

RBL Talk June 2025

This is the story of Patrick Milner-Barry and his brother Walter in WW2. All four brothers pictured below made significant personal contributions to the war effort and all survived. Jack, the eldest, helped plan D-Day. Stuart was a key figure at Bletchley Park. The talk today is about the other two brothers.

Pictured: Patrick, Stuart, Walter and Jack Milner-Barry. 1913.



Patrick's War. Patrick was the youngest son of Professor Milner-Barry and was born in 1908

Patrick had joined the Royal Navy straight from Dartmouth in 1922 and by the onset of war had served all over the world in a variety of ships having German raider hunted in the Indian Ocean, with no success, on HMS Kent, before in August 1940 he transferred to HMS Gloucester, a Town Class Cruiser.

War in the Mediterranean.



Figure 1 HMS Kent



Figure 2 Patrick

Patrick's diary talks of 'Club Runs' and 'various dashes' into Malta on Gloucester from August 1940.

These were lively convoy runs from our naval bases at Gibraltar or Alexandria bringing supplies to the besieged Island of Malta and in addition at this early stage in the war, support to the Allied forces in Greece. Club Runs is a misnomer. Most convoys were heavily attacked by Axis forces.

Patrick's first significant operation that year was off Cape Passero in October that year..

This was a Naval skirmish the Royal Navy convincingly won, resulting in the demise of the Italian destroyer Artigliere, targeted at night and severely damaged. Under tow, the ship was abandoned as the Italians fled.

At first light the cruisers HMS York, Gloucester, and Liverpool arrived to find Artigliere adrift. The survivors on Artigliere abandoned ship and York sank the ship with gunfire. The engagement marked the first effective use of radar in naval night combat by the Royal Navy. Ajax's radar had allowed rapid targeting

even in darkness which the Italians did not possess.

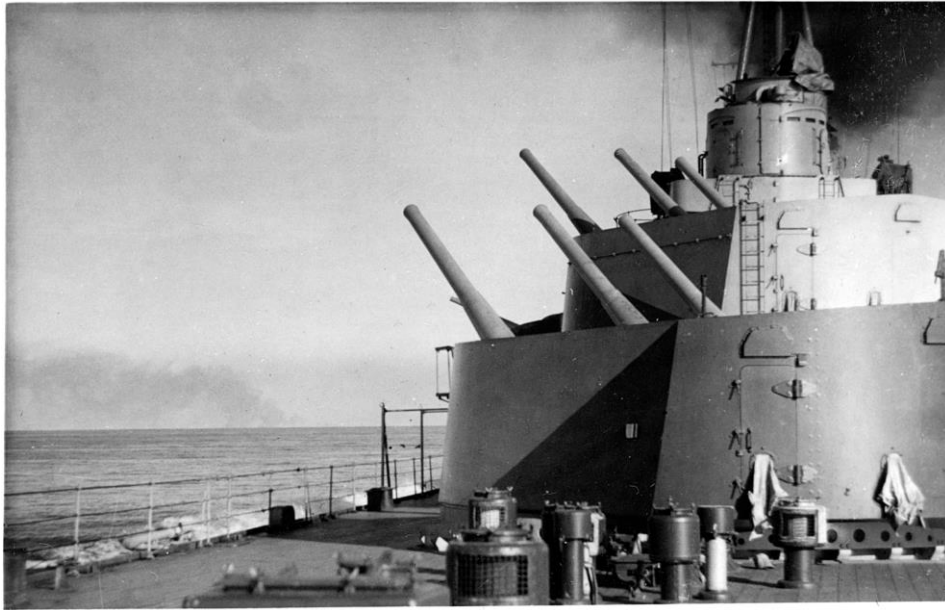


Figure 3 HMS Gloucester firing at full range

Another significant convoy operation Gloucester was involved with was the Operation Excess Malta runs in January 1941 when Gloucester was lucky to escape a direct hit.

This involved multiple convoys departing from Gibraltar, Malta, and Alexandria before converging in the central Mediterranean.

Convoy MC 4 consisted of four freighters from Gibraltar, three carrying goods destined for Piraeus, Greece. The fourth Essex carried 3,000 tons of seed potatoes, 4,000 tons of ammunition and twelve crated Hawker Hurricanes for Malta. The convoy was a relative success but the operation was the first to encounter the devastating Luftwaffe anti-shipping aircraft over the Mediterranean Sea, including the Stuka dive bomber.

It was busy. Gloucester was hit by a 550 lb bomb which fortunately failed to explode after penetrating through all five decks. Southampton was hit by at least two bombs and caught fire and sank with the loss of 81 crew. Remarkably, all the merchant shipping safely reached their destinations.

Afterwards in Malta, Patrick had a 'run in' of his own with Mountbatten (C-in-C Mediterranean) when he supported his Captain Henry Rowley's request that

the crew of Gloucester needed to be rested in Gibraltar after this latest run. His Captain was overruled and Gloucester was pretty much sent straight out again.



