

The military career of

Mr Cross

The Military career of Dennis Walter Cross of [23, Ruskin Grove, Bredbury, Stockport, Cheshire](#) began when his Attestation to the Territorial Army, at the age of 18 years and 7 months, height 5' 8½", weight 142lb, chest 35½", fresh complexion, brown eyes and light brown hair described as a "Butchers Assistant" was completed and approved in Manchester on 3rd March 1941. He was appointed to The Welch Regiment as a Private and posted to the 70th Battalion at [Holme Court, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire](#) the following day. Some indication of how this young man from Manchester came to meet a girl from Sawston can be gathered from the following:

"My first Christmas in the Army was spent in the Orderly Room of the HQ of 70th Bn the Welch Regiment at Holme Court, a farmhouse not far from Stratton Park on the main A1 London - North."

"Officially, the role of the Battalion was that of airfield perimeter defence in East Anglia. The spread of the unit encompassed Castle Camps airfield, Fowlmere, Duxford, Biggleswade and one other near Cambridge."

([Thank God We've Got a Navy](#) by Colonel Brian Jones.)

He continued to serve within the UK until 11th November 1943, a total of 2 years and 253 days when he was posted to India. Exactly how long he remained at Holme Court and The Welch Regiment is not shown on his service records but clearly he must have transferred from both at some time earlier than this date as he went to India as part of No 1 Commando. The following entry on [Wikipedia](#) gives some explanation of this and an indication of timing.

"Commandos were all volunteers seconded from other British Army regiments and retained their own [cap badges](#) and remained on their regimental roll for pay.^[7] All volunteers went through the six week intensive commando course at [Achnacarry](#). The course in the Scottish Highlands concentrated on fitness, speed marches, weapons training, map reading, climbing, small boat operations and demolitions both by day and by night."

Prior to this posting to India he married the girl he had met, Moyra Mary Davies on 9th August 1943 at the Cambridge Registry Office. On the wedding certificate his unit is shown as No 1 Commando so it is reasonable to assume that he had completed his training by this time.

Before he joined No 1 Commando they had undergone an extensive tour and operations in Europe and North Africa returning to the UK on 24th of April 1943. A photograph taken at Winchester Barracks later that year and prior to their departure to India can be found [HERE](#). Each of the 500+ members of No 1 Commando is numbered for identification purposes. Unfortunately it has not yet proved possible to identify Mr Cross but if anyone is able to perhaps they could comply with the web sites request and add a note to this effect.

They went to India as part of the offensive against the Japanese invasion.

"Burma

In August 1943 Lord Louis Mountbatten set up his South East Asia Command (SEAC) HQ in India. So far the Japanese advance had been relentless and Mountbatten laid plans to regain the initiative with an assault on Burma.

In the UK No 5 Commando, now under Lt-Col D M Shaw MC, became part of 3 SS Brigade under the command of Brigadier W I Nonweiler. Together

with No 44 Royal Marines Commando, No 1 Commando, with Ken Trevor in command and No 42 RM Commando, they left Gourock on the River Clyde in Scotland on 15 November 1943. No 5 Commando and No 44 RM Commando arrived in Bombay on 19th December 1943 after a five week voyage. They were moved by train to a camp at Kedgaon near Poona - a "cold, windswept, bleak and bare hill". At Lake Kharakvasla, also near Poona, a Combined Training Centre had been established to practice amphibious landing techniques. A month later, after putting into Alexandria for repairs following a German bombing raid, No 1 Commando and No 42 Royal Marines Commando arrived. "

