Major General Anthony John Deanne–Drummond **CB**, **DSO**, **MC** & Bar

23 June 1917 - 4 December 2012

Tony was educated at Marlborough College – part of a generation that, unbeknown to them, would have to emulate their fathers and fight another bloody war. Although not academic, Tony was bright and developed strong principles. Indeed, his potential was seen by one of the Masters, AR Pepin, who said to a young Tony: 'Put you heart and soul - as well as brains - into anything you do at school or after you leave here and you will get to the top.' It is also likely that Pepin, an officer in the school's CCF, also passed on a very great enthusiasm for signals to his pupil, for in 1937 when Tony passed out of the Royal Military Academy Woolwich, he was commissioned into The Royal Signals - a decision sealed by the Regiment's belief that it was the right of every officer to possess two army horses.

Meanwhile, Europe tumbled towards war; a war that seemed to hold no fears for Tony, but began lamely with his evacuation from the Dunkirk beaches in 1940. It was an experience that he never forgot but while some were demotivated by the disasters in France and Tony only became more determined to fight back and later wrote: 'It was time to do something more active.' Churchill thought the same and directed that special operations 'set Europe ablaze' – words which Tony seems to have taken as a personal order. The commandos and airborne forces that followed were just the sort of outfits that interested Tony and they, in turn, were interested in highly motivated, intelligent and capable young men just like Tony.

Tragino

Tony was selected for 2 Commando – which later became 11 SAS and then 1 Para - in July 1940 and so played a central role in the birth of these 'special forces'. He was a 'trail blazer', and that meant that he was often a guinea pig with training procedures that 'would horrify modern safety standards' although jumping with a reserve parachute was regarded as 'sissy'. But lessons were learned – the hard way - and the unit hurtled its way towards its first action.

Tony was specially selected to be part of that first airborne operation and in February 1941, 38 officers and men took part in Colossus, an operation to blow up the aqueduct at Tragino in southern Italy. Dropped at night in difficult mountainous terrain, the force demolished the objective and then began a 60 mile move back to the coast to rendezvous with a submarine. The episode ended with the group being taken prisoner - a cruel anti-climax to the operation considering what had been achieved - and Tony began his first period of incarceration.

Tony languished for 10 months in a prisoner of war camp with every passing day being regarded by him as a wasted day. Tony began planning his escape almost as soon as he arrived and even though other officers believed that the chances of escape followed by a 600 mile journey to the Swiss border were slim, he was not deterred. First he worked for six weeks on a tunnel, but it was discovered, but in December he managed to get over the fence when he and a fellow officer – replete in homemade Italian uniforms and carrying a homemade ladder – imitated electricians changing a light-bulb on the perimeter fence and took their chance. Although his fellow escapee was stopped by a guard's bullet – a bullet which also nicked Tony's cheek – Tony made a successful dash for freedom. He then embarked on a long and dangerous journey north by road and rail and successfully evaded capture until close to the frontier.

Detained once again, Tony refused to co-operate with his increasingly irritated Italian interrogators – telling them that he was 'bored, tired and not amused' by proceedings – and was sent for 30 days' solitary confinement. However, as an escapee he was to be sent to a special camp for 'dangerous prisoners' and so he feigned pain and deafness in one ear and was transferred to the Military Hospital in Florence from which Tony escaped through the window of his room – 70 feet above the ground. He then made his way by train via Milan to the Swiss frontier where he scrambled up a mountainside and burrowed his way under a wire fence under the noses of border sentries. From there, through contacts, he made his way back to England via Marseilles and a Gibraltar bound Royal Naval vessel disguised as a fishing trawler. He was one of just two British officers to escape from wartime Italy and was awarded his first MC.

Italy

Back in Britain Tony became signal officer for 2nd Parachute Brigade and in September 1943 arrived by ship in Taranto with 1st Airborne Division which then went on to take and hold the heel of Italy. Soon after Tony become involved with special 'round up parties', picking up groups of prisoners from the coast that had broken out of their camps when the Italians surrendered and were being hunted down by the Germans. Utilising a variety of strange craft, Tony was instrumental in returning scores of men to friendly lines. But on the division's return to England, it was not chosen to be part of the initial invasion of France in June 1944 and then a host of airborne operations were cancelled as the ground forces raced towards Germany in late summer. But, Tony and 1st Airborne Division were of course destined to see action again, and in one of the most famous operations of the Second World War - Market Garden.