Figure 4 Captain Rowley, later lost off Crete

Family history recounts that Mountbatten did not forget or forgive the questioning of his command decision by Captain Rowley at the time and supported by his senior officers, including Patrick.

The Battle of Cape Matapan was next up on the 27th March 1941.

P M-B diary records him being "Airborne in a Submarine Walrus to spot for Gloucester"

After the interception and decryption of Italian signals by the team at Bletchley Park where Patrick's brother Stuart ran Hut 6, ships of the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy, under the command of Admiral Cunningham, having been informed of the Italians plans, sank or severely damaged several ships of the Italian Regia Marina. Five Italian vessels were sunk for no loss to

the Royal Navy and Prince Philip search light operated on HMS Valiant, whilst Grandpa has been airborne earlier in the day. Matapan was a spectacular victory early in the war in the Med. It was essentially a Naval ambush. We were waiting.



Figure 5 Patrick's Walrus

There was a first engagement at about 8pm when the Italians spotted the British Fleet but gunnery problems plagued the Italians. They scored no hits against their primary targets, Gloucester and Orion, and were ordered to withdraw.



Figure 6 Patric, Naval Observer, Airborne in a Walrus

In the second engagement at 10:20pm, the Italians again spotted the British squadron, but thought them to be Italian ships in the darkness. The battleships Barham, Valiant, and Warspite were able to close to 3,800 yards (3,500 m) – point blank range for battleship guns – at which point they opened fire. This is where it went horribly wrong for the Italians.

The Allied searchlights (including those under the command of Midshipman Prince Philip aboard Valiant) illuminated their enemy.

Some British gunners saw main turrets flying dozens of metres into the air from the two Italian Cruisers, Fiume and Zara, as they were destroyed shortly afterwards. It was carnage.

The Allied ships took on survivors but left the scene in the morning, fearing Axis air strikes but not before Admiral Cunningham had sent a signal to Italian High Command informing them of the location of the remaining survivors. Allied casualties during the battle were the single torpedo bomber shot down by Vittorio Veneto's 90 mm anti-aircraft batteries, with the loss of the three-man crew.

Italian losses were staggering. Up to 2,300 sailors, most of them from Zara and Fiume. The Allies rescued 1,015 survivors, while the Italians saved another 160. The Allied success in the naval Battle of Cape Matapan in March 1941 was an early example of the contribution of the work at Bletchley Park to the war effort. It also emphasised the importance of ship borne radar yet again.

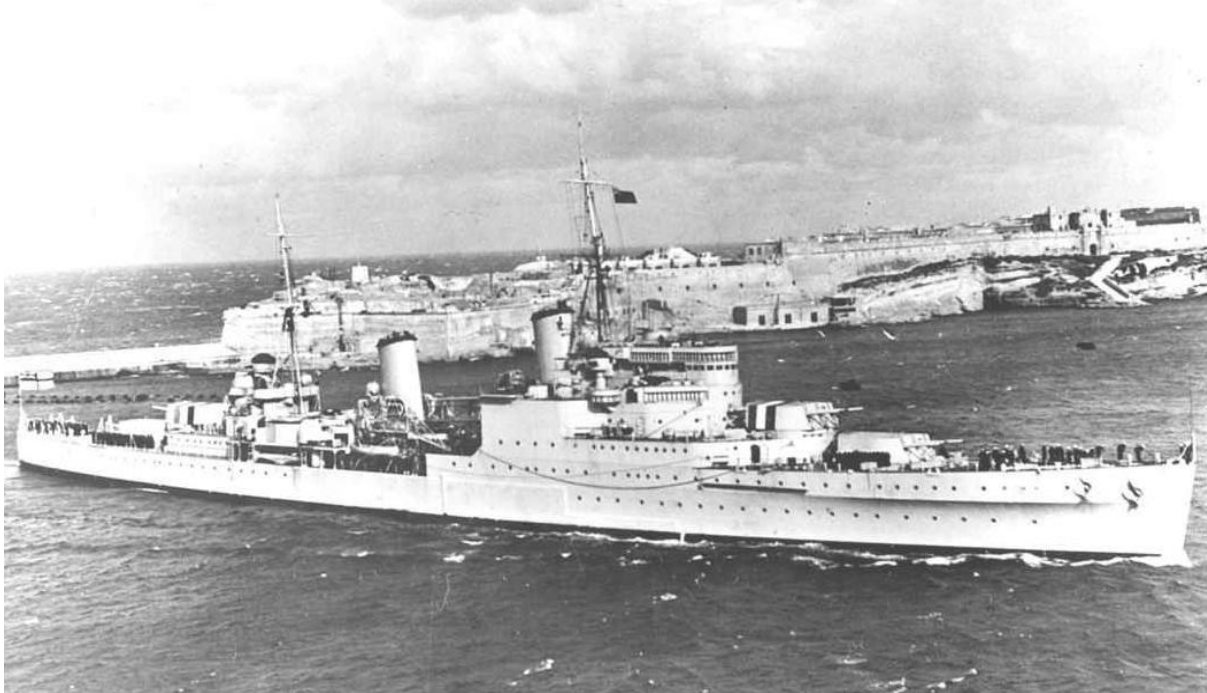


Figure 7 HMS Gloucester entering Valetta, Malta

Meanwhile just under two weeks later, on April 6th, the Germans finally invaded Greece, the Italians having been forced to withdraw to Bulgaria after their disastrous earlier offensive. The Germans were not hanging around and Athens fell on April 27th. Crete was next in line.

