

# Sergeant Thomas Daly

No.12 Commando and Holding Operational Commando.

Collection courtesy of his son Richard.



## Service in the Commandos

21 April 1941 to 15 April 1946

Tom was born in 1913 in Darlington, the 5th of six children of a master plumber (also called Thomas Daly) and his wife, Mary Catherine. As the second eldest son, he was sent away to a Roman Catholic seminary to train for the priesthood, but he decided this wasn't for him, and started working in the law instead.

He served 5 years as an articled clerk and qualified as a solicitor in 1938. He joined the forces around the time war broke out. I remember him telling me that the soldiers he was with were lined up and told that a new unit had been formed, and was looking for volunteers. Dad was aware of the soldiers' rule "Never volunteer", but thought it had to be better than where he was, so put his hand up. Hence becoming a commando.

He recalled training in Snowdonia and Scotland, and I think a raid on the French coast; but mainly because of his background he was given administrative work, in particular for Lord Sysonby; and he worked with a corporal called Fred Hunt (who always sent an Association Christmas card, and who wrote to me after Dad's death – see the enclosures). He would put proposals in to Lord Sysonby, who would return them, endorsed "I concur. Sysonby". This became quite a saying for my Dad, to the end of his life!

He was demobbed in 1946, and went to work in a law firm in Doncaster, where he met my mother at a New Year's Eve dance. They married in May 1949, and I was born in 1957, they having moved to Darlington shortly before this. He treasured his green beret, though it did look increasingly disreputable down the years. His Association wall plaque is still pristine, though.

Dad was a gentleman, and indeed a gentle man – most unlike the popular image of a commando, but I believe he was quietly proud of his service. I well remember visiting the memorial at Spean Bridge with him, and his sadness at the death of many comrades in the war. He died in July 2002.

Written by his son Richard Daly.

Holding Operational Commando  
Wrexham

16th Feb. 1946.

To Whom it may concern,

Sgt Daly has served in Commando for four years and during the last three years I have been in close contact with him, and in a position to study his character under the varying conditions of army service.

I have found him at all times, cheerful, willing and trustworthy, a man who did not try to avoid responsibility and upon whom a heavy burden of work could be placed with the certainty that the work would be efficiently and quickly done.

During his army service he has been employed in a responsible administrative capacity, and he made the welfare of the men his first concern.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the ability he has shown in the service will be equally displayed

in civil life and recommend him without reserve as a man of considerable promise.

G. B. Tait Capt.

This is to Certify that

(634) J. Daly is  
a Life Member of the Old Comrades Association of the Special Service Brigade.

Date 19.8.43

Hon. Sec.

THE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION



With the Compliments of the  
General Secretary

190, HAMMERSMITH ROAD,  
LONDON, W6 7DL.

Telephone No.  
081 - 746 3491



## Letter from Fred Hunt Holding Operational Commando

16th December 2002.

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter of last week, when I saw your signature as I opened the letter, I feared it was bad news.

I am so very sorry to hear that Tom had passed away, and I thank you very much for letting me share your last few weeks together. Although your Dad and I were "friends" for all off 60 years, our time together was actually only from April 1943 to July 1946, which now seems such a short space of time. Nevertheless during those 3 years we were very good friends, even though he rose to the exulted rank of Sgt and I was a mere Corporal. When we eventually moved to Wrexham late in 1943, I eventually met and married a local girl, and in 1945 we had a daughter. When the time came for Pat to be christened, my wife and I would have loved to have your Dad as her godfather, that shows how close we are, and your Dad actually approached a priest to see if he could fulfill this role, but due the fact that we were not RC's this never took place. Anyway your Dad was always welcome at our home ( I lived outside the barracks after we were married) and we had many meals and evenings together. I remember sometimes your Dad would arrive with a large tin of pork meat, a present from the Sgt Mess, which my wife would later make into a large pork pie, in the days of strict rationing this was quite something.

Some years latter of course your Dad met Kathleen and after they were married it as your Mum and I who wrote the Xmas cards, and exchanged reports on our various holidays that year during the Summer months. I seem to rember that France was a great favourite during those years, which of course you knew all about. Although I never met your Mum, through our correspondence she came over as a lovely lady, and I always thought of her as a friend, and I was quite upset when she died.

So now you are on your own, but of course you may have relatives and friends to spend Xmas, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the year, and wish you a Happy and proe perous New Year, and good health for the future. Thanks once again for taking the trouble to give me the news, even though it was so sad to receive.

Yours , most sincerely,

*Fred Hunt*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> letter from Fred Hunt

with some memories of their time in the Commandos

9th January 2003,

Dear Richard,

I cannot thank you enough to receive your letter about your Dad, and the eulogy which you gave at his funeral. I was much moved that you included me in the message, even if anonymously, thank you once again.

You are quite correct when you say it isn't until you lose someone that you realise how little you know of their earlier life. My Dad, was a regular soldier and served 4 years in the trenches 1914 - 1918 and I know very little of the conditions under which he served. He won the DCM, quite a high ranked medal but it was only after his death, that I read the citation and learnt how he won the medal.

