoughts and asked him 'Excuse me which Commando Units were you in?' 'Number Twelve and Number One' came the swift reply. 'Incredible… they were my Father units' I excitedly responded. 'Which troop was he in, Number one?' he asked '4 Troop' I replied.

And then a man I had only met 30 seconds earlier proceeded to apologise to me that during the battle of Hill 170 at Kangaw Burma in 1945, he and his comrades of 3 troop, who had launched a counter attack, failed to get through to reinforce my father and his fellow members in 4 troop during a crucial time in the engagement. The undergrowth was too thick and the conditions prevailed.

This I was later to find out was typical of John's character. He was a devoted and loyal comrade, generous, kind and above all humble and modest.

I gave John my contact address and asked if he would mind if I asked him a few questions via letters about life in the Commandos.

A few days later I received a letter from John saying how poignant he had found our meeting and he would be delighted to help me all he could. This triggered five years of correspondence between us at the rate of about two letters a month. During this time I am proud to say we became firm friends and John related many stories and anecdotes to me. I suggested he tried to send me a sort of potted history of his war time experiences and the result is what follows in this booklet.

However, before we could finish our task, sadly, John died in June 2008

This is my tribute to a lost friend and a lovely man.

God Speed.

John M.

Notes on the Script

Several times during our correspondence John's 'Old type' typewriter stopped working and the message read 'she's packed up so I hope you can decipher this scribble'. Fortunately the handwriting was OK and proved to be no problem. There are however some words I was not able to read or guess at. I was hoping to send a copy for John to go over but sadly that was not to be.

John proved to be a natural narrator and his character and wit shines throughout the narrative.

The Memories begin ……

At the station, awaiting our arrival was a Sergeant. He was about 6'0" plus and built like a heavyweight boxer. He was wearing the short peaked khaki hat of the Guards Regiment with the badge of the Grenadier Guards. Although the snow was waist deep outside the station he was wearing a leather, fleece-lined jerkin secured around the waist by a length of rope (which we learned later was called a 'toggle rope', and we all got one eventually). This martinet fell us in on the station platform and we then saw that together with us there was a squad of men from the various Guard's Regiments, men from the other Fusilier Regiments, Artillery, Engineers and all sorts of units making three squads in all. He told us to collect our kits and that because the snow was so bad the lorry that should have collected us had been unable to get through and that we would have to march carrying our kit.

We set off on a narrow road uphill. The snow was waist deep and it was pitch black. To get along at a marching pace was extremely difficult to say the least, considering that we had been travelling for most of the day. We had only gone a few minutes when we were ordered to double if we wanted a hot meal at our destination, if we didn't get there in time it would be cold. He had us marching a hundred yards and then doubling a hundred, this was quite a task. We finally got to a small encampment. There was about 5 'Nissen Huts' around a large Scottish house, he told us this was called 'Ackdalugh'. We were allotted a nissen hut to each squad. By this time we were just about exhausted and starving, we were told to dump our kit and make our way to a large hut which was the dining room. We did so taking our mess tins and there we were served with the mess tin full of a hot stew-like meal, which we later learned was called 'McConakies'. Whatever it was, I can remember really enjoying it so much so I went back for a second helping, and got it.

By the time we had finished our meal it was about 1.0 am, we were told to bed down. First parade was 06.30 PT. We found that the beds consisted of two small trestles about 9" from the floor concrete, making a bed 6'by 27", there were no pannas or type of mattress, we just had our three blankets and the boards. I found that the boards were very springy and using my big pack for a pillow I was soon asleep.

It only seemed like 5 minutes before I was roused by shouting and banging, it was 0.600, Reveille, and we had to parade in PT kit, in the snow. The washing facility was a pipe stretched along and over a row of tin basins, there was a tap at each basin and it was cold water. The nissen hut we were in contained 25 beds, 25 men and I soon realised that in our hut we were all from the Fusilier Regiments. We were paraded in three squads, in the front squad were all men from the Guards, then we were second and behind us were men from other corps and regiments like the Artillery, Engineers, Armoured Corps and men from regiments like the East Lancashire Kings Own.

On the first morning a PT instructor took us for a run along the loch side, which wasn't bad, just a bit cold. After PT we got dressed in our plain battle dress, had breakfast and then we had a lecture informing us just what we had got ourselves into, what was to be expected of us and we were given the chance to withdraw. So far as I knew, no-one withdrew. We were then issued with a leather jerkin, similar to the one worn by our welcoming Sergeant, a toggle rope, and a 'Fairbairn Fighting Knife'. We were ordered to pack away our greatcoats, as no matter what the weather the only protection allowed was the sleeveless jerkin. The greatcoats were only to be retained for ceremonial occasion, if any, I found this rule ok, as it was far easier to slip on the jerkin and loop the rope around your waist than have to bother about keeping creases correct in the coat.

The toggle rope had a loop (spliced) at one end and a small wooden bar spliced at the other end, the idea was that if a rope was required to surmount an obstacle, then all the ropes would be easily joined by slipping the bar through the loop of comrade's rope.

The fighting knife was a fearsome object, manufactured and invented by a man named Fairbairn purely and solely for stabbing the enemy. I was allowed to retain mine as a souvenir at the end of my service and I still have it.

The camp was still under construction by men of the Royal Engineers Coy. One of the main buildings under construction was a brick built ablutions and toilets (army name 'Latrines'). I mention this because the building figures in one of my earliest memories of introduction into life in the Special Service Brigade. As a priority of course the toilet section of the ablutions building was completed first. The toilet consisted of planks suspended along one side of the building resting on a brick built wall, seat high, at intervals along the planks there were toilet holes, below the seats was a very deep trench into a drain. It was a communal toilet with no privacy and on top of that the men of Construction Coy were still working on the building. On one occasion, we had been in the camp about a week, and I found I required to use the latrine, so I went along and found that for once I was the only one using them. I was a bit pushed so got sat down in a hurry and to my dismay I discovered that there was no toilet paper in evidence. To my embarrassment the brickies of the engineers were working nearby and some of them noticed my predicament mainly because I shouted. Being a lad of twenty I thought everyone was a friend, they had a good laugh at me but whilst they were laughing I saw that there were some empty cement bags near by that they had discarded during their work. So I leant forward and reached for some of the cement bag paper, and used the smooth side to clean myself making sure they all saw what I was using. They went quiet and someone muttered about these lads have to be so tough they wipe their backsides on cement bags.

When the training commenced we found it was far advanced and although it was concentrated on endurance and fitness it was vastly more interesting and dangerous than the normal infantry programmes. What I enjoyed was the fact that a spirit of competition

engendered throughout, one squad against the other two, and to be in contention with the squad from the guards regiments including the drill (the Regimental Sergeant Major was from the Grenadier Guards), if we beat them at anything we felt it an achievement. One of the most arduous things was called the 'Sprint March'. This was a march carried out in 'Battle Order', that is with all weapons, ammunition and equipment. We doubled (ran) the first two hundred yards and then marched for one hundred yards, and when we marched it was at a very fast pace. The object was to achieve 7 miles in one hour.

You must understand that life in pre-war Britain was all about playing fair and respecting your enemy or rival. For instance of in our teenage years if we had a fight, it was always one against one, and if you managed to fell your opponent you stood back and allowed him to get up, and if he said he had had enough that was respected and the fight was over. This type of principal prevailed in all walks of life, including the Army, it was all 'Queensbury rules', don't hit a man below the belt etc. Then the war came and it was soon realised by the 'forward thinkers' of the Special Service that the enemy did not abide by these rules and the fact of life, as demonstrated by the Germans in particular, was to win at all costs. One could argue about whether the methods used were fair or not after one had won had all the cards so to speak.

The above fact was impressed on me, and I have no doubt, on my fellow trainees, by a lecture which was given during the first week or our course. We were all marched into a hut which was used as a dining hall and lecture room. The commanding officer addressed us and told us we were to receive a talk from two gentlemen who served their time in the Shanghai Police Force and had survived that experience by quickly learning all the dirty tricks etc of infighting, in particular using a knife in defence and attack. Indeed one of the gentlemen had designed the fighting knife with which we had been issued and which bore his name. Myself and the others awaited the arrival of these two men. I expected to see a big battle scarred bruiser in sweaters and rough clothing, but we saw two very well dressed gentlemen in well cut suits and overcoats, both wearing 'Anthony Eden' hats and both wore spectacles. They both addressed us as 'Gentlemen' and took off their specs and coats and then we saw a few scars and other signs that they had been through the mill.

The first principle they bought out, which was impressed on me, was the fact that 'No dead man ever won a fight or battle' and one who was standing after was the one who dictated the terms. They then demonstrated the vulnerable parts of the human body as targets in a desperate fight, starting at the eyes and finishing at the insteps of the feet. We were told to forget the rules of decency using the hands, knees and boots and although bad you must remember the desperate times and the desperate situation this country was in and the type of operations envisaged for our type of unit. The two men demonstrated the different methods of attack when armed only with the knife and ones own body, the subject of this was followed up in all our training sessions termed 'Unarmed Combat'. In subsequent training sessions we were put squad against squad in unarmed stalking and attacking schemes. Another training

method we had to undergo was known as 'Milling', for this a boxing ring was erected and two squads were fallen in each side of the ring facing each other. We were not sized off and each squad was given two pairs of boxing gloves. The first two men fit on the boxing gloves and when the whistle was blown they had to jump into the ring and hit out at each other for a round of two minutes. When the whistle was blown again the first two got out the ring and the next two got in and so on until all the men had been in the ring. The round wasn't timed until the first blows were struck, so one couldn't go easy on a mate etc. I soon learned that the secret was to jump into the ring first and get across to my opponent before he could get clear of his ropes and then hit him, not fair but I wasn't a big man and if we were milling against the Guards squad it evened things up a bit.

It was during this period I was shown an example of comradeship and thoughtfulness which prevailed throughout my service in the Commandos. One day we were doing training in stalking unarmed combat, for this we only wore what was termed 'Denims', this was a battledress made of Denim material and which we had three sizes, small, large and larger. In other word the quartermaster just threw the tunic and trousers at you. The tunics in those days had collars which fastened around the neck by means of two hooks and eyes. My tunic, collar was so large that instead of fastening around my neck, the hooks and eyes met somewhere near my lower chest. The trouser waist went around my waist almost half again. It didn't matter because the whole dress was for fatigues and crawling about in.