We had heavily reinforced Crete with soldiers evacuated from Greece by the Navy. However, over the space of just a few days, the Mediterranean Fleet moved from trying to stop the Germans gaining a foothold on the island to being involved in a hasty evacuation as the invaders overran Crete.

After German paratroopers seized key points on the island, reinforcements were dispatched by sea in Greek fishing vessels – known as caiques. Around midnight on May 21st 1941, the German invasion fleet was intercepted by the Royal Navy, which took a terrible toll of the wooden craft. The Germans then captured Maleme Airfield on day two, despite suffering horrendous casualties, so could now fly in reinforcements.

By daylight on May 22nd, the British ships were finally sighted by the Luftwaffe. Their commander promised to commit everything he had – and he had 700 aircraft, half of them bombers – against the Royal Navy. The Germans had taken very heavy casualties from their airborne and seaborne troops so were out for revenge.

An aerial onslaught followed. HMS Naiad counted 36 near-misses in just ten minutes, cruiser HMS Carlisle was damaged, and the battleship HMS Warspite – veteran of Jutland – was mauled and suffered more than 100 casualties.

The destroyer HMS Greyhound was the first vessel to succumb to the aerial attack, sunk in 15 minutes as she tried to finish off a Caique which had escaped the night-time decimation of the German soldiers.

HMS Gloucester, alongside other ships like HMS Fiji, had been initially operating north of Crete to intercept German convoys and protect Allied positions.

The ships had already expended much of their anti-aircraft ammunition after days of constant action but despite warnings about low ammunition, they were ordered to assist the destroyer HMS Greyhound before she was sunk.

Eventually Gloucester was recalled but within half an hour of attempting to leave to rearm and steaming all full speed, Gloucester and Fiji were both relentlessly exposed to German Junkers Ju 87 Stuka dive bombers. She eventually sank, after becoming a stationary sitting target and being bombed again and again for over 30 minutes. She had no means of defence having run out of anti aircraft ammunition and with the RAF air support having been completely eliminated.

The ship's surgeon recalled

“Shortly afterwards I do not know what time the ship slowly turned turtle and sank by the Stern. My first impression when I entered the water was it was agreeably warm but I soon found the water which is pleasant for bathing is not necessarily a suitable medium in which to spend a day and a night. After swimming about 100 yards at a leisurely pace to get clear of the ship before she went down, I came across the blowing head of a torpedo which struck me as good as I suppose I could wish for as a buoyancy aid, but it turned out otherwise. I therefore abandoned it and at this point the ship went down.

Someone had had the foresight to set the depth charges to safe so we were not troubled by the concussion of their explosion as she sank. It felt very lonely in the water after the ship had gone. At intervals after leaving the ship I'd watch squadrons of German aircraft fly over, I presumed on their way to attack HMS Fiji by then out of sight over horizon (Fiji was later sunk)

Returning from the attack on Fiji, several planes came down to machine gun survivors in the water and it was one of my more unpleasant minutes watching a Stuka dive straight for a party and seeing the spurts of water from the bursts coming out in a straight line in my direction. I believe a number of men were killed in this way"

The survivors were repeatedly bombed and strafed in the water. Of the 807 crew, only 85 were rescued, some after being in the water for up to 24 hours. Nearly all the officers perished and Captain Rowley's body washed up on a nearby Island 4 weeks later. He had in Navy tradition been the last man to leave the ship.

"Gloucester had enjoyed a reputation almost unparalleled in the Mediterranean Fleet – always in the thick of the action as you have heard... and always coming through, largely unscathed. ." She had five battle honours in less than one year... and a nickname: the Fighting G.

Gloucester's luck had finally run out

Of the 40,000 Allied troops defending Crete, almost 15,000 were bravely evacuated by the Navy from the south of the Island under great pressure from German aircraft. However, it was a strategic setback for the Allies with the loss of a major air base, the loss of yet more critical Navy ships and an important foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean.

So what of the fate of Patrick, my grandfather? Gloucester was his ship.

Patrick's mother received the following letter, which bears no resemblance to the actual fate of the ship;

9th. June, 1941.