You asked me to try and remember details of your Dad's career in the commando's, well I have stretched the old brain cells and I hope the following throws some new light on what you already know.

Early in the Spring of 1943, together with another volunteer, I arrived at Dorchester Station from Aldershot, and somehow eventually arrived at a large house in Maiden Castle Road, I had arrived at the HQ of No. 12 Commando. I was then sent to my civilian billet with a Mr. Bouvier at Frome Terrace, Dorchester who was a butcher so, I eat quite well for a short time. The next day I presented myself in the Orderly Room, run by RQMS Ray (Ruby) Ayres and his second in command a certain Sgt T. Daly. At the end of Maiden Castle Road was a Roman fortification around which we had to run most days, before tossing a few tree trunks about, which was our PT. I hadn't been at Dorchester many days before I learnt that we were going to move to Scotland for mountain warfare training, and before I knew where I was I was on Dorchester railway station along with the rest of the lads. The Adjutant was marching in front of us with a folder under his arm, marked "Top Secret, Move to Braemar" (a bit like Dad's Army). The journey took about 36 hours, and lucky for me we stopped at Leicester to refuel the engine, and I was able to ring my Dad on the phone at work, to tell him I was OK and moving up North. We had to "brew up" and cook inside the carriages on little "Tommy Cookers", I think there was more smoke coming out of the carriages than out of the funnel. Eventually we arrived at Ballater, the nearest station to Braemar, and the Pyffe Arms Hotel. The Officers were in the Hotel but we lesser ranks were in huts in the grounds. The Orderly Room was in a large lounge at the front of the Hotel, and one of my jobs was chopping up small trees to keep the fire going in the office. We, the HQ staff did not move far from the hotel, but the troops were on the mountains throughout the week and only came into the Hotel at weekends. We soon made friends with the local young boys and used to play them at football on the famous Braemar Highland Games site. At weekend we sometimes ran a dance in the village, and it seemed heaven for the girls from miles around to suddenly have about 200 young men arrive from what to them was 'outer space'. After about 4 weeks the CO, The Lord Sysonby DSO, TD thought the lads needed a break, so we all boarded 3 tonners and set off for Aberdeen, a trip of some 60 miles. We were billeted in the YMCA for the weekend, and we had a brilliant weekend as far as I can remember. Some years later I took my wife and daughter on holiday to Aberdeen (it was still standing) and we went to Braemar, and I took tea in the old Orderly Room, it was quite a moment. Eventually our time was up and we had to return to Dorchester (We had not invaded Norway, as some bright comrade kept telling us). Whilst the main body of No. 12 Commando was in Dorchester, "B Troop" were in the Shetland doing raids on Norway and another troop were in Dover doing little jobs in France and the Channel Islands. I don't know whether your Dad told you this story but on one of the raids on the Channel Island, a certain Capt Pickney and his men took some German prisoners, and that's all.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> letter from Fred Hunt (page 2)

with some memories of their time in the Commandos

Although this seems quite a reasonable thing to do, it was apparently contrary to Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners, and when Hitler eventually heard about it, he was furious and issued a proclamation that any Commando soldiers captured in raids on the Continent should be shot by firing squad. This unfortunately happened to a few Commandos later on.

We were not long at Dorchester, before we entrained for Weston Super Mare, but not much happened there apart from the mundane life in the Army. I seem to remember we ran a dance at the winter Gardens entitled "Welcome to the Commandos" and the next week we left for Bognor Regis.

At Bognor life was much the same, our HQ was in a large Hotel opposite the pier, and although the South Coast was prohibited to the civil population of the rest of the UK, we troops were allowed to have the beaches to ourselves. It was whilst at Bognor that we heard the bad news that our Commando was to be disbanded. Our CO was given a staff job in Washington DC (who could blame him) and the rest of us were re-allocated into different Commandos. It was the luck of the draw, your Dad and I could have finished up dead on the 6th of June 1944, instead we were tucked up nicely in Wrexham when the news of the invasion was announced.

We went to Wrexham in October 1943 and stayed for over 3 years. I met my wife, Aurwen, married and we had our lovely daughter, Pat, who now lives in Nth London with her husband and 2 children, Deborah and Adrian, both in their 20s. After I was married, I was allowed to live at my wife's home, over the Barrack field wall, and it was there that we used to invite your Dad for a meal every now and then, and of course we met up in Wrexham in the evenings. When the War finally finished in Europe in May 1945, it soon became my job to de-mob all the rest of the Army personnel as they became due for demob, and eventually the Army Commando Group at Wrexham, was commanded by one Sgt. T. Daly, Cpl Hunt and 2 OR's. The Commando side of the Military was to be taken over by the Royal Marines, who had never quite forgiven the Army for pinching their role, and we 4 "Pongos" joined up with the Royal Marines in Wrexham Barracks and were transported to a place in Nth Wales called Llyngwil, just south of Barmouth, where we used to spend our evening, either at the "New White Cinema" a tin shack or the local hostelry. Eventually we got rid of the 2 ORs back to their parent Regiments, your Dad was demobbed about June 1946. Because he was that much older than me he was demobbed a month before, so that left me. I somehow got posted to Sth Wales District HQ at Abergavenny. I remember I got the job of collecting an absentee from Barlinney Gaol in Glasgow and taking him to Hereford, had a fortnights leave and was eventually demobbed at Oldham in Lancs, and that is the end of the story.