The day we were doing this training was Friday, and we had just been paid. Being naive I had put my pay in my trouser pocket. I successfully stalked one of the men in the other section and we engaged in a tussle. As it happened we were watched by two of the instructors, later they would discuss the training and give criticism. As we were being criticised I felt into my trouser pocket for my pay, the only money I had, and the pockets were empty. I had lost the money somehow during the exercise. Of course I began to look about and the instructors saw me and asked in no uncertain terms why I wasn't paying attention. I told them I had lost my money and they organised a search. The money was never found, so they all volunteered to subscribe a little of their own pay and thereby make up for my loss.

Shortly after this episode we were moved to another camp. A place named 'Achnacarry' this was the estate of the Laird of Loch Eil, and it was a large 'Fortified house' it was called Achnacarry Castle, the Laird who was the Chief of the clan had loaned this castle and it's surrounding large tracts of Mountains, fells, rivers and lochs to the Special Service Brigade for training purposes. The castle of course became the headquarters and we were installed in Nissen huts in the immediate vicinity to continue our training. This became more and more arduous, boat training, river crossing on ropes, climbing and lots and lots of shooting. There was the usual drilling as well and of course there had to be a Dress Guard on the headquarters. The guard was changed every 24 hours with the laid down Army drill, one of the things about this was that if you were picked out as being the best turned out soldier you were designated as 'Commanding Officer's Stick Orderly' for the day and this duty relieved

you from doing sentry (which was a bore). But one of the duties (and most important) was that the stick orderly took over the telephone switchboard for the night, and had to keep the fire going to heat the water for the cooks and the Officer's mess.

I managed to get picked for Stick orderly when it was our turn for guard duty, which was alright, but I had no idea how to use the telephone switchboard. In those days the telephone was a wondrous thing, so you can imagine I had a hair raising time trying to answer the phones and also keep my eye on the 'b….y' fire, which went out. I never won the Stick Orderly again it was far easier doing the two hours sentry every six hours.

On looking back I enjoyed the course, the whole programme was so different and advanced from the normal run of the mill army infantry training of those days. It was very arduous and sometimes back-breaking but we were young and became very fit. Anyway about the second week in February 1941, our squads were ordered to parade in full marching order and to have our kitbags packed and ready to move. This was immediately after breakfast at 07.30 hrs. We did so and then some Officers came along and began inspecting us and talking to some as they moved along the lines. I then saw that one of these Officers was the one who had interviewed me back at the Lancashire Fusiliers depot. When he reached me he told me that he remembered me and asked how I thought I had done on the course. I told him I had enjoyed it but did not know what the instructors thought about us. He said 'You have done alright and you are coming to my troop in No 12 Commando'.

I and most of the fellows who had been with me from the Lancashire Fusiliers, together with some of the Guardsmen and other units were told to fall out, collect our kitbags and fall in as one unit. We were then marched to the railway station at Spean Bridge, where, after a wait we boarded a train. The Officer who I now know to have been Captain Robert Henriques, and some others got on the same train.

We had been issued with the army's one day ration, this was a large 'door knocker' type sandwich of a red coloured cheese, and the only drink was the water from our water bottles. It was quite a journey as the rail line from Spean Bridge was single track until you get to south of Glasgow, so it was a slow, long journey especially as we had no knowledge at all as to our eventual destination.

However, we eventually arrived at Southampton where after some messing about a Sergeant Major sorted myself and Lancashire Fusiliers comrades and some others onto a 30 cwt lorry with all our kit and we arrived at a small village situated on the River Hamble called 'Old Bursleden'. Captain Henriques spoke to us all again individually and handed us over to a Corporal (who I will describe later) who took us, myself and my great comrade and friend Eric Gott, to a very small cottage and introduced us to the occupiers and on whom we were billeted. They were called Tom and Ellen Rogers, two lovely simple country folk who didn't deserve to have us foisted on them.

Our first parade took place outside the Troop HQ which was a large house in the village where the Officers were billeted, and there we met our new comrades for the first time. They were from all sorts of regiments ranging from the Pioneer Corps up to the Guards Regiments. The Troop Commander turned out to be the person who had interviewed us when we first volunteered, he was called Captain Robert Henriques, he was a regular army officer in the Royal Artillery, he was also part Jewish in appearance. The troop was divided into two sections called 'Left' and 'Right' sections and each section was commanded by a Lt. We were put into the Left section and our officer was called Lt. 'The Honourable' Anthony Mildmay, he was the son of Lord Mildmay of Flete Castle in Devon. It turned out that before the war started he had ridden his own horse in the 1938 Grand National. The horse was called 'Davy Jones' and at the last fence was leading, but a reign broke and the horse ran into the crowd and off the course, to this day at the Grand National meeting at Aintree one of the races which takes place is 'The Mildmay Chase' in his memory.

The other section was commanded by the best Officer, man and gentleman who I have ever met in my life, no matter where I went he was Lt. Philip Pinckney. There's a lot more to come in my story about Phillip as it unfolds. The Hon. Anthony Mildmay's regiment was the Welsh Guards and of course he was of independent means also, he was a good man and Officer, there's a little bit more to come of him.

The troop Sergeant Major was called Nussey from the Staffordshire Regiment, built like a collier and I eventually found him to be good soldier and decent man. Each section had a full Sergeant and I found ours was called White, he of course went by the name 'Knocker' he was from the band and drums of the Grenadier Guards, he had retained his fife from his time in the guards and he livened up many an exhausting march for us by playing marches on it, even though wherever we marched as a troop it was 100 yds marching at light infantry pace and 200 yds doubling.

I could go on describing others but I think it better if I describe them as the story unfolds. On this first day we were marched from our village (Old Bursleden) to a place called 'Warsash' near the mouth of the River Hamble and which we found was the depot and home of the Navy coastal forces called HMS Tormentor, this base was our Commando Headquarters. At this base we were issued with a leather jerkin, this was a sleeveless coat of light leather on one side and khaki cloth on the other, it was lighter and less cumbersome than our issue great coats. We also got our own 'toggle rope' and a pair of rope soled shoes, these shoes were originally designed for use on the deck of sailing vessels like yachts, but we were issued them for quiet movement as opposed to wearing boots. We also received a 'Fighting Knife' for use in close infighting. I still have this knife as we were allowed to retain it when we were demobbed after the war, the day I was issued with it was 1st February 1941, so that was sixty years ago or more, it may be of some historical value? All this was extra to our normal Army equipment and was the first of much more as time went on. We were also issued with a shoulder flash, this consisted of a small piece of green cloth, on which was embroidered the

word 'TWELVE' in gold letters. This was to be worn on the right and left shoulder just below the epaulette. From then until the time when publicity was allowed about the Special Service Brigade when anyone asked us what the twelve meant we jokingly replied that it meant the twelve apostles. On the march to the Headquarters we got a little hint as to how our Officers looked at leading us which was far different from the normal Army Officers. At this time I was marching to the rear of the small column and I overheard Captain Henriques say to Lt. Pinckney, "I wonder if these men could do with a little spending money?", so Lt. Pinckney cried out "Who would like a sub?", we all kept quiet thinking it was the old army game of getting volunteers for some fatigue or other. Henriques then said "They must all be well off, ask them again". Pinckney did so, so I shouted "Me" and most of the others followed suit. To our pleasant surprise after we received the equipment I have already described we received a nice little amount of money in advance of payday. This was consideration we were not used to in our other regiments.

On the following day we were ordered to parade in our best battle dress wearing our own Regimental dress hat with belt, bayonet and rifles and we were marched onto a C.O Commando Parade. On this parade were 6 troops each of 45 to 60 men, and on that parade were men wearing the dress hats and badges of 76 regiments and Corps of the British Army. There were men from the Household Brigade, Horse Guards, Grenadier, Coldstream, Irish and Scots, Artilliary, Engineers and us from the Infantry of most of the County Regiments. The troops were lettered 'A, B, C, D, E, F and a HQ Troop. We were 'E' Troop and I was to remain in 'E' Troop until 1943. This day was 2nd February 1941, and was the beginning of a very adventuress time in my life, with the very very best of comrades.

We soon found that each Troop Commander was responsible for the training of his own Troop and of course this was delegated to the Section Officers, and each Section Officer vied with the each other to get the best trained Section, this soon passed down to us so that there was keen rivalry between the sections and troops. As the operations envisaged for us were obviously going to take place at night most of the schemes and exercises took place at night, so that we worked very long hours. A lot of the training was to do with boats, small craft of different designs, from collapsible wooden and canvas construction, to canoes that were made in the USA and were fast speed boats of marine plywood and manned by two naval ratings. We had experience of the coastal command boats, the ML's Motor Torpedo Boats and Motor Gun Boats. I found I really enjoyed this part of the training, especially the Falboats, which were designed for two men and it was great to use these for secretive landings etc.

'E' Troop as I have said before was stationed in the village of 'Old Bursleden' and near the village was a brickworks which because of the war was temporarily closed down. It had a quarry from which normally it obtained clay for the bricks, this quarry was utilised as a short range firing range. We designed all types of targets, some to move by the application of wires, these targets were of course situated against the head of the quarry face so that when

we were firing at the targets we were firing into the face. The clay in working times was fed into the brickworks by means of trolleys carried on overhead cables, these were still in place when we were using the quarry, the brickworks had two small factory chimneys about 50 yards apart. One day, our section of 'E; Troop were using this range, doing a bit of firing practice, it was a dull dampish day and the bottom of the quarry was like a quagmire. There was only room for two men to use the firing point, so whilst two men were firing the rest of us were just stood around waiting for our turn. As I was next to use the point together with another man, I had 5 rounds in my rifle with the safety catch on, when suddenly a twin engined aeroplane, a bomber appeared over the quarry face. Someone said "E he's low" and then we saw the black crosses, it was a German Heinkel Bomber and as it passed over our heads I clearly saw the rear gunner's face and he was starting to point his guns. I got off two rounds but of course by this time it was passing, and it was so low, between the two chimneys. I saw two articles fall from the plane and heard explosions, it had dropped two small bombs, the pilot had obviously been as surprised to see us as we were to see him. As there were some council houses near to the brickworks Henriques who was with us ordered us to get to the houses and see if any damage had been done. As we were running there he shouted us by names to see if we were ok. We found the damage was broken windows and shocked residents. We learned later that the plane had crashed into the Solent, having been damaged in a fight with one of our fighters before it got to us.