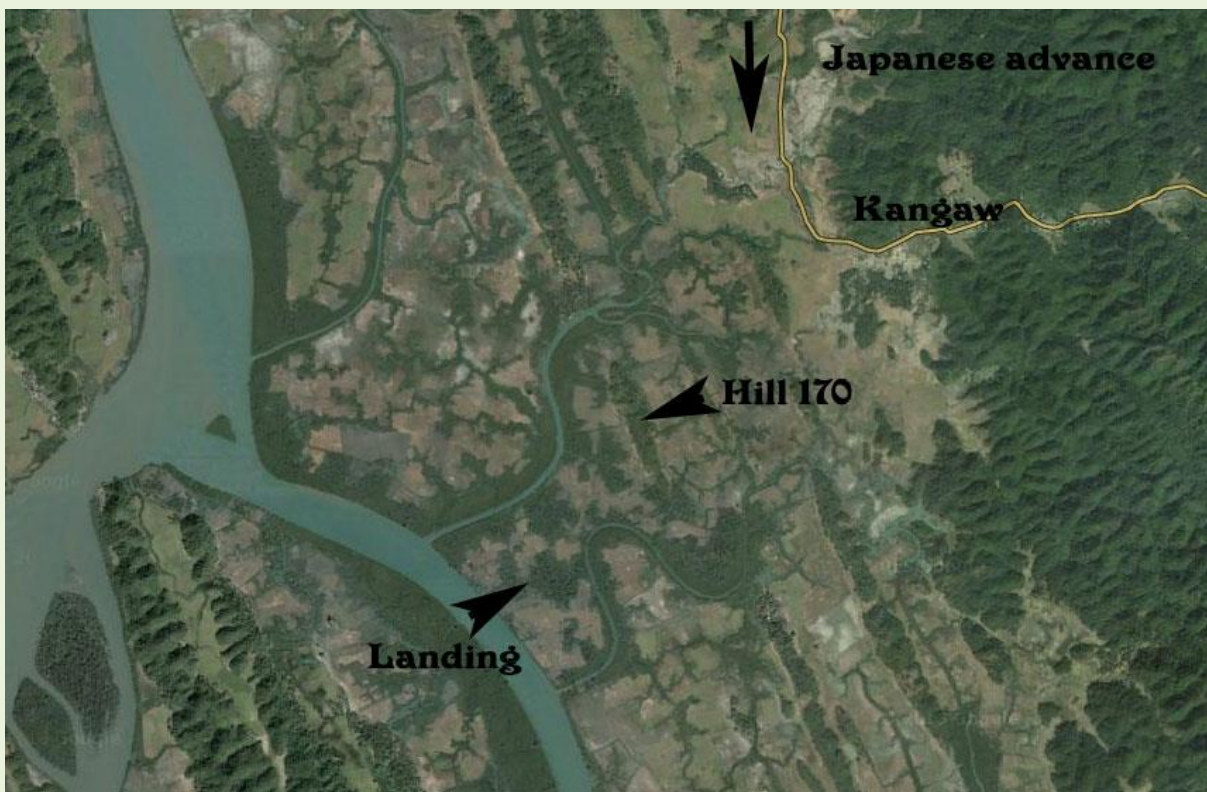
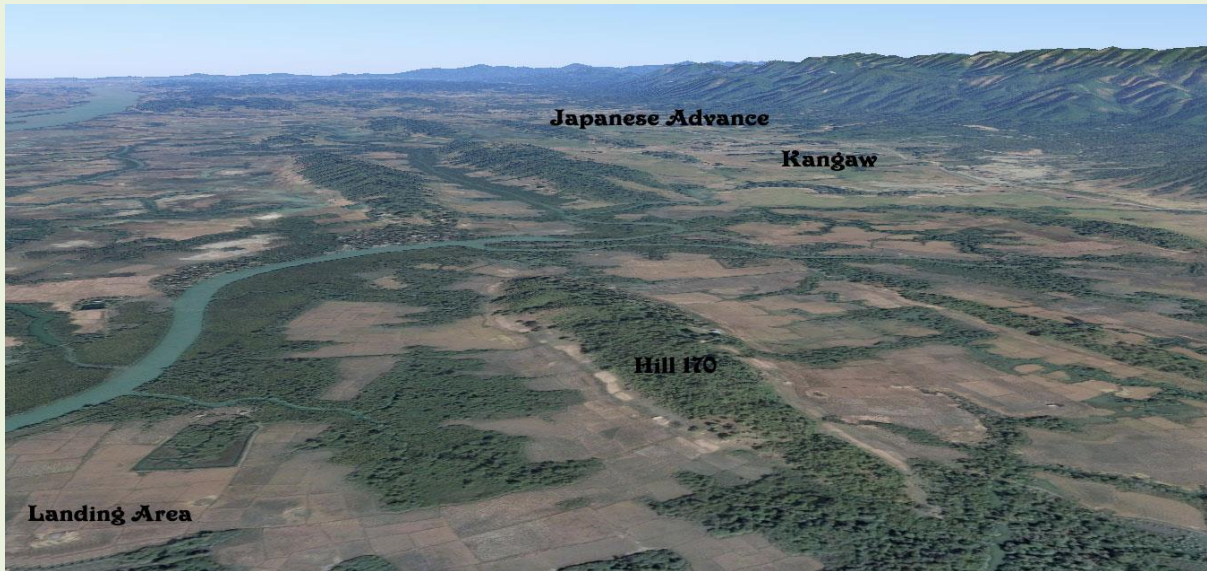
(Combined Ops web site and its [Brief history of No 1 Commando](#))