I hope I have filled in a few gaps in the life of Sgt. T. Daly and that I have not bored you too much.

Thank you, Richard, for your letters, it was nice to sit down and recollect my times with Tom Daly. He used to say that really he was Thomas Sebastian O'Daly but he had changed his name by deed poll, that was your Dad, wasn't it. God Bless.

Yours most sincerely,

*Fred Hunt*





Tom Daly and his son Richard.

A few days later Tom passed away.

RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE				Army Form X 202/A
Army No. <u>231037</u>	Present Rank <u>W/sgt</u>			
Surname (Block Letters) <u>DALY</u>				
Christian Name/s <u>Thomas</u>				
Unit, Regt. or Corps <u>RASC</u>				
Date of: *Last enlistment <u>7 11 48</u>				
* Calling up for military service. * Strike out whichever is inapplicable.				
(a) Trade on enlistment <u>Solicitor</u>	(c) Service Trade <u>Class Class III B (RASC)</u>			
(b) Trade courses and trade tests passed <u>Class Class III B (RASC)</u>	(d) Any other qualification for civilian employment			
Military Conduct: <u>Exemplary</u>				
Testimonial: <u>Sgt Daly has served with this unit for two years. During this time he has carried out his extremely responsible and difficult job as the Record Officer and he is very conscientious, hard-working and reliable, remaining calm and efficient at all times. I am glad to recommend him for any position of responsibility and trust.</u>				
Place <u>LONDON</u>	Date <u>10a April 1948</u>	Unit Overseas or U.K. Stamp		
Officer's Signature <u>C. H. C. Campbell</u>		Signature of Soldier <u>T. Daly</u>		
* Army Education Record (including particulars under (a), (b), (c) and (d) below).— This Section will not be filled in until the receipt of further War Office Instructions.				
(a) Type of course	(b) Length	(c) Total hours of instruction	(d) Record of achievement	
(i)*				
(ii)*				
(iii)*				
(iv)*				
* Instructors will insert the letter "I" here to indicate that in their area the record refers to courses in which they have acted as Instructors.				
Signature of Unit Education Officer				
POSTING OF SOLDIER ON TERMINATION OF RELEASE LEAVE 1. A regular soldier with Reserve service to complete will be transferred to the Royal Army Reserve, and will receive Reserve pay until his period of Reserve service has been completed. If on that date his Emergency call exists, he will cease to draw Reserve pay, and will then be transferred to Army Reserve Class "X" (unpaid). 2. A regular soldier who has completed his Colour and Reserve service commitment will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "X" (unpaid). 3. All other soldiers will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "X" or Class "Z" (unpaid). SPECIAL NOTE—Army Reserve soldiers are liable to recall to the colours, if necessary, under the provisions of the Emergency. KNOW: (1) Further details of service and of medals to which entitled may be had on application to C of R, accompanied by the applicant's A.S.64, Part I. (2) If this certificate is lost or mislaid, no duplicate can be obtained. (3) Any alterations of the particulars given in this certificate may render the Soldier liable to Prosecution under the Soldiers' Pay and Pensions Act, 1944.				
THE ABOVE-NAMED MAN PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY DISPENSAL UNIT STAMP OPPOSITE.				
N.B.—A certificate showing the date of transfer to the appropriate Army Reserve (A.R. X 202/B) will be issued by the Officer in Charge of the Record Office.				
MANCHESTER JOINT FOOD OFFICE 81 EVERETT STREET 15 APR 1948				

## Two poems written by Tom Daly

### **Dawn (Before Embarkation)**

Sweet child of night! Oh lovely dawn,  
    Upon the open arms of light  
        So gently borne,  
    So soon to die beneath the might  
        Of day,  
Thy touch is hope, thy gift eternal morn.

A trumpet call, an angel prayer,  
    Upon the lonely mountains falls  
        And lingers there  
In echoes, whispered from the halls  
        Of death.  
    Be free my soul!  
    Let heaven fill the air!

### **In Thankfulness (and in Memory of a Blind Soldier)**

At last I see  
    Life's wonderful reality.  
Beyond the vanity of dreams I've passed,  
    To certain rapture have I come  
        At last.  
    I live in an uplifted land  
    And hold the future in my hand.

What king can claim  
My untold treasure, what my name,  
Or what vast empire can enclose  
    My life?  
    I go in freedom, undismayed  
        By strife  
That shadows day and burns the night;  
    Misfortune cannot steal my sight.





Thomas Daly

Born 18-07-1913.

Died 09-07-2002.