So that was my first clear sight of our enemy, a second and it had gone. But I did see the gunner aim. Old Bursleden is or was situated near to the Southampton to Portsmouth Road, and the railway passed nearby. There are two bridges over the River Hamble, one is the road bridge and the other the railway bridge. Both bridges were quite high above the river surface. Pinckney and Mildmay had a habit that if we were coming back to billets after a long scheme or exercise and had to pass over either bridge (we sometimes walked along the railway lines) they would shout "Everybody in" on which command we had to climb over the bridge parapets and drop or jump into the river and swim or get ashore anyway we could. That was in full kit and just about tired out. On other occasions we would be ordered to swim from the bank and they would lob grenades into the river from the bridges (great fun)!

I quickly realised that the training devised by our Officers was far in advance of the normal training in our own regiments or units. For instance we had to handle explosives and learn how to calculate amounts of explosive required for specific work. We were made to depend on our own map and compass reading and as our operations would obviously mostly require movement at night and the utmost silence almost all the training was at night. It's surprising how difficult the movement of a body of men at night over unknown terrain and surmounting obstacles without losing touch and in utter silence is. It also had the effect of bonding us together since all the activities required the ultimate in teamwork and fitness.

There were many more aspects of training which we experienced as my service on the Special Service Brigade progressed, these aspects developed due to the requirements of

operations. My first experience of this came towards the end of February 1941. On this occasion we were ordered to parade in the early evening in Battle Order, and we were instructed to produce receipts from our landladies or landlords certifying that we had paid our just dues and demands for our billets (later in my service I learned that this particular order was a good indication that we were going into action of some sort).

We paraded as ordered, and to my surprise we were ordered onto some motor coaches (the height of luxury for lowly rankers), because of this unheard of luxury and the fact that we had not been told to bring rations I began to experience suspicious thoughts and all sorts of ideas and rumours began to circulate. However, the coaches driven by the Army drivers set off, and because it was dark and of course the 'blackout' was in operation the journey became tedious and most of us fell asleep. Eventually we reached a destination and found ourselves in Army Barracks. We were instructed to go to barrack rooms and told to settle down for the remainder of the night and that we were confined to our barrack room for the night.

However, in the morning we were roused and taken to the dining room where we had a good breakfast and then to a drill shed where we were informed that we were on standby for a raid with the object of destroying shipping that was lying up in a river – I think it was the Loire. We were then paraded in our troops and the Troop Commander Captain R Henriques came along the lines and spoke to us individually to select the men who were to go. I was selected to take a light machine gun, the 'Bren Gun', my pal at the time, a lad from Manchester, was also told he had to go, for some reason he got very upset. We were then issued with ammunition, and of course we had our personal weapons and also we were provided with an 'Escape Kit' and a small waterproof wallet containing French money, a small petrol cigarette lighter (which had a small compass hidden in the base) and a type of jack-knife, (which I still have), this knife has a blade, two saw blades, wire cutters, screw driver and tin opener.

As it was daylight we discovered that we were in the Barracks of the Queen's East Kent Regiment, Canterbury. When all this had been done we were taken into the dining room of the Barracks to await the signal to embark. We were there for sometime and instructed as to what the operation was to be and our roles in it. It became evident that the operation was such that there was not much chance of us getting back onto the landing craft because of the timing of the tides etc the issue of the escape kit became obvious.

We were allowed to write a letter if we wished to be posted should the worst happen. You can imagine out thoughts at this time. However after quite a long wait we were brought to attention and who should come into the room by Winston Churchill, who was Prime Minister and our Commander in Chief, Sir Roger Keyes.

The great man told us to sit down and then informed us that the operation was cancelled due to all sorts of administration reasons and the fact that because of the change in the weather

conditions at the mouth of the river it would not have been possible for our landing craft to get to the landing beaches. He said all sorts of things about being sorry for us being worked up etc and that other opportunity would arise in the future. We were then ordered to gather our kit and return to our Commando areas. We were taken back to Old Bursleden in the backs of army lorries, a bit different to the journey there. On reflection, of course, it was a lucky break as in all probability I wouldn't have been writing this today.

We returned to our billets in Old Bursleden and resumed the daily routines of training. Shortly after this the Troop Commander, Captain Henriques left us for a higher position, and the great man, Lt. P H Pinckney was promoted to Captain of the troop and Lt. Anthony Mildmay was our Section Officer. We received a new officer in the troop called Lt. Littljohn, his regiment was the Highland Light Infantry. He appeared in a kilt and always wore it, he was a dour Scot and was built like a pit prop. The Officers were largely responsible for training and developing new ideas, so Mr Mildmay decided to take us to his Fathers home, Flete Castle which was at Ivybridge on the outskirts of Dartmoor, to do compass marches and night marches and all sorts of antics on the moor, and also, I suspect, to show his soldiers to 'Daddy'.

When we got to Ivybridge he marched us, in full kit from the railhead to the castle, which was quite a way and the weather was quite warm so when we got to the castle we were pretty hot, sweaty and fed-up. The castle was surrounded by a wall and was entered through a large gate into a courtyard. The main door of the castle was surmounted by a small balcony. As we entered through the gate, Mildmay ordered us to 'March to Attention' for there on the balcony was Father and Lady Astor who was then Lady Mayoress of Plymouth. One of the older soldiers, who was a peacetime regular soldier, Rifleman Berski, shouted out in disgust "Look who's up there, the old bag should be in Plymouth not living it up out here".

At that time Plymouth was receiving heavy bombing raids nightly and also being shelled occasionally by the Germans big cross channel guns. Berski was put on a charge, but it passed. Once inside the castle we were shown to our quarters which turned out to be on the ground floor, in fact they used to be the quarters belonging to the 'Men-at-arms' who served the Lord of the Castle.

I, personally enjoyed the place and found the building very interesting. In our troop at this time was a man named Grandfield, he was of Jewish extraction and of course because of this he was nicknamed 'Ikey!'. Ikey was a native of the East End of London and spoke like a true blue 'Cockney'. One day he was wandering the many corridors of the castle when he was asked by someone he did not recognise if he knew where Mr Mildmay was. The next day a piece appeared on daily orders, as follows; "When asked by my Father or when addressed by him, the correct way to answer or refer to him is "My Lord" and not "I Dunno Old Cock". Ikey was a terrific soldier and the Germans were to know about him in the days to come.

Regarding Lt. Mildmay, he was a true gentleman and tried his best to carry out his duties. In the years before the war began, of course he was the son of a land owning Lord, very well off and amongst other things he owned, trained and rode his own racehorses. During the last race at Aintree, before the war, Mildmay injured his neck when his horse ran into the barrier near the end of the race. This race had been filmed by the Cinema News people and his father had purchased a copy. During one of our breaks from training his father took us into the main hall of his home and showed us the film, it was very enjoyable and of course in those days it was a rare thing to see. It was enjoyed greatly along with the break from slogging around Dartmoor.

Before we left Ivybridge or 'Flete', Mr Mildmay arranged a football match between us and a nearby town called Plymton. I played in the match and managed to score the only goal of the game. When we came off the field Ikey came to me and said "I'm glad you scored that, I did alright out of it". Ikey was not a sporting type but in true Jewish fashion he had eyes on the money, he had won the bet he had laid with the locals.

We returned to Old Bursleden where Captain Pinckney was waiting for us with movement orders for us to go to Scotland to a place called Loch Eillort in the wilds area of Fort William, a really rugged camp on the shores of Lock Eill. This place boasted the first battle assault course to be instigated by the British Army, and it was a stiff one, it was planned out of a natural gorge or glen in the hillside and there was all sorts of obstacles both natural and man-made which we had to surmount in full battle order and carrying the arms and ammunition etc. Because there were other troops there after we had practiced on the course a competition was arranged between us and the others to see who did it the best, at the end of the route we had to attack a supposed enemy strongpoint, which was built in the hillside. It consisted of a number of trenches and in the trenches (we didn't know this at the time) were instructors who would raise a small target or part of target which we were to fire at.

I and my good pal, a lad called Harry Corfield from Manchester, were the crew of the light machine gun which added weight to what the others had to handle. When it was our turn to do the course we got to the end alright but were both just about exhausted and we got the machine gun set up when I saw something white move against the trenches. I shouted to Harry 'There it is Harry' and Harry let off a burst of gun fire whereupon a man jumped up from where I was pointing and ran like the wind, it was only the instructor and I had not seen the target but his hand and Harry was a good shot. It turned out the instructor was unhurt but frightened to death.

It was then decided that even though there was no shots on the real target, the fact that we had seen the instructors hand at such range and our burst had almost deprived the staff on an instructor and it was his own fault for showing his hand that we should not lose marks. We won the competition and the skipper, Pinckney, was highly amused and delighted.

After this incident we moved a short distance away to a placed called Loch Moidart, which was a small sea bound loch, where another large house had been taken over for training in the use of small boats, and of course, 'Landing Craft'. This place was staffed by the Royal Navy. My first memory of this was the first day there when we were put in the charge of a Petty officer who was about 6' 4" and very well built with it, he also had a 'full set' (Beard and Moustache). I looked at this man and thought what on earth are we in for now?. However he took us to a secluded part of the grounds where there was a length of rope stretched between two posts. From the rope there were pieces of thick string and this giant of a man then began to teach us some knots, just like a group of Boy Scouts, we had a laugh and he joined in.