Madam,

In confirmation of the Admiralty's telegram of 4th June, 1941, I am commanded by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to state that They have been informed that your son, Lieutenant-Commander Patrick James Milner-Barry, Royal Navy, has been reported as missing on active service since Thursday, 22nd May, 1941, when H.M.S. GLOUCESTER in which he was serving, was sunk during the operations off Crete. In view of the fact that an ample supply of boats and other life-saving apparatus was available, My Lords hope that he may have succeeded in reaching either Kithera Island or Crete, in which case he would probably have been taken prisoner by the enemy. I am to assure you that every endeavour will be made to secure news of his safety, but some time may elapse before this is received.

Meanwhile...

Mrs.E.M.Milner-Barry,
11 Park Terrace,
Cambridge.

Meanwhile, My Lords desire me to express to you Their deep sympathy in the great anxiety which this news must cause you, and to assure you that any further information which can be obtained will be immediately communicated.

I am, Madam,

Your obedient Servant,

A. Markham

Miraculously, Patrick was a survivor, but not because he was rescued from the sinking. Before the letter of the 9th June and once news of the sinking of

Gloucester had reached England, Grandpa had sent a telegram, which sadly we do not have, from Alexandria letting his mother know he was safe in Egypt. When Gloucester was sunk both the Admiralty and our family thought he was still part of the ship's company. He was not. He had left Gloucester perhaps two weeks before her last fateful journey to Crete having served on her through all her testing engagements of the previous year.

Somehow, in all this war around him, Grandpa then managed to get to Durban, South Africa, a few weeks later, in late June 1941, to marry my grandmother. We do wonder if this was the reason he was not on Gloucester at the time she was sunk? We will never know.



Figure 8 Wedding, Durban

After a brief honeymoon, it was back to Blighty.

Grandpa's next ship was HMS Dasher, a Convoy Escort Carrier, in February 1942. He had been part of the ship's crew who had brought Dasher over from New York after she had been completed in record time in a Naval dockyard in Brooklyn. Fortunately the convoy was not attacked by U Boats as it crossed the North Atlantic.

Operation Torch, the Allied Invasion of Morocco and Algeria, was Dasher's first major outing in November.

This was a key moment in WW2, often overlooked, as we opened a new front in North Africa. It took pressure off the Russians, helped to finally exit the Germans more rapidly from North Africa securing much of the Med and prepared us for the Invasion of Italy, Churchill's soft belly of Europe, except of course it was not soft at all.

HMS Dasher departed the Clyde two weeks before the landings to join the invasion force.



Figure 9 HMS Dasher off Africa, Operation Torch

P M-B diary "Two squadrons of Hurricanes embarked for Torch."

En route the large convoy was spotted by an enemy reconnaissance plane. The Convoy Commander ordered no action against the enemy plane which puzzled the gunners. However, when the plane departed the convoy double backed on its voyage and its was tactics such as these that ensured that not a single ship was lost to U boat activity.

On November 8th after a massive naval bombardment, Dasher launched six sea hurricanes before dawn to escort and defend an Albacore strike on Oran's La Sienna airfield.

Unable to find their return because of the haze, four of planes from Dasher made a forced landing on a salt pan but the other two planes were lost at sea with their pilots. The following day the remainder of Dasher's air group consisting of six hurricanes assisted by a few aircraft from Biter, her sister carrier, flew defensive patrols over the area before they left with Biter and Furious.

Over 107,000 troops were landed in Torch and after initial stiff resistance, the Vichy French quickly surrendered and changed sides. Torch also coincided with the stunning victory at El Alamein.

Sensing improving Allied fortunes after years of setback and tragedy, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill summarized the operation's significance at a speech in London two days after the Torch landings:

"Now this is not the end," he said. "It is not even the beginning to the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

Dasher returned home to Liverpool and began working up for her next area of operations, Russian Convoys.

February 1943

P M-B diary " Eventually we set off on the first leg of a Russian Convoy, still not worked-up. A heavy gale sprung up off Iceland"

On the 15th of February 1943 Dasher had sailed for Murmansk. Two days into the convoy on the 17th they encountered a violent storm in the North Atlantic so severe as a storm that it registered gale force 11. The winds were over 70 miles an hour and the wave height was 55 feet.

Of the 28 freighters in the convoy 6 had to turn back, the cruiser HMS Sheffield, had a gun turret roof smashed away by the heavy waves breaking over her and Dasher lost two of her crew over board. The four Hurricanes hanging from the roof of the Hanger had worked loose from their tie wires and was smashing into each other on the hangar deck and an 18 inch torpedo had gone adrift from its couplings and was washing to and fro in time with the rise and fall of the ship.

The hanger was a complete shambles due to the violent rolling and pitching of the ship and eventually all the security lashings had worked loose and every aircraft was smashed beyond repair. I then refer to Grandpa's diary again

P M-B diary "At the height of it a white-faced sailor appeared on the bridge and assured the officer-of-the-watch that he could see the sea through the ship's side. It was true: some ominous cracks had appeared in the plating around the loading ports. The ship was ordered to leave the convoy and there was nothing for it but to ride out the gale in Aka Rui Fjord in Northern Iceland"

Seeing the accompanying convoy ships through the cracks in the ship must have been very sobering indeed. The crew were no doubt absolutely delighted to be in the safety of the Fjord, which allowed temporary repairs to be carried out before she sailed to Dundee for three weeks of permanent welding.

