

L Detachment's Forgotten Hero

by Alan Orton



Alan Orton's Father, Johnny Orton, served with Bill Fraser in the original SAS, in the deserts of North Africa

Major William (Bill) Fraser MC

1917 – 1975

1st Battalion the Gordon Highlanders

No.11 (Scottish Commando

L Detachment Special Air Service Brigade

Special Raiding Squadron

1 S.A.S.

Military Cross with Bar

Croix de Guerre with Palm

Africa Star

Italy Star

France and Germany Star

1939-45 Star

War Medal 1939-45

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Prologue.

A Scotsman by birth William 'Bill' Fraser was born into a military family on the 4th January 1917 in Aberdeen with both his father serving and grandfather served as senior non commissioned officers in the Gordon Highlanders. He was five feet eight inches tall, fresh faced and with brown hair. This was the regiment he chose to join when he enlisted and was the first of his family to hold the rank of a commissioned officer.

He enlisted into the ranks of this Regiment on the 27th May 1936 and during 1940 he was promoted to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, he held this rank until 1941 when he was promoted to Lieutenant.

He served with the 1st Battalion, the Gordon Highlanders with the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940 and was successfully evacuated. In June of 1940, he was posted to No.11 (Scottish) Commando under the command of Lt. Col. Dick Pedder of the Highland Light Infantry and here he became the officer in command of B Section, 8 Troop, a troop made up mainly of fellow Gordon's.

As part of Force Z or better known as Layforce he sailed for the Middle East in January of 1941.

Originally No. 11(Scottish) Commando was to have taken part in Operation Addition along with No.7 Commando and 4 Troops of No. 8 (Guards) Commando but this operation was cancelled and the men from No. 11 (Scottish) Commando disembarked from their landing ship.

The Scottish Commando was now sent to garrison the island of Cyprus and prepare for their part in the forthcoming Operation Exporter, the invasion of Syria.

Throughout the first 2 weeks of May 8 Troop garrisoned Lefkoniko and on the 3rd week of May along with 7 Troop they moved to Kondea until in June they sailed for Syria.

8 Troop formed part of Y Party along with 1 and 7 Troops under the command of Pedder and were the centre party of the 3 assaulting waves.

During his part in the Litani River operation Bill Fraser's helmet chinstrap was struck by a bullet which concussed him and he had to temporarily hand over command to Sergeant John Cheyne before he was able to resume command at a later time.

After the conclusion of the operation No. 11 (Scottish) Commando returned to their garrison duties on Cyprus awaiting official disbandment.

Bill Fraser decided to answer Stirling's call.

He became the officer in command of 1 Troop, 1 Section which included 12 men from A, B and C Groups.

During training he concentrated on the navigational aspect and taught the men as he himself learned.

An accident during training in which he sustained a broken arm kept him out of Operation Squatter in November, L Detachments first operation but he did take command of the trucks of the rendezvous party which would carry those who returned home.

He took part in operations from December 1941 until the end of the war in the deserts of North Africa in 1943 by which time he had been promoted to the rank of Captain and was a troop commander in A Troop.

After reorganisation of 1 S.A.S. he took part in operations during Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily.

There would be further action in the Italian campaign with the Special Raiding Squadron the new title for 1 S.A.S. after the final days of the African campaign.

At Termoli he was wounded when an enemy shell exploded and killed many of the men from the troop that he commanded.

By 1944 the S.R.S. and returned to the United Kingdom and reverted back to being 1 S.A.S. he took part in operations to support the Allied invasion of France and would also be engaged in the fighting in Germany when again he would be wounded close to the end of the war.

Steadfast.

France September 1939 – June 1940.



Bill Frasers 1st Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders was one of the first battalions to go to France in 1939 at the start of the Second World War, they were part of the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division. By October of that first year of the war they were in forward positions but as this period before the Germans struck in May 1940 much of their time would be spent drilling and training and digging defences. They like their fathers before them found themselves in a static war waiting for an offensive which would break the German lines and bring a swift result. With no end in sight to this Phoney War Bill Frasers Battalion were transferred to the 51st (Highland) Division under the command of Maj. Gen. Victor Fortune. The aim was to stiffen this Territorial Division with regular troops; they became part of Brigadier G.T. Burney's 153 Brigade. The 51st who in the previous war were known as 'Harpers Dud's' based around the Divisional sign HD and after their commanding officer Gen. Harper, HD later in the war would become Highway Drivers as one could not go too far without seeing the famous HD sign in the Western Desert campaign.

After their transfer on the 13th April 1940 the Division was chosen to gain experience holding part of the Maginot Line. When finally the Germans attacked the 1st Gordon's were in reserve but would soon find themselves engaged in

fighting the enemy in an area of 4 woods, Spitzwald, Hartsbuch, Grossenwald and Winkelmerter. The fighting in this area that Fraser's company took part in became known as the Battle of Remeling.

As the general situation went against the Allies the Division was forced to withdraw and by the 20th May were held in reserve at Etain 20 miles north west of Metz, here they were attached to the French 2nd Army in positions around Grandpre and Varennes the date now being the 25th. The following day they came under the control of 3 Army Group and Groupement A and were to hold defensive positions along the river Somme, positions that would eventually extend to the coast. The unrelenting German attack forced further withdrawals and by the 2nd June they were in positions on the river Bresle around Gouy and Moyenville.

The French proposed a counter attack and the 1st Gordon's made their contribution quite successfully at Grad Bois west of Cambren but was forced to give up their gains after the French failed to follow up with their promised support.

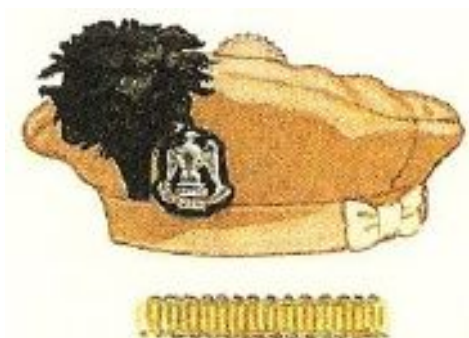
Further withdrawals followed and by the 9th June they were in the place which would go down in the history of the Division as their greatest sacrifice, St. Valery-en-Caux. The 1st Gordon's held positions on the east side of the river Durdent close to the villages of St. Riquier-Le-Plains and Ingouville. Here the Division was forced to surrender to General Irwin Rommel as there was no realistic chance of evacuation although some did manage to escape the bulk would spend the rest of the war as prisoners of war.

Bill Fraser was one of the lucky ones he made it back though from where is not known some reports have said from Dunkirk, it may be that he was wounded earlier on in the short campaign and was evacuated as a casualty though it could not have been too serious as only walking wounded were taken especially towards the end in France.

In the U.K. the 1st Gordon's were to be re-raised and life in the depot as the new men were trained in the art of soldiering and the traditions of the Regiment Bill Fraser answered the call for volunteers for Special Service with the newly formed Commandos. He was with his experience in battle accepted and posted to No.11 (Scottish) Commando in August 1940 then mustering at Netherdale Mills.

The Black Hackle.

August 1940 – June 1941.



This Commando recruited from all eleven Scottish regiments mainly from those within Scottish Command but consisted of only ten troops, their numbers were filled up from The Wiltshire Regiment and also the Manchester Regiment. At the time they were being mustered at Netherdale Mills in Ayrshire, here they were billeted in an old disused mill where conditions were extremely spartan with no running water or heating facilities. The food was considered by most as appalling but they settled down and began training consisting of route and speed marches to get their physical fitness up to requirement. Night exercises were undertaken and much emphasis was put on weaponry. By September the unit was ready for a move and so debussing at Galashiels the volunteers were told that they would have to march to Ayr which as the crow flies was about one hundred miles away. Trucks were provided but anyone using this option was returned to unit. They also had to carry their own kit but any unwanted items could be left at the railway station.

With bagpipes playing they began their march and it would not be until the sixth night that they finally bedded down at Ayr racecourse, each troop took the lead in rotation with the pipers which had been borrowed from the Cameron Highlanders piped them along, all that there was to feed them was the staple diet of bully beef and biscuits, water for washing and drinking was taken from streams, sleeping arrangements were quite simply bed down where you can which meant that most nights they would sleep in the open air taking whatever cover they could find which included sleeping in the hedgerows. Those that fell out during the march and had used the transport had laughed and jeered at the marching men but now they received travel warrants and returned to their parent units as unsuitable material. Most troops were made up of members from each regiment, the 4th being The Wiltshire's, 6 Troop from the Seaforth Highlanders, 8 Troop known as the Gordon Troop and within their number was Lt. Bill Fraser who commanded the Troops B Section, The Cameron's being 10 Troop although men from many other regiments filled out the ranks, some coming from The London Rifle Brigade, The South Lancashire's, The Kings Own, the York and Lanc's, the Lincolnshire's, Duke of

Cornwall's Light Infantry, Royal Artillery and of course all the support units so it wasn't as the name suggests purely a Scottish unit.

On the 9th September they moved to Lamlash on the Isle of Arran by special train boarding the Glen Sannox at Fairlie to begin amphibious training under the command of Lt. Col. R.R. (Dick) Pedder of The Highland Light Infantry and were to become the first operational Commando. They were billeted with the islanders and each man was given a daily allowance of six shillings and eight pence to cover his food and lodgings. The men were billeted in individual dwellings and were extremely well looked after by their landladies who provided them with up to four meals a day and they could have a bath at least once a week. They would also dry the troop's sodden clothes after a day in the field where the men always seemed to be perpetually soaked.

The training was intense incorporating map reading, route marches both day and night, mock exercises, weapons training, climbing on Goat Fell, cross country runs, demolition, field craft, unarmed combat, and how to pick locks and to blow safe's, and of course seaborne landings, speed marches and route marches, swimming in full kit was also included, it did appear that at one time they would be used on an operation and were even embarked aboard a vessel but this in turn was cancelled for one reason or another, this could possibly have been Operation "Brisk" which was to seize The Azores. During the autumn with the threat of invasion from Norway the commando was moved to the area of Falkirk to defend it from any Axis attack but apart from a few air raids nothing came of this and they soon returned to the Isle of Arran and continued the training programme as set down by Lt. Col. Pedder.

There was to have been another operation which was called "Workshop", a proposed attack and capture of the Mediterranean island of Pantelleria which was situated between Tunis and Sicily and its position controlled the Gibraltar, Malta and Alexandria convoy routes and could become a serious thorn in the sides of Allies. The island was approximately ten miles long and five miles wide and boasted its own airfield with underground hangars and held about eighty aircraft. Bays were also created for a flotilla of German E-Boats. It was also protected by about eighty guns of various calibres and garrisoned by around eleven thousand Italian troops. The commando was taken from Lochranza on Arran by the Royal Scotsman and rumour was rife one being they were heading for Norway but was scotched by the authorities who told them it was only an exercise but the preparation they had gone through severely doubted the official take they then returned to Arran and disembarked, this operation did eventually go ahead but it was not to be until 1943.

But the wheels were indeed turning and General Wavell on hearing of the Commandos devised a plan so that he could utilise them. This would have been the proposed plan to invade Cyrenaica but due to the success of Operation "Compass" was in turn yet again cancelled. Wavell was later to have said on their eventual arrival that he did not know why they had sent these men to his command. But indeed they did go to the Middle East, No. 7, No. 8 (Guards), and No. 11 (Scottish) Commandos were joined together to form "Layforce" under the command of Brigadier Laycock the officer commanding No. 8 (Guards) Commando. No. 7 Commando was drawn from Eastern Command and by the time it's ranks were deemed full there were 58 different Corps or Regiments represented within their ranks, they became known as an undisciplined unit the opposite to No. 11 (Scottish) who were deemed in some quarters to be over disciplined while the Guards Commando were The Guards although some thought that their officers were comprised of quite a few 'good time Charlie's' who seemed to be part of a 'club' whom spent much of their spare time drinking and gambling.

During the month of October they were amalgamated with No. 9 Commando and 6 Company from the 9th (Scottish) Division and with 7 Company from the 15th (Scottish) Division to form the short lived 2 Special Service Battalion in which they became two, five hundred man companies but were eventually to return to their original designation. Their Scottishness was further enhanced by the wearing of a Black Hackle on their glengarries this signified that "They had a quarrel with someone".

On the 14th January they were given one weeks leave and in the week after they returned they planned and carried out a successful mock raid on an aerodrome. The guards were distracted by two of the Commandos dressed as women while others cut the perimeter fence and gain entrance to the site where they carried out a simulated attack on the Officer's Mess with un-primed Mill's bombs. On the 31st January 1941 they set sail from Gourock on the Firth of Clyde with the commando split between the Infantry Landing Ships Glenroy and Glenearn, The Glengyle carried the other commandos, these were converted for the task in hand from ships from the Glen Line which had been built between the years of 1938 and 1939. They were well protected and had for their fire power eight two pounder pom poms, four two pounder guns and eight twenty millimetre Oerlikons. They carried three L.C.M's and twenty four L.C.A.s/IL.C.S. (M)'s and were capable of carrying between seven hundred and eleven hundred troops.

Leaving the Firth of Clyde they steamed west out into the Atlantic and into a Force 9 gale and most of the occupants suffered accordingly. On the first of February the convoy was joined by the S.S. Georgie and by the 17th the cruisers H.M.S.'s

Devonshire, Forester and Faulkner was also on station. They sailed way out into the Atlantic to avoid known German U-Boat patrol areas. After three days steaming with the Queen Mary also in the convoy they finally headed south.

They stopped over at Freetown in Sierra Leone to pick up supplies and leaving here they found themselves in much calmer waters and were able to see dolphins, flying fish and even an albatross. From their boats though they could smell quite easily the stench of rotting vegetation and human waste as it drifted on the breeze to their nostrils made worse by the hot and humid conditions, this being for most of those on board their first taste of conditions outside of the United Kingdom, would this be a taste of what was to come?

They and their escorts eventually set sail from the 'White Man's Grave' arrived off Table Bay on the 19th February and for security reasons they were designated the title "C" Battalion and the 7th and 8th became "A" and "B" respectively. On arrival at Cape town the C.O. put them through a four hour route march in full kit and after spending so many weeks on board ship where exercise would be limited to the ship's deck this would have been a blessing in disguise, to feel solid earth under foot and not to feel the rolling of the ship would I should imagine have made them feel one hundred percent, plus they could show their own swagger to the crowds who turned out to watch them march to the swirl of the pipes. There was also an outbreak of diarrhoea which swept through the ranks. The other two commandos No. 7 and No.8 (Guards) were allowed a period of liberty to enjoy what the city had on offer but Pedder's discipline never bent this far. For many of the other Commandos of Layforce this short period of liberty that they enjoyed saw them able to visit the local landmarks and mix with the local population who looked after them extremely well, inviting them to their homes and sharing food and drink with them. For others, they visited the bars and again made most welcome especially after the previous convoy carrying Australian troops to Egypt had well and truly gone off track and had wrecked many places. They also came into contact with what was to continue to blight South Africa for decades to come, segregation. Many were amazed to see this and the many notice boards bearing the legend 'White's Only'

Leaving Cape town they shipped to Cairo via the Suez canal but before they arrived here they received a report of the Admiral Scheer a German capital ship was operating in the area and so the convoy swiftly headed for Durban and sent H.M.S. Dorsetshire and H.M.S. Glasgow both cruisers to investigate, also on station by this time were H.M.S.'s Kandahar and Flamingo. The reports were unfounded and they were able to continue the voyage taking them through the Red Sea which due to the conditions that they had to endure on the ships which had no air conditioning they christened the 'Sweat Sea' and arrived here on the twenty-fifth and were

mustered at Geneifa on the Sinai Peninsula before heading to be billeted at Abbassia Barracks and were immediately granted leave. On the 28th March after completing their acclimatisation period three weeks after the Western Desert Force had been ordered to dispatch an Expeditionary Force comprising of probably their best and most experienced to Greece as part of Operation Lustre to prop up the Greek forces, Laycock hoped that the whole of Layforce would be found a role to play but any proposals that he had were swiftly pooh poohed by Wavell and his staff instead they moved to Geneifa and in turn travelled to Port Said by the ninth of April. Before this event though orders were received on the second of April relating to the 'Racecourse Plan' which was a brigade exercise involved A, B, C and D Battalions and was successfully completed by lunchtime on the 4th April although it only lasted several hours. A further scheme scheduled for the 5th still within the framework of the 'Racecourse Plan' was though cancelled. On the 6th April they received orders to move from Camp 42 to Camp 47 but as was the norm this was duly cancelled and it would not be until the seventh that the move actually took place, transport difficulties were cited as the reason as only six 15cwt trucks could be found but only for a short time when the number of trucks would be reduced to two. Also during this period it became apparent that all ranks were still likely to go down with illness more serious than the usual 'gippy tummy' of which most had the unfortunate pleasure of contracting. 2nd Lieutenant Lancaster was diagnosed with spinal meningitis and was immediately quarantined in hospital, a reminder to them all that service abroad held its dangers not only from enemy action. From here then on the fourteenth they embarked on their landing ship for a proposed raid on Bardia which had been given the codename 'Addition' with No. 7 Commando and set sail but due to adverse weather conditions during the voyage the raid was cancelled and they returned to port. Their part in the raid was to be known as "Project B" and they were to attack the Sollum – Sidi Barrani highway east of Tobruk. It was hoped that here they would attack and destroy any motor transport that they came across and also to take prisoners. It was also hoped that they would be in a position to destroy a stores depot which lay in the vicinity to the west, the duration of the raid was to last around three hours. 6 Troop were given the task of unloading all of their stores from the landing ship into lighters ready for transport to the dock front a job that was completed by 20.30 hrs. Here to while away the hours before they could be returned to their camp Lt. Col. Pedder had them march around the docks until the transport was found. They also had the first post delivered to them from home which was hugely welcomed, a timely reminder that they were not forgotten now they were on active service. A few days later the raid did take place but was somewhat scaled

down and No.11 (Scottish) played no part in it. The raid was not deemed to be a great success.

After debussing from their transport they moved to Alexandria via the transit camp number 3 at Amiriya and then on the 23rd April they entrained and travelled to Haifa crossing the Suez Canal at Kantara and entraining again at Kantara East and proceeded to Haifa in Palestine crossing the frontier at 19.30 hours and on the 30th they embarked for Cyprus on the S.S. Warsawza.

Arriving at Famagusta 8 Troop was sent to Lefkoniko on the 1st May and here they guarded the coast against a half expected Axis attack, they set up fields of fire and dug slit trenches and also prepared buildings for demolition. On the 23rd May they moved to Akhyritou along with 7 Troop who'd moved from Kondea. They along with a battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and the usual ancillary units would be the only defence available if an attack did come but all it amounted to was a considerable amount of nuisance raids by the Axis air forces.