His tour in India lasted until 8th September 1944, a total of 302 days and began, after their late arrival, with jungle training in [Belgaum](#) on the western side of India close to Goa. According to [Wikipedia](#) this had become a main army training centre under the British and remains so, for the Indian armed forces, to this day. After the jungle training in the spring of 1944 No 1 Commando together with 42 Royal Marine Commando moved to eastern India for the summer to continue training at [Cocanada](#)/Kakinada (*Spelling of English-Indian names vary and where they do they will be shown in this way.*) where they probably did small boat and landing craft training.

On the 9th September he was posted to Ceylon/Sri Lanka. Here No 1 Commando and No 42 Royal Marines Commando joined up with the other elements of 3 Commando Brigade, No 5 and No 44 Commando, in [Trincomalee](#). This posting was to be short lived and on 3rd October he was posted back to India. India was the base but the actual posting was to Burma. There followed several engagements which are well documented in the **Combined Ops web site** [Brief history of No 1 Commando](#) culminating in the [Battle of Hill 170](#). This battle was of course only part of a wider campaign, the assault on the Arakan Peninsula which was itself but part of the final days of the Burma war. No single battle can win a war but the Battle of Hill 170 was significant enough for Lieutenant General Sir Philip Christison to state to the 3rd Commando Brigade in a special order of the day, **"The Battle of**

Kangaw had been the decisive battle of the whole Arakan campaign and that it was won was very largely due to your magnificent defence of Hill 170."

Briefly Hill 170, also known as Brighton, was a wooded ridge some 700 yards long and 170 feet high standing in a landscape of mangrove swamp, paddy fields, rivers and streams.



Its height, in such a landscape gave it command over the landing area where the allied troops were coming ashore and forward over the area of Kangaw, the Japanese advance and deployment. In simple terms because of action in other areas the only route available to the Japanese 54th Division was along the road shown in red on the map above.

The objective set for 3 Commando Brigade was to make a landing and secure the bridgehead and area to the South and West of Kangaw so that other troops could then land and push through to engage the Japanese 54th Division before they could either escape or regroup and mount further attacks.

On the morning of 22nd January 1945 3 Commando Brigade waded ashore and it was the task of No 1 Commando to secure Hill 170 which they did against little opposition. Other units secured other features in the area again with little resistance. The Japanese had been caught unawares.



The Japanese soon retaliated with intermittent shelling but on 25th January they commenced very heavy shellfire which continued for

several days. They were in a position where they had nothing to lose and so could use up any ammunition they had to secure their escape. Just as Hill 170's position was vital to the allied force it also stood out as a prime target for the enemy. On 28th January Mr Cross sustained shrapnel wounds and while it is not known to what degree and how he was treated it was significant enough to be mentioned on his records.