Dasher left Dundee again in late March preparing for a Russian Convoy in what was to be her last voyage.

P M-B diary. "This time we were determined to have a proper work up in the Clyde before the next operation - another Russian Convoy. However, on 27th March, at the end of the second week, when things were going well, Dasher blew up. There was a violent explosion and she sank by the stern in five minutes, in sight of Ardrossan. Half the officers and two thirds of the men were lost. Many were trapped below. Some had miraculous escapes. Local craft and coasters showed remarkable bravery in rescuing men from the vicinity of burning petrol"



Figure 10 HMS Dasher sinking

The Carrier was carrying thousands of litres of aviation fuel that ignited on the surface burning many of the sailors in the water to death. His son, my Uncle Simon, remembered Patrick recalling in later life the burning fuel on the water and the screams of the survivors in the water as they perished.

Sub Lt John Ferrer, another survivor recalled “ On 27th March we had just finished deck landing practice and were admiring the views of the hills of Arran with the sun behind us. I went below deck to have a wash and change into my dress uniform. Suddenly there was a loud explosion. The lights went out and there was another explosion, much louder than the first and we ran down the corridor in the darkness. On reaching the deck, which was now at a very sharp angle, I met with fellow Greenock man John McFarlane who shouted ‘what will we do?’

Having been torpedoed six months before, I had no hesitation in shouting ‘I will show you’ and took off my jacket and jumped overboard. John did likewise. I never saw him again.

Dasher was now slipping below the surface and there were crewman all around me in the water. Suddenly without warning there was a loud whoosh and the sea was on fire. One minute they had been swimming and the next they were encircled in searing flames. It was awful hearing those screams and watching the men being burned to death. The screaming and shouting then stopped. We

were all covered in thick oil and were rescued by a coaster and taken to HMS Sir Galahad and landed at Ardrossan”

Patrick was also rescued and brought into Ardrossan.

Only 149 of her 528 crew survived. The loss of the ship was only publicly revealed in May 1945 due to wartime secrecy. I think because it was such a huge loss of life in relatively safe home waters....

Granny would have been around 4 months pregnant with my mother when Dasher was sunk, as Mum was born on July 10th 1943, the day the Allies invaded Sicily.

After a period of leave, Grandpa was posted to the office of the Staff Commander Western Approaches until late 1943 when he was sent to the Caribbean and the RNAS in Piarco, Trinidad and Tobago.

By this time, U Boat activity had almost ceased in the Caribbean but it remained a threat.

Patrick finished the war in the Caribbean. On reflection, he was extremely lucky.

Which brings me on to Walter's War.

Walter, the second son of Professor Edward Milner-Barry, was born in 1906.



Figure 11 Walter, Alexandria, 1941, in the uniform of the Trans Jordanian Frontier Forces.

Walter had joined the special forces in 1942 from the Trans Jordanian Frontier Force, having fought the Vicky French in Syria. He was clearly a bit of a maverick and a rogue. Before the war he had worked in the Middle East for Shell Oil and was both an Arabic and a Greek speaker as well as a British diplomat, skills that were to be very useful to his regiment as the war progressed.

This is a fraction of Walter's Special Boat Service War in Egypt and Greece. He kept extensive diaries.

When he arrived at Kabrit in the desert east of Cairo in early 1943 it was the base of the LRDG and the SAS.

Walter's diary. " We passed clouds of flies and the uninvited smell of food rising for every cook house mixed with the sickest smell of disinfectant rising from the latrines. David Sterling had liberated a certain amount of equipment to set up the camp from neighbouring bases, often borrowed at night, including a piano, but it was still a pretty simple base.

I reported to SAS HQ on the evening of the 5th of January 1943 where I got a very hospitable reception from the acting officer commanding, Major Pouch, and his adjutant. They gave me a tent to myself and told me I could stay with them or the Greeks which ever was most convenient. David Stirling himself was not there being somewhere behind the retreating Germans in Tunisia. He was something of a legend already"

Stirling's career in the SAS was somewhat curtailed as he was captured two weeks later and imprisoned for the rest of the war but his vision and determination ensured that the newly formed regiment continued without his leadership.