Five hundred troops from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force which had arrived after the Greek debacle were offered the chance of joining the Commando on the 4th May to help bolster their numbers but only one officer accepted and he duly joined on the eighteenth. On the 14th May His Excellency The Governor of Cyprus inspected the Commando with 9 Troop acting as the Guard of Honour. They were also preparing for another of Wavell's plans, this was to be the capture of the island of Rhodes called Operation Cordite and shipping had been gathered together at Alexandria but due to the deteriorating situation in Greece and the eventual evacuation of the Expeditionary Force by the 28th April in which all three of Layforce's ships were actively involved again led to yet another cancellation.

The troops now had by this time become bored, they were also deemed to be over disciplined and all through their voyage and time on land they had trained indefatigably. The promise given by Churchill in his request for volunteers had contained the line "to Butcher and then bolt" and in reality become chibble and meander. Many men after nine months of false promises had requested that they be returned to their parent unit or posted to a battalion in the front line, the bars and brothels of Nicosia and Famagusta faced more trouble than the Axis forces did. One thing though could not be denied under the leadership of Lt. Col. Pedder and his junior officers whose average age was only twenty one the welfare of the rank and file was of paramount importance and they were well looked after but all this could not hide the fact that due to the lack of activity morale was low. Plans were now being made for the invasion of Syria which at this time was controlled by the Vichy French and were allowing the Germans use of their airfields and airspace. The attack was to be made by an Australian division aided by Yeomanry regiments of the Cavalry Division who were still mounted on horseback at this time.

No.11's role in Operation "Exporter" they had by this time reverted back to their original title was to be a seaborne landing at the mouth of the Litani river and to seize the bridges at Kafr Badda and Quasmiye and to allow the advancing 7th Australian Division to cross the river and continue their attack.

On the 7th June they embarked aboard the Glengyle each man wearing khaki shirts and shorts, rope soled boots and camouflaged steel helmet and those with the Lee Enfield rifle a hundred and ten rounds of ammunition, they also carried grenades and spare magazines for the Bren light machine guns, and escorted by the destroyers H.M.S's Hotspur and Ilex set sail but on arriving off the designated landing area the operation was cancelled due to heavy swells on Naval advice. It would have been too perilous to launch the landing craft as the heavy seas would have swamped them, endangering lives unnecessarily.

The Vichy navy was also spotted on the horizon and it was assumed that they had been spotted as they now had information stating that the Vichy forces had knowledge of the impending attack. The landing force which now included the 15th Cruiser Squadron which consisted of H.M.S's Ajax, Phoebe, Coventry and H.M.A.S. Perth along with the destroyers H.M.S, s Kandahar, Kimberley, Janus and Jackal steamed to Port Said and here Lt. Col. Pedder successfully argued the case to proceed with the operation, although the land forces had started the operation on time so this would put them at a disadvantage as the plan would be twenty fours old when they would themselves become engaged. On the ninth of June they set sail again but due to a shortage of landing craft 6 troop were to remain aboard the

Glengyle and control the anti aircraft duties using Bren guns and Lewis guns others did the same task on the landing craft, but contrary to the official W.O. report many from this troop dad included were crammed aboard the available craft and did indeed take part, some of this troop did pay the full price for this action and remain in Syria to this day.

Operation Exporter.

09-06-1941 – 10-06-1941.

Bill Fraser

B Section, 8 Troop

The Litani river would be the scene of what could be described as the first full combined forces operation of the Second World War where air, land and sea forces acted together in Operation Exporter, the Allied invasion of Syria.

Lt. Bill Fraser and the men he commanded from B Section, 8 Troop of No.11 (Scottish) Commando part of Layforce would play a considerable roll in its execution.

To allow the ground forces of the attacking Australian 21st Infantry Brigade from their 7th Division the commandos were to land behind the lines and seize and hold 2 bridges to enable the Australians to continue their advance but it didn't get the start it expected with the commandos unable to land on the original date due to naval intervention who told Lt. Col. Dick Pedder that the surf would cause their landing craft to flounder and so as with so many other Layforce operations it seemed it would be cancelled. Layforce seemed to be yet again living up to one wag's description of them Be-Layforce.

Pedder though was able to argue for the recommencement of the operation and though late it would now make their landing on the morning of the 9th June 1941.

Bill Fraser's B Troop was part of Y Party which also included the H.Q. Troop and also 1 and 7 Troops. At around 03.30 hrs Bill Fraser and his men boarded the Assault Landing Craft from their transport ship H.M.S. Glengyle and landed some 600 yards north of the rivers mouth at 04.20 hrs. The H.Q. Troop and 1 and 7 troops faced mortar, machine gun and small arms fire but 8 Troop were able to make their landing with dry feet and none of the above. The main aim of Y party was to act as a reserve for X Party but as their radio was unusable they would now have to act independently. The 2 sections of 8 Troop under the command of Capt. Ian Glennie made their way quickly off the beach finding that they were slightly north of where they should have landed but quickly adjusted their position and headed to the east. Fraser's B Section took the lead with A Section following in

reserve, B Section then made contact with 7 Troop and were able to offer their support in their operations and at 05.15 hrs successfully attacked enemy positions around a road but were now out of contact with the rest of their troop. A Section was encountering their own troubles and came under some considerably heavy though somewhat inaccurate fire. Fraser and his section advanced further east into the hills and successfully reached the crest meeting no serious opposition. A detachment of French Spahis fighting un-mounted had taken positions amongst a line of tree and now commenced to open fire on Fraser's section. The fight would be a short one after initially going to ground to avoid the small arms fire they engaged the French causing some casualties but also taking around 30 of the enemy as prisoners. They were now joined by a sub section of 4 Troop and after leaving a small guard on their prisoners they headed in a southerly direction along the lie of the hills meeting no further enemy resistance. From the top of the line of hills they were able to see the Litani river where the Australians were under fire from the French positions. Not wishing to be seen by the enemy Fraser wisely withdrew out of the enemies sight locating themselves beyond the crest and took up defensive positions here they were joined by Lt. Richards and his A Section from 10 Troop of X Party. Fraser and Richards drew up plans on how to stop the enemy from shelling the Australians close to one of their originally intended aims, the Qasmiye bridge although this bridge had by now been destroyed by the French defenders. Joining up a 1 section they began an attack on the enemy taking them from the rear, Fraser and his men attacked the enemy forces on the southern slope of the hill and quickly and efficiently dealt with 3 machine gun posts causing considerable casualties to the enemy they also again took a number of prisoner Party were, they faced little opposition and what they did face was dealt with efficiently whilst others melted away not wishing to suffer the same fate.

By 17.30 hrs contact was made with Z Party and they were ordered to take up defensive positions at the Kafr Badda bridge again one of their original aims.

By this time Bill Fraser had been suffering concussion after his chinstrap on his helmet was hit by an enemy bullet and was left with no option to hand over command to fellow Gordon Sgt. John Cheyne.

Whilst manning these positions they were finally ordered to affect a withdrawal across the river at 20.00 hrs. Having disengaged from their positions they headed

east towards the hills which they succeeded in doing with no casualties. With no enemy forces to harass them they moved south east to try to cross the river somewhere to left of known enemy positions here again they met up with troops from 7 Troop at 00.30 hrs. Here they took some well earned rest whilst Sgt's. John Cheyne and Charles Nicol searched for a suitable spot for them to cross. Both swam the river and located a likely crossing point and with the help of a rope they were able to get their men to form a chain and successfully make their crossing. Three men had been left behind, these had been guarding the prisoners that had been taken but they would themselves eventually cross and make contact with their section again.

By mid-day on the 10th it was all pretty much over the Australians had finally made their crossing and were now advancing through the positions which were held by Geoffrey Keyes's X Party and No.11 (Scottish) Commandos part in Operation Exporter came to an end with them making their way in transport laid on for them to a transit camp at Haifa in Palestine. War Correspondent Alan Moorhead would recall seeing the Jocks, exhausted but nearly all smoking and enquiring about their comrades as they made their journey picking up stragglers on the way and mourning their dead.

After a period of leave in Haifa they set sail for Cyprus at 18.50 hrs on the 14th June on the S.S. Rodi reaching Famagusta the following morning at 07.00 hrs and disembarked at 08.30 hrs.

Operator Exporter was a success of sorts and lessons would be learnt sadly the casualties amongst the commandos were high with nearly 130 killed, wounded or missing including their C.O. Dick Pedder.

Bill Fraser would say of Sgt's. Cheyne and Nichol "who during the whole action behaved with considerable coolness under fire" and that it was they who had successfully organised the withdrawal across the river.

The Jocks would now spend a period of time re organising themselves with troops amalgamating but the end for No.11 (Scottish) Commando was in sight, with the losses they had incurred there was no replacements but that was immaterial as the decision to disband Layforce had already been taken. At the end of their

garrison duties they returned to Egypt with Bill Fraser one of the last off the island of Cyprus as officer in command of the baggage party.

Some after all of the misfortune which had befallen Layforce would have given up with Special Forces but Bill along with Eoin McGonigal of 4 Troop and 12 other ranks would eventually join with David Stirling and his newly formed unit, L Detachment Special Air Service, another ex No.11 would eventually be its commanding officer, 7 Troop's Robert Blair Mayne.

L Detachment.

18-08-1941 – 16-11-1941.



Those men who had been selected to become the original L Detachment, most from the No.8 Guards Commando who followed Stirling from 3 Troop while the rest from No's.7 and 11 (Scottish) Commando went through a selection process which was a brief interview in a tent in their respective camps within the sprawling Infantry Base Depot at Geneifa with Stirling who asked each one what was their feelings on parachute jumping? Did they have the basic needs that were required? Initiative? An aptitude to stretch themselves further than they had been stretched before? arrived at various stages throughout late August and early September only to be greeted by a desolate site, Kabrit lay ninety miles east of Cairo on the edge of The Great Bitter Lake, there was a wind that blew in over the camp from the waters which invaded everywhere, every nook and cranny was covered. If that wasn't enough there were always the ever present flies to contend with. Although a barren place there was also in the vicinity an R.A.F. Airbase R.A.F. Kabrit and also to the north was R.A.F. Kasfareet and to the south R.A.F. El Shallufa and on the banks of the lake stood H.M.S. Saunders which was the first Combined Operations Training Centre to be established outside of the United Kingdom. All were in the vicinity of the large and sprawling Fayid Army Base. There was no camp for them as such apart from one large marquee tent which served as the Quarter-masters store and the Q.M. Gerry Ward himself slept within it, also to be found were three EPI's. These were tents made in India for European personnel. They were instructed that if they wanted a camp they would have to make it themselves and

so with the few tents available they were tasked with digging them in and erecting them but there was discord in the ranks as the N.C.O's mainly from the Guards Commando oversaw this. Many refused and requested that they be returned to their parent units via the Commando Base Depot at Geneifa but this was refused and so they reluctantly carried on after Jock Lewes had climbed onto a table and addressed the men telling them that whatever they believed there was an apparent method to this madness and they would have to deal with it even inciting near open rebellion by declaring them to be cowards with a long streak of yellow down their backs. Some of those from No.'s 7 and 11 (Scottish) Commandos believed that their volunteering was a bit more than the gamble they had anticipated. As M.E.H.Q. was doing all that it could to scupper 'L' Detachment most of the other requirements were lifted from a New Zealand camp nearby, they were at the time engaging out in the desert on a training exercise not that they really needed training as they were deemed to be the finish fighting infantry within the whole of the Western Desert Force although there was parts of the camp still occupied, blagging their way past the Indian guards those men who were mainly from the Guards Commando including Jim Blakeney, Dave Kershaw, Bob Lilley, Johnny Rose, Bob Bennett, Pat Riley and John Almonds took what they needed over three trips in a three tonner including a piano of all things, They had with the help of Gerry Ward made a full indent of what was to be required to get up and running.

They had one lucky escape when they were approached by an M.P. but were able to appease him by giving him a light to his cigarette telling him that their C.O. believed every hour of the day or night was a working hour and they finally returned to their camp site quite satisfied with their nights work. Some of the men were a bit concerned about this exercise as they had a high regard for the New Zealanders but it was just a simple case of they have and we need it regardless of the respect that they had for them. Over the years much would be made of this episode although it does appear that apart from the piano which many years later the New Zealanders asked for its return they only took what they actually needed. They would also raid a local Royal Engineers Dump to steal materials to enhance the camp. Bricks were stolen from a Royal Air Force camp and a bar built and run by Israel 'Cockney' Kaufman late of the Queen's Royal Regiment and No.7 Commando and was the envy of the officers who had only a tent. Kaufman however would not last the course and was one of the first to be returned to his parent unit supplemented their supplies by stealing from Army stores and selling it on to the locals or bartering in the time honoured Egyptian tradition to acquire what they needed to supplement their allotted rations which on the whole were poor and there was the constant promise of a full plate at the next feeding time

but this would be greeted with the same response, 'better food tomorrow', of course tomorrow came but better food? Tomorrow! Bill Fraser on more than one occasion would be asked these questions and always gave that same response, although on one occasion he did arrange a good feed for one of the men.



Bully beef, biscuits, herrings and porridge hardly the fare for what they were expected to do. But dissent was still rearing its ugly head as some were still were not happy with their lot and broke camp and found a local bar and had a few drinks. In their opinion they weren't there to be treated as labourers but to be soldiers. They returned with a few more bottles of beer but were eventually coaxed into putting the camp together and so all was soon forgot. Six were allocated to each of the tents and for the time being the men stuck with their units and the men that they had already soldiered with and had grown to like and trust.

Kabrit was located on a headland on the western shore of the Great Bitter Lake near to its junction with the Suez Canal, east of Cairo and a similar distance south of Port Said, nearby the R.A.F. Kabrit airfield which flew Blenheim light bombers and received quite a lot of attention from the Axis air force's so the digging in of the tents proved beneficial. The Suez Canal was also bombed and mined. With the Axis threat of advance always a constant danger sentries had to be set each night and of course day so they were always alert to the possibilities of danger. Some wag had erected a sign outside of the main gate into the camp bearing the legend 'Stirling's Rest Camp' but the truth was far from that.

Captain Stirling, a six foot five inch aristocratic Scot with his gentle stoop and quiet voice who never seemed to order anyone to do anything but seem to suggest to them that 'periapt's this would be a good idea' or 'could you possibly do this?' of course if the request wasn't met to the full the outcome would that he who had been asked would be unceremoniously returned to unit. Known amongst 'his set' as 'The Giant Sloth' gathered them all together and set out his requirements for the unit which included discipline on the parade ground as tight as that of the Guards who made up the bulk of the men, although saluting every time a other rank came into contact with an officer was waived. The Armies ritual of cleaning

their personal weapons for the parade ground and inspection was put to one side to the relief of all. They must learn to think for themselves and that they could not expect to be spoon fed by M.E.H.Q. The bulk of the unit was made up of No.8 (Guards) Commando mainly from 3 Troop, most of this Commando had seen no significant action although elements were present in Tobruk, one hundred of their number served here in a support role for a period until they were withdrawn in August while a further two hundred men were to be engaged in an attack at Gazala in April. The men boarded the Royal Naval gunboat "Apris" and set sail only to be attacked on their voyage by Stukas of the Luftwaffe and two men were wounded and the engines damaged forcing them to return home. The final batch of those from 8 (Guards) Commando arrived during Thursday the fourth of September, these were the men that had fought in Tobruk and had recently been relieved. The second highest was those from No.11 (Scottish) Commando who originally were to have been part of the raid on Bardia with No.7 Commando but after its initial postponement due to inclement weather were excluded when the raid did finally take place. After being on garrison duties in Cyprus had taken part in Operation Exporter the invasion of Syria where they suffered considerable loss's including their C.O. Lt. Colonel Dick Pedder, next followed No.7 Commando who had seen action at a landing on the coast at Bardia and also they covered the withdrawal of the Allied forces from the Island of Crete although they were originally sent there as reinforcements to bolster the islands defences but the situation changed so rapidly that their role was quickly changed to that of rear guard and finally by those from outside of the original Layforce and most likely to have come from No's.50 and 52 Commando who along with No.51 was known as the Middle East Commando and had been raised initially in the Middle East and had previously seen action in Eritrea during the East African campaign and also as with No.7 Commando during the Crete debacle. In March Brigadier Laycock on learning that the Western Desert Force were to commit probably it's best trained and most experienced troops to the defence of Greece under Operation Lustre requested that a role be found for his Layforce Commandos but this fell on the deaf ears of Wavell and his staff in Cairo much to his great dismay. Originally David Stirling had asked that he be able to recruit two hundred men from the ranks of Layforce but this was cut down to a total of sixty five by the authorities in Cairo. 'L' Detachment came under the command of the old Layforce commander Bob Laycock who was doing his utmost to reconstitute the Commandos in the Middle East as due to shortages of man power were in the process of being disbanded but this was only to be temporary. Training was to be harder than that of the Commandos but on operations discipline would be of a more relaxed nature. On the fourth of September David Stirling had paraded his men and told them that he

expected of them self discipline, personal motivation, modesty and the highest standard of turnout and behaviour and a hundred percent devotion to having a crack at the Hun.