It was clear to the Japanese that if they were to move or escape they had to take Hill 170 and on the morning of 31st January they mounted a ferocious attack on the northern point of Hill 170, the position occupied by Mr Cross's unit Troop 4, No 1 Commando which was now down to 24 men. The attack, which lasted until 2nd February, was resisted in what was one of the fiercest battles of the entire Burma campaign when many heroic deeds were recorded. [Lt. George Knowland](#) Troop 4 Section leader was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.

It is possible, due to his injury only a few days before that Mr Cross was still undergoing treatment at the time of this last assault. A hospital ship, a converted coastal or river steamer was moored back in a wider part of the river and casualties were carried to it from the various forward dressing stations. One such was located about 150 yards behind the front line at Hill 170. A short film from the time, which can be viewed [HERE](#), shows casualties being evacuated to this ship from that very dressing station behind Hill 170.

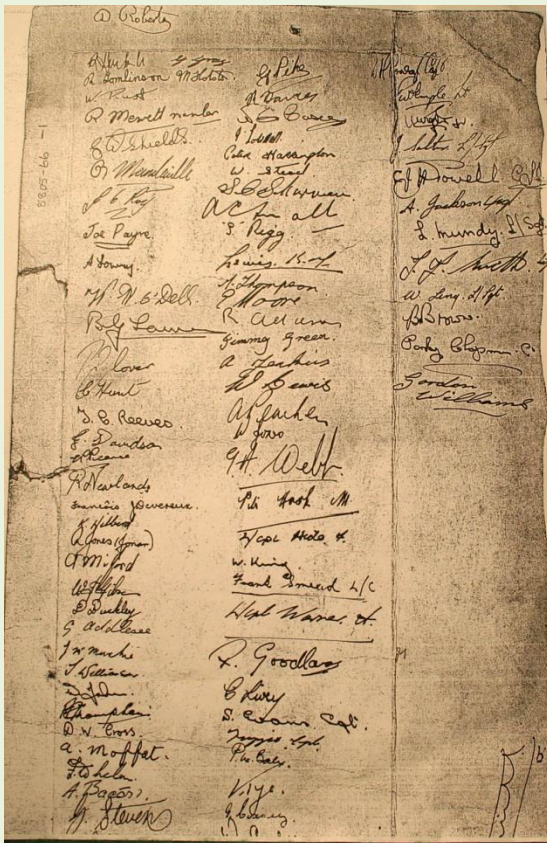
This battle marked the end of the No1 Commando involvement in Burma as they were soon relieved and the Brigade moved first to Akyab/Sittwe and then Madras/Chennai where they were granted leave. They were then moved to Karakwasla/Kharakwasla where they prepared for the invasion of Malaya and Operation Zipper.



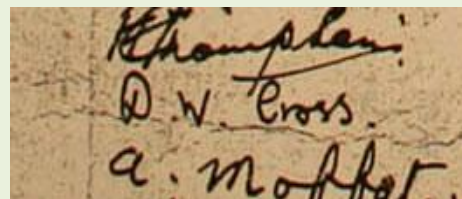
Photos courtesy of John Mewett and the [Commando Veterans Association](http://www.commandoveterans.org.uk).



4 Troop, No1 Commando at Ahmednager, India 1945. Mr Cross is on the far left of row 2, detail to the left, confirmed by his tattoo. This photograph was probably taken while the Troop was training for Operation Zipper as its numbers appear to have been made up to 80.



The photograph is signed on the back, as shown to the left, by those present and D.W. Cross signature is the 5th from bottom in the left hand column, detail below.



Perhaps somewhat ironically, as we will come to see, Operation Zipper was cancelled and on 12th September 1945 Mr Cross and No1 Commando were posted to Hong Kong. The war was now over and the process of running the services down and demobilisation began. On 5th September 1946 Mr Cross was posted back to the UK and on 4th December 1946 he was transferred to the ZT Reserve.