Marriage

At this point, I need to break my narrative for to continue without reference to another very important development in Tony's life would be to underestimate its significance. As the devastating storm on the Continent was set to reach its crescendo, Tony fell in love and married. Having met a young lady with 'laughing eyes and a welcoming smile', Tony wed Evie in Hampstead Parish Church in January 1944. Evie was Tony's 'lovely and vivacious wife' and they shared their lives together for 58 years. During this time her love and support was unceasing - but I cannot imagine that being married to Tony was without its stresses. In September, for example, Evie (by that time carrying their first child) received news that Tony was missing - last seen going into house in Arnhem that was then set of fire.

Tony was second–in-command of Divisional Signals and had parachuted into Holland on the first day of Operation Market Garden. As the parachute battalions endeavoured to push through to Arnhem, Tony found himself in the thick of the action and ended up taking command of a 1Para company after its commander had been killed because 'To take over seemed the only thing to do.' The intense fighting left him with just 20 men all with very little ammunition and under intense German pressure. Taking up defensive positions in some houses on the outskirts of the town, he and four others moved into a building close to the Lower Rhine. When a party of Germans joined them, Tony and his small group secreted themselves in the small ground floor lavatory where they remained for three days and nights. Meanwhile, a dozen of the enemy moved in on the upper floor and a machine gun was set up in the roof. The Germans often tried the lavatory door but finding it engaged, went away again. On the fourth night Tony and his comrades make a break for it and heading for the river, swam its 400 yards and then headed down the bank, only to find themselves in the German front line. Tony was taken prisoner – again.

Escorted to a large house back on the north side of the river which was being used as a temporary ‘cage’ for prisoners, Tony found a hiding place - a wall cupboard – four feet wide, seven feet high and 12 inches deep. He moved the lock to the inside, sealed the outside keyhole with some wall-paper and when the other prisoners were escorted away, Tony took up residence – and there he stayed for 13 days and nights with just a hunk of bread, a tin of lard and a few pints of water to sustain him while the Germans occupied the room just inches from his nose. Tony’s escape from the house and his subsequent evasion of numerous German patrols is an extraordinary story, and with assistance of some brave locals and the Dutch Resistance, he made his way back to friendly forces. ‘Arnhem’ had been a five week ordeal for Tony - during which time he lost two–stone in weight – but he was quickly put on a flight back to England. On landing he spotted a waiting car bearing his unit’s insignia. ‘Did you know I was coming?’ a confused Tony asked the driver, ‘Well, not exactly, Sir’ came the answer, ‘We heard that a party had got back across the Rhine and the Sgt Maj said that you were bound to be with it. I think he had a bet, you see, Sir.’ Tony was mentioned in despatches for his escape, and was also awarded a bar to his Military Cross.

Post-War Military Career

As the war came to an end and in its immediate aftermath, Tony enjoyed a number of interesting tours – although they look rather anaemic in comparison with his wartime experiences - including study at Staff College, Palestine, a stint at the War Office and then, in September 1948, on an advanced signals course in America. The highly competitive Tony came a very respectable second on the course, but later contended, ‘If I had not disagreed with their solutions on Airborne communication I would have been top.’ On his return from the US Tony came here, to RMAS, as an Instructor where – remarkably – he found the time to write up his wartime exploits and have them published as Return Ticket – it became a best –seller and was serialised by the Sunday Times.

His next job, on promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, was as a member of the Staff College Directing Staff and it was at this time that he was diagnosed with cancer and, given just two months to live. A second opinion was more accurate, but having dealt with one health scare, Tony was very lucky not to have been killed on his next tour of duty in Cyprus. While commanding a 1Para company on anti-terrorist operations, Tony’s Land Rover came under attack and his skull was fractured by a stone thrown through the windscreen. Surgeons used a piece of Tony’s ribs to fill the two inch the hole in his skull and he eventually made a full recovery. While recuperating, however, he was medically downgraded and, in Tony’s words, given jobs ‘that were suitable for those recovering from broken heads’ and also went gliding – although neglecting to tell Evie that doctors had banned him from flying.

Tony had learned to glide as a subaltern because he ‘had a yen to fly’, and quickly became hooked. He was captivated by the ‘poetry of soaring flight’ and ‘the sheer joy of using air currents to keep one aloft.’ Now, in true Deane-Drummond style, Tony pushed the limits and by 1957 was British National Gliding champion and he went on to represent Britain in competitions on four separate occasions. Evie, meanwhile, had also been gliding since 1951 and herself set the record for the longest distance flown by a lady three times.