No. 8 (Guards) Commando were deemed typical of the Guards, a club to be enjoyed by the officers over dinner, pink gin's and cocktails by 'the good time Charlie's' who seemed to fill their ranks, many had gambled away their money on the voyage over the sea's and Stirling embraced this occupation with relish while No.11 (Scottish) Commando was said to be over disciplined and over trained and bringing up the rear was No.7 Commando the complete opposite to the previous, under trained and with no discipline. Whatever was true these men who all had one thing in common to be able to fight the enemy would have to forge together and forget any differences or rivalries that may have existed to become a unit. All of the Officers apart from Bonington came from Layforce, Stirling was a Scots Guard a failed art student who had returned to England on the outbreak of war from America where in the Rocky mountains he was in training for an expedition to climb Mount Everest, Lewes from the Welsh Guards after spending time in the 1st Battalion of Tower Hamlet Rifles a Territorial Regiment from the East End of London, a strange place to find a graduate of Oxford University and a member of their winning Boat Race team from 1937 who was born in Calcutta, India to English parents but grew up in Australia. Both came from 8 (Guards) Commando. Bill Fraser was a Gordon from No.11 (Scottish) and was in France in 1940 before the evacuation and eventual fall of France and was wounded in action, he would appear to have been the only Regular Officer on their strength. Fraser though did not come from the officer class that the army so desired, both his father and grandfather served in the Gordon's as Sergeants, Bill Fraser though broke the mould and was commissioned into the family regiment. He would though never be truly accepted by his peers from within what Stirling wanted to create, a classless unit. Fraser preferred his own company and that of his pet dachshund 'Withers'. Eoin McGonigal from the south of Ireland and was pre-war a Solicitor who liked Rugby, Mayne was from the Northern Ireland and also was a Solicitor who represented the British Lions during the 1938 South African tour, he was also the Ireland Universities Heavyweight Boxing Champion and a finalist in the British Universities championship. Both were great friends who disregarded the tensions between their two countries. Both enlisted into the Territorial Army, the 5th L.A.A. Regiment R.A. before they transferred to the Royal Ulster Rifles, they both applied for an attachment to the Cameronian's (Scottish Rifles) before joining 11 (Scottish) Commando. Both saw considerable action during the Litani river operation in June 1940. Eoin McGonigal had remained with No.11 (Scottish) Commando but Mayne had left them and was at the time awaiting confirmation of his posting to Military

Mission 204 in the Far East and not as one of the greatest legendary misnomers ever created. It was said that he was languishing in jail charged with striking his Commanding Officer Geoffrey Keyes who took over after the death of Pedder at the Litani River and pending Court Martial. The closest to the truth is possibly or most likely probably is that Mayne when he started drinking could become quite uncontrollable and frequently would become violent. On one particular occasion on Arran he while under the influence struck Gerald Bryan a fellow officer in No.11 (Scottish) Commando who was billeted with him, on waking the following day and saw the black eye he was sporting asked to tell him who had done it and he would sought him out showing that he had no recollection on what had gone on the night before. Sadly though later during a 'Guests Night' in the Officers Mess in Cyprus he had got drunk and 'very bolshie' so that Major Charles Napier had to ask him to leave. Later Napier was assaulted in his tent by a 'huge unknown assailant' and severely beaten. On this being reported to the then Acting Commanding Officer Major Geoffrey Keyes he assumed that due to the description given Mayne could be the only suspect and reported the matter to the islands Divisional Commander Brigadier Rodwell who immediately had him returned to unit which resulted in him being sent to the Commandos Base Depot in Geneifa, Egypt. Here he went down with a bout of malaria and was confined to No.19 General Hospital, Canal Zone to recover.

Charles Bonington was an adventurer who left his wife and child in Scotland to travel to Australia where he worked as a journalist, on the outbreak of war he joined the Australian Army and served as a Sergeant before being commissioned onto the General List, he served as the Intelligence Officer for the 1st Cheshire's. During a period of sick leave he met up with David Stirling who had shared the same school as him and threw his lot in with him. Originally his name was Bonig which came from his German father but he changed his name before marrying in Scotland.

One further officer was attached to the unit from the very start a Major F.C. Thompson of the Frontier Force Rifles, Indian Army. He was to act as a H.Q. observer and to oversee the initial camp administration acting in a way as an Adjutant. Headquarters had obviously decided that they wasn't going to leave it all to one man to raise and organise the proceedings, it also gave them their own man in the camp as well.

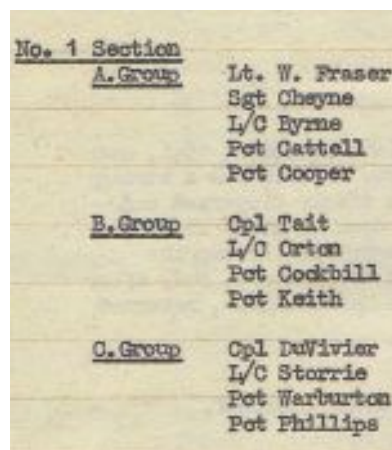
Discipline was to be overseen by Lieutenant Blair Mayne and any defaulters were to be treated to a unique form of punishment, if the offending soldier after being paraded accepted Mayne's award he was promptly taken to a boxing ring and faced Mayne who was a skilled heavyweight boxer who administered the punishment over several rounds. After the eventual defeat of the soldier all

was quickly forgotten and the subject was never to be mentioned again. If though the offender could offer a good excuse which for the enjoyment of Mayne would be a rather tall cock and bull tale and it suitably amused him then no action was taken though he would know as well as Mayne that he had just about got away with it. One such story which came later involved a soldier who was late back to camp and he offered the story for his defence that he had headed back to camp with plenty of time in hand and when he tried to light a cigarette the wind proved to be so strong and so he turned his back into the wind to complete his task, once his fag was alight he headed on only to find that he'd forgotten that he'd turned about once he had arrived back from where he had started from. An amused Mayne knowing it was pure bull and immediately dismissed the relieved soldier.

There was to be no 'pissing about' like what was to be found in the normal regimented army with those who did not reach the desired requirement, if you didn't meet the mark you would be returned to their units something that is still a bad mark against you even today but there were some amongst their ranks to although didn't quite make the mark rather than being returned to their parent unit they were kept on, one Gunner Tommy Corps of the Royal Artillery from Newcastle on Tyne became Lieutenant Mayne's batman and driver whilst Guardsman Leitch from the Scots Guards took on the duties in the officers mess. Stirling had Company Sergeant Major George 'Bill' Yates and Sergeant Ernie Bond acting as Platoon Sergeant to help oversee developments. The Quartermaster side was looked after by the able Gerry 'Daddy' Ward assisted by two other ranks.

Training could now begin it was Friday the 5th September, though David Stirling would be absent from this for much of the time being at M.E.H.Q trying to cajole with his quiet influence to gain the required resource's for his men. The physical training instructor was CSM 'Gus' Glaze from the armies Physical Training Corps but Lieutenant Jock Lewes was in overall command of their training which included route marches both day and night covering distances between ten and thirty miles carrying packs full of stones, some emptied some out to lighten their loads but he soon caught on to this and had the stones numbered thus foiling any attempt to make life easier. As each morning broke the men were roused and while still dark their first task of the day was a route march or a long distance run. Following this they engaged in a game of Rugby in which both sections A and B would basically knock each other about a bit something that Paddy Mayne certainly excelled at. In the Commandos they had trained to achieve a marching speed in full equipment of two and a half miles per hour over a distance of thirty five miles. They learnt to recognise sounds so that it became second nature. The men were now becoming the elite of the elite and would soon surpass that. Three day exercises comprising of a sixty mile hike covering twenty miles each night and lying up during the day.

Each man would scrape a hollow in the desert sand and lay in it covered by their smocks; food was minimal comprising of dates and hard rations plus their personal water bottles. Laying up they would hope that sleep would come easy. Map reading and compass work was essential for their proposed work in the desert as would have to be their medical knowledge, their training even included how to perform an amputation. Stirling had clashed with Lewes about how many men should make up a section; Lewes favoured ten or twelve while Stirling preferred a section of five.



<u>No. 1 Section</u>	
<u>A. Group</u>	Lt. W. Fraser
	Sgt Cheyne
	L/C Byrne
	Pet Cattell
	Pet Cooper
<u>B. Group</u>	Cpl Tait
	L/C Orton
	Pet Cookbill
	Pet Keith
<u>C. Group</u>	Cpl DuVivier
	L/C Storrrie
	Pet Warburton
	Pet Phillips

A compromise was eventually reached which would have favoured Stirling. They had finally settled on a four man section which would be known as a patrol, each member of the patrol would be a 'Specialist' either a driver/mechanic or a medic, a navigator or a demolition expert. Each patrol would then be mutually dependant on each other, they would be further split into two pairs of 'muckers' so no man was ever on his own. The classic Kim's game was also used to help train their memory as they would have to memorise map references and other things as they would not be able to take written information with them. Weapons' training was essential as all ranks had to be fully conversant with all weapons belonging not only to their army but also those of the Germans and Italian's, they were also able to make their own choice of personal weapons. Instruction in this field was overseen by Lt. McGonigal. Navigation came under the experienced eye of Bill Fraser, while Paddy Mayne also looked after P.T. along with Gus Glaze.

Languages would also play a part of their education, operating behind the lines as they would they would need to have some understanding of their enemies language to get by and they would spend some time learning the rudimentaries. Water discipline was of high importance no man was allowed to share their bottles and they would only be allowed to drink when the order was given, it was expected that when they returned from a march their bottles would still be full; some believed it was the comfort of the knowledge that they had water if they needed it which helped them get through it. One man couldn't do without his

water and although he made the grade in everything else water was to be his downfall and he found himself returned to his unit. Lt. Lewes had however made an error of judgement during training regarding water consumption, he wrongly believed that the men could go for long periods without replenishing themselves but luckily no lasting harm came to the men involved and the water discipline was relaxed slightly, but all men knew that when the chips were down they had acquired their own personal discipline to overcome problems of thirst. To alleviate the effects of dehydration during the many marches they undertook some of them lightened the loads that they were carrying but Jock Lewes soon cottoned on to what was going on and he took steps to end their little ruse. Their packs would contain rocks each numbered so that at the end of the exercise each man would have to produce the required amount of rocks in his pack which would weigh around sixty pounds and on occasions far in excess of this. Cunning may have been an essential requirement for the Special Air Service but Lewes quite rightly saw this act as detrimental to their training and could compromise them at a later date.

They were also blindfolded and required to perform various tasks both at night and during the day so that they would be able to perform any given task regardless of the circumstances. Languages, motor transport and the use of the wireless were also included in their training. At the end of each days training the men would return to their tents and in exercise books supplied to them they would write up notes on the day's activities and in turn these would be checked at various times by Jock Lewes to see how well the lessons had been learnt and how well the principles that were being instilled in to them had been absorbed.

Schemes were set up to start at night after a full days training and after a beer with their food they would be called out to participate in whatever Lewes had planned for them. They eventually worked up to a ninety five three day and four night exercise and the experience that they gained from this would soon be put to use. Lessons in explosives led the men to demolish local buildings and all would become experts in destruction. Lewes would at times goad the men calling them 'yellow' and these insults made the men show that they were worthy of inclusion in L Detachment. Lewes would never ask his men to do anything that he himself couldn't do and on many occasions he would complete a scheme on his own and tweak it where he thought it was required before calling on his men to perform it. Much emphasis was put on night-work and the exercises conducted during these periods gradually became easier as David Stirling quite rightly believed that the key to successful night fighting was in a soldiers self confidence. During demolition training they were joined by a Egyptian railways employee who showed them the best places to plant explosives to get the best results in destroying train and track

and that a curve in the track was the best place as this would almost certainly cause derailment but also cause more problems to replace a curved piece of track rather than a straight piece.

By the time their training expanded they had been put into groups away from their regiments or commando unit, these would be the squads that they would operate within. The training intensified ready for parachute training. One of the first exercises was jumping into a sandpit so that they could practice rolling.

Jock Lewes became aware that lying unused in an old quarry was a narrow gauge railway and the ever inventive officer thought that he could make use of it. Accompanied by about five men in a 3 tonner they went to see what was on offer. About 80 yards of track and sleepers were lifted along with one of the hoppers and taken back to their base.

The sleepers and track were re-laid down the side of a sand dune, decking was added to the hopper so that the man could balance on the top of it. This was set in motion by the men as they pushed the hopper to the edge and the hopper and man on top hurtled to the bottom of the dune, as the hopper hit the far side of the dune the man on board jumped off and would try to land safely with a forward roll, injuries were common place with broken collar bones top of the list.

Lewes had the idea of jumping backwards off the back of a lorry at various speeds to simulate landing but with most of them suffering some sort of injury including various breakages this was eventually stopped. Amongst those who succumbed to these injuries and would for a period require hospital treatment were Jeff DuVivier, Jimmy Brough, Johnny Orton, Johnny Byrne and Bill Fraser.

Jim Almonds built a frame for jumping from various heights and this helped ready them for their first jumps proper. Almonds pretty much built all of the training facilities himself but at times he was able to call on the help of Italian prisoners of war and when the occasion needed it a party of Royal Engineers. They had acquired the use of a Bombay Troop Carrier from R.A.F. Transport Command based at the nearby airfield of Khanka, Lieutenant Peter Warr of the East Surreys had been sent out from England to oversee their instruction and arrived in early November but too late to have any impact on their initial training programme and soon they were jumping from this near obsolete aircraft.

A hole was cut into the bottom of the fuselage to allow them to exit the plane but due to the size of the hole and the parachute pack on their backs most took a hefty blow to their faces, there was also the possibility that they could get caught up on the tail wheel so it was not such an easy exercise to perform. The static lines used to open their 'chutes were connected to a bar which ran along the bottom of the fuselage as they exited the 'plane the line would open the 'chute, sadly on the second stick during this stage of their training Ken Warburton's chute failed to

open, the next in line Joe Duffy would have seen this happen but not the Jump Instructor who urged him on, he jumped and his line failed to open his 'chute and he to plunged to his death, when they found his body they could see that faced with imminent death his mind was still working and he had tried to claw open his pack but alas to no avail.

The third to jump was Bill Morris and following him was Johnny Orton but they were held back by the dispatcher Flight Sergeant Ted Pacey and the aircraft returned to base. When they recovered the bodies of Duffy and Warburton they found that during the descent Duffy had tried to manually open his 'chute and had very nearly succeeded but the height was such that he never had the time although he had managed to pull out half of the 'chute.

On landing the problem was diagnosed as a fault in the clip and new one's were sought and fitted, a similar problem had occurred at Ringway in England but they had not passed this information on so some responsibility for the deaths of the parachutists both who were Seaforth Highlanders and both had served in 6 Troop, No. 11 (Scottish) Commando must fall on their shoulders.

The clip was a snap link similar to those found on a dog lead which was then attached to the dog's collar. Dougie Arnold and Alex Westwater had been detailed to go into Cairo and pick up a batch. The link was attached to a bar welded into the aircraft's fuselage with the parachute's static line already attached. It was governed by its breaking strain, when the man exited the aircraft and became fully extended it would break thus releasing the parachute.

Stirling who was a M.E.H.Q. in Cairo at the time, a five storey building of an art deco fashion located at 10 Tonbalet street in the Garden District of Cairo known as 'Grey Pillars' or simply 'No.10' received a signal from Kabrit telling him of the disaster, Stirling's reaction was that they should suspend activities for the day and stand the men down pending an investigation but they should be ready to resume training the following day. The rest of the day then was spent in contemplation about the tragedy and many nervous hands smoked countless cigarettes which had been issued free. Prior to the jump many of them had put on the pretence of bravery but know they were different with the realisation that what they were doing could seriously injure them and possibly lead to an untimely death. The next morning at 05.30 hours they all went back and successfully jumped being led by Jock Lewes followed by Pat Riley, not a man refused showing the high degree of morale which was now to be found within them.

All though in view of what had occurred the previous day was given the option of standing down. They were due to do four day and two night jumps and one also into the Suez Canal but in the end they did five day and one night jumps. The men

were to be known shortly as 'Stirling's Para shots' although this was crudely modified by the L.R.D.G. to 'Stirling's Parashite's'.

Some of the sceptical middle ranking officers at Headquarters sarcastically named them the 'Short Range Desert Group' thinking that they preferred the close proximity of Cairo and its extensive range of bars.

One problem that took some time to overcome was a bomb to destroy aircraft, what was available to them was a five pound explosive device but this proved not up to the job in question and also the weight issue would mean that they could not carry enough, after some weeks Jock Lewes found the solution and the 'Lewes' bomb became part of S.A.S. folklore. Lewes had earned the nickname by of 'The Wizard'. The Lewes bomb was basically plastic explosive and thermite roll together in engine oil with a No.27 detonator, an instantaneous fuse and a time pencil. The time pencil looked like a biro pen, it was a glass tube with a spring loaded striker held in place by a piece of copper wire. At the top was a glass phial containing acid which was gently squeezed to break it. The acid then ate through the wire to release the striker. The thicker the wire, the longer the delay. The time pencils were colour coded according to the length of fuse. An aircraft production man told them that when they planted their bombs they were always to ensure that they placed them on the same wing as the enemy like them-selves kept quantity of each wing as spares but if same wing was used they would soon run out thus rendering more aircraft as non operational.

By October 1941 their training had progressed far enough for Stirling to be able to offer a £10 bet that his men could simulate an attack on Heliopolis airfield who would be warned of the "attack", they marched from Kabrit to Cairo and then across the desert a distance of roughly one hundred miles, they carried four water bottles, a pound of dates, half a pound of boiled sweets and some army biscuits, they used Italian haversacks which were far better than the standard issue British ones and also a piece of hessian with which they could camouflage themselves from the prying eyes of the aircraft which were up looking for them. To simulate the bomb load that they would be expected to carry on operations stones were once more used, and were put into the haversacks of the men, with most carrying around eight stones which would equate to eight Lewes bombs which weighed around one pound apiece. There was to be five groups each split into ten man sections further split down to two's, each group was commanded by one of the five officers, Bill Fraser, Mayne, Lewes, McGonigal and Bonington who would on the forth coming operation be in command for the real thing except for Bill Fraser who due to an injury sustained later in an exercise would take command of the rendezvous party with Stirling taking his place. They marched by night and lay up during the hot days. On the fourth night they were all in position and broke

through the perimeter wire and successfully planted stickers on all of the aircraft, on further investigation it was found that some of the aircraft had more than one sticker on! The bet was duly paid and the men then marched to Abbabasyia Barracks with their four day beard growth, unwashed and dishevelled and with their Italian haversacks they were at first taken to be Prisoners of War but after slaking their thirst's they made their identities known and the Officer commanding arranged to have them transported back to base at Kabrit happy though exhausted with the knowledge that their exercise was a resounding success. Only one man from the whole unit fell out during the exercise and he was duly returned to his unit.

Following their return Captain Stirling organised a competition to come up with a badge and a motto for the unit, the basis of the badge was designed by Bob Tait and further modified by Jock Lewes before being accepted, the motto was finally coined by Stirling himself although one of those proposed was 'Seek and Destroy' or 'Strike and Destroy' which aptly described what the unit was all about but 'Who Dares Wins' was finally adopted. Although many options were available one being 'We Descend To Avenge'. This would overcome one of the problems that had affected the Commando's from the start that they had no common badge to identify them. The badge brings about regimental pride and now they had one and it made all the difference in the world. This and their Parachute Wings would be manufactured in Cairo. A badge and a motto that they could be proud of. They also needed one more thing; all of the other ranks all sported various headwear from Field Service Caps, Tam o Shanter's and the Guards with their peaked Service Caps. What they now needed was a common hat that would unify them and what they got was a white beret! These may have been black tankers berets washed in petrol and then bleached white in the hot desert sun, but white? These were adopted after Squatter and were first worn when they were given a few days leave in Cairo. They found that they were wolf whistled and generally ribbed by all and sundry especially those New Zealanders, South Africans and Australians whom they came into contact with, understandably this caused trouble and once their leave was over they quickly dropped them and returned to wearing their usual head dress. For a period khaki Field Service Caps known as Fore and Afts were worn these though having dark blue facings which would have normally been walking out caps were worn until the now familiar sand coloured beret was adopted as the standard head dress.