From then on though it was pretty tough, we were rowing cutters which were more like large lifeboats, and also sailing them by erecting masts and sails. The rough part was night exercises, consisting of landing on the beaches of remote islands in the Inner Hebrides from landing craft known as 'Eurichas' or 'R' boats. These craft were part of the lease arrangement with the USA and were constructed from marine plywood and were really a power boat which accommodated about 20 to 30 men in the well of the craft seated on a low bench running along the port and starboard of the well, with the engine housing in the centre. The deck was a narrow walkway on each side, there was a small winch aft to which was a steel hawser attached to a 'Kedge'. A kedge was a type of anchor made so that the tines could swivel when the boat was running into the beach the tines would dig into the sea bottom and grip, the hawser would run out and when the time came for the boat to be dragged off the beach the winch would go into reverse with the engine and so pull the boat into deeper water.

The problem was so far as were concerned, when the boat had run up the beach the deck was about 7' high. We had to jump from the deck onto the beach or into shallow water, a drop of 7', you can imagine a soldier fully kitted out for battle with explosives, ammunition and goodness knows what landing from 7' high onto a sandy or gravely surface made a noise, this multiplied by about 30 or so men, someone was going to hear, which for the purpose of night raids and other exploits was not on.

On this course, one of our Section Officers (J Saunders) was not so popular at this time for different reasons, although he became alright in time, one of his expressions when he was telling some one off was "Blast yer eyes", he became known by this. Anyway to continue about the landing craft and the noise problem, someone came up with the idea that if the boat carried two light ladders when the craft beached the ladders could be lowered on each side of the boat and we could climb off silently and creep ashore.

It was decided to try this out on a small landing exercise on an island called 'Muck' or 'Eigg'. It was a very cold night and a not very calm sea, the craft approached the small beach and we all lined up on each walkway and 'Blast yer eyes' was at the front of our side.

The boat scraped on something and the seamen lowered the ladders, 'Blast yer eyes' began to descend the ladder and we were about to follow when the seamen held us back, as silence was essential no-one said anything to 'Blast yer eyes' who kept descending the ladder. The seamen whispered 'It's a sand bar', 'Blast yer eyes' carried on until his Officer's cap floated. The boat withdrew a little and then found a way onto the beach, we had a perfectly dry landing but poor old 'Blast yer eyes' was sopping wet through. He had to carry on.

It was on this course that we met up with the famous Lovatt's Scouts, who were a unit made up of men from the Lovatt Estate. They were gamekeepers or 'Ghillys' as they were known in the area. These were really men of the hills, they tried to show us how to find, catch and cook things from the wild so as to exist without supplies etc. We watched them 'Tickle Trout' from the streams and then how to cook them using leaves to wrap them in and placing the trout and its wrapping beneath the embers of a small fire, when the leaves were burnt the trout was beautifully cooked.

Before the forgoing course took place, in 1941, we were taken to a place called Inverary on the shores of the Clyde Estuary, a small town which figures in Scottish history, and on arrival there we found that most of the Commandos in the Special Service Brigade were there in one camp. We were then issued with tropical gear and began practising large landings and battle manoeuvres obviously some largish operation was being planned. It was whilst we were here that news broke about HMS Hood being sunk by the German raider Bismark. When this happened all the schemes and manoeuvres finished. The rumours came out that one of the reasons why the Bismark was at sea was that information of our intentions (to attack a small island near to Malta in the Mediterranean) had leaked to the enemy and she was looking for our convoy. How true that was I don't know but the concentration of the Brigade was broken up and we were taken by sea round the coast to Ayre.

Once again we had to find billets, in the town of Ayre. Myself and my pal Harry Corfield found a family called 'Catternak' in a house in Russell Street they were a couple who had a young daughter. He was a bus driver and they were a really nice family and appeared to be really proud to have us as paying guests. And so once again we got back to hard training, long sprint marches in full battle order, night swimming in kit etc. It was at this time that we had to practice swimming in our denim uniform carrying a bomb called a 'Magnet Clampon'. This was a metal half sphere filled with explosive and had a flat side fitted with magnets so that the bomb would stick to a metal surface, the bomb was fitted with a 'Time Pencil' which was a small tube containing a detonator and a small phial of acid. When the bomb clamped onto the target object the phial was crushed and the acid ate through the small spring retaining the striker and exploding the bomb. The strength of the acid determined when the explosion would occur, so giving you the time to swim away.

At this time there was a small cargo ship in Ayre harbour of Dutch origin. The crew and Captain were Dutch having brought their ship away from Holland when the Germans

invaded their country. Pinckney decided (no doubt having being instructed from higher up) that we should use this ship as a target for us and our bombs, as a practice for a more serious event in the near future. So, one cold wintry night we had to parade, I remember a large crown gathered when they saw us paraded. Some of us were given two of the 'Clampons', they were attached to a webbing strap which we used to fasten the bombs to ourselves. We had to enter the water and swim to the moored Dutch ship attach our bombs (they were dummy's with just the timer and detonator fixed) and then swim back to our starting point. As I said earlier it was very cold and some of the crowd watching us were soldiers from the nearby barracks, who were all wearing their greatcoats and gloves.

The swim was about 100 yards and of course due to the blackout regulations it was pitch black in the water. Anyway some of us managed it and got back just as the detonators went off. There was a great commotion on board the ship but Pinckney saw the Captain and explained that it was just a rehearsal whereupon we were invited on board and treated to a hot drink laced with rum.

Thankfully, on looking back, no actual operation came out of this as if we had had to attack enemy shipping in this manner there was not much chance of survival. During our time at Inverary we had taken part in a number of exercises and schemes during on of which we, 'E' troop had to simulate an attack on an enemy strongpoint, we did so after being out for days with such expertise and enthusiasm it was noted by the official observers unknown to us, so much so that the troop was obviously marked for future use as will be seen later in this narrative.

After this episode in Ayre harbour we were taken to the Isle of Skye by Pinckney for an exercise in 'Living off the Land'. We were there for three weeks, and I really enjoyed it personally though some of the others seemed to find it hard going. We were lodged in a shooting lodge called 'Kamasunary' which was miles from anywhere and if we wanted to eat we had to catch whatever there was. The skipper (Phillip Pinckney) owned a pair of double barrelled shotguns, they were Purdeys which were the best make, but he only had so many cartridges for their use, do he decided that we could take turns at going hunting with these guns instead of using army weapons. (In other words two of us in turn had a gun each with four cartridges). If we managed to come back with some sort of game for the pot then we won a further supply of cartridges and could go out again.

One of the Corporals called Aerod, he was a big strong lad who rejoiced in the nickname 'Busty' because of his build went out in his turn and came back with two rabbits so he qualified for a further issue of ammunition and permission to go out the following day, he again came back with two rabbits. Whilst this was going on some of us had tried our hand at setting snares (following the training from the Lovatts Scouts). When Busty came back the second time we became suspicious of his success, as we all wanted to have a go with the marvellous guns, so the following day some of us stalked Busty and sure enough he went to a

place where we had set our snares and if a rabbit was caught he simply shot it, released it from the snare and claimed to have shot it on the run. He lost his turn with the gun but his rabbits still went in the pot. During this period we did a lot of climbing and abseiling and practised with explosives, we caught quite a lot of fish using explosives, throwing home-made bombs into the sea which stunned any fish in the area and we were able to just pick them out.

It was July 1941. We returned to Ayre and found that our exploits in Inverary had borne fruit as 'E' Troop was chosen to carry out a small operation against the French coast. The plan was to use an armoured landing craft, a small vessel newly designed for use in landing troops on beaches. The craft was broadly speaking an armoured self propelled barge. The bows consisted of a ramp which could be lowered and raised for us to run off onto the beach side. Inside the ramp were double gates of steel, inside the body or well of the craft were fitted three rows of low benches running along the sides and one down the centre for the troops to sit on. There was a small engine room aft fitted with two marine engines, the room was entered by a small hatch and the stoker or engineer sat between the two engines to operate. There was also a small winch aft to which was attached a cable and a type of anchor named a 'Kedge'. Amongst the men on the craft was a Naval Commander called Sir Geoffrey Cosgrove. To continue the story we were to attack a small beach which was supposed to be undefended, or so they said. All was well until we got quite near to the beach, it was beautifully dark and all seemed well when suddenly flares shot up from the shore line. We were exposed and a heavy machine gun opened fire on us, the gun was firing down from the top of a small sand hill cliff. The gun had to be silenced so a small party lead by Captain Pinckney got ashore under the fire and threw hand grenades onto the cliff top. The gun was silenced.

One way or another the craft was withdrawn from the beach but it was found that the stoker in the small engine room had been killed and Sir Geoffrey Cosgrove had received a mortal wound. Attempts were made to save him, but he died on the way back. At the debriefing I believe that Captain Pinckney was asked if he wanted to recommend anyone for a decoration, as he did not believe in them he said 'All of them'. He was told that this was not possible and so he said "in that case - None". I was told that some time after this action a person professing to be of 'Holy Orders' called at the home of Sir Geoffrey Cosgrove's next of kin and after commiserating with them about their loss and quizzing them about the whole matter, he tried to insinuate that his death had been caused by Captain Pinckney giving Sir Geoffrey too much morphine. This of course, was proved to be untrue and the next of kin denied this, the person disappeared and was not seen again. He was obviously a spy.

After the July incident life resumed with training and the military routine. My next memory concerns another great officer in 12 Troop. Major General Purdon, who I think is still with us, in Ayre in 1941 he was a Lieutenant, I do not remember which Troop he was in but my story relates to a day when he was the Commando Orderly Officer and I was a Fusilier ordered to be on Headquarters Guard. The HQ was a big old town house in the main

square, and during this period Ayre was a very popular holiday destination for the hard workers form Glasgow. The spectacle of the Commando's performing the drill manoeuvres of a formal army guard mount caused a large crowd to gather and watch.

On this occasion I was determined to gain the award of Commanding Officer's Stick Orderly so that I would be able to escape the two hours on four hours off of sentry duty. During the manoeuvres of drill there is a movement where the Orderly Officer has to look down the barrel of the rifle which the man holds in firing position with the breech open. As I was number 1 in the line Lt. Purdon came to me first, whereupon a drunken wag in the crowd shouted "Pull the trigger now mate". Being only young I had difficulty suppressing a giggle and I thought there goes my Stick. Much to my relief and gratitude Lt. Purdon awarded me the honour. Lt. Purdon was taken prisoner at the epic St Nazaire operation, and is another Commando Officer I am very proud even to have known.

