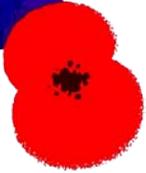




# The Bulldog Bulletin



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

President: Priya Guha British Consul General



HMS Anson

The Newsletter of The Royal British Legion  
San Francisco, California Branch

June, 2012



HMS Albion



HMS Biter



HMS Argyll



HMS Bristol

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## RBL Chairman's June report,



For those members who are finding it difficult receiving the Legion Magazine, I thought it may be a useful link to access it.



<http://www.legion-magazine.co.uk/>



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**The next meeting** will be Tuesday June 19<sup>th</sup>. at the Veteran's War Memorial Building, Van Ness Ave, San Francisco. At 6:00 p.m. Hope to see you all there.

In regards to the Veterans Administration Building and its closure, for repairs and updates, we are hoping that they will assign us a new place where to have our monthly meetings. However this is all up in the air. I will let you know as soon as we get any more information.

They have moved the date that we have to be out of the building to July 2013.



## Sir David Stirling DSO, OBE

Stirling was born at his family's ancestral home, Keir House in the parish of Lecropt in Perthshire (near Stirling). He was the son of Brigadier General Archibald Stirling, of Keir and Margaret Fraser, daughter of Simon Fraser, the Lord Lovat, (a descendant of Charles II, King of Scots). His cousin was Simon Fraser, 15th Lord Lovat, and his grandparents were Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, 9th Baronet and Lady Anna Maria Leslie-Melville. He was educated at Ampleforth College and Trinity College, Cambridge. A tall and athletic figure (he was 6 feet 6 inches (1.98 m) tall), he was training to climb Mount Everest when World War II broke out.

### World War II and the founding of the SAS

Stirling was commissioned into the Scots Guards from Ampleforth College Contingent Officer Training Corps on 24 July 1937.<sup>[2]</sup> In June 1940 he volunteered for the new No. 8 Commando under Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Laycock which became part of Force Z (later named "Layforce"). After Layforce (and No.8 Commando) were disbanded on 1 August 1941, Stirling remained convinced that due to the mechanised nature of war a small team of highly trained soldiers with the advantage of surprise could exact greater damage to the enemy's ability to fight than an entire platoon.



Aware that taking his idea up through the chain of command was unlikely to work, Stirling decided to go straight to the top. On crutches following a parachuting accident, he sneaked into Middle East headquarters in Cairo (under, through or over a fence but spotted by guards) in an effort to see Commander-in-Chief General Claude Auchinleck.<sup>[3]</sup> He ran into one office, only to come face-to-face with an officer he had previously fallen out with. Retreating rapidly to shouts of 'Guards,Guards', he dodged into an another office, Stirling came face to face with Deputy Commander Middle East General Ritchie. Stirling explained his plan to Ritchie, the latter immediately convincing Auchinleck (in the office next door) to allow Stirling to form a new Special Forces unit. The unit was given the deliberately misleading name "L Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade" to reinforce an existing deception of a parachute brigade existing in North Africa.

Short of equipment at the outset when they set up base at Kibrit Air Base, particularly tents and related gear, the first operation of the new SAS was to relieve a well-equipped New Zealand unit of small tents, a large tent and contents including a bar and a piano. A truck and a series of bluffs managed to convince curious onlookers and the New Zealand unit that all was well.

After a brief period of training, an initial attempt at attacking a German airfield by parachute landing in support of Operation Crusader was disastrous. 42 of his 61 officers and men were killed, wounded or captured far from the target after being blown off course or landing in the wrong area, during one of the biggest storms for thirty years. Escaping only with the help of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) who were designated to pick up the unit after the attack, Stirling agreed that approaching by land under the cover of night would be safer and more effective than parachuting. As quickly as possible he organised raids on ports using this simple method, often bluffing through checkpoints at night using the language skills of some of his soldiers. Under his leadership, the Lewes bomb was invented by Jock Lewes, the first hand-held dual explosive and incendiary device. American jeeps, which were able to deal with the harsh desert terrain better than other transport, were cut down, adapted and fitted with obsolete RAF machine guns. He also pioneered the use of small groups to escape detection. Stirling often led from the front, his SAS units driving through enemy airfields to shoot up aircraft and crew, replacing the early operational strategy of attaching bombs to enemy aircraft on foot. These hit-and-run operations eventually proved Stirling's undoing; he was captured by the Germans in January 1943. Although he escaped, he was subsequently re-captured by the Italians, who took great delight in the embarrassment this

caused to their German allies. A further four escape attempts were made, before Stirling was finally sent to [Colditz Castle](#), where he remained for the rest of the war. After his capture his brother Bill Stirling and [Blair 'Paddy' Mayne](#) took command of the SAS.