They were given the option of wearing the wings they had been awarded for their parachute jumps either now on the shoulder or after they returned from the operation on their breast. They all opted for the latter, for many though this option never became a reality and increased the value of these wings to those

who got to wear them later. Several of the men were hospitalised for various reasons and one Johnny Orton languished here for a period with a badly infected foot picked up from a training accident but with the knowledge of an impending operation he discharged himself on the twelfth of November having been there since the twenty ninth of October and returned to his unit. Operation Crusader was due to start on the 18th November; originally it was to have begun on the 11th but was postponed until the 15th and again put back to the 18th. Rommel was due to start his own offensive to finally end the stubborn resistance of the Tobruk garrison on the 20th so no further delay could be allowed. Their part in it was to attack three Axis airfields at Gazala and two at Tmimi, five parties in five aircraft were to be dropped near to the airfields where they would then attack them and hopefully destroy as many of the enemy planes as they could before heading for a rendezvous with a patrol of the Long Range Desert Group who would then return them to the Allied Lines. Crusader was to be the attempt to relieve the garrison encircled at Tobruk and then force Rommel into a general retreat and so the destruction of these enemy aircraft was critical. 8th Army Operation Order Number 16 which David Stirling received on the 10th November instructed him that fifty four men and himself were to parachute behind the enemy lines and to co-ordinate their attacks on the airfields so that each groups bombs went off at the same time, all contact with the enemy was to be avoided unless it did not compromise their mission. The priority was to be the destruction of German aircraft; ME109's being the most important followed by ME110's, HE111's, Stuka JU87's and finally JU88's. The Italians priorities were to be G50's, Macchi 200's, CR42's, BR20's and S79's. The Western Desert Air-force would also carry out various raids on the airfields on D-1 and D1 using Wellington bombers and Albacore bi-planes which were similar to the Fairey Swordfish and just as obsolete to drop flares to guide the Wellingtons in, he was instructed to arrange for three 'L' Detachment trucks along with one officer and three other ranks plus provisions to accompany the L.R.D.G. patrol to the rendezvous to return the men to Allied lines although there were only two 15 CWT Bedford trucks available at the time and so the orders were amended before their final issue.

Before they moved off for the mission they were visited by General Claude Auchinleck at Kabrit and he watched as they went through their paces and Jock Lewes and a stick of men dropped in a demonstration for the C.O. of the army to see how well they had progressed. Captain Stirling was also quite crafty during this visit and although the cap badge had not yet been adopted officially by the army by wearing his cap badge and being saluted by 'The Auk' this gave the much needed seal of approval. During the training period the camp had been visited

several times by Major General Richie the man to whom Stirling had first placed his proposals to and he had taken quite an interest in their development.

On the fifteenth of November those that were selected for the raid were transported from Khanka to a forward airfield at Ma'aten Bagoush airfield in readiness. Here the sealed Operational Orders were opened and the men studied them so that they were fully conversant with what the operation entailed, by the time they were finished each man knew by heart what was expected of them.

The R.A.F. treated them to a top rate meal believing that these men were on a suicide mission and so deserved such a feast, they then broke into the liquor store of the Officer Commanding the airfield and stole his supply and got themselves ingloriously drunk, during this the Officer Commanding chanced upon them and asked where they had got the drink from and was able to tell them it was his drink bringing the impromptu party to a premature end. The following morning they were dealt with by Jock Lewes who found the whole episode serious and gave them a grand rollicking but with a degree of humour embedded. 'Habitual criminals or congenital idiots' is how Lewes described them and to some extent it shocked the men out of their hangovers as they realised the result of their actions. They knew that in the imminent operation they could not afford to let him down or the rest of L Detachment something that they achieved admirably. The men were assembled and the full plan was explained to them and they quickly set themselves down to memorising all of the information and studied the maps so they knew all that would be needed to know to complete a successful operation.

The weather at this point was deteriorating to such an extent that due to thirty five an hour winds which was more than twice the recommended speed for a jump it was thought that they might have to cancel the operation. November in the Western Desert was the wet season and although rain could obviously be expected along with high winds which in turn could whip up dust storm's or 'khamsein's' the nights still remained bitterly cold but the days could have temperatures reaching as high as thirty degrees Celsius, eighty six degrees Fahrenheit.

Those doughters at M.E.C. gave them every opportunity to pull out but after a conference between the L Detachment officers and the R.A.F. they decided that in due of all the previous cancellations they had met during their time in Layforce the op. must go on, which was to bet met with absolute approval by all the other ranks. Bill Yates was told to assemble the men together so that Stirling could let them know what was happening. The Brigadier, General Staff Co-ordinator had also advised David Stirling though to cancel the operation but his words went unheeded. The men assembled all backed wholeheartedly his decision to go ahead

with the operation. These men were not 'Gung Ho' they just wanted to get on with the job in hand, a job that they had trained so hard to achieve the exacting standards that was demanded of them. It would also help to heal the memories of the two fatalities from the parachute training accident one month previously and also the it would make worthwhile all of the injuries that so many of them had sustained and to finally put to bed the constant cancellations of operations that they had endured during the brief but troubled existence of Layforce. They were young, fit and well trained they had no fear just a belief that they would come through unscathed. The weather though did improve somewhat and by the time the aircraft were due to take off the conditions were recorded as 'clear and still' but this was to change quite dramatically.

A final briefing was held with all those who were to go and here virtually at the last minute the five sticks were changed from eleven men per stick and aircraft probably due to the amount of equipment stowed on board the aircraft, Stirling's stick was to be himself and seven other ranks the three others who were unable to go on this flight were in due course allocated places with McGonigal's and Lewes stick's. Mayne's and Bonington's remained pretty much intact. In overall command of the operation was Stirling himself with Lewes in command of 1 and 2 Sections and 3 and 4 sections by Paddy Mayne. Thirty minutes before the first aircraft was due to take off the men climbed aboard R.A.F. trucks and made their way to the awaiting aircraft on the dispersal area. On arrival the men debussed and headed for their respective transport. They chatted and had a final smoke and bade cheerio's to the rest of the men in the other sticks, they noticed that the wind was starting to change.

Operation No.1.

Squatter.

The Rendezvous Party.

17-11-1941 – 26-11-1941.

Bill Fraser

3 Other Ranks

8th Army Operational Instruction No.16 issued on the 10th November 1941 laid out the requirements for L Detachments first operation, the raids on the enemy airfields in the Gazala/Tmimi area and to destroy as many as possible the many types of aircraft that would be found there. David Stirling had previously taken part in an aerial reconnaissance of the area and knew what to expect.

On the night the operation commenced 5 Bombay transport aircraft of 216 Squadron of the R.A.F. would parachute 5 sticks of S.A.S. men into the area once regrouped they would make their way independently to the intended targets and attack. It seems simple enough to get there but how would they get back?

Stirling had earlier considered exfiltrating his men by submarine but this method was quickly dropped due to the scant resources of the Royal Navy and the obvious problems this would cause.

The alternative was equally as simple as going in, once their mission was completed they were to head for a rendezvous and meet up with the Long Range Desert Group who would once all those who returned had been assembled would then head for a second rendezvous where trucks crewed by the S.A.S. would help in the return to Siwa the current base at the time of the L.R.D.G.

The rendezvous party needed an officer to command it and this fell to Bill Fraser who if not had been injured in a training accident like so many of the L Detachment men would undoubtedly have been part of the main attack.

Bill would take his men and the only 2 trucks that belonged to the fledgling S.A.S. from their base at Kabrit and drive to Siwa where they would meet up with the L.R.D.G. and would accompany them to the 2nd rendezvous in readiness.

Before the 16th November Fraser set out from Kabrit in 2 Bedford 15cwt trucks to a prearranged rendezvous with the L.R.D.G. who would be the guide them to Siwa where they would make their final preparations and restocking of supplies in readiness for their desert journey. They were to carry enough supplies to cater for 55 men for a period of 6 days, food, water, medical needs, most importantly petrol to last for 6 days; they themselves would need to cater for themselves for up to a period of 10 days. The trucks would be laden not only with this but also the usual requirements for operating out in the desert, blankets, greatcoats, camouflage netting and weapons and ammunition and spare tyres. The L.R.D.G. gave them the loan of a 3 tonner to help with the load as the 2 trucks would not have been up to the task that lay ahead.

On the night of the 16th/17th of November Stirling's men took off on their mission and the following morning the 17th Bill Fraser and his men set out for the rendezvous area at 05.30 hrs. The L.R.D.G. patrol R 1 was commanded by Jake Easonsmith who was highly experienced in operating behind the enemy lines so they were in very good hands but sadly the truck loaned to Bill and his party didn't meet their expectations and whilst they journeyed on that first day out it blew a gasket and was unusable and was duly left behind after they had transferred all of the equipment and stores onto the other vehicles.

It took them until 08.00 hrs on the morning of the 19th November before they reached Wadi-el-Mra which was the location of the second rendezvous, here Fraser and his men concealed their vehicles covering them with the netting to avoid the possibility of detection from the air by any passing aircraft and selected a concealed spot to lay up ready to receive Stirling and his men. The weather had turned for the worse during the last few days with high winds and thunderstorms which turned out to be the worst weather experienced in this region in living memory something which was to play such havoc with Stirling's men.

Easonsmith and his patrol pulled out from here and headed for Garet Meriem in a NNE direction and the rendezvous with Stirling. This was located close to a low hill

near to the Trigh Cappuzo the track that Stirling's men would use to find the rendezvous.

The plan for Easonsmith whilst Bill Fraser and his men waited for their return was to spread out and remain concealed until the parachutist's made their return they would then await a radio transmission for further instructions before commencing on the return journey.

They over stayed their allotted time by some 8 hours hoping that more of the parachutists would reach them but sadly 2 sticks commanded by Lt Eoin McGonigal and Lt. Charles Bonington never made it back, both of these parties took casualties whilst the bulk of them became prisoners of war. Lt. Blair Mayne and Lt. Jock Lewes brought in their parties pretty much intact but they also had casualties leaving them no option but to leave these unfortunate men behind to fend for themselves. Capt. Stirling's also encountered similar problems losing 1 man on the drop whilst the other apart from him and Bob Tait became prisoners of war after Stirling sent them in search of the rendezvous.

Bill Fraser was unaware obviously of the disaster that had befallen their mission as they waited for them to return staying concealed in their hide up as enemy air activity increased, they hoped that it was a sign of the success of the operation but in reality no aircraft were destroyed and these flights were all part of the German response to the commencement of Operation Crusader.

By the 22nd^t November having received instructions for his patrol to head for Bir Tenedger and with the realisation that there would be no more of Stirling's men returning the depleted band set off, once reaching this destination the S.A.S. men join with R 2 patrol who would then return them to Siwa. The journey here though was met by an attack by an Italian Savoia 70 bomber which caused one of the trucks to overturn but there were no injuries save for a few bruises and the truck was soon righted and the journey could continue. The Italian aircraft though had radioed to his base of their findings and soon a German Heinkel HE 111 was soon on the scene searching for them but the L.R.D.G. were the masters of the desert and avoided detection, the Germans though did locate some derelict trucks and contented themselves with bombing these probably thinking that they were their intended target.

The L.R.D.G. and the S.A.S. camped here for the night some 3 miles from their destination and the following morning their movement was further restricted by enemy aircraft although they remained unseen, they could not though locate the R 2 patrol who probably remained hidden to avoid detection.

All the while back at the second rendezvous Bill Fraser and his men waited anxiously constantly scanning the desert floor for the arrival of their comrades and always keeping a watchful eye to the skies and for any enemy aircraft who they themselves had noticed seemed to be more prevalent than before.

Easonsmith made the rendezvous and the two parties from L Detachment were reunited but it would be with great sadness that met Fraser and his men when the gravity of the situation and the full story emerged, an unmitigated disaster had befallen them with so few just 22 men returning so many of their comrades who had shared the hardships and deprivations had not come back.

For Bill Fraser the sadness was increased by the loss of his fellow Gordon and stalwart from B Section of 8 Troop from No.11 (Scottish) Commando Sgt. John Cheyne who had taken command of the section at the Litani river in Syria and led the withdrawal of the section across the river so successfully after Bill had handed over command to him after suffering concussion from a bullet that had hit his helmet strap. Sadly John Cheyne had to be left behind as he had badly damaged his back on his landing and was in no condition to continue, he lies today somewhere within the barren desert wasteland with no known grave.

Bill would have missed another of his Jocks with Dougie Keith not returning, he became a prisoner of war but was lost when the Sebastano Venier was attacked off the coast of Greece in December of that year as it transported prisoners to mainland Italy.

They still though had to return to Siwa and after reaching Jarabub by mid-day on the 25th November they finally reached Siwa by 07.00 hrs on the 26th.

Thus ended L Detachment's first operation and they would quickly overcome their losses and disappointments and would soon make M.E.H.Q. notice them; Bill Fraser would be at the forefront of this and would become one of the most influential of all S.A.S. officers.

Operation No.3.

Agedabia.

19-12-1941 – 23-12-1941.

W. Fraser.

D.R.Tait, J.DuVivier, J.V.Byrne, A.Phillips.

For Lieutenant Bill Fraser the Agedabia operation would be his first having missed out on the debacle of Operation Squatter due to a broken arm sustained during the later stages of L Detachments training and preparations although as seen he was the officer in command of the rendezvous party so he had some knowledge of life behind the enemy lines .

Parachutist's Arthur Phillips and Johnny Byrne would also be going on their first but would be accompanied by two of those who had returned, Bob Tait who had jumped with David Stirling who were the only two to return from this stick, five becoming prisoners of war and one being lost on the drop itself and Jeff DuVivier who was part of Jock Lewes's stick who had only lost man, John Cheyne who had earlier taken command of Frasers second at the Litani river. All bar Phillips had come from No. 11 (Scottish) Commando, Arthur Phillips was a Royal Warwick from 7 Commando and had fought in the rearguard action on the island of Crete in May 1941.

Stirling had planned the raid on the airfield when Brigadier Reid of E Force had asked him to put in a raid so that his force could move out on the 22nd December to link up Marriot's forces, with enemy aircraft activity this would become difficult and possibly very costly if they were caught in the open so Stirling devised the raid to destroy as much as possible on Agedabia airfield to limit the enemies activities.

They set out on the 19th December 1941 with S1 Patrol under the command of Lieutenant Charles Holliman commonly known as Gus of the L.R.D.G. on a trip of around 150 miles to their target area.

They arrived at Ain Naga in Wadi el Faregh around 40 miles south of Jedabya on the night of 19th/20th and joined up with Lieutenant Olivey's S2 Patrol. Early the following morning on the 20th at 01.00hrs they were about 16 miles from Jedabya on the road to El Haseiat. Here Fraser and his section parted company being given

a compass bearing and the position of the rendezvous after the conclusion of their operation. They marched off towards their target laden with weapons, bombs, rations and equipment until they were about 3 miles from the airfield but due to there being too much enemy transport activity they were unable to find a suitable position to lie up and so moved off to find a place where they could remain concealed from any prying eyes.

Having moved a few more miles they finally found a location which would give them cover and prepared for the break of the day so that they could begin observing the airfield.

At daylight they saw several hundred Germans digging defences half a mile to their north and scanning around their position they could also see similar activity to the east and west. Their position was about 8 miles from their intended target and through binoculars they made careful observations regarding the dispositions of the defences and the aircraft weather permitting. Throughout the day there were several rainstorms which forced them to take what shelter from the elements that they could find. They knew that the one thing L Detachment needed was a major success and so carefully noted the positions of the aircraft on the landing site they made their final plans, how to get on the airfield and more importantly how to get off to enable them to reach their rendezvous with the trucks of the L.R.D.G.

Dressed in the sand bleached overalls that covered their battle dress and with the minimum of equipment which included their revolvers, a spare magazine for Johnny Byrnes Thompson machine gun and eight primed Lewes bombs per man carried in their haversacks. One though had to be left behind as it had a damaged time pencil and was buried nearby. Their headwear was the scratchy cap comforter and they wore heavy rubber soled boots, each man carried in his clothing a map of North Africa printed on silk, a tissue paper map of Europe, a rubber covered hacksaw blade and a couple of them carried fighting knives.

As darkness fell the section moved off towards their target cautiously in a slow march of about one mile per hour stopping at the end of each hour to answer the call of nature as they were finding that their bladders needed emptying frequently, something typically felt by men going into action. Three hours or so into the mission the last man in the line Byrne was called forward by Phillips to find Tait

and Fraser beside a two wire stranded fence they had come to the perimeter, the lead man had not noticed the wire and had walked into it but luck was with them and no one from the enemy had been alerted. Fraser pointed into the darkness and told Byrne to take the lead and stepped over the fence to be the first of the party onto the airfield. They had somewhat luckily arrived at the airfield from the north which had meant that they had avoided a number of machine gun positions which had been sited for any possible attacks from the east. He quickly moved off and the others followed and were to soon reach the runway. Across from here they encountered the first batch of aircraft containing both fighters and bombers. There appeared to be the occasional strolling sentry present on patrol but they quickly became aware of men sleeping beneath the wings of the bombers which they assumed to be the crews. Acting fast they began to place their bombs, the fighters got one for their noses while the bombers had one placed high up on their wings. DuVivier and Byrne entered a hangar but it proved to be too dark to search properly. There was a bit of confusion as Fraser was seen climbing up onto the wing of one aircraft to place a bomb but Byrne and DuVivier had already visited this one.

The aircraft were close together parked in groups and the men methodically dealt with each aircraft in the group before they moved to the next, although they had to act stealthily they never saw any sign of the enemy guards that must have been about. On the centre of the runway Fraser and Tait encountered a tractor and a lorry and these too had bombs placed on them.

Right on time at 00.42 hrs the first of the bombs detonated in quick succession and the airfield was engulfed in flames. The enemy now reacted swiftly believing that they were in the middle of an R.A.F. raid and machine guns, light anti aircraft guns opened up as searchlights combed the night sky for their attackers not knowing obviously that they were actually at ground level. Two machine guns firing on fixed lines now opened fire down two sides of the airfield which would hamper the L Detachment men in their withdrawal. All the time the ammunition in the aircraft was exploding and the fires had spread to the petrol and ammunition dumps, the enemy's guns rapidly firing skywards not a shot came their way. With the airfield lit up by the flames of the burning aircraft they now spotted a previously unseen group of German fighters these they knew they had to take out and so collected

what bombs were remaining a total of seven, one short. Fraser now order the other three to make their way back to the rendezvous while he alone would tackle the remaining fighters but they would have none of that and remained to cover him. Fraser along with Byrne ran towards what now appeared to be brand new Me 109-F's and lay their bombs and to make sure that they got them they yanked the pull switches which would give them just fourteen seconds before they exploded. Fraser kept watch as Byrne placed each bomb but he missed the seventh fighter and ran onto the eighth as Fraser stood by the seventh shouting for him to return but by now all of their bombs were used up. The first bombs now went off followed by the last three and as luck would have it all eight were enveloped in flames.