Walter's diary

"After the fall of Greece and Crete, large numbers of Greek officers and men had escaped and eventually been formed into the Greek Sacred Squadron with which I'd been operating in other parts of the Middle East the previous year. A great regular officer with a record of exceptional bravery had decided to form his own little force among his particular friends and call them the Aeros Locos named after the band of Spartans who fought to the last man at Thermophole against the Persians. This man was Colonel Christodoulos Tsigantes. He resembled a prosperous restaurateur, but was highly sophisticated and charming, spoke five languages, and was fearless in action"

"When I arrived at SAS Kabrit in order to start working as liaison officer with the Greeks again the Greeks were doing parachute training and I protested that I had no intention of parachuting. The reply was this would not be necessary as the commanding officer Colonel Tsigantes was too fat to get through the aperture of an aeroplane and it was on the basis that I accepted the

appointment. Colonel Tsigantes was forever afterwards known as Colonel Gigantes”

“However, I had’t been longer than a few days in Kabrit before even seeing the Colonel again that I realised if I did not parachute myself it would be like living in a golf club without playing golf so I committed myself to undergoing the training”

Walter undertook parachute training leaping off moving lorries, short platforms and finally out of aircraft over several months. The excessive injuries, including those to Walter, eventually encouraged a change in training tactics.



Figure 12 Walter, Kabrit, right of picture

But it was the water not the land that was calling.

Walter’s dairy. “In addition to David’s SAS operations, several of his old friends from Middle East commando days had undertaken individual operations by sea with notable successes the previous year. George Jellicoe was particularly successful in what was called the special boat section at the time and essentially this was the unit I joined with responsibility liaising with the Greek Phantom Squadron.”

It was out of this the SBS was born as a separate entity and separate regiment from the SAS in March 1943

Walter was appointed George Jellicoe's second in command of the raiding section of the SBS. He was to be known as Papa in the regiment. He was a remarkable 38 years of age, old enough to be a father figure to many of the young men who were only in their early twenties

Under Jellicoe's leadership, Walter and Colonel Gigantes personal rapport and language skills helped forge the SBS and the Greeks into the successful combined fighting force they were to become.

Prior to the Dodecanese campaign, the SBS had conducted hit and run operations all over the Aegean sea. They mainly used schooners and caiques or were inserted and extracted by submarine. The early parachute training of the desert was largely redundant, for both the SAS and the SBS.

The SBS sowed chaos in small groups all over the islands. But from Walters diaries, there were often long periods of training, standing down from operations at the last minute and loafing around. The officers certainly enjoyed Cairo life. Fine wine is a regular diary entry. They often say war is 95 % boredom and 5% sheer terror. Followed by more boredom.

One diary entry reads...."When I got back to Athlit, I discovered there was no news of immediate operations. So it was a question of spending the time waiting, by getting fit in various ways, such as practicing demolition.

Other training included swimming under water, carrying adhesive bricks called limpet mines intended for clamping onto ships bottoms to blow them up. I only had one alarming moment when my oxygen gave out and I couldn't find the reserve bottle....there was never a dull moment!"

Next up was the Dodecanese Campaign

Churchill was obsessed with small side campaigns. A few worked but many, like Dieppe, were notable failures. The Dodecanese islands campaign was one such operation. Churchill believed for strategic reasons the 15 islands, close to Turkey and including Rhodes, with the Italian capitulation in September 1943, needed to be secured before the Germans could replace the Italians. Most of the Italian troops simply wanted to go home after the Armistice or fight with the Allies.

The SBS including the Greek Sacred Squadron and the LRDG quickly worked their way through all the Islands, largely ahead of the main Allied infantry who established defensive positions behind them. Kos was reinforced with amongst others the Buffs, my father's regiment.