In North Africa, in the fifteen months before Stirling's capture, the SAS had destroyed over 250 aircraft on the ground, dozens of supply dumps, wrecked railways and telecommunications, and had put hundreds of enemy vehicles out of action. [Montgomery of Alamein](#) described Stirling as 'mad, quite mad' but admitted that men like Stirling were needed in time of war.

According to John Aspinal, Stirling had the reputation of having personally strangled 41 men.

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### The Bathtub Test.

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, "How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an Care Home ?"

"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," I said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said. "A normal person would pull the plug."

Do you want a bed near the window?"

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### A scouser walked into the local job centre,

marched straight up to the Counter and said 'Hi, I'm looking for a job'.

The man behind the counter replied 'Your timing is amazing.

We've just got one in from a very wealthy man who wants a chauffeur/bodyguard for his nymphomaniac twin daughters. You'll have to drive around in a big black Mercedes and wear the uniform provided.

The hours are a bit long but the meals are provided. You also have to escort the young ladies on their Overseas holidays. The Salary package is £200,000 a year'.

The Scouser said 'You're having me on!'

The man behind the counter said 'Well you started it!' \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question** What's the most confusing day in Liverpool?

**Answer** Father's day

**Question** How do people know Jesus wasn't born in Liverpool ?

**Answer** You try finding 3 wise men and a virgin there!

## P.O.W. ESCAPE ATTEMPT FROM BRITAIN

During the war, no German prisoner of war escaped from Britain. Many believe that Franz von Werra was the most notable escapee but von Werra made his escape in Canada, where he was sent as a POW. (In Canada there were twenty-one Prisoner-Of-War camps set up during World War II.)

The most audacious attempt was made by Lt. Heinz Schnabel and Oblt. Harry Wappler on November 24, 1941. The two Luftwaffe officers were prisoners in Camp No.15 near Penrith, Northumbria (formally the Shap Wells Hotel). Forging papers that identified them as two Dutch officers serving in the RAF, they made their way to the RAF airfield at Kingstown near Carlisle. Without difficulty they entered the station and with the help of a ground mechanic started the engine of a Miles Magister, of which there were fifty parked around the airfield. Taking off, they headed for the sea and Holland, a distance of some 365 miles. Over the North Sea they realized they could not make it (the maximum range of a Magister was 367 miles on full tanks). Rather reluctantly they decided to turn back and landed in a field about five miles north of Great Yarmouth. Back at Camp No. 15 again, the two daring escapees were sentenced to 28 days solitary confinement.

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## THE FALL OF HONG KONG

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1941, the blackest Christmas in the history of the British Empire, the territory and island city of Hong Kong fell to the Imperial Forces of Japan. This was the first British colony to fall since 1791. After seventeen days of vicious fighting against hopeless odds, the defenders were forced to surrender. These brave fighting men included the British 1st Middlesex Regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scots, two Indian infantry battalions and a small detachment of Royal Marines, two Canadian battalions, the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles of Canada, all helped by a Chinese Regiment. Known as Force "C", it consisted of 1,975 officers and men. British residents were conscripted into what was called the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. In all, the defenders numbered around 10,000 and faced the Japanese combat troops of Major-General Ito Fakeo which numbered about 60,000. After the fighting, those still alive ended their sojourn in Hong Kong as prisoners-of-war and for the next three years and eight months endured the most primitive conditions in Japanese camps where many died of starvation and disease. The worst tragedy being the 843 prisoners who drowned or were shot during the sinking of the Lisbon Maru by the American submarine '*Grouper*'. The ship was taking prisoners to mainland Japan when attacked, the captain not knowing who or what was on board.