The airfield was now lit up like day and with the noise and bedlam all around them they formed up in a line and rapidly made their escape as from above they heard the sound of bombers from the R.A.F. who dropped bombs on the area of Jedabya on the El- Agheila to Benghazi road, to add to the cacophony of sounds one stick of bombs hit the airfield itself.

The time was 00.55 hrs and as one of the anti aircraft guns located near to a desert fort by the desert track opened fire which gave its position away to Frasers men and they were able to the airfield well away from it and affect their escape. In a half circle movement they headed for the track accessing it well away from the fort and headed off into the desert walking and then running checking the kilometre stones which marked the track to see how far they had gone. Sand had drifted onto the track which they had to go around which delayed to some degree, some of the drifts were as large as hills and was certainly an unwelcome sight.

By 03.00 hrs they began to feel the effects of the last two days and their lack of sleep, the elation temporarily wearing off and they still had a long way to go to the rendezvous. If they were late would the L.R.D.G. wait? Spurred on with the knowledge that they had to make it on time again they pressed on alternately walking and running without respite until at 0.500 hrs as dawn was breaking they finally made it. They could see no sign of the patrol and thought that their lung breaking efforts had all been in vain but soon they heard a voice calling them and they were led to one of the Patrols trucks which were parked up just west of the track.

The truck drove off and rejoined the rest of the Patrol which was waiting concealed some five miles away. Luck had been with them again as they were four hours late making the rendezvous and staying on had put the Patrol in some risk but they had showed their kinship to these brave raiders and that they would never let them down if possible.

Within the hour they came across the lead elements of Brigadier Reid's E Force, the Kings Dragoon Guards a most impressive sight for them to see. Fraser made a brief report to Reid who was more than impressed with the outcome of their operation and thanked them wholeheartedly.

E Force moved on leaving the Patrol to make a temporary camp, make breakfast, and brew up and importantly to put out aircraft recognition signs, wooden circles painted as R.A.F. roundels for any friendly aircraft to see.

As they gathered around for a breakfast of tea and porridge made from biscuits two R.A.F. Blenheim light bombers came into view and spotted the laager, whether they saw the recognition panels or not or thought it was just a ruse used by both sides to avoid attack remains unknown but attack them is what they did. Opening fire on them one man was killed and another mortally wounded, Corporal Laurence Ashby and Private Reginald Riggs both of the Royal East Kent Regiment 'The Buffs' and attached to the Rhodesian Patrol were both needlessly killed but such are the fortunes of war. The aircraft continued on their attack but as the men on the ground had now dispersed to what cover they could find there were no further casualties. Finally with their work done the Blenheim's flew off leaving the L.R.D.G. and L Detachment men to curse the R.A.F.

The bodies of the two men were carried to the back of one of the trucks and laid in the back covered up, quickly clearing everything up the Patrol sped off before a short time later halting close to a large boulder to sadly dig the graves for their two deceased comrades within its shade. At this landmark they solemnly buried their dead without the presence of Fraser and his group. The Patrol leader had asked them not to attend the sad but brief service as to them it was a personal thing and they did not want the company of outsiders, although acknowledged by the Rhodesians that the attack was not their fault they were British and so were the aircraft that had attacked them. Fraser and his men understood the situation

and took no offence and so silently waited for the burial to be completed, here at this landmark two men now lay buried.

The following day the Patrol finally made it back to Jalo on the 23rd December and Fraser made his report to Captain David Stirling. All in all it would be the most successful operation carried out by L Detachment in regard to the numbers used.

From a total of thirty nine usable bombs they had accounted for thirty seven aircraft, a tractor and a lorry for no loss of their own except for the two unfortunate casualties from the L.R.D.G. Patrol.

Fraser's men had completed a remarkable haul vindicating Stirling's overall thesis proving what a small number of determined men were capable of.

The rebirth of L Detachment was now pretty much complete.

Christmas had come early.

Operation No.5.

No.3 Group.

Marble Arch.

25-12-1941 – 09- 01-1942.

Bill Fraser.

D.R.Tait, J.DuVivier, J.V.Byrne, A.Phillips

Operation Marble Arch, named after Mussolini's famous monument on the border of Tripolitania, proved to be one of the greatest feats of endurance in the history of the Regiment .

Fraser's men set off along with Jock Lewes party with the same L.R.D.G. patrol on Christmas day led by 2nd Lieutenant Morris of T2 Patrol.

This target was located close to at S.V.5492. Frasers men were to be dropped off first close to their primary target at Ras Lanuf and then move on to Nofilia and part company with Lewes men and head for the agreed rendezvous and after picking up Lewes party they would then return and pick up Frasers.

After a somewhat uneventful journey Fraser and his men were dropped off around 10 miles south of the airfield. The cover was good and they lay up in a small hollow screened by scrub and soft sand, the area resembled that of the sand dunes found at some sea side resorts but the sea was a sea of sand. They arranged their equipment and settled down to wait for night to fall. During the long cold night they kept watch and tried to sleep wrapped in their blankets. Throughout the following day they lay hidden again keeping a watch until finally as us dusk fell they collected their bombs, weapons and equipment and set off for the target. In just less than two hours marching they reached the airfield or to put it more correctly the landing strip and its accompanying shed but what was to greet them was to be a disappointment the strip was empty. This left them with no choice but to head back to their layup and wait for Morris and his patrol to pick them up.

Again they settled down each taking his turn as watch but by when night had fallen the following day there was sign of the patrol although they knew that there was a possibility of a problem they remained not unduly worried but a further twenty four hours passed and the alarm bells began to ring. They watched as a continual patrol of German Stuka's passed overhead and saw them bomb an area some fifteen miles distant and saw as black smoke rose in columns, they had no idea at this time who or what had lay beneath the bombs and smoke but later they would learn the true story and it's sad ending. Water was now extremely short and all they could do was to moisten their lips and avoid drinking to conserve their dwindling supply which by now was down to about half a pint per man, to be left isolated like this in the desert was each soldier's nightmare come true and they now began to weigh up their options. Tait made the suggestion of marching to the coast road to see if they could ambush a truck and drive back to Jalo, although this idea had its merits meaning they could take with them all their bombs and equipment to be used on further operations it had a snag, they would have to navigate across hundreds of miles of desert without the aid of a sun compass a very serious problem. A further very real problem was if they did manage to capture a vehicle there was a very real possibility of it breaking down at some point leaving them in a very isolated and perilous position.

Bill Fraser decided that their best option open to them was to march parallel to the coast road which would keep them in some sort of contact with the civilian population and to try and reach the last known British positions some two hundred miles away east of Mersa Brega. They would though hold out at their hide out until the very last moment in the forlorn hope that the patrol would turn up. Although the training that they had undergone initially on joining L Detachment this march would be behind enemy lines and would present many dangers from the air the land and possibly from the native population a different prospect indeed.

Six days into the operation and still with no sign of the L.R.D.G. patrol and with water pretty much gone they now had only one option that being Frasers suggestion.

They hurried about burying the bombs and equipment that they could no longer take with them and at first light they set off after tidying up their hiding place.

Rations for the journey was limited to biscuits, cheese and raisins and a tin of emergency chocolate, this would last them no longer than two days. Each man with his haversack and blanket and what little of their precious water that they had left in their bottles set off on the march but trouble hit them as soon as they had started. Having spent some six days of inactivity their bodies did not react well and it was only their self discipline that was able to let them carry on.

In single file they marched each taking a turn at leading under the relentless sun stopping for ten minutes each hour but taking no water at these rest's preferring by agreement to wait until dusk before they would wet their lips. They halted at midday and sat around together and hoped that this would not be how it would end for them.

On and on they went the rear man taking over from the lead man after each all too brief rest period each man setting a past pace only once did a man lag behind and after catching up at the rest spot he found that the ten minutes were up and he would have no rest as he now led the group, the call of nature cannot be ignored!

At dusk they scraped holes in the sand and tried to sleep wrapped in their blankets until the chill of the morning woke them up and off they set again. Rigidly they stuck to their routine but now on one of their breaks they agreed to walk through the night, resting up till then. Dusk came and they drank the last of their water but at least now they would be marching in the coolness of the night.

Through that night they marched and only stopped the once as the sun came up. They now resumed their normal routine and by mid morning they knew that they were making good time as in the distance they spotted the salt lakes to their east.

They knew that the water in these lakes was undrinkable but as they headed to them their speed increased until when they reached the largest of the lakes which took them two more hours they flung themselves down on the water's edge and tried it. Their wishful thinking which had developed a 'periapt's its drinkable' proved obviously to be nothing more than wishful thinking and they each spat out the foul water even trying in desperation other parts of the lake but each time all that they got was the same result.

Their faces and beards were now covered in salt and due to the salt water they had swallowed they found that they were acting in a strange way, dehydration, exhaustion and salt was having its effect on them. They tried to tell themselves that it was possible to drink small quantities of salt water without any effect but the result of drinking just brought on vomiting, in desperation they argued that it may not be salty desperation was setting in.

They spotted some caves on the north shore of the lake and slowly set off for them. Fraser and Jeff DuVivier suggested that it could be possible to distil the lake water, Arthur Phillips and Johnny Byrne thought it was a mad idea but set about the process willingly.

The distilling process lasted throughout the afternoon and by dusk about a pint had become available for use. Tea they thought was the best option and they set about brewing up. The result was a brew which tasted like urine and Byrne, Tait and Phillips spat out the foul brew, Bill Fraser and DuVivier though drank theirs.

Phillips and Byrne now set off on the suggestion of Bob Tait who also went along to set off on a recce to try and find a source of drinkable water while those that remained carried on with the distilling.

After an hour's march they reached the coast road and watched as enemy vehicles passed them by. Keeping to the south side of the road they marched along until they came to a temporary parking spot marked off by empty barrels, it could hold up to four vehicles. Byrne kept watch with his Tommy gun which he had steadfastly refused to leave behind when they had began their march whilst Phillips and Tait re-arranged the barrels so that only one vehicle could have access.

After an hour or so a covered enemy lorry carefully pulled up , from the rear the L Detachment men positioned themselves so that they cover both sides and waited for the driver and any passengers to get out. No one did so carefully advancing cautiously listening they guessed that the back was empty. Tait went to the right as Byrne and Phillips went to the left. Phillips opened the door and Byrne pointed his weapon at two Germans inside.

Tait and Phillips searched the truck while Byrne kept watch on the Germans having relieved them of a pistol that they were previously examining. Luck was to a

certain extent with them as although the truck was empty there was one Jerry can of vital water.

The Germans were lying face down with their hands clasped behind their heads as Byrne kept a watchful eye on the road. They were unsure now what to do and contemplating taking the truck back to their cave but the terrain they would have to travel over was not ideal. They could along with the Germans and the water return to the cave on foot and see what Bill Fraser had to say about returning back to the truck and finding a place in the area where the desert was more suitable and proceed on their journey this time by wheels and not by foot. With daylight approaching they along with the German prisoners in tow carrying the water set off on the return, around half a mile from the cave they decided to turn the prisoners loose and duly sent them on their way but were surprised to find as they took a drink of water that they were returning. One who could speak some English told them that they were scared of getting lost, something that they all feared in the desert. Bob Tait pointed to a star in the sky slightly east of where the truck was parked up and sent them on their way again this time telling them not to come back.

They finally reached the cave to a welcome like Royalty or more likely the water was the Royalty and Fraser and DuVivier drank their fill. A brew up was in order but it was decided against and as the water took its effects they found that they now had their appetites returning and feasted on cheese and biscuits.

After filling their water bottles and taking the can with them they resumed their march and by dawn found a small cave to lie up in. There was concern that the two ex prisoners would pass on the information of the three men who had assailed them and so they thought it best to remain concealed until they had got an idea of what lay ahead for them.

By midday there was no sign of enemy activity and so they set out in an easterly direction on what was to be a reasonably uneventful march and that night they slept soundly for the first time in several days.

The following morning they continued on following their usual routine stopping each hour and stopping for a brief lunch break.

By the afternoon they had broken their self imposed water discipline and their water bottles which held only two pints dwindled fast.

The following day as a sand storm began their water had all but given out and they struggled on until eventually after several hours they had no choice to shelter as best they could until the storm subsided somewhat and they could carry on.

When the storm had calmed down they were more than surprised to find themselves very close to an enemy laager. Over a wide area they could clearly see hundreds of Italian vehicles parked up in an orderly fashion. The Italians roused themselves from the storm at the same time as the L Detachment men and began shouting to each other. Creeping away they flung themselves down into the first cover that they could find.

At 19.30 hrs on the 7th of January keeping watch from their hiding place in a hollow in the sand one vehicle they noticed was parked some distance from the main group and Bob Tait took a compass bearing on it and they waited for darkness to fall. An oil lamp helped guide them to the truck which was hanging up in the back with a blanket somewhat ill fitted acting as a black out, with the aid of the compass they approached the truck. Fraser and Phillips climbed silently into the back as the other three kept a vigilant eye. The Italians in the back thought that they were Germans and cried out that they were their allies but soon shut up when they realised that they were in-fact British, Phillips now joined them in the back as Tait and Byrne kept up their watch. Tins of fruit and sardines were soon thrown out of the back of the truck along with a small stove. A large water bottle was found and Arthur Phillips passed it to Bob Tait who found after taking a draught of it was in-fact petrol. With no water available they tried the radiator but this proved fruitless. They now proceeded to do a full search of the vehicle and its occupants, the five Italians were cooks and all it now contained was bedding but no weapons. Jeff DuVivier spoke to one of the cooks and convinced him that the whole vehicle park was surrounded by British forces and an attack was planned for the following morning.

Leaving the enemy cooks to their own devices they moved around the vehicle park via a large detour they continued marching to the east, the ground in the Wadi El Faregh was broken and covered in rocks which made their march all the more

difficult as it was hard to keep direction but by dawn they had found cover and lay up for the rest of the day until dusk.

Sitting around in their new hideout but with no water they decided to make inroads into the supplies that they had taken, a two pound tin of jam was disposed of first followed quickly by the sardines and finally the pears were consumed with great relish.

Night came again on the 8th of January 1942 and so did the march, heading north out of the wadi they came quite unexpectedly to a vehicle track heading north to east and soon spotted a vehicle approaching but they could do nothing about getting hold of it so waited for another to come.

Arthur Phillips the smallest of the party volunteered to stand in the middle of the road with a blanket over his head pretending to be an Arab and flag the next vehicle down while the rest of the party took up covering positions. Within the hour a vehicle was sighted. What turned out to be a German Mercedes had to swerve to avoid Phillips and stop. The L Detachment quickly pounced on the Germans and disarmed them throwing their rifles into the dark and then demanded water but once again they were thwarted, there was none, they tried the radiator but the contents proved to be salty.

At least now they had a mode of transport and with Fraser and Tait and the German driver in the front and Phillips, DuVivier and Byrne with the other German in the back they drove off down the track until they turned onto the coast road and through quite heavy traffic they drove to Mersa Brega, here the traffic had emptied due to mines on the road.

Instructing the driver to take the next right turning which petered out into narrow rutted track and they slowed down to a crawl with the driver telling them that the area was mined, finally being given so many confusing instructions that as the track forked he drove into a salt marsh in-which after a struggle they found that they could extricate themselves. Their position was now south of the Mersa Brega to El Agheila road in an area known as Sebkhah es Segira.

Fraser told the two Germans to march back to the coast road whilst they themselves stayed with the truck until they were out of sight before continuing themselves to the east and through the salt marsh.

As day broke they hid not daring to show the slightest sign of movement, all day long they endured the relentless sun and pitiless conditions until at last as the night fell they yet again continued. By midnight their nostrils were assailed by the stench of battle. They passed graves of fallen British soldiers who had been dragged out of their resting places and stripped of their clothing and boots, through this deeply saddened by the fate of their comrades in arms they continued.

A shout went up and for the first time in their journey the five men panicked and ran full pelt back around two hundred yards and then threw themselves to the ground and lay quiet and motionless trying to work out from where it had come from. It was only a solitary shout and they wondered if it was a shout at all but as they quietly talked it over between themselves they became convinced that a sentry had heard them and had indeed challenged them. They began to believe that they had approached the perimeter of a defensive box and so quickly but quietly they moved off to the left and as nothing seemed to be happening they believed they were in the clear suddenly though a volley of shots rang out and they immediately threw themselves to the ground there now followed a fair degree of shouting but importantly the no more shooting. As they lay and waited for the disturbances to die down they pondered the future would they get away. As it became quiet and settled they crawled forward slowly, cautious of making any noise that would again alert the guards, any inadvertent noise that they made they halted and listened before carrying on.

In the distance they spied a light which turned out to be from a paraffin lamp hanging up in a tent belonging to an Arab. Fraser threw a stone onto the top of the tent to see if there was any life inside, they all began to notice an awful stench of death which seemed to be coming from within. From within the tent emerged a man and his child, as they crawled out they asked him for water and the Arab pointed to a petrol tin which was half full of water, the contents was foul and stank to high heaven but they were glad of any water and all drank from it. The Arab now pointed to the source of the overpowering stench, lying close by were the bodies of his wife and another child but were unable to clear up how they had died even though they were able communicate with him fairly well. They were

able to find out though they were in a sort of no man's land and the Arab pointed them in the direction of the British lines, cordially thanking the Arab they left.

They were elated and lifted to think that they were close to salvation but still moved with caution. By dawn they found themselves amongst a large amount of armoured cars and tanks but they were no threat to them as they were the burnt out hulks of a recent battle. They searched around for food and found a few tins blackened by the fires which had engulfed the vehicles but there was a part of each can that they found which was edible. They moved on slowly as the ground again was rocky and descended into a deep ravine, at the bottom they looked up to the top of the other side and were greeted by the sight of armoured cars of the Kings Dragoon Guards. They were safe now for the time being once again amongst friends with the ordeal of the trip very nearly behind them.

An armoured car escorted the lorry in which Bill Fraser, Jeff DuVivier, Bob Tait, Arthur Phillips and Johnny Byrne travelled back to their own lines at Msus and as luck would have it they found two jars of rum and some cans of condensed milk which they rapidly consumed with great relish. They had to own up in the end to what they had done but their actions were graciously brushed aside.