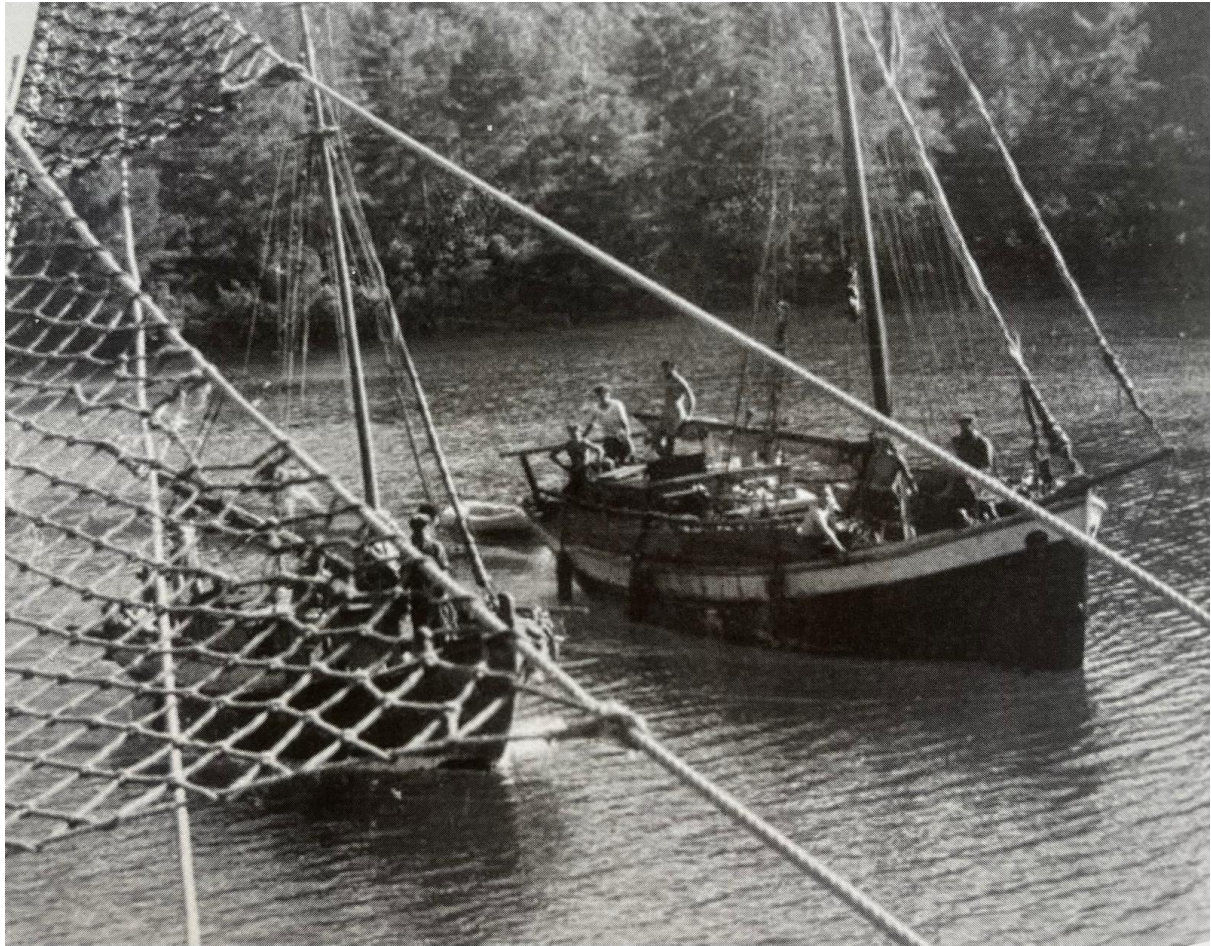


Figure 13 SBS Schooner

Walter recorded his arrival in Kos. From his diary....

“When we sailed proudly into the harbour of Kos and landed, we got a tremendous reception, though the Italians were dubious. Word had speedily got round of the German reaction in Rhodes to the Italian soldiers after their arrival there, and there were no doubt as to the treatment they would get if they collaborated with us. The unfortunate Greeks, however, welcomed us as liberators, having no reason to suppose, any more than we had, that their freedom was going to be so brief. We stayed in Kos merely for two days and slept on board the landing boats. But when we moved on to the neighbouring island of Kalymnos, it was decided we should establish a temporary base. The Greeks wanted to do something to mark our arrival. They had no gifts to offer the soldiery, so they decided to declare a holiday, during which everybody who

wanted was given a free shave and a haircut. Kalymnos had not been occupied by Germans and contained only a small Italian fort, so we established ourselves in the only building that seemed to be big enough, which was a warehouse for sponges, that island having been the centre of the sponge fishing fleet of the Dodecanese. The factory, and indeed most of the island, was owned by a lady of great distinction, who we inevitably called the Sponge Queen. David and I, and Stefan, dined with her formally, and after digging in her garden, she produced the most delicious wine, which she concealed from the Italians. Officers and men altogether slept in the warehouse, with the patrols jumbled up in any old order.”

The Germans did not hang around. Wasting no time after capturing Rhodes, the 17th September airfield bombing in Kos was devastating, putting the key airfield out of action (remember this was only two weeks after the Italian Armistice). By September 26th the Spitfires were down from 20 to only 4. On 3rd October the Germans came in force, by land and air, and in 24 hours Kos surrendered. Walter could only watch from Kalymnos, a mere mile away. It was over before they could even react.

The SBS role quickly changed, from direct fighting to extracting troops and here Walter took considerable risks.

He organised the final evacuations, returning to Kos to try and delay the Germans, even as the Island was surrendering.

In the first round, Walter managed to collect the stragglers, some British and around 50 or so Italians. Some others tried building rafts, but these sank and they had to swim back to Kos. Walter then organised a second round of evacuations 3 nights later, to neutral Turkey by caiques. Not content, Walter went back again on the night of the 18th October and found another 18 soldiers. He then went back yet again and was able to locate a Lieutenant - Colonel Browne and forty officers and sappers. Walter must have saved at least 200 Allied soldiers from becoming POWs. Not surprisingly, he was soon hospitalized suffering from exhaustion.

After the fall of Kos, the SBS and other Allied units tried to hold off the Germans but by the end of November it was over. On Kos, the Italian Commander and many of his officers were executed. It was the penalty they had all feared. On Hitler's orders, these executions were commonplace amongst

Italian soldiers who had switched sides throughout the Greek island campaigns.



Figure 14 SBS Trooper

The Germans continued to occupy the Dodecanese islands they had captured until the end of the war in 1945, when they surrendered to British forces.