Somewhere around this junction our Lt. Anthony Mildmay, went out on some escapade and used the Troop runner's cycle. I don't know much about it but he got a little tipsy and fell off the cycle and broke his ankle, and so we lost a smashing officer. He went back to his unit, the Welsh Guards and we got a man named Lt. Saunders who was to stay with us. So the officers, now at this time were Captain Philip Pinckney (the best), Lt. Littlejohn, a sturdy dour Scotsman (he always wore his kilt and won the M.C with No 6 Commando during the second front) and Lt. Saunders.

Two other names have sprung to mind, they are Rob Bostock, he came to us from the Middlesex Regiment and there was a rumour that he had been a regular officer pre-war but had been cashiered for something. I don't know about that but he was a great comrade and an expert with the Vickers Heavy Machine Gun. The other name was Wilf Littleton, a lad from Liverpool, he was a very smart soldier and very athletic.

I remember during that year in Ayre, was when, I think on reflection, that I was tested. It happened that Captain Pinckney decided one day to use the Maybole firing ranges situated a few miles outside Ayre. We were told that we would need rations just for the day, so my pal and I just asked the Landlady for a couple of sandwiches and told her we'd be back for tea. Well as it usually did on the firing ranges it poured down, but nevertheless, we had to carry on doing allsorts of manoeuvres. It got dark and we decided to carry on and do some night firing practice. By this time we were all wet through and hungry after eating our sandwiches at lunch time. My pal and I were the last ones to fire and by this time it was about midnight, so it was left to us to tidy up the range before heading for the range hut. When we got to the range hut we found the lads had got a fire going and so we set about making a drink of tea, I had just got my Dixie half ready when someone behind me said "Here you are, have these" and dropped two nice sized potatoes into my Dixie. I did not see who my benefactor was but had just started to boil them, whereupon Sergeant Major came to me and asked how I had come by the potatoes, took them off me and told me I was on a charge. I was marched before

the Commanding Officer and remanded. I went before the Commanding Officer – Lt. Col. Harrison, who threatened me with the 'Firing Squad' for looting if I did not tell him who supplied the vegetables. For some reason I did not tell him. Apparently the spuds had come from some poor fellows allotment, but I don't know whose or whether the story was true, anyway by keeping silent I had gained a lot of kudos.

He sentenced me to 28 days pay stoppage, which didn't really matter as we were on subsistence allowance. Being only young I did not realise the trivialities of the affair and have thought since that it was a trial to see how I would react and perhaps others were put to a similar test.

We came to December of 1941, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. On the second week we were ordered to parade in 'Battle Order' and produce our clearance chits from the landladies. A sure sign, that something was to come. Sure enough we were entrained and got the train at a place called Greenock on the Clyde. There we embarked on the Prince Albert, she was a cross channel mail steamer which had been converted and adapted to carry landing craft and ourselves. It was a great little craft and took us out and up the Scottish coast, through the piece of water named 'the Minchins' which is part of the Irish sea which in it's temper you wouldn't wish to meet. We went on to Scapa Flow in her and there Captain Pinckney selected a section of us and we were taken onto the Destroyer H.M.S Bedouine, a tribal class destroyer. I shall never forget her and her crew for their kindness to us and their efficiency.

At Scapa, the largest navel base in the Royal Navy, there were allsorts of ships and we were told that we had to learn to 'Slip the Whaler' as there was of course no landing craft on a Destroyer and apparently we were going to land somewhere by rowing ashore. Well the first time we tried it, it was a right shambles and you could have heard the shouts and the jeers from the ratings on other ships "Hey look at these Pongoes messing about". The drill is that the whaler, the ship's rowing boat, is lowered until its almost touching the water and then we had to slide down the 'falls' and take our seats in the boat ready to row ashore. Some of us sat to port and the others to starboard, one oar each, one of the seamen would steer and cox. All this was happening whilst the ship was still moving forward, when all were ready the cox would order "Slip" and the shackles were released and the boat was 'shoved' from the ships side and we would start rowing. Sounds easy but in practicing it and then rowing away in good order together with full battle order dress it wasn't at all. Anyway we made it by a lot of hard work and repeated practice until the matloes got fed up of watching us especially as we got rather good at it.

The upshot was that in due course we set off into the North Atlantic and to Norway. On board the 'Destroyer', for the journey, we were divided into 'Canteen Messes'. A 'mess' was one of the long tables situated on the mess deck for a set number of men, one of whom had the title of Cook. His job was to prepare the raw food and take it to the Galley where it was

cooked. At meal times one would hear "Cooks to the Galley, hands to ……. (whatever meal it was)".

This was all new to us but we soon got used to it, and the rum ration, and the navy custom of 'Sippers' of 'Gulpers' to celebrate one of the crew's birthday or something. The food in the mess in which I was allocated was always excellent. Our cook was a 'Badgy', a man who had been in the navy a long time and knew all the ropes. He always sat at the head on the table.

Once into the enemy occupied waters the crew was ordered to be closed up, that meant they were on duty for four hours and then off four hours. So we took over the routine duties so they could get some rest when off duty. They appreciated this and together with the dangerous mission it formed a bond of friendship between us that I will never forget.

Christmas found us steaming up Vestfiord flying the Nazi ensign, at a fare rate of knots, with orders to destroy and capture any sort of signal or communications. Apparently the Norwegian pilot was a bit out in his estimation of speed and gave our 'Destroyer' Captain a bit of a scare, so much so he took over and navigated himself. Part of the operation went very well and so 'Kriegsmarine' had the New Year in England and not quite as they sang about… The action was part of the Christmas 1941 operations against Lofoten and Vaagso, the first time the Germans were brought to action in Europe since the Dunkirk evacuation.

Whilst recalling the foregoing another little incident has come to mind of our pre-December activities in Ayre, and it may amuse you a little.

At Stranraer in the southwest of Scotland we were at a small airfield, which was used by the RAF as a training field for air crews. Captain Pinckney noticed this and thought that if we could each obtain a trip in one of the planes the experience may fit us out for future use eg. Landing from the air etc. So my turn came and along with some others we made our way to Stranraer, and were made welcome and were allocated to a plane. The planes were twin engined antiquated light bombers called 'Botha's' apparently made in South Africa. Part of its defences was a mild upper manually operated turret which in action would mount twin machine guns worked manually. As I was a passenger and not one of the students I was asked to travel in this. In those days the parachute was separate from the harness and on entering the plane one had to deposit it in a rack near the door, the harness was fitted to the body and if one had to use the chute it was hooked by the harness on the front of the body. I carried out this drill on entering the plane and went to the mid upper turret, being the only passenger I was not issued with a helmet which contained a headphone, so I was not in any sort of communication with the pilot. There was about seven students on the plane, all grouped near the pilot, so I was isolated. I struggled into the turret which was glass-domed, and the plane took off. It was a nice day and the glass dome made it seem as though I was in a greenhouse and I amused myself by playing around with the gun mounting. We flew over

Douglas on the Isle of Mann and when we were returning over the Irish Sea, due to the heat in the turret and a little bored I was dosing off when the sight of two small bulbs caught my eye. There was a green one and a red one along with a notice that read: "When green light flashed prepare to abandon the aircraft – When red light flashes abandon aircraft".

Well the green light was flashing, I looked about and thought it couldn't be true, there was only the sea below and I was wondering if it was genuine or not only half believing it when the red light started to flash. I thought well here goes something must be wrong, so I struggled out of the turret and headed towards the parachute rack when I saw the pilot and students laughing at me. They thought it a joke and I was a bit thankful that it was only a joke.

On our return to Ayre from Norway we went back to our billets. When my pal and I arrived at the door the landlady burst into tears on seeing me, apparently the Sergeant who had been sent around all the billets to see if we would be welcome back had told her I'd never made it back. I don't know why but it just illustrates a little of how kind and thoughtful people were towards us.

This was the beginning of 1942 and to my knowledge the Special Service Brigade at that time consisted of twelve Commando units number 1 to 12. There were no Royal Marine Commandos at that time. Also at this time number 7, 8 and 11 Commandos were in the Middle East. We were in Ayre, No 2 were nearby in Prestwich, No 4 were in Troon, No 3 in Largsand No 9 were in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. So that meant most of the Special Service Brigade were grouped around the Clyde. I don't know whether this was by accident or design, but a little titbit comes to mind about the way things were in those days. Intelligence came to our ears the 'U' boats were delivering and unloading small arms and ammunition gathered from the battlefields in France, in Bantry Bay, Southern Ireland for the IRA. Some members of the Irish fishing fleet were in the habit of when they saw a convoy leaving Liverpool Bay they passed the information on the German Council in Dublin. How true the latter was I don't know, but it was enough that the idea was mooted that we should ask for Leave Passes to Belfast and then work our way up to Dublin and blow up the consulate (if there was one!). Fortunately a more official project came up so it was passed off.

Not so long after this incident we became involved in several practice landings and operations against and with the other Commandos, but were eventually moved to Dunnoon. My troop 'E' went to a little hamlet called Strone which was across the Loch from Dunnoon itself. Moored in the Lock itself was a large vessel called H.M.S Forth, It was a submarine Depot Ship, and always had many submarines tied up alongside her in groups known as 'Trots'. I thought it was a marvellous piece of marine engineering. The crew boasted that they could build a submarine in its workshops but they wouldn't be able to launch it.

It wasn't long before we were messing about it 'Fallboats' a type of two man canoe, working out ways and means of attacking or doing the most damage to a vessel and it's charges such as this on the enemy's side. To transgress a little, here's a little bit of history: In 1938 during the rush and haste to re-arm, a submarine called the Thetis was on trials in Liverpool Bay in the Mersey. She had civil workmen on board as well as crew when she sank and despite desperate efforts to save her and the crew all but three were lost. Eventually, however, she was repaired and came into service again and was called 'The Thunderbolt'.

It was arranged that we should carry out an operation by landing from a 'Submarine' and of course you've guessed it the Submarine was H.M.S Thunderbolt. The idea was that we should use a collapsible boat called an 'Ufferfox', this was a stout wooden base with canvas sides which could be raised and secured by metal braces fore and aft and when erected it held a section which propelled it by means of paddles. For our purposes this was bound to the deck grating of the Submarine and the skipper would get as near to the beach as possible and then we would exit through the forward hatch, release and erect the boat, paddle ashore, carry out the job and then return to the waiting Submarine.