From here the section was flown to 8th Army Head Quarters and Bill Fraser made a report to General Ritchie.

Their return to the rest of their comrades after being away for over a fortnight with no one knowing if they were alive or dead was soon sullied with the news of the death of Jock Lewes.

Operation No.7.

No.3 Group.

Barce.

16-03-42 – 28-03-1942.

W. Fraser.

E.A. Badger, D. Kershaw, E. McDonald,

A. Phillips, T.R. Chesworth.

S1 patrol under Gus Holliman loaded with Bill Fraser's party left Siwa on the 16th March and the first two days of their outward journey was reasonably uneventful until on the 18th as they lay up 25 miles south west of Bir el Garrari (S) T. 5642 they received a message from HQ that there were enemy patrols active between Bir el Garrari and Msus 40 miles to their south west. The following day leaving behind 3 trucks under Corporal Eastwood at Sidi Zamut (S) s. 8475 which was 55 miles due east of Benghazi he headed with Bill Fraser and his men to a point south east of Barce in the hills (S) N. 8110, the journey there was a rough one and on average they could only manage a desultory 1 mile an hour but had reached their destination by the 20th.

Eastwood's detachment now noticed an increase in enemy activity notably more patrols had moved off to the pre arranged rendezvous at Cheda bu Maun and was joined there after Holliman had dropped off Fraser and his men.

Fraser's group made for the airfield and was able to observe the activity going on around them though there was indeed little.

They were able to get onto the airfield but all that they found was 1 aircraft and 4 workshop shop lorries which they were able to duly destroy.

Holliman in the meantime had managed to salvage 2 vehicles that had had to be abandoned on a previous patrol due to intensive floods in the area.

On the 27th Holliman sent a truck the rendezvous to pick up Fraser's group doing so and returning to the main party on the 28th.

After having joined up with S2 patrol the following day they received a wireless message instructing them to return David Stirling at once which would mean that they would now be in the position of being unable to pick up Lieutenant Dodd's party.

Holliman decided to despatch 3 of his trucks to the camp of Hamed bu Serawaliya who was acting as a local agent, asking him to locate Dodd's group and guide them to Sidi Musa.

By this time the Germans had occupied Sidi Musa and to be able to make contact with the group local friendly Arabs went on foot to locate them and to guide them to Hagfet Gelfag and to wait until another patrol came for them telling them hopefully it would be by the end of the first week of April which was successfully achieved.

Stirling and his team returned with the LRDG until they reached Hatiet el Retem and went directly to El Adem.

Fraser and his team finally reached Siwa with a result of sorts but not was expected especially when you consider the great success of one of previous operations.

This was also to be Tom Chesworth's last outing.

Operation No.12.

Fuka.

July – August 1942.

With the British forces reeling yet again from another of Erwin Rommel's offensive's which had driven them back to a line that would eventually go down in history as El Alamein both the L.R.D.G. and L Detachment were forced to abandon their joint base with the L.R.D.G. leaving stay behind parties to harass the enemy and the S.A.S. heading back to Egypt. Such was the panic at this time that the 1st July 1942 would be known as 'Ash Wednesday' as document after document went up in smoke at the M.E.H.Q. at Tonbalat street in Cairo. The R.A.F.'s bomber squadrons were being withdrawn to Palestine and the Royal Navy was in the process of leaving Alexandria. With the situation in the Middle East now critical and with David Stirling that if the worst scenario reared its ugly head then he and his men would withdraw to Nairobi in Kenya, Auchinleck had sacked Ritchie and took over the forces himself and soon under his steady command the front stabilised.

By this time though the men of L Detachment no longer needed to be transported to their target areas by the L.R.D.G. as they were now in the possession of a quantity of Willy's Bantams converted for their requirements in a new stage of the desert war although the L.R.D.G. would still provide guides and navigators.

Friday the 3rd July saw Bill Fraser and the rest of the S.A.S. men which pretty much left Kabrit empty were ready to commence operations against the Axis.

They headed for Cairo from Kabrit where David Stirling was at his brother's flat with several other members going over the final plans for their operations.

From Cairo they headed for Alexandria and picked up Robin Gurdon of the L.R.D.G. who would guide them to their area of operations via an advance base of his group lying on the north western edges of the Qattara Depression, in some quarters this

crusted salt lake was considered no not be navigatable but it had been crossed before so they had a great advantage over the enemy.

The journey out that Bill and his men faced was somewhat difficult with the shifting sands causing so many problems for their supply lorries all full to the brim with the necessities of war or for that of the S.A.S. with them constantly getting bogged down. At camp that night it was decided that 2 of the lorries would have to return to Kabrit the following day with their contents being as evenly distributed between all of the other vehicles as possible.

After a meal and a brew up the men bedded down and tried to sleep through a cold night waking the following morning sodden caused by a low lying mist that had enveloped the area.

Not only the men were cold and wet but also their General Purpose vehicles now known to one as all as 'Jeeps' were giving their crews trouble starting them but after a short period of time they were ready to move off bidding farewell to their somewhat sad comrades who had to make the return to Kabrit. For many of the men this would be their first taste of action with the S.A.S. and those who had to make the return were extremely disappointed to do so.

Huddled up in their vehicles wearing as much clothes as they could to ward off the cold they headed off to the west and by mid-day they found themselves sweltering under the increasingly hot sun. They passed through the positions held by the 8th Army and by nightfall made camp. The following day they reached the edge of the Depression and took the track known as the Palm Leaf Road which followed the edge of the depression where they could see below them from the cliff edge the totally barren landscape hundreds of feet below them. After a journey of some 400 odd miles they finally reached the L.R.D.G. forward base at Qaret Tartura and set about dispersing their vehicles and camouflaging them before brewing up and cooking their evening meal and here Stirling told the gathering that the following morning they would commence operations against the enemy.

Again a cold night was endured and that next morning Bill Fraser along with all of the others joining Stirling for his briefing.

Their operations were to coincide with 8th Armies operations around the area known as the Ruweisat Ridge, L Detachments targets were to be the landing grounds at Bagoush and Fuka and to destroy as many enemy aircraft as possible.

The first set of operations included Bill and the attacks on Fuka Landing Grounds, No.'s 17, 18 and 19 only brought limited results due to poor reconnaissance, on the night of the 7th/8th July on No.'s 17 and 18 were attacked leaving 10 aircraft destroyed.

David Stirling and Blair Mayne would take on Bagoush. George Jellicoe later of S.B.S. fame would set up a roadblock between Fuka and Galal. Capt.'s Peter Warr of the East Surrey's who had come out from England in November 1941 to become L Detachment's Parachute Jump Instructor and Bernard Schott who also instructed at Kabrit were led by Capt. Alistair Timpson of G1 patrol to Sidi Barrani, they discovered that this landing ground was being only used in daylight for the landing of supplies by JU 52's, the information they were able to get to HQ led to many of these aircraft being shot down by the fighters of the R.A.F. squadrons.

Bill Frasers patrol though initialled moved off after spending the morning in preparation, checking food, water and petrol rations, bombs and weapons with Stirling and Mayne along with Lt. Augustin Jordan's French unit and another party led by an attached R.A.F. officer Arthur Sharpe.

On their journey they had to stop once due to the sighting of an enemy column and now had to keep an even keener lookout not only from the air but also at ground level not forgetting that any roaming Allied aircraft that spotted them would more than likely take them to be of the enemy's forces.

They were forced to make a detour from their route as they spotted an enemy tented encampment but all went well and they, for the time being remained undiscovered and reached by last light an escarpment from which they could see the target. It was here that the party split into its respective groups.

Fraser was able with some difficulty and considerable noise to negotiate the journey down the escarpment once the cover of night had fallen and headed for the airfield, they were now in a position close to their target but ahead of them lay the racks of the Alexandria to Mersa Matruh railway with the main coastal road lying further beyond the airfield. Stopping briefly for a quick feed the men

prepared their bombs and equipment and at midnight set out. They left a group of 4 men to stay behind along with the L.R.D.G. guide in readiness for their return and Arthur Sharpe and his group headed off for a satellite airstrip which lay close by. Bill Fraser led his men past the enemy guard posts and now planned to get onto the airfield itself to plant their Lewes bombs on the aircraft.

Although their approach work was sound as was to be expected from such an experienced operator as Bill Fraser the French were not so cautious they tried to walk in through the gates of the Landing Ground that they were attacking masquerading as Germans to try to fool the Italians on guard but the Italians didn't fall for it and it left the French no option other than to carry out a rather swift withdrawal. The resulting gunfire quickly alerted the guards at Fraser's target, Fraser and his men were negotiating the wire surrounding the target were left in the position of being compromised which left Bill to reluctantly give the order to abandon the mission. As Bill stealthily crawled away he passed a small rise in the ground and spotted a group of Italians, he drew a grenade from his pack ready to lob it at the unsuspecting enemy who were oblivious to his presence, he never primed it and returned it to the safety of his pack realising the futility of his proposed act saving the lives of these Italians, others may have gone through with it but Fraser did not and carried on with his escape. Guided by a torch beam which was flashing at 30 second intervals back at the spot where their vehicles lay hidden they successfully managed to return they also made contact with the French patrol whose actions had rumbled their mission but they had at least had some luck and did in-fact manage to destroy 9 aircraft with a further 6 damaged but this did little to console Bill and his party who let fly at them for not following orders. On the 11th July Bill Fraser attacked Landing Ground 16 again at Fuka and would attempt to attack it using his Jeeps and their mounted Vickers 'K' guns but as they attempted to cross the enemy defences his Jeep drove into an unseen rifle pit and alerted the enemy who fired upon it, it was with great difficulty that they finally extricated it, a second Jeep was also employed but its gun mountings became dislodged returning fire and finally they had to give up withdrawing out of sight but that was in the near future.

At 03.00 hrs they moved away stealthily to gain as much distance from the enemy as possible so they could be in a lying up position by dawn. They rescaled the

escarpment but to affect a quick exit they could not afford the time of following the path and elected to take a rather risky chance of travelling through a minefield luckily for them the mines were without fuses but luck ran out for them as one of the lorries broke down quickly followed by 2 German fighters flying low, taking what cover they could behind the lorries hoping that the enemy would assume that they were derelicts and luck for Bill now returned as the German aircraft flew off taking no action against them. The truck needed to be repaired and they quickly set about the task and succeeded before heading off again to lie up.

A likely spot was found which would give cover to the Jeep in some scrub but the lorries would be left out in the open using an old ruse used many times before by the L.R.D.G. leaving the bonnets up to give the impression from the air or from the distance on the ground they were out of action. On occasion men would urinate on the engines giving the impression that they were old and rusted to fool the enemy's closer inspections when they did indeed come across them.

Taking cover they took time to get a little sleep leaving a lookout to keep an ever vigilant eye out for any enemy activity.

It was possible to move during the day as the heat haze very often covered up or disguised movement and by early afternoon they were on their way to their base which they reached after driving south westerly at not being observed.

The L.R.D.G. patrol G2 led by Gurdon destroyed or damaged up to 40 vehicles that they found in an enemy staging point they then picked up the S.A.S. parties from Fuka and returned them to their operating base.

The base though came under air attack by a single Italian aircraft a CR 42 who strafed the base but flew off once his ammunition was all expended.

One vehicle was destroyed but there was no casualties to themselves but they knew that their position was compromised and they would have to quickly vacate the hideaway and find another. Jellicoe's men came in later and an assessment was made regarding the success of the operations, David Stirling would always be very cautious regarding the amount of damage that his unit did in operations once he reported to H.Q. there were still those back at H.Q. who were seriously against these 'private armies' and their private wars with many considering the men employed on these kind of operations as lesser men than those in the front line

who had to take their chances against bayonet, bullet and bomb. If only they knew the truth of what these men faced on a daily basis whilst out operating behind the lines.



To make sure that H.Q. could not accuse him of exaggerating he wisely informed them that the tally was 30 aircraft although the true number would have been nearer 50.

They now sought a new spot to work from and at 03.00 hrs they moved off to the north east crossing the Matruh Qara track 25 miles to the west at Bir el Quesir (689283) on the 9th July this became their new base of operations.

The night of the 12th/13th July saw a further operation undertaken by Jellicoe leading 1 party and a second being the French, Jellicoe's party of 4 Jeeps was attacked by enemy aircraft destroying 2 and leaving a 3rd to be abandoned which left his party of 9 men to return the 90 miles back in just the 1 Jeep having to abandon their mission to raid El Daba. The French party led by the L.R.D.G. officer Robin Gurdon was also attacked by 3 Italian Maachi's killing Gurdon, this effort was also abandoned.

With their supplies coming to an end Bill Fraser along with most of the men employed on the operations headed back to Kabrit, Stirling would attend meetings in Cairo before returning to their desert base with more men and even more supplies for future attacks against the enemy.

For Bill though the conditions of operating behind the lines in such exacting conditions was beginning to tell and when David Stirling and his resupply column reached the 20 odd men who had been left behind at the forward operating base he had not accompanied them worn out and suffering from desert sores he remained behind at Kabrit in an attempt to recover.

Benghazi and Beyond.

August 1942 – January 1943.

In mid August 1942 Bill set out once again for operations behind the lines in the first of 3 convoys (Advance, Main and Rear Parties.) led by Blair Mayne from Kabrit and drove through Cairo and crossed the river Nile and headed south following its western bank. The second and third convoys would not set out until the end of the month once they had set up a base at their destination at Kufra oasis. They left the green belt of the Delta after following the Nile upstream towards Aswan. At Assyut they followed a track to the southwest between Girga and Nag Hammadi in the direction of Kharga a route that had been followed for many centuries by the caravans of the traders. They would soon come to the Kharga Depression and the track that wound its way along the edges as they headed for their destination Kufra oasis. The going was poor and they were constantly slowed down to a halt as they dug out their sand marooned vehicles. Kharga itself lay a third of the way along the route they traversed to reach Gilf el Kaber a ridge of mountains which climbed to over 3000 feet above them. The oasis at Kufra lay in a slight hollow a small colony that had existed for centuries. The L.R.D.G. was also using Kufra as a base and here the 70 to 80 men and 35 vehicles of Mayne's convoy set about organising themselves setting their HQ close to that of the L.R.D.G.

Their location was around 150 miles south of the Matruh railway line and lay 200 miles behind Rommel's forward positions at El Alamein.

To reach their intended area for operating would mean a journey out of up to 3 days but the fact that the base was secure from enemy activity far outweighed the problem of the distance to the target.

It was from here the S.A.S. would launch their part in Operation Bigamy an attack at Benghazi. G.H.Q., M.E.F. had issued Operation Instruction No.140 for this attack, it's principal aims was to Block the main harbour, sink all shipping in the harbour, destroy oil storage facilities and pumping plants, generally to cause havoc in the

harbour. They would operate as Force X and would consist of 214 S.A.S. all ranks along with 95 vehicles, S1 and S2 patrols of the L.R.D.G. would also be with them although originally the orders only called for 1 patrol, a Royal Naval detachment, men from the S.B.S., a reconnaissance officer from the R.A.F. and lastly 2 Stuart light tanks. These though could not make the journey and would be abandoned as they were forever bogging down. This was an operation that David Stirling had done his best to avoid deeming it totally unsuitable for what the S.A.S. was all about, there were security issues but he was told not to listen to 'Bazaar Rumours', as it turned out this operation was doomed to failure along with that of Operation Agreement which would run at the same time only their attack would be at Tobruk and would consist of air, land and sea operations.



Stirling and his men were compromised before they could get into Benghazi and would eventually be left with no option but to call off their role in the overall picture and make the return to Kufra where Bill Fraser had remained at their base, he took no part in the operation.

Realising the error of their ways M.E.H.Q. attempted to placate David Stirling and promoted him to Lt. Col. And gave L Detachment regimental status and authorising him to recruit new members to bring them up to number, these orders were dated 28th September 1942 and the new 1st S.A.S. regiment was broken down into 4 Squadrons, a total of 29 officers and 572 other ranks, many of these would come from within the ranks of the Middle East Commando who had been formed from the ashes of the old Layforce and whose last operation had been in Operation Agreement.

Blair Mayne commanded A Squadron with Bill and many of the other 'Originals' on board, Stirling would command B Squadron, the French would form C Squadron and the Special Boat Section soon to be renamed Squadron in January of 1943 became D Squadron.

A Squadron would begin operating again from a base in the Great Sand Sea, a very remote area and would attack the enemy for 3 weeks in the areas of Tobruk and Matruh prior to the beginning of Montgomery's long awaited offensive at El Alamein.

They attacked railway lines and enemy convoys. Mid November saw A Squadron based at Bir Zelten and were joined here by B Squadron.

A Squadron continued attacking the enemy as they retreated under the incessant attacks by the 8th Army this time though in the area Sirte and El Agheila causing great destruction, amongst their were losses though was Jimmy Storie who had served in No.11 (Scottish) Commando along with Bill albeit in different troops, Storie being a Seaforth and in 6 Troop became a prisoner of war, a great loss not only to the S.A.S. but also to Bill.

All losses were felt keenly in the S.A.S. and Bill Fraser had lost most of the men who had come with him from the Scottish Commando, Eoin McGonigal killed on the first operation along with his stalwart Sgt. From the Litani river John Cheyne. Ken Warburton and Joe Duffy killed in the training accident back in October 1941. Fellow Gordon's John Byrne now a prisoner of war and Dougie Keith who had died on the way to Italy. Another Seaforth John Orton who had jumped in Stirling's stick on Squatter another prisoner of war along with Bill Morris. This left Bill and technically Blair Mayne as the last of the officers along with Ed MacDonald, Jeff DuVivier and another Gordon, Bob Tait along with Cornelius 'Maggie' McGinn who came shortly after as the last of the Jocks.

Bill was now acting as 2 I/C to Blair Mayne in A Squadron and the havoc he helped to cause led to the Tobruk railway line being blown up on 7 separate occasions until finally HQ had to ask them to stop, He would also been keenly aware that his old battalion albeit a reconstituted one was fighting again with the re raised 51st (Highland) Division, as the Allied offensive ground on chasing Rommel further and further back A Squadron switched their attentions to targets in the Agheila to

Boureat area, an area these veterans of L Detachment knew well, again they were to support the continuation of the offensive throughout December.

A Squadron was split into 8 patrols each covering a 40 mile sector and aiming to put in at least 3 strikes against the enemy each week. Their efforts was overwhelmingly successful reducing the Axis traffic to virtually nil.

Before Christmas came A squadron was withdrawn and returned to Kabrit whilst the newly raised B Squadron continued the harassment.