For many this was the end of their military career but Mr Cross was re Attested on 10th July 1950 and given a new army number while his former service in the Welch Regiment was allowed to be reckoned for pay purposes. After initial holding he was Taken on Strength of the Kings Own Regiment on 30th November 1950. It is difficult to know exactly what brought Mr Cross back into the army but it is perhaps not entirely a co-incidence that at this same time the Malayan Scouts was being formed and the re birth of the S.A.S., which had also been "let go" at the end of the war, began. Mr Cross was Struck off Strength of the Kings Own Regiment on 7th March 1951 when authority was granted for his transfer to the Malayan Scouts.

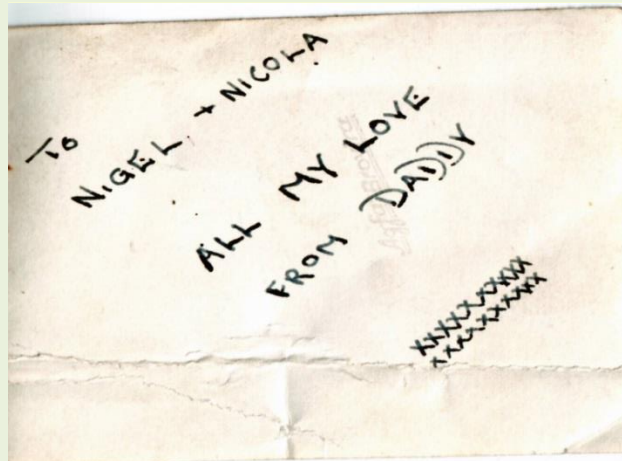
Just as he had participated in the so called "Forgotten war" in Burma he was now to participate in the "Forgotten War" in Malaya. A reasonable account of this war, the Malayan Scouts and the rebirth of the S.A.S. can be found on the [Winged Soldiers](#) web site. It was a photograph on this site that finally led to the full identity of Mr Cross being established, as acknowledge [HERE](#).

While many of the SAS Operations in the Malayan campaign have been written about, in one form or another, it is very difficult to establish precise details of any particular involvement. Service records show that Mr Cross was promoted to acting Lance Corporal on 29/7/1952, acting Corporal on 24/10/1952 and acting Sergeant on 1/11/1952 a rank he retained until he returned to his parent regiment on 19th January 1956. He disembarked in Singapore on 29th May 1951 thus arriving a few months before the departure of "Mad" Mike Calvert who was largely responsible for the formation of the Malayan Scouts. Calvert was not the

only person to part company at this time as the service records note that Mr Cross's wife was granted a divorce on 26th July 1951.

Amongst any other specialist training and operations that he may have undergone in the first part of this tour parachuting would have figured prominently. The technique of parachuting into the jungle canopy and then lowering to the ground became an established method of entry in these early days finally using a webbing strap about 200 feet long to aid descent from the canopy. *(In simple terms primary jungle is an area that has become fully established over time with the taller growing trees, sometimes rising as high as 200 feet or so in the competition for light, forming a canopy at their summits, rather like a group of umbrellas. This canopy denies light to the area beneath and limits the growth of other vegetation. Secondary jungle is an area where these tall trees have been removed either by man or some natural cause and their absence allows a mad rush for survival of other vegetation. This growth competition can be so dense as to make it almost impenetrable.)* Mr Cross is recorded as a Qualified Parachutist and Trooper in 22 S.A.S.R. on 9th June 1952. The photograph below was probably sent to Sawston at about this time but was only discovered recently (2013).