Having been passed fully fit again in 1957, Tony was posted to command 22SAS in Malaya and given the mission to go deep into the jungle and then locate, track down and kill terrorists. ‘It was’, Tony later said, ‘a desperate job’ but an important one to do well for the future of the SAS under intense scrutiny in Whitehall. Indeed, one senior officer said to Tony as his troops got to grips with the enemy in Malaya: ‘Your chaps have been quite superb in the jungle, but I can’t see a task for them away from the trees.’ Tony – or ‘The Cupboard’ as

he was affectionately known – was convinced that the salvation of the Regiment would come from fulfilling its task in Malaya - which it did – and then revealing to the decision makers that the Regiment was no one trick pony by doing something exceptional elsewhere. The much desired opportunity to shine in a different environment came early in 1959 when Tony seized the chance to oust some 500 rebels from a stronghold on a plateau at an altitude of 7,000 feet on Jebel Akhdar in Oman.

The SAS in Oman

The words of some who argued that the job required a brigade of troops motivated Tony to excel and he planned an operation with a meticulous attention to detail while placing complete faith in the qualities the two squadrons involved. It was, said Tony, like 'pitching David against Goliath'. Even so, the night attack was an outstanding success with one squadron providing a diversionary attack while the other climbed the precipitous mountains and struck at dawn – and the rebels disintegrated. The Times said of the action:

It had been a victory at the first attempt by a numerically inferior force against an able enemy with geography on its side…The enemy were conquered by surprise, not slaughter; a brilliant example of economy in the use of force.

Peter de la Billere, then a Troop Commander but later, of course, Director of the SAS, has said that Oman 'proved a turning point in the history of the SAS…this victory gave it a new lease of life.' For his part in the success, Tony was awarded the DSO.

On leaving the SAS Tony was promoted to Colonel and in 1961 took command of 44 Parachute Brigade TA – taking over from Johnny Frost. At this time was the subject of This is Your Life. Surprised by Eamonn Andrews in the usual style, Tony was initially 'furious' at this subterfuge, but was pacified by the news that he would £50 for his trouble. After his brigade command, Tony came back here, to Sandhurst, as Assistant Commandant. A strong believer in academic studies and focussed on developing the military course wherever he found weaknesses, he was always interested in the progress of the Officer Cadets and the quality of what the Academy was turning out into the field army.

On taking command of 3rd Infantry Division in 1966, Tony was promoted to the rank of Major General. During this period he made such full use of helicopters to get around Salisbury Plain to see his units, that he decided that he would learn to fly them himself. Always looking for new challenges, Tony passed the demanding training without a fuss and later no doubt enjoyed the look of surprise – and admiration - on the faces of those that came to greet him on landing.

Tony's final job before retirement in 1971 was as Assistant Chief of Defence Staff in Whitehall. It was a job with a title that demanded respect, but Tony believed it a appointment that was not an efficient or effective use a two star with his experience, and he quickly became exasperated by the organizational muddle that he found at the top end of the three services. He did not see himself as a 'Whitehall Warrior'.

'Retirement'

Having retired from the Army, Tony's obvious talents and ability were quickly recognised by industry, and in June 1971 he was appointed Director of the Training Board for the Paper Industry. Tony enjoyed the challenge, but after several successful years changed tack with a decision to run his own business selling wood burning stoves in Somerset: 'After seeing so many small firms run by incompetent people' he said 'I was sure I had to do this to satisfy my ego.' With Evie's help Tony hit his sales targets, exceeded them, and grew a new business

when he might have been taking an easier path. When he sold the business three years later on moving to South Warwickshire, it was thriving – but Tony was still not ready to put his feet up, and with Evie launched into the vigorous renovation of several houses before finally settling in Little Kineton. Here, Tony finally found the time to spend on his carpentry, the restoration of antique furniture and, in 1992, the writing of his autobiography Arrows of Fortune. That book was dedicated to the two halves of his life – 'those soldiers and civilians with whom I have worked and played' and Evie and their four daughters – Shirley, Angela, Anna and Celia.

Family Life

With a life such as Tony's it is easy – nay, understandable - for a tribute such as this to be dominated by details of his professional feats and adventures, but I am certain that Tony's life would not have been as rich, meaningful or as stable as it was without his family providing a vital anchor of love, support and understanding. Today there are ten grandchildren and six great grandchildren - many of whom are with us here today at this Service. I have had the privilege to get to know four of the Deane-Drummond clan over the years – Anna, and her two children Rebecca and James, and also Shirley's son Anthony, who followed his grandfather into the army and also served at Sandhurst as an instructor – and in all four I detect more than a hint of Tony's looks, along with a heavy dose of his intelligence, talent, tenacity and comradeship. They, and the family as a whole, are quite rightly proud to be related to the extraordinary Tony Deane-Drummond, a man that lived his 95 years to the full and reflected all those values that the British Army holds so dear: selfless commitment; integrity; moral and physical courage; loyalty; discipline and respect for others. Tony Deane-Drummond was, without doubt, the most inspirational man that I have ever met.