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## UNDERWATER GIANTS

In 1942, Japan commenced building the world's biggest submarines. The 400 foot long I-400 series had a displacement of 3,530 tons and were intended to destroy the Pacific exit of the Panama Canal. They could cruise 37,500 miles and dive to a depth of 325 feet. Each of the I-400s could carry three specially designed seaplane bombers which were dismantled and stored in a watertight hanger inside the submarine. Only three were completed before the end of the Pacific war and survived the massive American bombing of Japan's naval bases. All three were captured and destroyed by the Americans in April, 1946.

## BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

By the middle of 1943 approximately 90,000 British and Allied soldiers were incarcerated in POW camps throughout Italy. When the Allies invaded the south of Italy, members of the Italian underground took this opportunity to arrest the fascist dictator, Mussolini (Italy's King Victor Emmanuel had dismissed Mussolini on July 25, 1943) whom they found living at the Hotel Albergo-Rifugio on the Gran Sasso mountain.

A new government, headed by Marshall Badoglio was formed and immediately sued for peace with the Allies. In POW camps all over Italy cries of 'finito, finito, viva Badoglio' could be heard loud and clear. Prisoners now prepared to await their imminent release. On September 12, SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny and his soldiers rescued Mussolini (Operation Eiche) from his mountain retreat on the Abruzzi Apennines where he was imprisoned and by the end of the month had re-established his authority in Northern Italy as Hitler's puppet ruler. Allied authorities ordered all prisoners to 'stay put' for the time being. A few days later the POWs awoke to find German soldiers everywhere. Marched to various train stations they were soon on their way to Germany to undergo a further eighteen months, in some cases under appalling conditions in POW camps and in concentration camps in Germany and Poland. There can be few examples of utter disappointment on such a massive scale as that of the Allied POWs in Italy.



A British aircraft carrying submarine similar to the Japanese I-400 series submarines, the largest in the world.

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## THE BARI DISASTER

The port of Bari, on Italy's east coast, suffered the most devastating air raid of the war since Pearl Harbor. On December 2, 1943, about thirty German JU-88s blasted the harbour to smithereens and in the process sank seventeen ships and damaged six others.

About thirty ships were in the harbour waiting to unload war supplies.

One American merchant ship, the SS John Harvey, whose cargo included 2,000 M47-A1 mustard gas bombs, (intended for retaliatory use in case the enemy started using it) exploded, killing all 74 persons on board. A total of 628 military personnel were hospitalized in the 98th British General Hospital and the 3rd New Zealand Hospital.

Within a month, sixty-nine patients had died from the effects of the gas. In the town of Bari (pop.200,000) hundreds of civilians became casualties but the number of deaths is not known for certain (some sources put the death toll at around 1,000) The harbour was closed for a full three weeks after the bombing.

## Captain Charles Upham VC & Bar

Only three men have ever won double VCs, and the other two were medical officers: Col A Martin-Leake, who received the decoration in the Boer War and the First World War; and Capt N G Chavasse, who was killed in France in 1917. Chavasse's family was related to Upham's.

For all his remarkable exploits on the battlefield, Upham was a shy and modest man, embarrassed when asked about the actions he had been decorated for. "The military honours bestowed on me," he said, "are the property of the men of my unit."

In a television interview in 1983 he said he would have been happier not to have been awarded a VC at all, as it made people expect too much of him. "I don't want to be treated differently from any other bastard," he insisted.



When King George VI was conferring Upham's second VC he asked Maj-Gen Sir Howard Kippenberger, his commanding officer: "Does he deserve it?"

"In my respectful opinion, Sir," replied Kippenberger, "Upham won this VC several times over."

A great-great nephew of William Hazlitt, and the son of a British lawyer who practised in New Zealand, Charles Hazlitt Upham was born in Christchurch on Sept 21 1908.

Upham was educated at the Waihi Preparatory School, Christ's College and Canterbury Agricultural College, which he represented at rugby and rowing.

He then spent six years as a farm manager, musterer and shepherd, before becoming a government valuer in 1937.

In 1939 he volunteered for the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force as a private in the 20th Battalion and became a sergeant in the first echelon advance party. Commissioned in 1940, he went on to serve in Greece, Crete and the Western Desert.

