

Memories of John Angus (1945-1984)

A few weeks ago, I dreamt I was on a road run with (the late) John Angus. Those who knew him will remember he was a very useful X-country runner, so we were both lathered with sweat as we pounded down the road in boots & denims. The memory was so vivid I was still sweating when I woke up! It must have been a re-run of Easter 1969, when I was on Sqn Pre-Para. For the two weeks block leave, I went home to Musselburgh with John, who lived a few miles away in the small village of Macmerry. At that time I drove a Morris Mini, while John had yet to learn to drive. We thought we should best use this leave period so that he could help me get fitter for 'P' Coy, and I could teach him to drive. So, we arranged that John would get a bus every morning up to Musselburgh, where he and I would run up the A1 to Portobello, and go for a half-hour swim in the Public Baths. After a cuppa and a bacon banjo, we would run back to Musselburgh for lunch with my parents. In the afternoon we would go for learner driving lessons in my Mini on the minor roads in the area, with much gear crunching by John, and lots of "Ferchrissake watch that wall/car/kerb!" from me. We would end up driving to Macmerry for tea with his parents. John would put on his going-out-for-a-few-beers-and-birds kit, and we would drive to Musselburgh so I could do likewise. Although it may be remembered that John, as one of the original "smoothies" dressed so immaculately I could never hope to emulate his style. After enjoying a few beers in several Edinburgh pubs, we invariably ended the evening by filling-up with fish suppers in Musselburgh, where I would pour John onto the last bus to Macmerry. Over the leave period, I suppose we ran about 9 miles each day, which, with the swimming, greatly improved my fitness, and helped me pass the following 'P' Coy. The driver training, although it knackered the clutch, must have helped John, for he eventually passed his driving test in Aldershot.

John Angus enlisted in Royal Signals in 1961, and joined the All Arms Junior Leaders Regiment in Wales. In 1962, he graduated from JLR and moved to Catterick for training as a Radio Operator. Later that year he volunteered for Airborne Forces and travelled to Elles Barracks, Aldershot for Pre-Para training. Subsequently, he passed 'P' Coy at Maida Barracks, and completed a Basic Parachute course at RAF Abingdon. He joined 216 later that year. During his service with 16 Para Bde he carried-out tours on active duty in Cyprus 1963, and Bahrain 1964, for which he was awarded a UN Medal (Cyprus), and a GSM with clasp, S Arabia. It is thought that, at about this time, he may also have re-trained to become a Radio Telegraphist. John was promoted Cpl in 1966, and Sgt in 1970. According to many of the Sqn from those days, John Angus was one of the best Radio Detachment Commanders the Sqn ever had.

In addition, John was, without doubt, one of the smartest soldiers in uniform or in civvies, I have ever known. His attention to meticulous detail was absolute, his turnout, and bearing an example to all. His tiny NCOs bunk in Arnhem Barracks was tidier, and better kept, than most married quarters of that era. John, a proud and very patriotic Scot, possessed a dry, often cutting wit, but one generally found much humour in his company. Like most of his peers in the Sqn, he found it hard to tolerate fools, low standards, or craphats. John was also a very fit man, representing both Sqn and Corps at Cross-country Running

and Soccer. It is thought he may have had a trial for the Army Soccer XI at sometime.

While in Aldershot, John met and courted Valerie, who was with WRAC Signals at SE District Comcen. [VALERIE'S MAIDEN NAME NOT KNOWN AT THE TIME OF WRITING] They were married in the summer of 1970 at the Registrar's Office in Aldershot. I was his Best Man, and my wife June, then June Morgan, was Valerie's Maid of Honour. John and Val wanted a quiet wedding so there were no guests other than Valerie's parents, who came down from the NE England for the ceremony. When John left the Sqn and the Army in the early-1970s, he and Val moved to a flat in Wimbledon. Their son, John Richard Angus, was born soon after that. John took employment with Shell International Communications HQ in the city, his Army communications training and skills very much to the fore. I also heard he played football for Wimbledon FC Second XI. We met briefly at a Para Sigs Officers & Sgts Dinner in Aldershot in 1976. After that, John and I lost touch with each other for years until, unexpectedly one night in 1984, he 'phoned me in Shetland. He sounded ok, and we had a rare old chat. When I asked him how he was keeping, he said he "wasn't too well, but no matter, how were June and Sarah?" He seemed interested to hear how my career had progressed over the years since we last met. He chided me about our runs along the roads to/from Portobello Baths, and spoke of some of our times together in the Sqn. When I asked how Civvy Street was treating him, he stated quite firmly that he continued to be "Never, never craphat, always ex-Brigade!" We bid each other farewell and agreed we should speak again soon. What I did not know then was that he was actually saying farewell, because he was dying from bone cancer. He was actually working through a 'phone list of all his old Sqn pals to have a final chat. Mick Granitza visited him at home in his remaining months, and subsequently told me that John, onetime fit young Paratrooper, sat slumped in a wheelchair, a bent and tortured shadow of his former self. A representative from 5 AB Bde Sig Sqn attended the eventual funeral, along with many friends and colleagues from Shell Comms HQ.

Recent contact from Paul Richardson, who served in 216 in the early 1960s, told me he worked alongside John at Shell International Comms HQ in London for a few years prior to John's death. Early stages of the cancer were shrugged off with comments about "a bad back from poor Para landings at Hankley Common". Even when latter chemo treatments must have caused him agony, John made light of his condition and soldiered on at his desk. He showed a grimly determined airborne spirit to the end. Paul is actively trying to contact Valerie Angus and John Richard through friends at Shell HQ in London.

Written by Richard "Grumpy" Hamilton
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John Angus (front row, second left) trade training 24 Signals Regt – 1961



John during trade training 1961