The time came for a rehearsal and this was to be carried out in a Loch called 'Holy Loch'. After numerous day time trips in the 'Thunderbolt' during which we became acquainted with the crew, the rehearsal was of course was during the blackout. All went well until we came back to the submarine after much difficulty finding her in the pitch black night, and because it was only the rehearsal, we had to recover and secure the Utterfox on the grating. Well to stand on the deck and lean over to get hold of the boat was proving very hard, I had my back to the Conning tower and was having to look over my shoulder whilst struggling and having to keep quiet. I could just see the cap peak of the skipper and at that moment realised the water was creeping up past my knees, without thinking I shouted out "Hey he's going down without us". I was told in no uncertain terms to keep quiet, I then realised that the skipper was very skilfully lowering his craft to make it easier for us to get the boat up on deck. Well I was mortified. I'll always remember our submarine experience. I believe the Thunderbolt later during the war did not return from a patrol.

Prior to this we had experienced very rough wintry weather on the hills surrounding the Lochs, during which we did a lot of climbing and exercises in the hills. Captain Pinckney had a dog which was always with him on these exercises, it was called 'Coolie' and was an Irish Wolfhound, a big dirty looking thing, but he thought the world of it. On e day we were in the hills doing some explosive training using blocks of Guncotton and I had to blow a piece of iron girder apart, pretending it was a part of railway line. I had two blocks of high explosive guncotton for this and I laid them one on each side of the line in what was called a scissors charge. When detonated the force of explosion across both ways cuts the object in to two. Well I fitted the detonator with the safety fuse and after warning everybody I lit the fuse and retired to a safe distance. Everyone followed suit except Coolie who thought the fuse was something that deserved a smelling. No matter what I or anybody else tried the 'b….y'

dog would not come away from it. Talk about sweat, I thought if it blows that dog up the skipper will shoot me. I was deciding to make a dash for it, when thankfully the dog moved away, the charge went off and Coolie never flew so fast in all his life.

All part of the training, just like when Bostock who was an expert on the Vickers machine gun, had us firing it from the hip, we were up on the hills at that time and we were firing into an expanse of high rough grass on the hillside. He didn't tell us that he had placed incendiary rounds in the belts and we all started firing away, having a great time until we saw that half the hillside was ablaze, what a man.

Another lighter incident of this period was early in the year. An international football match was advertised. This match was to take place at Hampden Park, Glasgow, so a small party of us being Lancashire lads and followers of football thought we would try to go and support England. So we had to apply to Captain Pinckney for a weekend pass so we could get to Glasgow. When one of us went to get the passes Captain Pinckney asked why we were all asking for passes, when he was told we wanted to see England play his response was "Right then, we'll all go". This was on the Wednesday and the match was on Saturday, so we were paraded in 'Battle Order' and off we went, the long way around to Glasgow. Under night cover we went all around the shores of the lochs, via Helensburghe, encountering obstacles such as the Home Guard along the way, until we got to Greenock on the Friday morning.

At Greenock there was a factory which in peacetime was owned by the makers of the Singer Sewing machines, after some exercises in street fighting in the bombed out area of the town we were taken to this factory. The engineers and boffins of the factory had perfected a cheap quickly made light automatic gun called a 'Sten Gun'. It had been designed at the Government's request for issue to the Home Guard. The gun fired 9 millimetre rounds. We were shown around the factory and were allowed into the indoor firing range which was operated by women workers. We were allowed to fire a few rounds each. The gun of course was developed from its original cheap form as time went on.

We finally got to Glasgow and were able to clean up and attend the match. I was delighted to learn that Captain Pinckney was himself a keen footballer and I believe he won his blue at Cambridge for it.

We returned to Strone. In 'E' Troop, as in the other troops I expect, was a small section who were recognised as the explosive squad or demolition squad their job was obviously if the operation required something blowing up these were the 'brains' or 'experts'. Corporal 'Jumbo' Reeves and Corporal Ferguson were the two that I can recall in 'E' Troop. From another troop there was a man named 'Chaung', he was reputed to be part Chinese, whatever he was he was a good man. I have mentioned this because around February time, Jumbo and Fergo went missing and I was called upon to be a member of the squad.

Around this period we were taken aboard the Princess Josephine Charlotte, another craft similar to the Prince Albert, who had taken us the Scapa prior to the Norway trip. Off we went around the Outer Hebridees and other places. One I can remember was the Port of Stornoway. We were not briefed for anything as I remember, but we were all kitted out and fully armed, so it was obvious we should have done something. We did a lot of arduous landings but nothing else, and so we returned disappointed and feeling down. There was still no word on Jumbo and company.

Not long after our return from this trip we were moved again, but this time to our delight we arrived back at Old Bursleden. The Commando HQ was once again at Warsah, H.M.S Tormentor. It was this time we learned of the greatest raid of all – St Nazaire. Sadly the news came through that Jumbo and company had been taken P.O.W.

We soon settled in and we found that because the river was at the centre of the boat yards that were making landing craft and other coastal craft, the German air raids were intensified. However I found that our hosts in the village were wonderful and courageous about it.

At this time the enemy developed a fighter aircraft which was a bit faster than the Spitfire and this was worrying our people. In Old Bursleden a man named 'Quill' or 'Quillan' was the Chief Test Pilot of the RAF Spitfires, he was also a great friend of our skipper Captain Pinckney. It had been decided that it would be a good thing if one of the latest enemy fighters could be captured so it could be examined to see what its secret was. Captain Pinckney planned a scheme whereby he and his pal Quill would go over to France to an air field where all the planes were. Captain Pinckney would overpower and kill the pilot of a plane that was ready to fly, Quill would then jump in to the cockpit and fly them and the plane back. Fortunately on the eve of their departures an enemy pilot of one of these planes mistook his bearings over Britain and landed perfectly safely on a British air field. I say fortunately as the full scheme included us as a troop having to see they both got over to France.

Also at this time we received an intake of men who were Police Officers in civilian life, until 1942 their job had been a reserved occupation but in 1942 those who wished had been allowed and elected to come into the Commandos. They had been given a regiment and sent straight up to Achnacarry for training. They all turned out to be great men and good comrades.

By now I had reached the dizzy heights of Corporal and I was given the job one day of meeting these men with a lorry and taking them round to respective billets. Some of these billets were in a small place called Hedge End, adjacent to Old Bursleden.

Hedge End was quite heavily wooded at that time, and also in that area was a large 'Mannorial' type house. The owners and occupiers were known to the Skipper, and apparently one day they told him that a copse, part of the wood, was interfering with their

view and wished the relevant trees could be cut down. "No trouble" said the boss "We'll blow them down", we did but the windows of the lovely old house went too.

Whilst this was going on some large crates arrived containing Sten guns, which I explained earlier were a cheaply made weapon and which we had seen being made and tested in Greenock. We were ordered into the woods at Hedge End, told to pick out a weapon and start firing. The weapons were liable to misfire because the mechanism was controlled by a heavy breech block which had a return spring that easily became too weak. Anyway once we had found one that suited we were briefed to stand by for a little raid on a French beach, we were to go from the nearby Burleigh Estate. We stood on standby every night for a week but there was always something that prevented us from getting over the water. That was my experience with the Sten, which became so well used.

About this time an incident occurred which tends to illustrate the type of man Captain Pinckney was. We were briefed to take part in a large brigade exercise on Salisbury Plain. After messing about doing different attacks for about three days and nights, we had to attack a defence strongpoint which we were told was manned by the Home Guard, who in this area were quite good and well trained. To cut a long story short, we found this place and put in a night attack. We suddenly came under heavy live arms fire and the situation was for a short time rather hairy. It turned out that the Home Guard had been relieved by a regular battalion of infantry who had not been informed of the exercise, and one of their Sentry's had quite properly done his duty and defended his position so well that he had bayoneted Captain Pinckney in the forearm. When all was settled and discussed, Pinckney had his wound dressed and the Sentry on Pinckney's recommendation was promoted to Corporal.

Not long after this Jumbo, Ferguson and company left us and I also believe Chaung and Lt. Purdon from other troops. We didn't know it at the time but they joined men from other commando units – No 1, 3, 5, 9 and 12 who were Demolition (Explosive) squads to train and indeed take their part in the Epic Raid on St Nazair, mainly carried out by No 2 Cdo. under Lt. Col. Newman. They did a lot of their training at the Cardiff docks.

The raid, codenamed 'Chariot' took place at the end of March and we learned with pride of the undoubted success of it and the courage and skills of the lads (the ones I have mentioned were taken as P.O.W). Meanwhile we were kept busy by Captain Pinckney on learning to handle two-man canoes called 'Fallboats'. Also at this time I learned of an organisation that was at first named to us as 'No 62 School' which later became 62 Cdo. This unit operated from a lovely place in Dorset called 'Anderson Manor' and was operated by the organisation S.O.E and when they required assistance of troops, a section of 'E' Troop went there for whatever time was needed.

Towards August of that year, or I think it was August, we went on a big Commando scheme. In full battle order with full ammunition we went into the New forest where we got in flat

bottomed boats called 'Goatleys' in which we had to paddle along the River Avon until we got to Christchurch. We arrived there when the rest of the lads were in Dieppe. I do not know what they had planned but I suspect that if the landings had been successful then we would have been ready to re-in force the landing after No 40 Royal Marines had gone in, otherwise why were we fully equipped?. Also when we arrived at Christchurch there was a fleet of Landing craft – 'R' boats.

The only result for us was a return march back to out billets.

A short time after Dieppe we were taken to New Haven near Brighton and there we were briefed for a job. We were to be allocated to landing craft 'R' boats. Half the Commandos were to load with 2" mortars and the other half had an extra issue of Bren guns with the drum type magazine for aerial defence. The idea was that we should attack a beach and make a big 'scene' with the mortars so that the Germans would turn out their air-force and when they did we would withdraw and the RAF would ambush them. We would have to take our chances. In other words we were to be the 'Sitting Ducks'. It was a crazy sounding idea but it was to give the RAF an opportunity to inflict a lot of casualties on the Luftwaffa.