After spending the Christmas of 1941 behind the enemies lines Bill Fraser now spent the festive period of 1942 behind the lines also, this time though it was their own lines although safe it wasn't that safe.

In Cairo whilst on leave Bill became involved in a scuffle the result left Bill sporting 2 black eyes much to the amusement of his men, they remained with him for several weeks highlighting his eyes giving him an even doleful look. The New Year now upon them and the war in the desert going well a change was in sight.

A Change in Direction.

Sicily and the Special Raiding Squadron.

1943.

At the end of the war in Africa Bill was in command of A Troop of A Squadron of 1 Special Air Service Regiment, Blair Mayne had taken over the reigns after the capture of David Stirling early in 1943. Under his command changes were afoot but the changes would come from the old adversary, Head Quarters.

Mayne fought his battle well but to keep them in existence he had to accept compromises, from now on there would be no swanning about the desert this time they would be operating in a more conventional roll landing by sea and taking out enemy positions a roll which was very much in the nature of commando work.

1 S.A.S. was now to be re-named the Special Raiding Squadron and would incorporate the Special Boat Section now named squadron under the command of George Jellicoe who at one time David Stirling saw as his potential second in command of L Detachment. To bring the S.R.S. up to full strength in readiness for the soon to be invasion of Sicily many men from the recently disbanded Middle East Commandos who rose from the ashes of the old Layforce were given the choice of joining the S.R.S. or the S.B.S. in which many did although others preferred to return to their parent regiments or other special forces including the Parachute Regiment. These men went through their training in the same style as the original L Detachment and would eventually join their new unit in Azzib in Palestine.

Bill Fraser's had arrived here in early 1943 he was now in command of No.1 Troop which was split into 3 sections. Lt. Johnny Wiseman commanded 1 Section whilst Lt. A.M. Wilson the 2nd. One of the original L Detachment members from August 1941 who was at the time a N.C.O. was now promoted to Lt. and commanded the 3rd Section Charles Riley better known to all as Pat.

A Squadron would train at The Cedars in the Lebanon in skiing in readiness for any attack the Germans may have made through the Caucasus in Turkey, Iraq or Persia.

Jeff DuVivier who had operated with Bill on the most successful raid of the desert war was not with him he was now in Algeria helping to train Bill Stirling's 2 S.A.S.

After this course all men including Bill and the rest of the officers now had to go through a re-training period and to pass tests to prove of their continual suitability for the work they would soon commence, the test would come from the Table and Organisation of Equipment once this had been completed they would then go on to a more rigorous and advanced training.

One part of this training which had to be completed by all regardless of rank and position was a march of about 45 miles. Set around Lake Tiberius would prove a stern test of stamina, determination, strength, will power and sheer guts to complete. Conditions for the march was far from ideal but this was the purpose, the area was some 600 feet below sea level and was a cauldron of heat, sand and scrub chosen to represent the harshest of environments.

Bills troop would be the second of the 3 troops to make their way through the harsh terrain and conditions but were able to negotiate it with most suffering blisters and bloody feet, cuts and bruises and ultimately worn out.

This done they now engaged in further training of an amphibious nature for future operations that they knew were imminent but of a time, type and destination at present they did not know. During June Fraser's men trained with Assault Landing Craft to attack a coastal battery consisting of 1 and 2 Troops which led them to a frontal attack on landing.

Cape Murro di Porco.

10-07-1943 – 12-07-1943.

By the 28th June 1943 they were ready for the real thing and they learnt of their roll in the fort coming invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky.

Onboard the Ulster Monarch they listened to a speech by Bernard Montgomery but were not impressed by his words. The S.R.S. now had a complement of 18 officers and 262 other ranks and on the 4th of July set off for their attack of the Italian gun batteries located at Cape Murro di Porco.

At 01.00 hrs on the 10th they boarded their landing craft which held just over 30 men and made their way to the landing beaches. On the way they passed many men struggling in the water from the Airborne, men from the glider assault who now found themselves after many of the inexperienced American pilots released their gliders to early heavily weighed down and on the point of drowning. Orders were simple they could not stop to help them their priority was the beaches and the guns, through cries for help the S.R.S. ploughed on although Lt. Wiseman in his A.L.C. did stop to pick up some of the men in the water and would deposit them on the beach.

His section on landing took the lead and quickly assaulted the battery and was able to take it with no losses to themselves although they took quite a toll on the Italians in Killed, wounded and prisoners of war.

With their objective achieved Fraser's men now waited for the main force to land when all of a sudden a hidden battery which was unknown to the Allied planners opened up began shelling the fleet.

Fraser led both 1 and 2 Sections along with their prisoners to where 3 Section was located on a nearby farm which also now housed the Squadron Head Quarters. Here they deposited their prisoners and led by Fraser headed inland in a north westerly direction setting off at 06.00 hrs. As they approached their target they had met limited resistance which had been overcome with relative ease.

Once their attack on the target began Frasers men came across some Italians who were showing signs of capitulation as they were beckoned forward to surrender a

machine gun from a hidden pill box opened up as the Italians fell flat treacherously betraying the flag of surrender, one man Geoff Caton was hit and subsequently died of his wounds. Incensed by this betrayal Sgt. Reg Seeking's ex No.7 Commando and original L Detachment rushed forward to attack the pillbox and swiftly dealt with it, the consequence to the Italians was simple he took no prisoners, for this action he would be awarded the Military Medal.

The whole mornings action to Bill Fraser's men had been the loss of just one man Geoff Caton but they had affected considerable loss's to the enemy with over a 100 of them dead and around 500 taken prisoner. They now settled down in positions to rest, eat and recuperate as they waited for the advance elements of the landing forces to arrive.

On the 12th July from Syracuse harbour they were shipped out to the waiting Ulster Monarch and Fraser and his men were briefed on another assault that they would be making sooner rather than later. North of Syracuse some 11 miles away lay Augusta and the S.R.S. were to land to ensure that further landings on a far larger scale could take place. Again with Bill Fraser leading 1 and 2 Sections they would land and consolidate the Citadel and town itself and to deal with any enemy troops that they might encounter, it was due to commence that evening at 19.30 hrs.

Augusta.

12-07-1943 – 13-07-2013.

11 miles north of Syracuse lay the strategically important port of Augusta, the S.R.S. were to go ashore and assess the situation regarding a full scale landing. Blair Mayne briefed his men regarding the forthcoming operation onboard the Ulster Monarch. The plan called for 2 waves of assaulting troops, Troops 1 and 3 would go in first whilst the Mortar Section and those from No.2 Troop would follow in the second wave. Bill Frasers No.1 Troop would head for the town and begin clearing it of any enemy forces, No.3 Troop would head out of town cross over a bridge and on to the railway station and secure it from here they would commence a speedy advance to an important crossroads around a mile from the towns perimeter. No.2 Troop once landed they would assist Frasers Troop while the Mortar Troop would set up positions in support. The landing went in around 19.30 hrs supported by the Destroyers H.M.S.'s Kanaris, Nubian and Tetcott and the Cruiser H.M.S. Mauritius who didn't really seem to know what the Ulster Monarch was doing.

The enemy in the shape of men from the Herman Goering Division holding positions in the surrounding hills observed the landing and immediately opened fire on the S.R.S. and the supporting naval forces who in return quickly replied.

As the men waded ashore they started to take casualties but soon the bridge was secure and Bill Frasers entered the town and started to deal with the enemy which seemed to consist of mainly enemy snipers but by dusk they had been dealt with and the town secure.

No.3 Troop crossed the bridge successfully and headed for the crossroads but during their approach the enemy fired upon them causing casualties yet again. The fire was heavy enough for Mayne to order a withdrawal and wait for No.2 Troop to come up and give them support along with the Mortar Section, before they could continue their advance Mayne countermanded this order in favour of a general withdrawal back to the town itself and to take up defensive positions around the Citadel along with Frasers Troop.

The 3 Troops spent the night waiting for dawn when they expected the enemy to counter attack, as dawn approached they heard the sound of tanks and prepared to meet their enemy, the tanks though were themselves withdrawing. With the situation now relieved there was little for them to do but wait for the main landing, troops from 17 Brigade who finally linked up with them on the afternoon of the 13th.

A pair of Destroyers now embarked the S.R.S. and transported them back to the Ulster Monarch now lying back at Syracuse. On the 15th they were briefed about a proposed landing at Cape Molinari lying to the north of Catania but it was cancelled. On the 17th they moved back to Augusta and as the Sicilian campaign came to its conclusion they found themselves in a camp near to the volcano, Mount Etna, here on many occasions they climbed it helping keeping them fit for the future campaign on the mainland they would also from the summit hold impromptu drinking session under the guidance of Blair Mayne, 10 minutes talking followed with 10 minutes drinking and woe betide those who didn't strictly adhere to Maynes instructions.

During August another operation was planned, Operation Walrus was for 2 Troops to capture a road bridge at Capo D'Ali and to demolish it so that it collapsed onto the railway that ran below it, this again was cancelled.

From their camp at Cannizzaro on the 9th September the war beckoned them yet again.

Bagnara.

03-09-1943 – 05-09-1943.

Operation Baytown would another amphibious landing made by the S.R.S. at Bagnara Calabria a small town situated on the west coast of Italy.

The capture of any bridges or installations further in land after successfully taking the town also featured in the follow up plans.

This would be just one part of the Allied invasion of Italy codenamed Avalanche the main landing at Salerno.

The S.R.S. boarded 2 L.C.I.'s at Catania on the 1st September 1943 and moved to Riposto reaching here around 18.00 hrs and would begin making preparations for the operation to come.

On the morning of the 3rd they set out for their target in 1 L.C.I. accompanied by 5 L.C.A.'s . By 16.45 hrs they had made a successful landing on a beach north of the town but due to a navigational error they found themselves around a mile from their intended landing beach. Within the hour though all the men were safely on dry ground and they commenced their work although they were running somewhat behind schedule but so far they had met no opposition. This would soon change as they heard the sound of explosions in the distance these being the enemy destroying what they had come to liberate. Two Troops No.'s 2 and 3 took up defensive positions on the outskirts of Bagnara and also covered the beach. Most of the town was empty of both the enemy and civilians alike with most of the latter found to be sheltering in the abundant caves and tunnels that surrounded the town.

Bill Frasers No.1 Troop led by A Section made for the centre of the town and came upon a section of Germans marching along the main road totally unaware of the British presence who quickly opened fire on them and after a very brief fight they took close to 30 prisoners and wounding 5 others. Both B and C Sections of this Troop were caught by intensive enemy machine gun fire augmented by mortar fire

and began to take casualties, 2 being killed with a further 7 being wounded seriously. B Section would continue with its advance but C Section remained to take up defensive positions in the town.

B Section would find them-selves in considerable trouble as heavy and accurate machine gun fire and would find them-selves cut off and surrounded.

No.2 Troop now became involved as they moved out from the beach and engaged the enemy and No.3 Troop would also enter the fighting launching an attack whilst the mortars set up around the HQ Troop would give covering fire. They were able to silence the enemy and the S.R.S. would spend a reasonably quiet night consolidating their positions.

The 5th September brought more fighting for the S.R.S. and more shells from German 88mm guns. No.1 Troops B Section engaged an Italian patrol opening fire on them at 600 yards and killing 2 of the enemy. Men from 2 Troop were sent out on a patrol to the west to try to locate the Germans guns which was causing them problems but due to radio equipment that was faulty initial contact with HQ was lost, they would soon though come to village of Regna-del-Fiuma from where the villagers informed them that the Germans had now left the area. Contact was made with the forward elements of the Green Howards. By 16.00hrs the patrol had returned to Bagnara handing over a few prisoners and some captured documents. The cost to the S.R.S. in this action was 5 killed and 17 men wounded. They now returned to Sicily and at Messina they disembarked to re-organise and take some well earned rest.

Termoli.

03-10-1943 – 12-10-1943.

As the smoke and noise cleared the sight that met the eyes of Bill Fraser and the survivors of what to date had been the greatest loss to the S.A.S. since November 1941 was nearly beyond comprehension, yes they had seen death but nothing as yet would have prepared them for the devastation that now befell their eyes.

The German 105mm shell that had hit truck being loaded with men from Bills No.1 Troop set the Hawkins grenades they were all carrying, the shell was potent enough but along with the detonation of the No.75 grenade used against tanks blew many men to an untimely end.

Although not actually in the truck Bill was overseeing the loading of his men and the force of the explosion would send him flying through the air with shrapnel in his shoulder landing on one of his men, Bill in a state of shock stared, bleeding and concussed hardly able to focus on what had just happened. All around lay the bodies and parts of bodies of the men now dead and the wounded, some who would survive and others that would succumb. Civilians paid a price also a shell doesn't discriminate against who or who it does not get hit. All around chaos, smoke, flames, bodies, screams and shouts, men not injured rushing to help their stricken comrades struggling with the shock of what had just happened.

This was the tragedy of Termoli.

It had all begun on the 3rd October 1943 when the S.R.S. was to land at the Adriatic sea port of Termoli just above the boot of the Italian mainland. Operation Devon would see the S.R.S. along with No.3 Commando and No.40 Royal Marine Commando tasked with the capture of the port and also the capture of the river bridges which crossed the Biferno river until they could be relieved by the main landing group of the 78th Division. Ultimately it was hoped that their success would be able to help 5th Armies advance on Naples. Both the bridges though would be blown by the Germans.

They had sailed from Manfredonia and lay off the town until they were signalled in by No.3 Commando, once the signal was received they headed in to land in their LCI's but ran aground and had then to use the smaller LCA's to ferry them in. Once

they had landed they headed inland and moved off through the perimeter held by the Commandos.

One section became cut off after being engaged by the Germans of the 1st Parachute Division with many of their number becoming prisoners of war, their officer John Tonkin was able to escape and rejoin the S.R.S.

All of their sections were in contact with the enemy as they dispersed into countryside and by noon lead elements of the Lancashire Fusiliers had landed and prepared to take over the duties of the combined special forces. Mayne sent out orders for all of his men now to return to Termoli.

So far it seemed to be going reasonably well with just a few losses's the bulk being from Tonkin's group, the rest of the day and following morning remained somewhat calm with just a sporadic outburst's of enemy artillery and a few raids from enemy aircraft. It was now thought that the area was stable enough for the S.R.S. and the Commands to re-embark but new intelligence showed that the Germans were planning a counter attack. In a house that was requisitioned to act as the HQ for the S.R.S. Bill was in the company of Capt. Phillip Lunt the Medical Officer, Blair Mayne and Pat Riley engaged in a game of billiards. Within a short time the air of calm was broken as enemy shells began landing in the vicinity of their HQ waiting for an opportune moment Mayne waited for a chance to see for himself what was happening.

It turned out they were now facing a major attack from German paratroops, men from the 78th Division new to the fighting broke under the pressure and retreated, others fought on and were wiped out.

Assessing the situation Mayne ordered all available men to the front to bolster the defence. The men of 1 Troop, Bill's men under the command of Johnny Wiseman prepared to emboss on the trucks waiting for them in a side street and then the fortunes of war dealt it's most grisliest card as the 105mm hit. For 18 men it was the end.

For the wounded the M.O. did what he could assessing those that he could help and those that were beyond his help Bill was lucky to be in the first group, shrapnel and shock bad as it was it was within the M.O.'s capabilities and he was duly dealt with an evacuated.

The S.R.S. fought on along with men from 2 S.A.S. who had landed the previous day, the Commandos and elements of 78th Division and was able to stabilise the front. As night fell on the 5th of October the Germans withdrew as the day progressed tanks appeared from the 38th Irish Brigade and Canadian tanks also appeared on the scene from the south, for the Germans though there was one last attack mortaring men from Bills No.1 Troop which caused casualties before finally withdrawing facing a fierce counter attack by the London Irish with fighters of the R.A.F. in support.

As the sun went down on the 6th October the S.R.S. gathered together to bury their dead in the Public Garden in Termoli.

They had lost from a total of 207 all ranks 21 dead, 24 including Bill Fraser wounded and a further 23 missing it was a heavy price to pay.

On the 12th October 1943 they embarked for Molfetta where they were to stay to recuperate from the strains of the fighting, for many men the war had taken on a whole different context.

The 1st November news broke that they would be returning home and preparations were duly made only for the order for embarkation to be cancelled.

It would be a further month before the return home would come to fruition and not from Italy but from Algeria after their Christmas dinner on the 25th December setting sail on the SS Oranto.

Once they had returned to the United Kingdom and had docked at Greenock they were given a month's leave and for Bill this would be his fought time at home since the winter of 1940, after the completion of their leaves all the men were to assemble at their new base in the south west of Scotland, the village of Darvel.

What faced them next was another new journey, the journey to France in support of Operation Overlord in June 1944.

Operation Houndsworth.

10-06-1944 – 06-09-1944.

A Squadron.

After nearly 6 months of leave, recruitment, re-equipping and intensive training Bill Fraser would parachute into France returning nearly 4 years after his and the B.E.F.'s hurried exit from the invading Germans.

Operation Houndsworth's primary aim was to be a long term operation behind the enemy's lines and would be established in the Massif du Morvan an area covering much of the Department of the Nièvre west of the city of Dijon.

The area was covered with hills, valleys and large swathes of unmanaged woods and from here they would launch their campaign against the enemy lines of communications, attacking troop movements and the railway lines that ran between Paris and Lyon and another line between Le Creasot and Nevers. There was a further target, the line that ran between Orleans and Paris but this proved to be rather an over optimistic scenario and would eventually come under another operation, Gain.

D+8 to D+25 were designated as the dates which would be of the utmost importance to the Allied cause and the Normandy landings on the 6th June 1944.

The night of the 6th June saw the advance party of Lt.'s Wellsted and Stewart along with the Jedburgh team 'Harry' would drop to begin establishing their base taking off from Tempsford. Bill Fraser would drop 4 nights later. His party was a mixed one consisting of Lt. Cooper, Marc Lennan, Sgt. Zelic, Col. Hastings, and a Phantom team made up of Lt. Moore, Sgt. Harris, Cpl. Wood and Tpr.'s Babbington, Furness and Masson and also Rfmn. Rolli taking off from Fairford at around 22.30 hrs.

The finding of the drop zone proved to be somewhat problematic which led them to be dropped not only in the wrong place but also scattered due to the height that they dropped from. As Bill prepared to make his landing he became entangled in the branches of a tree that due to the black of the night he was unable to avoid after attempting to release himself from his predicament he decided that caution

was the better part of valour and would wait until first light. As day broke Bill Fraser now had the task of freeing himself from his predicament but it would prove to be far easier than he could have ever imagined as he found himself no more than 3 inches off the ground.

Having lost such a lot of time he now had to find his way to the base that the previous party had established and it would take several days before they were all re-united.