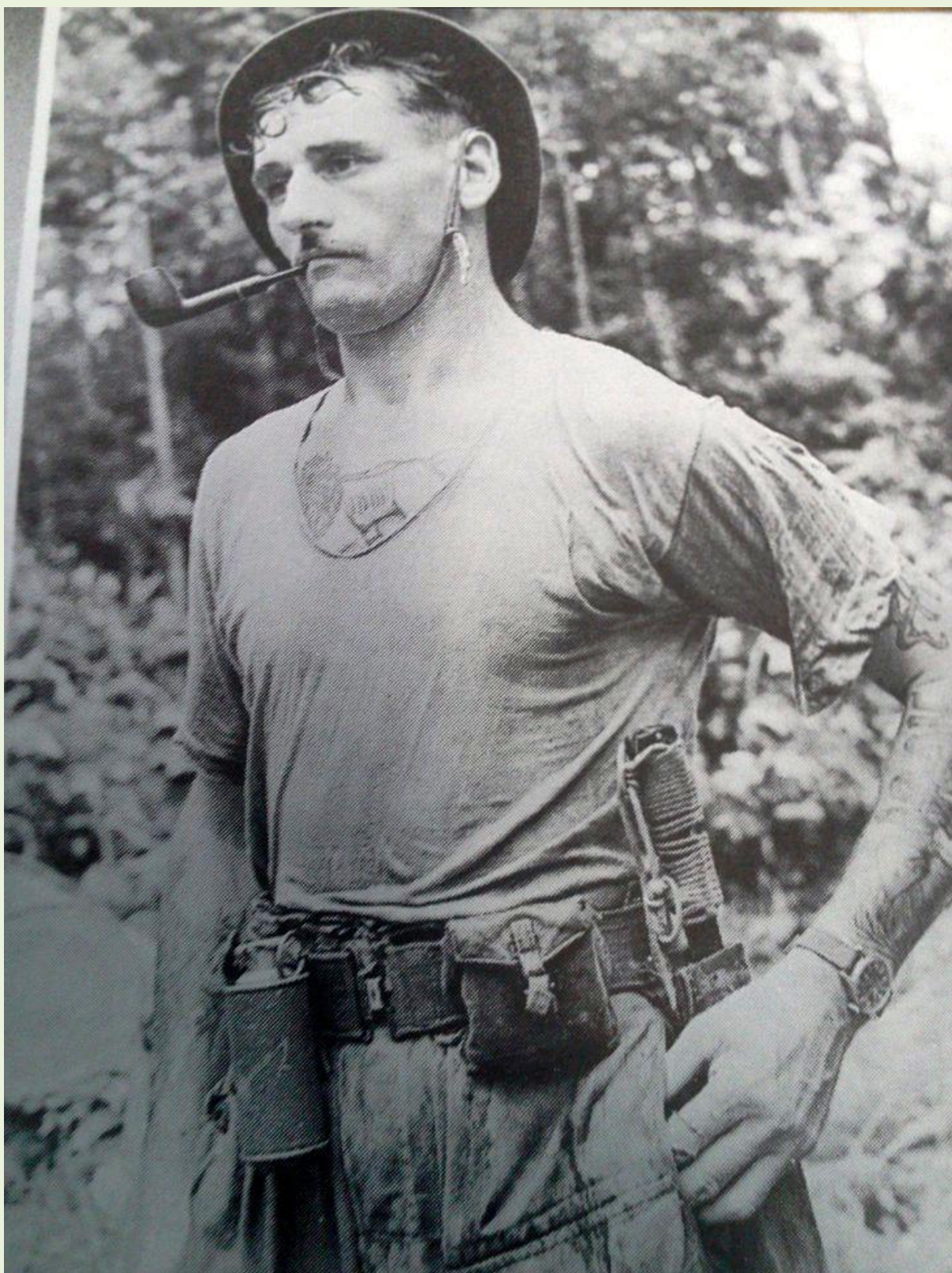




As has been said it is almost impossible to identify any particular Operations that Mr Cross may have been involved in during this time however one incident stands out as it was recorded in a series of photographs that have been variously published. It is with great thanks to the authors, publishers and contributors of "Re-enter the SAS" that some of those photographs are shown here.

The incident is described thus in "The Malayan Campaign 1948-60" By John Scurr ***"A trooper of a 14 man patrol of 22 SAS has been wounded in the head during a clash with terrorists in the Ulu Keneboi jungle early in 1953. His comrades carry him in an improvised stretcher across a fast flowing river to reach a clearing suitable for air evacuation. It takes one and a half hours to cover the 800 yards distance."***

The first picture below is titled "Sergeant Danny Cross ponders the next move", this was the photograph that first led to establishing his full identity. Below that is the river crossing with Sgt Cross holding the stretcher on the far right of the picture while in the third photograph he is seen to the far left as they await a helicopter which would have been an RAF Dragonfly Mk 2 of the Casualty Evacuation Flight.



