

OBITUARY

MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM THOMSON (BILL) MACFARLANE CB



William Thomson Macfarlane, better known throughout the Army as Bill, was born in 1925 and enlisted into the Corps at the age of 20. After being commissioned from 150 OCTU in 1947 he joined 1 Egypt Command Signal Regiment as Assistant Adjutant and later took command of the largely independent Suez Detachment as a temporary Captain, this followed the amalgamation of the two Egypt Command Signal Regiments in 1949. During this tour in the Middle East he accompanied the Chief Signal Officer, Major General CMF White on a grand tour of the Sinai desert; including a visit to Petra, paying official calls on the Arab Legion and Trans Jordan Frontier Service in Ma'an and Amman, together with visits to operational units in Palestine.

On return to the UK in 1950 he was posted to the Army Apprentices School at Harrogate, and appointed Adjutant. In 1953 he moved to BAOR to become Chief Duty Signals Officer, Rhine Army before returning to the UK to undertake the parachute course at Aldershot in 1954. After successfully completing the course he was again posted as Adjutant, this time with the 42nd (L) Infantry Division (TA). Then followed a spell as a Platoon Commander/Company Instructor at RMA Sandhurst before attending the Staff College at Camberley in 1958.

Promotion to acting Major from Staff College marked the first of two active tours of duty in the Far East, on this occasion as the GSO 2 Signals to Brigadier Eric Swainson at GHQ Far East Land Forces in Singapore from 1959 to 1961. He returned to UK to command 16 Parachute Brigade Signal Squadron (Later redesignated 216 Parachute Signal Squadron). He had the unique distinction of taking over as DAA and QMG of the Brigade, which was then deployed in Greece, for the last few months of his tour, while continuing to command the Parachute Signal Squadron.

He was proud that, as the senior staff officer, he accompanied the Brigade Commander on the Annual Inspection and drafted the final 'outstanding' report on the Squadron. Following attendance at the Joint Service Staff

Course in 1963 he was posted back to GHQ FARELF this time as Military Assistant to the C in C.

An eventful tour followed during which he served successively Generals Hewetson, Jolly and Carver. This was during the period of confrontation and the Cs in C were busy visiting their troops in Malaya, Brunei and Borneo. Additionally, there were many fascinating VIP visits to other countries including India, Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1967 it was back to regimental life with 22 Signal Regiment in Germany to learn something of the BAOR scene before assuming command of 1 Div HQ and Sig Regt later that year. There then followed tours as the Services' representative in the Secretariat of the Cabinet Office 1970-72 and on promotion to Brigadier, as Commander Corps Royal Signals 1972-73 and Director of Public Relations (Army) 1973-76. He was promoted Major General in 1976, to be Chief of Staff, HQ UKLF, in which appointment he somewhat surprised his staff by parachuting with members of one of the Regiments he was visiting during their annual Camp in 1977.

In October 1978 he assumed his last appointment as Chief of the Joint Services Liaison Organisation in Bonn from which he retired on 4 January 1981, having been appointed a Colonel Commandant in 1980. His distinguished military service was recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List that year with the award of Companion of the Bath.

He was equally successful in his second career. On his retirement from the Army he moved to Hong Kong joining the Cha family and their newly formed company (Hong Kong Resort Company) as its Operations Director. In this role he developed and managed a self supporting multi million pounds new town development on Lantau Island. Following three very successful years in this role he returned to the UK where for the next decade he managed Sion College in London which supported the education and fellowship of Church of England clergy. During this time he was given the Freedom of the City of London. His final job saw him working again for the Cha family on their newly acquired Compton Manor Estate in Hampshire. Here he worked as a consultant responsible for the clearance and refurbishment of all estate buildings and the Manor house before successfully overseeing the recruitment of all the staff who would manage the estate for the owners.

Bill was a strong family man and a much loved husband and father. He was highly respected by his fellow officers and soldiers being always kind and understanding. He had a developed sense of humour and a beautiful baritone singing voice that lit up many mess parties he attended. Always immaculately turned out, General Mike Walsh used to refer to him as 'Mr. Moss Bros'. He survived a quadruple heart bypass in 1991 and remained very active until his wife Helen predeceased him in 2018. He spent the majority his final years with his daughter Christina and granddaughter Iona at their home in Kent. Having enjoyed a full and rewarding life Bill died peacefully on 14 April 2019 at the age of 93.