Upham won his first VC on Crete in May 1941, commanding a platoon in the battle for Maleme airfield. During the course of an advance of 3,000 yards his platoon was held up three times. Carrying a bag of grenades (his favourite weapon), Upham first attacked a German machine-gun nest, killing eight paratroopers, then destroyed another which had been set up in a house. Finally he crawled to within 15 yards of a Bofors anti-aircraft gun before knocking it out.

When the advance had been completed he helped carry a wounded man to safety in full view of the enemy, and then ran half a mile under fire to save a company from being cut off. Two Germans who tried to stop him were killed.

The next day Upham was wounded in the shoulder by a mortar burst and hit in the foot by a bullet. Undeterred, he continued fighting and, with his arm in a sling, hobbled about in the open to draw enemy fire and enable their gun positions to be spotted.

With his unwounded arm he propped his rifle in the fork of a tree and killed two approaching Germans; the second was so close that he fell on the muzzle of Upham's rifle. During the retreat from Crete, Upham succumbed to dysentery and could not eat properly. The effect of this and his wounds made him look like a walking skeleton, his commanding officer noted. Nevertheless he found the strength to climb the side of a 600 ft deep ravine and use a Bren gun on a group of advancing Germans.

At a range of 500 yards he killed 22 out of 50. His subsequent VC citation recorded that he had "performed a series of remarkable exploits, showing outstanding leadership, tactical skill and utter indifference to danger". Even under the hottest fire, Upham never wore a steel helmet, explaining that he could never find one to fit him.

His second VC was earned on July 15 1942, when the New Zealanders were concluding a desperate defence of the Ruweisat ridge in the 1st Battle of Alamein. Upham ran forward through a position swept by machine-gun fire and lobbed grenades into a truck full of German soldiers.

When it became urgently necessary to take information to advance units which had become separated, Upham took a Jeep on which a captured German machine-gun was mounted and drove it through the enemy position.

At one point the vehicle became bogged down in the sand, so Upham coolly ordered some nearby Italian soldiers to push it free. Though they were somewhat surprised to be given an order by one of the enemy, Upham's expression left them in no doubt that he should be obeyed.

By now Upham had been wounded, but not badly enough to prevent him leading an attack on an enemy strong-point, all the occupants of which were then bayoneted. He was shot in the elbow, and his arm was broken. The New Zealanders were surrounded and outnumbered, but Upham carried on directing fire until he was wounded in the legs and could no longer walk. Taken prisoner, he proved such a difficult customer that in 1944 he was confined in Colditz Castle, where he remained for the rest of the war. His comments on Germans were always sulphurous.

For his actions at Ruweisat he was awarded a Bar to his VC. His citation noted that "his complete indifference to danger and his personal bravery have become a byword in the whole of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force".

After his release from Colditz in 1945 Upham went to England and inquired about the whereabouts of one Mary ("Molly") McTamney, from Dunedin. Told that she was a Red Cross nurse in Germany, he was prepared, for her sake, to return to that detested country. In the event she came to England, where they were married in June 1945. Back in New Zealand, Upham resisted invitations to take up politics. In appreciation of his heroism the sum of £10,000 was raised to buy him a farm. He appreciated the tribute, but declined the money, which was used to endow the Charles Upham Scholarship Fund to send sons of ex-servicemen to university.

Fiercely determined to avoid all publicity, Upham at first refused to return to Britain for a victory parade in 1946, and only acceded at the request of New Zealand's Prime Minister.

Four years later he resisted even the Prime Minister's persuasion that he should go to Greece to attend the opening of a memorial for the Australians and New Zealanders who had died there – although he eventually went at Kippenberger's request.

In 1946, Upham bought a farm at Rafa Downs, some 100 miles north of Christchurch beneath the Kaikoura Mountains, where he had worked before the war. There he found the anonymity he desired.

In 1962, he was persuaded to denounce the British government's attempt to enter the Common Market: "Britain will gradually be pulled down and down," Upham admonished, "and the whole English way of life will be in danger." He reiterated the point in 1971: "Your politicians have made money their god, but what they are buying is disaster."

He added: "They'll cheat you yet, those Germans."

Upham and his wife had three daughters, including twins.