Photographs originally supplied by A. McGregor and presented here courtesy of Alan Hoe & Eric Morris authors of "Re-enter the SAS" and publisher Leo Cooper.



On 3rd July 1953 Mr Cross was posted home no doubt for rest, recuperation and leave after two years in the jungle. In October he was posted back to Malaya and continued operations, exactly what we do not know but clearly with good effect as just a year later he was mentioned in despatches, one of seven members of the S.A.S. so mentioned in that year:

6054 SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 26 OCTOBER, 1954

King's Own.

22524303 A/Sgt. D. CROSS, att. S.A.S.

It is just a couple of lines, literally a mention, with no reason or explanation so exactly what it was for we shall probably never know although it is believed that it might have arisen from Operation Sword in January 1954. Operation Sword was an extensive operation which ran for several months and involved many units but this particular part of the operation highlighted some of the dangers for SAS soldiers entering battle. On this occasion they made a jungle canopy parachute jump, as described above, and although the parachutes opened three were killed in the descent.

A short account of the incident and routine is given in REBIRTH OF THE SAS: THE MALAYAN "EMERGENCY" by Alastair MACKENZIE

"A normal pattern for a squadron was two months in the jungle, two weeks of leave, two weeks retraining and then back to the jungle. As an example, on Operation SWORD, the SAS suffered three dead as a result of a parachute drop into the jungle in Kedah in January 1954. But in July all three operational squadrons dropped into Perak with only negligible injuries."

The following entry was published in The Times (London, England) on Friday, Jan 22, 1954:

