

AN APPRECIATION – BRYAN GREEN

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Now that I am being pulled, kicking and screaming, into the age group which exchanges symptoms rather than news, it gave me great pleasure to discover the Squadron's website, and even more to read the appreciation of my old friend Bryan Green. I may be one of those who knew him best; these musings will, I hope, round out the necessarily dry notice which appears on the website, and help to remind us of the man he really was.

I had tried to join the Squadron straight after Sandhurst and my Part I Course, but instead I was obliged to mark time for two rather dull years in 1, and then 3 Div. I finally made it, turning up in Aldershot rather unexpectedly just two days before embarking for Cyprus in August 1956 in the carrier *HMS Theseus*. I had actually been posted as RSO to (the then) 33rd Parachute Field Regiment RA, my second appointment as a gunner RSO; however, Dacres Beadon remained in post for a little while longer, and so I became Squadron Adjutant for my first few weeks in the Brigade - with SSM Ernie Summers keeping a very close eye on me, and Signalman Shufflebothom (known to all by a similar, but rather different nickname) making sure that I looked more or less respectable on parade.

My stay in SHQ was brief but memorable. Firstly, I managed to mislay the key to the Squadron safe on a payday, resulting in a panicked, high speed trip to the Workshops in Nicosia, and a very large bar bill. Secondly, I was summoned by the Brigade Major early one morning to be warned off a certain Queen's Army Schoolmistress who, as it turned out, was upstairs with the Brigadier, the unique and justly celebrated Tubby Butler... A promising start to any junior officer's airborne career, you may feel. There was an unexpected sequel to this episode when, ten years later, I arrived at the Staff College in Camberley where Tubby – by now a major-general - was the Commandant. He welcomed me like a long-lost son – but refused to believe that I had actually managed to get selected. I can understand that: he wasn't alone.

When I finally arrived in 33rd, my second (radio) sergeant left for various reasons after a week or so, and Bryan Green arrived from the Squadron on promotion to replace him. At that time I had 35 signallers present out of an establishment of 40; of these, 32 were cockneys, and with Bryan's arrival they had their jovial Pearly King. He quickly made his mark: he was the best athlete, the best telegraphist – and probably the best looking, although my wizened, gnome-like Glaswegian lineman Troop Sergeant would probably have had a word to say about that! It was a joyous time. What a marvellous bunch they were, and how impressed I was by the warmth of their welcome, their individual skills and professionalism – and their unique sense of fun. Everything worked properly first time (and all the time), the Troop hummed along, and for the first time I understood what an outstanding unit really could be. It was as different as chalk to cheese to anything I had experienced elsewhere in those dull, grey National Service days.

After some officially sponsored anti-EOKA rambles in North and West Cyprus, we finally went to war with Egypt. The Troop arrived in Port Said by LST the day after Tac Brigade HQ (which included both my own gunner CO, and that redoubtable airborne signaller Maurice Flynn) and 3 PARA had jumped on Gamil Airfield. The gunner RHQ was initially set up

among piles of wrecked chalets on the seafront, and a couple of days later we all ended up in El Cap, a Canal station some 30 miles to the South, where the whole operation became static after the ceasefire.

My own memories of the period are a bit disconnected – but then, it was a long time ago. There was, firstly, the last living duck in the Canal Zone, chased, captured, plucked and cooked in an earth oven by Bryan Green (did you know that he was a sensational field cook, among his other talents?); secondly, a lung-busting Regimental inter-Troop cross-country competition which started with swimming across the Suez Canal (twice, there and back) followed by a six mile run through the mud on the Egyptian side, in which my E Troop (including Bryan) came a very respectable third; thirdly, the apprehensive looks of the pale, very young-looking Danish UN soldiers who eventually relieved us; and finally, the Scot serving as a medical Corporal in the RAP of the 1er REP (the First Foreign Legion Parachute Regiment) across the Canal from us at El Cap, who turned out to be on the run from his second, third (and counting) wives in sunny Dundee. Happy days...

Back in the UK I was dragged, unwillingly, back to Catterick for my Part II Course in September 1957, and at the same time Bryan and all the other signallers of my beloved E Troop returned to the Squadron as 33rd transformed itself into 7 Para RHA. (In passing, the Airborne Gunners considered it a significant comedown to become mere RHA, and I'm not sure that they weren't right). Curiously, it was during this Course that I next met Bryan. A group of us were in Gloucester at 14 Signal Regiment visiting COMCAN, and who should sweep me away to a nearby pub but Bryan, who turned out to be the radio sergeant of 602 Troop (Special Communications) who were based in the same barracks following their return from Kenya. As a superlative telegraphist, senior NCO and experienced airborne soldier he was in his element in the sensitive underworld of Special Forces, and he thoroughly deserved his BEM. I only wish that I had had someone of his calibre when I commanded the same unit from 1964-1965, but by then of course he had moved on.

After Staff College and a General Staff job in the old Southern Command in Hounslow, I had hoped very much to be selected to command 216, but the dates did not work out. Instead I was lucky enough to be given my first ever taste of BAOR, commanding 4 Guards Armoured Brigade HQ and Signal Squadron – and the only man there that I knew on my arrival (apart from two Guards commissioned ex-warrant officers, who in my Sandhurst days had been the RSM of Old College and the CSM of Dettingen Company), was none other than an old friend, now WO1 (RSM) Bryan Green. I benefited immensely from his wise (and accurate) assessments of our Royal Signals officers and NCOs; indeed, his advice led directly to three out of my four young officers being put back sharpish on the straight and narrow, and the Yeomen becoming operational (and very happy) Yeoman Troop Staff-Sergeants instead of just shuffling classified documents in their Training Office. The Squadron started ticking over as a really good unit should, and Bryan eventually handed over his excellent Sergeants Mess (and indeed the Squadron) to another old airborne friend (Harry 'The Big H' Meekings) in very good order.

Serving with Guardsmen is rarely a straightforward business; indeed, as Squadron Commander I may have commanded Guardsmen, but it was the Brigade Major (always a Guards officer) who reserved the right to discipline them if and when it became necessary. We were 150 signallers out of a unit of some 320, including 5 officers out of 8. It was instructive to see how Bryan Green operated in this unique environment: he demonstrated sensitivity, humour, firmness and tact. No-one questioned his authority, and his immaculate

bearing, cheerfulness and intelligence impressed everyone regardless of cap badge. He got on particularly well with my two commissioned ex-Guards RSMs (the QM and the MTO), which says much about his character. One of the two Brigadiers I served with even said to me (near Paderborn, as I recall, at about 0445 hrs on a dark and bitter December morning) how impressed he was with 'his' signallers in general, and with 'his' Royal Signals RSM in particular. From a former Scots Guards Commanding Officer who went on to become the Major-General Commanding the Household Division, this was praise indeed.

On his commissioning the officers of the Squadron presented Bryan with an inscribed sword, which he well deserved and which gave him particular pleasure. He was posted to a rear area Signal Regiment (in my view a stupid decision, and a gross waste of his ability), and not long afterwards he resigned from the Army, settled in East Anglia and had a particularly successful second career as an entrepreneur. I rather lost touch with him as we went our different ways, but I was not at all surprised by his success in civil life.

Bryan Green was a naturally talented soldier and leader, an exceptional tradesman, a devoted family man, and a long-time friend. He was an example to all of us who knew him, and he left us far too soon.

I miss him.