The 'R' boat in which I was positioned with two other Bren gunners was the first to breach the exit of Newhaven harbour, when we got the recall signal. We had to disembark as the RAF had called the scheme off as they could not get enough fighters for the job. We fell in on the jetty there and Lt. Col. Harrison told us the job was off. I saw he was upset and we fell in and marched past him. It was his last effort with us, I don't know where he went but we got another CO, Lt. Col. Sysonby. I will say not much more about him. He took us to Dorchester, we 'E' Troop had been in a little hamlet called 'Burton Bradstock' where we rehearsed one or two little e schemes of Pinckneys. It was there we were issued with the 'Green Beret'. It was late June 1942, so you can note that was the official issue of the proud head-gear.

The later part of 1942 saw us in billets in the Dorcherster area, and we were made very welcome by the people. This of course is near to Weymouth which was very handy for the Channel Islands and a visit to Sark by Captain Appleyard a 'free spirit' and Captain Pinckney and some of 'E' troop. Also we went for a short time to Braemar in Scotland where we were billeted in the Argyle Hotel. I came to know and befriend Sergeant Jack Cox who was in 'F' Troop. He went from Braemar to HMS Fox, in the Shetland Isles, Blerwick and I have learned since he was captured in Norway and later executed.

In the spring of 1943 we went on a parachute course, first we went to a place called 'Abbingdon' near Oxford and there we did a three week physical training course, and then went to Ringway Airport in Manchester. We did three parachute jumps, one was from a static balloon, one day jump and one night jump. At Ringway there was an old aircraft fitted with scaffolding which we had to practice falling and landing in a parachute harness, of

course it was pretty arduous. We did the day jump in an old Whitney bomber. Seven men at a time called a stick, through a hole in the middle of the aircraft. There was ad drill, securing each others static line and one stood to attention to drop through the hole. We dropped from 6000' onto Tatton Park. At the time Captain Pinckney left us to go in the SAS. He took four men with him that had been in his own unit the Yeomanry. He left me a letter telling men of his plans and an apology for not taking me with him. He suggested I should go for a commission and he would vouch for me. Anyway the commando moved to Weston Super Mare under Lt. Col. Sysonby, and not long after that I went into a small scale raiding party under Major Fynn operating from the Isle of Wight.

In September 1943, I along with others from a great No 12 Commando was posted to No 1 Commando and I was allowed to keep my rank and was posted into No 3 Troop and had command of a sub-section 'D'.

We did a lot of training in the New Forest and it was during this period that we were issued with the new style ammo boot now named 'The Commando Soled Boot', which is now the common issue as opposed to the old studded boots.

On the 7th November 1943 we were ordered to parade with all our kit at Winchester Railway Station and amidst all the lamentations from the natives we were whisked onto a troop train to arrive at the Port of Gourock on the Clyde. Without much further ado we boarded H.M.T Ranchi which was moored in the Clyde. We were confined on her for almost a week before she moved and we left the Clyde and joined a convoy, which we soon learned was bound for South East Asia.

Personally I like sailing and the journey was quite enjoyable, until we entered the Mediterranean ……..

We were passing Algiers when the convoy was attacked by German bombers. The Standing Orders for troops on passage on the ship stated that in the event of enemy action all troops were to remain on their mess decks so that the crew could fight the ship. Well they say "Curiosity killed the cat" and I'm afraid that order was broken as almost everyone was up on deck excitedly pointing out aircraft and bombs falling among the convoy. On the first day one ship to our rear was hit and caught on fire, but the convoy merely plodded on. On the second day our ship received a bomb through the Forecastle, it went through three decks and then ricocheted out of the ships side into the sea and exploded. The ship was able to carry on. There was one casualty, a poor lad who had obeyed orders and remained on the third deck, he was killed. There's a moral there somewhere or is there?

The ship carried on into Alexandria and we were then put into a camp at a place called Amriah which had been a reserved camp for the Battle of Alamien.

We had a miserable time in the dessert and then we went by train down alongside the Suez Canal to Port Toophick where we boarded a troop ship called the 'Scythia' which took us across the Red Sea to Bombay. We eventually arrived at a place called 'Kedgaon', it was nothing but sand and rocks and the nearest civilisation was at 'Poona' which was at least half a day's travel. Somehow the tents had been put up and we had to settle in and get acclimatised. We had football matches and of course the usual Army style route marches.

We had a boxing team and one of the star men was Sergeant 'Happy' Jackson, who could go on a bit. There was also a man who's prowess was wrestling he was Bob 'Mauler' Mewett. It was arranged that the good boxer should fight the good wrestler. Much was made of this contest and of course bets were made. It's enough to say that the wrestler won!

Another incident took place involving me and my section in 3 Troop. We had to attack a position by advancing under the cover of our three inch mortars, the idea was that the mortar bombs would keep the enemies heads down whilst we got to them. My friend Harry Winch professes to have been the Corporal in charge of the mortars concerned, I know I was Sergeant in the section with a Lt. called Turpin. We heard the command for the mortars to fire and we started to move forward when to our horror the first bomb fell amongst us. Of course we threw ourselves down as two other bombs dropped around us. The Lt. was hit in the stomach and one of my lads was hit in the thigh. Apparently the bombs were made in India and the flights sabotaged to make them drop short. I have a comrade who jokingly moans that three bombs only hurt two men.

Lt. Turpin was sent home for treatment, the lad who was not seriously hurt was treated in India and returned to us in short order. We then moved on to a place called 'Belguam', it was for jungle training as the place was a peacetime big game area.

We had to live in defensive boxes in slit trenches, just as we would later in real action. There was no N.A.A.F.I in India, comforts for the troops were provided by native businessmen called 'Contractors'. These men had served the British Army in India since the days of the East India Coy and knew how to do it. There was a canteen set up in one of the areas and on our free time of course we patronised this and as time went on paths were formed from our training areas to the canteen. One night I was returning to our base together with my mates when we came across a large Python (Snake), lying apparently asleep (well it was motionless!). It stretched from one side of the path to the other and was about 12' long at least, you could see in the middle of its body, the outline of a small goat which it was now obviously digesting.

In accordance with the drill of the British Army we sent for the Orderly Officer and after a lot of discussion, during which the snake remained comatose, a big game expert was routed out. He was an official of the railway and he came and shot the snake but in such a manner as to preserve the skin to make shoes.

One or two further incidents occurred during our stay but we learned a lot and we were soon on our way once more. This time we went across to a place called 'Cocanada' which was situated on the Madras coast on the Equator. We were housed in straw huts and it was the hottest place on earth. Why we went there – God only knows for the unit arrived 100% fit and ready for anything but we soon became subjected to all the known and unknown disease there was, 'Heat Exhaustion', 'Prickly Heat', along with 'Malaria', 'Dingue Fever' and 'Berry Berry'. The M.O Captain Hodges was the busiest person ever. It was here that we learned of the Second Front and that hit us harder knowing that we had missed that, and the song "We are the D Day Dodgers" became the song most often heard.

After a period of practice assault beach landings with the Indian Navy, thankfully we were moved and went down India by train to the toe of the continent and passed over 'Ceylon', now Sri Lanka, to a place called 'Trincomalle' (or known to the services as 'China Bay'). There our sick recovered, well most of us, one poor lad died during our stay in Coconada, and one or two contracted dysentery and were sent home.

Trincomalle was a lovely little place and we soon got fighting fit and our training continued once again. We went back up India and arrived at a place called 'Tek-Nef', it was a stretch of abandoned 'Paddy' fields on which tents and straw bashers had been erected. It was on the Indian side of the NAF River, the other side was 'no-mans land' and was the so called Front.

By now it was 1944, and we were getting a little fed-up with no action when the boss – Mountbatten, said it was time he had a prisoner to interrogate and find out what the Japanese were up to. So, we moved across the NAF River and took up strong points on the Maungdau, Buthiduang Road and other points in the 'Arakhan' area. From there we began patrolling and making 'trouble'.

Not long after we moved up '3' Troop did a three day fighting patrol and we discovered the Japs position in 'Buthidaung' village. We returned to base and made plans for an all-out assault on the village and strongpoint. Mountbatten promised that the unit who got a prisoner would be awarded 2M.M.s and an M.C. (That's what we were told anyway).

The attack went in completely as planned, after an artillery barrage, I and my section went into the right of the village and the section led by my mate Jim Crow went in on the left. We went right through our side and saw nothing, only abandoned foxholes. We came out in to the open of the village and came under a little fire but Crowe's men fell onto a slit trench with two Japs, one was killed in the ensuing fight but one was captured. Whilst this little action was taking place our troop C.O. was taking cover with his batman under the banks of the Chaung (river) which passed outside the village.

We got the prisoner out and back to our base and what do you know, the C.O. got an M.C and Crow and Glover (the lads who fell on the trench) got and M.M and all three went on home leave to the UK and incidentally missed all the heavy action in which we became involved. Talk about easy come ……...

I understand that the other half of the Commando which were positioned to patrol on the other side of the road to us, did a lot of hard slogging but with not much luck.

After this period we returned to Tek-Naf, from where reccy's were carried out but nothing sensational, until we were briefed for an assault on 'Akyab'. Akyab was the second important port in Burma. During our very short stay there, was an Indian Army Anti-aircraft battery near to our position which open fired on a small twin engined flying boat which was preparing to alight, obviously on the open port water. It was one of ours of course, but they fired enthusiastically, encouraged by us. As it was almost down they hit a piece of the tail. The occupants got out alright and it was one of their high officers who were coming to inspect them, or so we were told afterwards.

We only stayed a few days and then we were briefed for an assault landing on the foot of a small peninsular called 'Myebon'.

Whereas we were taken to Akyab on board a small Canadian Minesweeper and then had to struggle into L.A.C.s this time we were given the luxury of Landing Ships. The plan was to assault the defended beach under cover of bombardments from the U.S Battleship Missourie and the other smaller ships and also aerial straffing and bombing from Hurri-bombers. No. 5 and 44 Commandos were to go in first, followed by 42 and us, who were to go through them and take on the main defences.