Inquiry into deaths of paratroopers

From our correspondent Singapore Jan 21

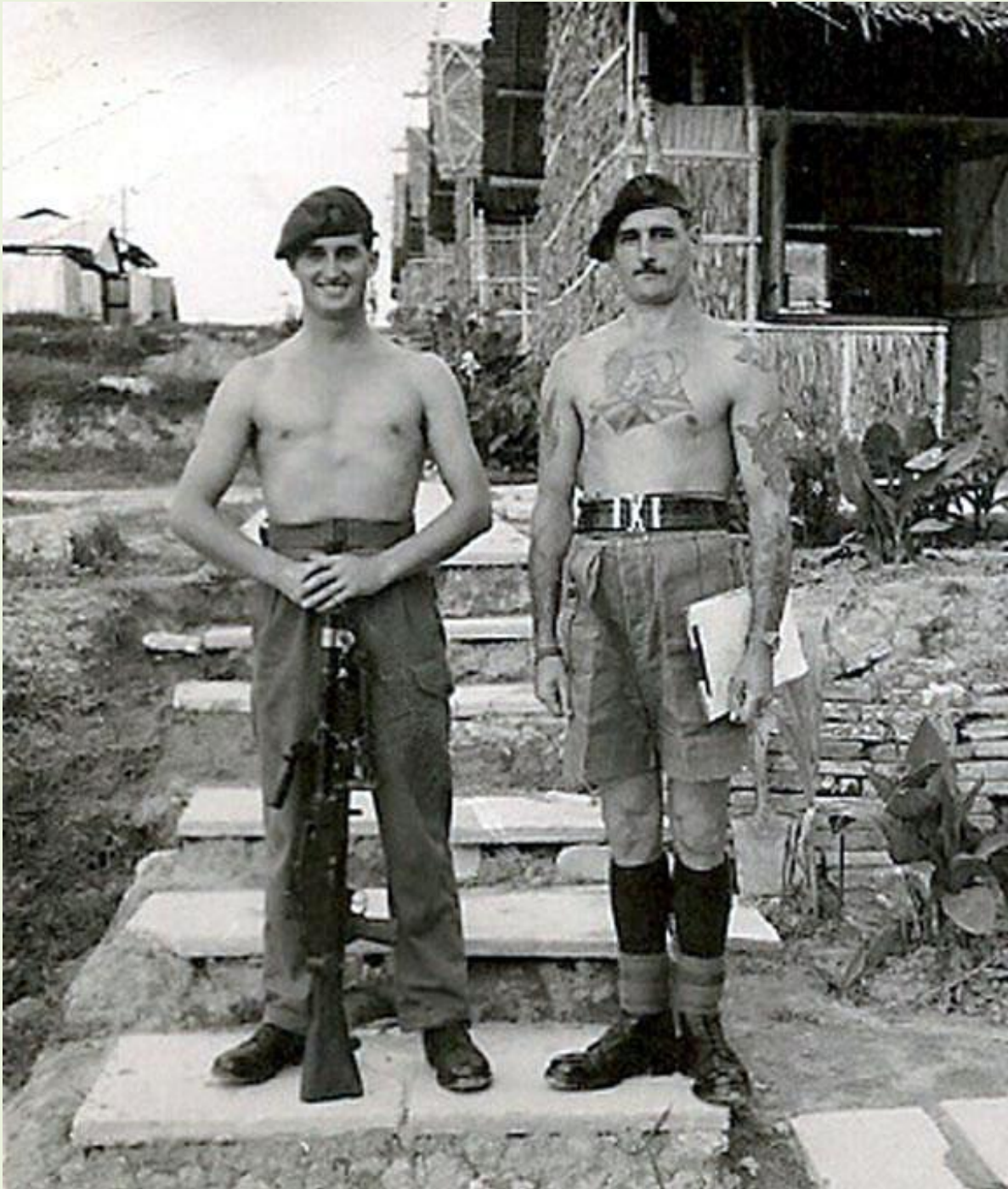
An Army statement issued today says a court of inquiry has been set up to inquire into the death of three paratroopers during an air drop in the Bongsu forest reserve area of Kedah on Monday. The names of those who lost their lives were given today as Lieutenant G.J. Goulding of the 22nd Special Service Regiment; Lance-corporal C.W. Bond R.E., of the same unit; and Captain J.R. Moffat, R.A., a ground liaison officer, from Butterworth. The men, who were dropped into trees, had been trained and equipped for the task and it is known that all parachutes opened.

([Butterworth](#) was a R.A.F. Station in Malaya and [De Havilland Hornets](#) flying from this airfield were used in Operation Sword.)

A film showing a demonstration of this type of parachute jump, made in 1954, can be found [HERE](#).



The following year, 1955 [Corporal D. McFarland](#) of "B" Troop was mentioned in despatches and it is thought that the photograph below, kindly provided by Cpl. McFarland's son and the [Special Forces Roll of Honour web site](#), was taken at that time.



Cpl. McFarland to the left and Sgt. Cross by his side.

Early in the following year, 19th January 1956, he was posted back to the Kings Own Lancaster Regiment, reverting from A/Sergeant to full Corporal, and while the reason for this transfer is not at all clear the fact that he married a local girl from Stockport on 18th February 1956 may have had something to do with it. Perhaps he was looking for a more stable way of life after so many years of action and if he was it is not at all clear that he found it because as early as 22nd March that very year he was on his way with the regiment to Hong Kong. There is little detail of his remaining service except that he served in Africa, Bahrein, Cyprus and finally Northern Ireland until 11th June 1972 when he was granted 28 days terminal leave. There was one incident in this time that stands out and which occurred on 2nd December 1967 when he caused a disturbance in the Sergeants Mess and was fined £20. No military career would be really complete without something like this and my respect for him grew even more on reading of it.

So with a total qualifying service towards pension of 27 years and 277 days he finally left the service with that pension, the War Medal 1939–1945, the General Service Medal (1918) with a clasp for Malaya and General Service Medal (1962) with a clasp for Northern Ireland, mentioned in despatches in 1954 and Exemplary Military Conduct on 9th July 1972 to enjoy his military retirement at [30, Higher Bents Lane, Bredbury, Nr. Stockport, Cheshire.](#)