Before operations could begin they would need reinforcements but on the night of the 17th 3 R.A.F. aircraft carrying 3 parties of S.A.S. were unable to locate the drop zone, 1 aircraft after deciding to return crashed with the crew and the 16 man stick under Lt. Leslie Cairns all perishing in the crash, the other 2 aircraft safely returned.

The 21st saw the welcome addition of Johnny Wiseman and Alex Muirhead and men from both 1 and 2 Troops along with elements of 3 Troop, the new 1 S.A.S. doctor Mike McReady, his brother would also become part of the operation at a later date and the Rev. Fraser McCluskey.

There was little the men could do at this particular time apart from secure their camp, engage in reconnaissances of the area to get the lie of the land and try to make contact with the French Resistance which they achieved. These were lengthy periods of inactivity in which Bill worked well to keep them occupied. Their existence was a frugal one, sleeping in their sleeping bags under canvas, a limited supply of rations and any utensils that they needed for the purpose of cooking were fashioned by the men themselves from what they could find.

On the 24th June men from 2 Troop supported the French from Marquis Bernhard ambushing a small German convoy; the results of their actions were typically German in its brutal fashion. Their reprisals saw the burning of the La Verrierie farm at Monsauche and executions. At Vermot the Germans attacked the partisans and Bill Fraser along with Johnny Wiseman took a party of men in 2 groups to support the French setting off on foot in heavy rain. Wiseman and his men engaged the enemy whilst Bill Fraser and his spotted a group of Germans advancing who had not seen Frasers men, they opened up on the unsuspecting

enemy, a total of around 50 men and proceeded to cause havoc amongst their ranks by the time it was over there would only be 10 Germans left unhurt.

Fraser and Wiseman's parties returned to their campsite but would leave it as the French and the Germans continued the fight into the night, fighting between the two continued the following day and the Germans continued with their retribution against the local villages.

Fraser now made a report to Moor Park the main HQ in England and was ordered that he was not to get involved in the Partisans battles and to start acting out the original plans. With no transport as yet available to Fraser and with a target area a good 2 days forced march there and back this rebuke was not worthy, it certainly was not the fault of Fraser that they had to endure periods of inactivity or involvement with the French, and it was totally unjustified.

July brought in many S.A.S. men into the area, on the 3rd a total of 144 all ranks were dropped and on the night of the 4th/5th Lt. Trower and 3 Jeeps were dropped to them, the Jeeps though would see 40 trees felled to make them accessible which Bill sent in his report to Moor Park.

Communication between the Troops and Bills HQ was poor and it could take over an hour to get a simple message through and a further hour's walk back with a reply hardly helping the cause. The jeeps were proving a problem operating on the tracks in the thick wooded area, 1 overturned and the damage caused had to be rectified by a local blacksmith which took sometime not surprising under the circumstances.

Johnny Wiseman left Fraser's base to set up a new one to attack the railway south of Dijon, the 1 Jeep used would have to make several journeys to bring in more men and supply's, they would now remain detached from the main party.

In the 2nd week of July they made a reconnaissance as far as La Charite west of the river Loire and also 2 Luftwaffe airfields at Digoin in the Saone et Loire but they were disused so they contented themselves with the blowing up of the railway line and power pylons, on the 10th they put in an attack on a synthetic oil plant on the outskirts of Autun. Further attacks were made on German lines of communication often attacking the enemy on the main roads from the minor roads either by ambush or the use of mines at times closing the use of the road to the Germans

for days at a time. All in all, the railway lines in their area of operations would be blown up on 22 occasions causing the derailment of 6 trains and destroying 3 locomotives and up to 50 wagons.

On the 17th of July Jeff DuVivier one of Bill's Jocks from the days of the Commandos and L Detachment arrived on the scene with more men from 3 Troop.

Further actions were taking place at Lucy-sur-Yone where the S.A.S. suffered casualties including Capt. Roy Bradford.

Communication problems still existed and Bill had to contact Moor Park to retransmit a message to Lt. Ball who was operating outside of the area requesting that he and his party return which they did by the 25th.

More men and Jeeps were dropped in on the 26th but these would be for Operation Hardy, there would be 2 x 6pdr. Anti Tank guns for Fraser to use against the enemy. These were the short barreled version designed specifically for Airborne troops, a Mk.II version on a Mk.III split carriage and was able to fire both armoured piercing and also high explosive shells but considering the terrain they were engaged in would be of limited use. HQ would retain one whilst the other would go to No.2 Troop. They now also had 3" Mortars but again with the terrain against them they were somewhat impracticable.

The A/T guns did though on one occasion prove their worth whilst men from No.2 Troop were engaged with the enemy while they were attached to the Maquis Camile.

August came, Ian Wellsted and 3 Troopers in a Jeep supported the Maquis in the proposed attack on a German convoy believed to contain tobacco they has also a secondary target that of a railway bridge on a junction at Tamnay-en-Bazois the convoy proved to be a ruse created by the Germans and Wellsted and his men did well to get away. The following week a further attempt was made on the bridge but it was not of a brick or stone structure as they had been led to believe but one constructed of steel girders, the explosives they carried was not suitable to destroy the bridge but never the less charges were laid and following the explosion although some damage was done it was still usable.

Bill Fraser was now experiencing an ever increasing German presence in his area and realized he would need to evacuate the camp and set another but he had wounded men who he couldn't move with the transport he had available to him.

He was told to construct an airstrip to allow aircraft to land and evacuate his wounded, after putting together a suitable airstrip one attempt was made to land but this attempt proved to be fruitless and was eventually abandoned with no further attempts being made.

During a lull during August Fraser led a column on the 26th along with the 6 pdr. and any vehicles he could put together including civilian ones and left Chaloux heading in the direction of Arnost with the aim of attacking the German garrison at Chateaux-Chinon joining with the French forces but it became apparent by the 29th that this was impracticable and was duly cancelled. Unperturbed at this setback led a party to attack German traffic and did much damage with the Vickers K guns mounted on their Jeeps attacking the enemy from the side roads and then slipping away in a cat and mouse game, there were no casualties inflicted on his men by the enemy. At Saulge he along with some reinforcements to his group shot up a convoy of 2 German vehicles with 7 officers all of whom were killed in the resulting one sided affair. Further strafing attacks were made by other elements of Frasers men until the 6th September when Fraser's men in a convoy travelled through the lines and the safety of Allied occupied France. The wounded though had been left at Auxerre under the care of the French and would later be successfully evacuated to England.

Along with the destruction caused to the railway system Bill Fraser and his men destroyed up to 25 enemy vehicles, rescued a number of downed Allied aircrew, killed or wounded over 200 Germans with a further 100 odd being taken prisoner. They identified up to 30 targets which would be attacked by the Allied air forces and of course instigated the attempt on Rommel.

Bill would report that the insertion of A Squadron would have achieved more if they had been working individually as Troops and not as a Squadron which had become widely dispersed and would have had a more desired affect although there is no doubt that after a somewhat inauspicious start and a few setbacks they did achieve what they had set out to do.

Bill Fraser would for his achievements on Operation Houndsworth receive a bar to his Military Cross for whose 'untiring leadership and spirit kept his men alert and their morale high'. An award richly deserved.

From France Bills men reached Newhaven from where by train they travelled to Victoria Station in London and then onto Moor Park and were given 1 months well deserved leave.

Bill Frasers Phantom Party.

On the night of 10th June 1944, a group of 10 men were dropped into the Morvan Mountains, between Dijon and Nevers, in Operation Houndsworth. The party, led by Major Bill Fraser, commander of A Squadron 1 SAS Regiment, was the main reconnaissance unit for his squadron, which was parachuted into the area a few days later.

The objective of the SAS was to impede German troop movements, disrupt their communications and prevent them from reinforcing their offensive against the Normandy bridgehead.

The recce party had the task of deciding upon a suitable base for SAS operations, making contact with the Maquis, assessing the size of the force required and identifying the weapons and equipment that would be needed.

The Phantom Patrol, in charge of SAS communications, had the exacting and dangerous responsibility of maintaining a continuous wireless link with its base in England and relaying orders, information and requests for resupply.

The patrol was dropped nearly 30 miles wide of the planned Dropping Zone. Moore, then a lieutenant, landed on the side of a steep hill, tearing his trousers badly in a bush. Having tried to find his location without success, he sent off a pigeon and reported by WT.

In the early afternoon the patrol buried their parachutes and moved off southwards through thick woodland in heavy rain. The following day, they fixed their location as west of Lormes, about 25 miles from the planned DZ. While two men left the group to make contact with the Maquis, Moore's men moved west, following the line of a disused railway, to Sommes.

The sound of machinegun and rifle fire reverberated in the woods as groups of Maquis engaged the Germans, and for several days they were involved in a series of running fights with the enemy before they were able to make contact with Squadron HQ.

For the next three months, Moore maintained wireless contact with base despite repeated enemy attacks; and, at great personal risk, he prevented the WT equipment, some of which was highly secret, from falling into the hands of the Germans.

His patrol marked out flare paths on selected DZs with biscuit tins packed with a mixture of sand and fuel and guided aircraft in on beams from their Eureka radar beacons. They kept regular listening periods for operational broadcasts which were transmitted by the BBC; each was introduced with a recording of the song

Sur le pont d'Avignon.

The Germans managed to muster an infantry battalion and an armoured car in an attempt to flush the squadron from the forest; but the armoured car proved no match for a hidden six-pounder and the infantry soon lost heart. By early September, sabotage operations against strategic targets, including rail and power communications, had made a large area uninhabitable to the enemy. Other SAS units were by then deployed in France, and A Squadron returned to England. Moore's patrol landed at Newhaven after a rough Channel crossing by landing craft. He received an immediate MC; Corporal "Chippy" Wood was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Silver Star and there were four Mentions in Dispatches.

Operation Gaff.

18-07-1944 – 12-08-1944.

During the Second World War Operation Gaff was a six-man patrol of the French side of the Special Air Service, who parachuted into German-occupied France on 18th July 1944, with the aim of killing or kidnapping German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

From March 1943, Allied Intelligence had been undertaking research on the whereabouts, bases and travel arrangements of Field Marshal Rommel. Part of the research asked the question of how easy it would be to kill Rommel. After D Day the Allies were meeting fierce resistance, marshaled by Rommel with Hitler's orders to stand firm at all costs. With losses mounting, Field Marshal Montgomery agreed with a plan to take Rommel out of the battle plan.

After A Squadrons 1 SAS commanding officer, Major William 'Bill' Fraser was told the location of Rommel's headquarters, a chateau home of the Dukes de La Rochefaulcauld in the village of La Roche-Guyon, he requested that he and a small team should make an attempt to either kidnap or kill Rommel. Bill Fraser was certainly aware of Rommel and his reputation as it was Rommel who took the surrender of Bill's Division the 51st (Highland) back in the summer of 1940. Men from his old commando unit No. 11 (Scottish) as part of the Middle East Commandos made an attempt to do the same in November 1941 in Operation Flipper in which his ex commanding officer Geoffrey Keyes was killed in the attempt, Keyes was subsequently awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross the first to be awarded to the Special Forces. Fraser had a score to settle against his old adversary whom he fought against so bravely in the Western Desert. It was all to no avail, H.Q. would not sanction his attempt even though Bill pursued his request with vigour eventually it would be assigned elsewhere much to the great disappointment of Bill Fraser.

Brigadier R.W. McLeod assigned six specially-trained assassins led by French SAS Captain Jack William Raymond Lee although he was born as Raymond Couraud.

On 18th July, Lee and his team parachuted into Orleans; they found that Rommel had been severely injured the previous day after his staff car had been overturned in an attack by RAF Hawker Typhoons and replaced by Gunther Von Kluge. With their plan redundant, they moved toward advancing U S Army lines on foot, while ambushing trains and attacking German units along their route. They reached safety on 12th August.

Operation Archway.

25-03-1945 – 27-03-1945.

It would be tinged with sadness for the loss of some of those involved so late in the day but more for the loss of 2 of the original L Detachment men who had been captured during their first operation and had duly escaped from the Italian P.O.W. camps once the Italians capitulated in 1943. Both Roy Davies and Jim Blakeney were repatriated to the UK and both would sadly lose their lives Operation Archway was in support of 21st Army Groups crossing of the Rhine but was heavily linked to the airborne side of the operation named Varsity.

Bill Fraser and his men set out from Tilbury Docks on the 18th March and after crossing Europe they made their crossing of the Rhine river at 11.30 hrs on the 25th to conduct a reconnaissance in the direction of Bislich along with men from 2 S.A.S. on the 26th 2 S.A.S. left for conduct their own operations leaving 1 S.A.S. to act as reconnaissance for the 6th Airborne Division north east of Hamminkeln, the following day they made their first contact with the enemy. Bills Troop passed through the forward Canadian Airborne troops who had been driven back a determined enemy attack causing some casualties to them-selves. Bill surveyed the scene and situation and saw a chance of attacking the enemy through some dead ground on their left flank. After successfully negotiating the ground they got to within 30 yards of the German positions, here they met trouble as a well concealed German machine gun opened up on Bill and his men, the evasive action they had to take left Bills Jeep stranded in a ditch overturned with Bill himself suffering from a bullet wound to his hand. Bills Jeep was eventually towed out and the German positions eliminated but for Bill Fraser Operation Archway was over as he was taken to a Casualty Clearing Station and eventually evacuated back to England.

Operation Howard

29 -04-1945 – 04-05-1945.

Operation Howard began on the 9th April 1945 with the bulk of 1 S.A.S. departing the UK on the 6th with the main aim of reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and disrupting the German forces ahead of the advancing Canadian Army.

Bill though would only come into it towards the end arriving in Germany from the UK along with 1 other officer and 18 other ranks but for Bill the war was pretty much over

Post Script.

As the small band of men evolved into Regimental status he took command of A Troop, 1 S.A.S.

With Stirling becoming a P.O.W. in early 1943 Blair Mayne took on the responsibility of the Regiment, Bill Fraser was by now operating in Tunisia but changes were afoot and for a short period during the invasion of Sicily and the early stages of the campaign in Italy Fraser now a Captain took control of A Squadron of the renamed S.A.S. The Special Raiding Squadron.

Fraser's men landed on Sicily at Cape Murro di Porco and achieved their aim which was to destroy enemy gun emplacements he also took part in the operation at Augusta.

In the Italian campaign he was involved in action at Bagnara.

At Termoli in Italy during October 1943 he was wounded when a German shell exploded close by killing many of the men congregated round their trucks waiting to move off but his and the squadrons time in this theatre was nearly over and during December 1943 boarded a boat which would take them back to the United Kingdom where the S.R.S. reverted back to 1S.A.S.

During operations supporting the Allied landings in Normandy in 1944 Bill Fraser parachuted behind the lines as the officer in command of Operation Houndsworth and after this he was awarded a bar to his Military Cross which was first awarded to him back in December 1941.

The citation read whose 'untiring leadership and spirit kept his men alert and their morale high'.

Fitting words for a man who as a member of the family of Scottish Regiments that it was most important to put the men he commanded first and to ensure that they were well cared for and looked after, as the saying went in these Scottish Regiments 'Look after your Jocks'.

Be it Scottish, Welsh or English Bill ensured that he followed this great tradition and would be greatly respected and liked by all those who served with him during the war years.

Whilst he was engaged on this operation he became aware of Rommel's Head Quarters and contacted his own H.Q. to arrange an attempt to either kidnap or kill Rommel something that had been tried once before in November 1941 whilst he was with L Detachment although not by this unit but his previous unit No.11 (Scottish) Commando, Operation Flipper was not a success with only 2 Commandos able to make it back to their lines and 1 other from the S.B.S. Fraser was not given permission to carry this out even though he argued strongly for his case. As it turned out another S.A.S. unit was dispatched for this, Operation Gaff to be carried out by the French S.A.S. but by the time they arrived Rommel was already out of the picture after being wounded by the R.A.F. during a fighter attack.

Bill Fraser saw the war out as a Major with the Special Air Service in command of A Squadron. On the 27th March 1945 he was wounded in action in Germany when attempting to outflank a German position holding up Canadian forces, the operation was known as Archway. His jeep was fired upon by a German machine gun and he received a wound to his hand. This was Bill's 4th wound of the war.

Just over a month later he returned to the war on the 29th April along with 19 other ranks as the last reinforcements for Operation Howard.

By the first week of May he was in Poperinghe in Belgium before going to Norway to help oversee the surrender of the German forces stationed there.

After the war's end the Special Air Service were officially disbanded in October 1945 and he eventually returned to the Gordon Highlanders who had a battalion then serving in the Middle East.

Here he served as a company commander but peace time soldiering was wholly a different kettle of fish than that of active service in war time. The humdrum life of the barracks being miles away from the, if you can call it the excitement and adventure something that they had all craved for back in 1940 when he had initially joined the Commandos, in 1946 Bill left the regiment and his Jocks behind.

Many rumours floated around regarding his end to his time in the military much of it and can be said also of his later unsubstantiated, perhaps though the truth was that life now in army made up mostly of conscripts and no longer had the appeal that it once had and he when his time with the colours was up he chose not to re-enlist, should we not give him the benefit of the doubt?

The rumours though fit in with the myths created in and around L Detachment, let us not forget Stirling, his crutches a wire fence and entry into M.E.H.Q. also that of Blair Mayne languishing in jail pending court martial for striking Geoffrey Keyes, rumours, half truths call them whatever it seemed to fit in with the myths and mythsteries surround The Regiment.

There is no doubt that he did suffer from his war experiences, after almost 6 years it is understandable not forgetting him being wounded on at least 4 occasions.

In those years many veterans struggled to overcome what they had been through and there was simply no real help available help that Bill desperately needed to re-adjust to life as a civilian. He could not draw on what veterans from today's conflicts can draw on, 'Help for Heroes' he most likely felt isolated from the rest of the world, lost in a wilderness not unlike the desert he fought during the years of 1941 1942.

What of the Jocks who went with him from No.11 (Scottish) Commando to join him in L Detachment?

Bob Tait, Jeff DuVivier, Johnny Orton, Jimmy Storie, John Byrne, Edward MacDonald, Bill Morris, Cornelius McGinn and of course Blair Mayne all survived the war all though they are no longer with us, Jimmy Storie was the last of 'The Originals' those who had joined the ranks of L Detachment back in August 1941 to pass away on the 8th January 2012.

Bill died during the winter of 1975 in the area of Leamington Spa, he had been working as a Costing's Clerk for an engineering company in the nearby county town of Warwick, much had gone against him during his life, and his medals were stolen from his lodgings to add a last injustice in his life.

He will though it seems to be the Forgotten Hero of L Detachment.

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