Robbie Burns in one of his poems said "The well laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglai". Well the shelling started and the bombing and smoke screens, so much so that I told my lads there would be nothing left to land on. The ships we were on had landing ladders down the sides so all we had to do was walk down into the water, or so we thought, but no-one had reckoned on the fact the sea was tidal and when we began to land it was receding. We were left with about four hundred yards of almost shoulder to waist high mangrove mud and water to get to the beach, this under fire.

As we loaded with extra ammo and also each man had to carry six 3" mortar bombs by hand, so with rucksacks, full arms and ammo, one was fully overloaded. Poor Harry Winch's mortar men had the base plates and tubes of course. We were following them and it was quite a struggle, I was following behind one lad who had the base plate on his back and as I looked I saw him slowly sinking under the weight. I somehow shouldered my own load and was able to lift the plate a bit, I don't know who he was, but he did say thanks and struggled on.

We did make it and we were ordered to attack a small island to the left of the main beach which was reported to have a small battery of field guns which were bothering the support ships. We dropped our heavy stuff and went there, where there were no guns or Japs in sight. So we advanced up the main land. Our route turned out to consist of a series of small hills, all were well entrenched by the enemy, so the advance became a system of 'Leapfrog' attacks. The lead troop would hit the hill and the second troop would take over.

We were attacking one hill when we were told to halt, as a troop of tanks were joining the fight. So of course, we had to watch out as sometimes it had been known for tanks to run over their own men! Well we took cover, and the first tank came up the hill, passed through us and promptly overturned and went crashing down the hill. The only casualty was the tank C.O who suffered a broken leg.

During this attack we lost a young lad, who was a signaller and Captain Cowap, who was wounded. After this the Commando went into all-round defence, and we, a section from 3 Troop were sent on 'Fighting Patrol'.

We advanced along a jungle track for some time without any bother from the enemy. I had two scouts out a short way in front of me when we came across three large deposits of blood leading off the track and into the undergrowth, which climbed to our left and uphill. I signalled the patrol to halt and informed the Officer Lt. Woodruff that I intended to try to follow the trail of blood. He agreed, and I set off up the hillside and into the undergrowth.

I reached the top of the hillside without incident, but found that the top of the hill had a long ridge with a well worn path along it. I did not come across the enemy but found a discarded wound dressing. I brought the rest of the patrol up and we began to follow the path. We reached a small clearing when an Army Spotter Plane, an 'Auster' began to shadow us. Of course we just waved at him but he carried on circling us, a sign that he was estimating our position and range and I knew that is he stopped circling and flew straight over our position he would direct fire. To my horror, he did straighten up and came over us. I shouted "Take cover" and sure enough the first shell landed, what was known as the ranging shot. I shouted at the Signaller to try and get through to our base, and also did the Officer, but we received a barrage. The b….y plane kept circling us, I suppose observing the strike. At this time amongst our issue we were given a yellow piece of cloth, triangular in shape, and this was to be used if we were ever in a position to require an airdrop of supplies etc. If we placed the triangles together we could point out where we wished the supplies to land (we hoped). Well we hastily dragged some of these out and pointed them at ourselves, fortunately we escaped injury.

We returned to the Commando position without further incident, I received no explanation for the shelling. I don't know if the Lt. did but we were just ordered to take up position in the defensive box for the rest of the night.

The following day we carried on the advance, but so far as our sector was concerned, the Japs seemed to have retired further up the Myebon peninsular. Our troop carried on from where we had been shelled by our own guns and occupied a small hill top which had been strongly entrenched by the enemy. We were then near to a small village called 'Kantha', which was near a 'Chuang' or river. One of our troops, I can't remember who' laid an ambush on this river and caught the Japs ferrying stuff by barges along the river to their mainland positions, which I learned later included Kangaw. They destroyed the convoy and I am reliably informed that on the Troop Officers wore Jap boots for a long time afterwards.

We headed back to the bottom of Myebon. We were then allowed the luxury of a few days rest and time to clean up a bit. After this we were briefed for a landing and assault on the area of Kangaw. This village and area sat on the only metalled road used by the Japs to withdraw from the Arrakan, so obviously it was very important to them, in fact it was their lifeline.

The area was well into their land and the plan was for the Brigade to land and form a bridgehead for two Army divisions to get ashore and pass through us and cut the road. The area to be attacked from the landing site was governed in a way by three or possibly four hills. In the usual army way these were named, 'Brighton', 'Millford' and 'Pinner'. Of these Brighton was the key point, it was also known as Hill 170. It was a long, sausage, type hill, only about 1,700 feet but jungle covered, as they all were.

About the 19th or 20th January 1945, we embarked on R.N.I.S Sloop Sumna, I think that was what she was called. She was like a small destroyer, crewed by the Indian Navy. We all crowded on board, on the deck, and we sailed out and into the Bay of Bengal, into a stretch of water which one of the crew told me was called 'Hunters Deep'. Whilst we were on the way, the crew were really great, they kept bringing round fresh brews of tea and whatever else they could think of to make us comfortable.

On the night of the 21st we arrived at Hunters Deep, and we transferred from the Sloop into the waiting Landing Craft. Leading inland from Hunters Deep, was a wildish river called 'Dhaing Bongh Chuang', the banks of this chuang were jungle covered with mangrove, rotten stinking mud and age-old vegetation.

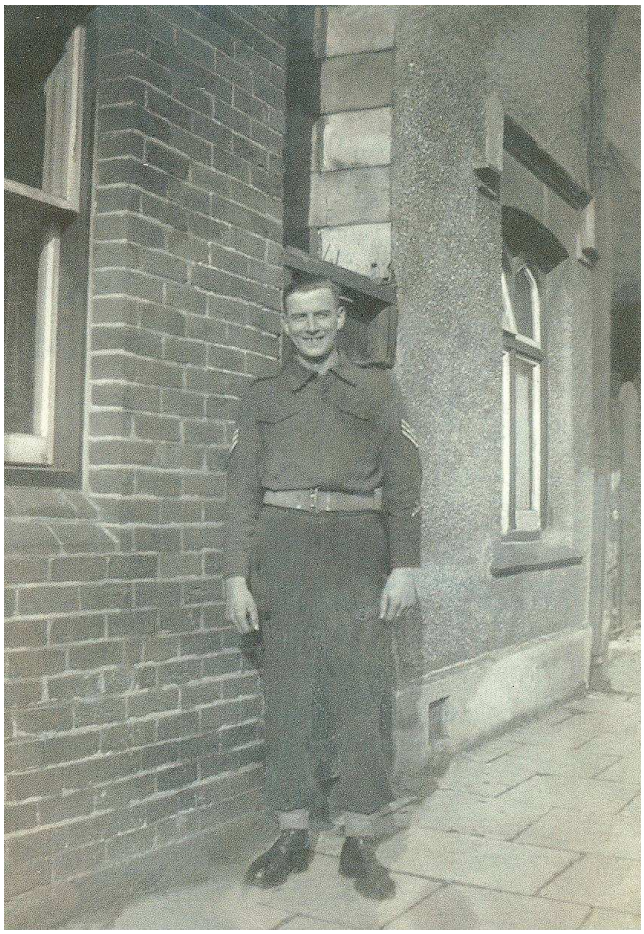
Broadly speaking the plan was to travel up 'Dhaing Bongh Chuang' to within striking distance of Hill 170 or 'Brighton'. After this it was always referred to as Hill 170. We, No. 1 Commando were to attack it. Between the hill and the jungle banks of the river was an area of abandoned 'Paddy Fields' or rice fields and just at the foot of one end of the hill was a largish pond of stagnant water. That's what we had been told, and it was of interest to me because 3 Troop and 6 Troop had to land first and lead the attack. And yes, you've guessed it, I and my section was to go first out of the cover of the jungle banks, across the 'Paddy Fields' and hit the Hill, with a section of 6 Troop on my left.

The trip along the chaung seemed to take ages, a winding, twisting route with the real danger of Japs realising what was happening and ambushing us. We were lucky until almost the point of landing when a shot hit the aerial mast of our craft and snapped it off. For some reason at that moment no other shots came our way.

Note: The last three pages were being typed when John left for holiday, sadly they were never completed.

Photos of John

John at Snow and Mountain Warfare Training – Braemar 1943



John on Leave

No 12 Commando - Names

As a part of our project I asked John to send me any names of his comrades in 12 Cdo that he could remember or were known to him.

I have listed below those comrades from No 12 Commando unfortunately we never got around to No 1 Commando comrades.

Pte. Harry Winch
Pte. Bob Mewett
Capt. R Henriques (Lt. Col)
Lt. P H Pinckney
Lt. The Hon. A Mildmay (Lord Mildmay of Flete)
Lt. Littlejohn MM
CSM Joe Nussey
Sgt. Victor John (Jack) Cox
Sgt. Mac Parr
Sgt. Alf Barker
Sgt. John Woodward
L/Sgt. P Robinson (S.A.S)
Cpl. Busty Herod (S.A.S.)
Cpl. Bob Watson
Sgt Knocker Wight
L/Cpl. Dicky Wright R.A.M.C.
L/Cpl. Jimmie Flint (S.A.S.)
L/Cpl. Horace Stokes (S.A.S)
L/Cpl. W.J.F. Ferguson - St. Nazaire
L/Cpl. Jumbo Reeves - St. Nazaire

Frank Ellis
Ken Darlington MM
Ted Love
Eric Gott
Harry Gorfield
Ikey Greenfield
E G Forster
E Ellwood
Tommy Gould
Flash Fowler
Roger Barry
F Barlow
J Crabtree
Paddy Worthington
D Wilson
J Deeds
J Stott
C Hay
R Bostock

Footnote written by John Huntington to names list.

***Lt. P H Pinckney** took command of 'E' Troop as Capt. He was the finest officer gentleman and leader I have ever come across during my lifetime. He once refused to be decorated unless every member of the troop on that certain operation received the same medal. Needless to say his request was turned down. Capt. Pinckney never received his medal. He was killed (murdered) on an SAS operation in Bologna in Northern Italy in 1944.*

***Sgt. Jack Cox** was captured on an operation in Norway and executed by the Germans in Sachsenhausen camp.*