The SBS continued Island hopping throughout 1944 where Walter's war continued but I want to jump to the liberation of Athens on the 12th October later that year.

The SBS had fought their way to Athens in September and early October across the Corinth Peninsula from the west facing stiff German opposition often ahead of the main Allied Forces. The campaign is well documented and figures such as the legendary Andy Lassen were at the forefront of the fighting. The Greek Sacred Squadron under Gigantes were also with them.

To the diary, Athens liberated. "October 11th 1944. Breakfast with the Brigadier and off at 7am. Lovely drive along the Gulf of Corinth. Stopped at Corinth for a word with the Highland Light Infantry as the canal was well and truly blocked with ships and blown. Stopped again at Loutraki for a bite of bullie. Then on to Megara. Showered with flowers and grapes by the Greeks, at Megara found the gliders about to land, a great sight. Yesterday the parachutists had 25% casualties owing to gusty winds, some being dragged for miles and only stopped by jeeps.

Brigadier Toigh said George Jellicoe must get into Athens somehow and assume control and handed him his red tabs to wear if necessary. It was agreed that George should be a brigadier and myself a full colonel. So we donned the emblems. Information about Athens was very conflicting, so rather timidly we embarked in a motorboat with George, Bill Reed, Sian Sedgwick and Corporal Newton as escort, about five pm, and went over to the Salamis shore. Flares, shots and explosions all around made the scene rather eerie. Decided to swim if shot up from the shore, but landed without incident just beyond Eleusis and promptly hid in a ditch until we heard obvious Greek voices. Just beyond Eleusis, contacted Ian Patterson, he and George bicycled into Athens, the rest of us following in cars. Reception by Greeks was overwhelming. Tears, shouts, kisses, handshakes, blows on the back, dragged into the houses and nearly suffocated. Made a speech from a balcony shouting 'Zeto to Elas', when I ought to have said Hellas, not Elas, meaning up with Greece rather than up with Elas, but I don't think the loss of an H was remarked on in the excitement.

Eventually arrived with three others on the back of a motorbike outside Grand Bretagne Hotel, there to be fervently embraced by my old friend Katsotas, now chief of staff. Entering the hotel, I was greeted by the Swiss manager, as though I'd left the day before, and invited to sign my name in the register immediately after General Falkenhausen, who had left it seems in a hurry a few hours before. Went to bed utterly exhausted.

Saturday proved to be an unforgettable day of ceremony in which we felt like cinema stars, the square outside the hotel was filled with cheering crowds, mad with excitement. We had to repeatedly appear on the balconies to convince the crowd the 'Ingleez' had really arrived. We were eventually smuggled out of the Grand Bretagne hotel into a car and drove to GHQ and thence to the Cathedral to attend a Te Deum mass. George, Bill Reed, Frank McCassey, Eric Gray and myself. The Archbishop, Damaskinos, a most imposing

figure, conducted the service, a moving and dignified performance, interrupted occasionally by cries of 'death to the traitors' or 'down with the Bulgars', but we had the situation in hand. The chanting was lovely."



Figure 15 SBS Acropolis

The SBS fought on after the liberation – up the Greek peninsula to Bulgaria. The Germans did not easily leave and it was a long hard slog.

Mentioning other SBS characters, Andy Lassen was a highly decorated SBS stalwart and a good friend of Walters. He mentions Andy many times and I've found another interesting anecdote from Walters diary, which is simply too good not to share from December 1st 1944.

" Breakfasted with Andy Lassen at a black market restaurant for about 15 shillings, Andy tells me he is able to keep himself by selling diesel fuel, amoral, but a modern Robin Hood. He solemnly offered to give me part of the proceeds and was quite surprised when I declined. On Friday 1st December I saw 3 corps people, from whom I got politeness but little else, and no explanation of their failure to answer any of my signals.

What I did succeed in solving, however, was why Charlie Clynes had never replied to my signals urging the dispatch of equipment, even when in exasperation I sent him a signal reading, 'Are you dead?'

It appeared that he jolly nearly had been killed because he had taken over Andy Lassen's room at the Grand Bretagne Hotel. The following morning, he woke to find a stranger in his room brandishing a revolver and Charlie emitted a loud cry which caused his assailant to miss a vital spot and shoot him in the leg. It had been subsequently discovered that the man was an outraged husband whose wife had been violated by Andy Lassen and he had thought he was shooting Andy.

Fortunately, Charlie has now made a complete recovery and was accompanying Andy to Crete tomorrow. I lunched with Andy Lassen and drove with him to Piraeus to assist in his arrangement for departure, a terrifying drive during which I reached, I suppose, the extremity of human terror because I had this distinct feeling that Andy simply didn't care if he did knock down somebody and kill them or us."

Sadly, Walter saw many of his closest friends die. Ian Patterson, who liberated Athens with Walter, was killed in an air crash in Brindisi shortly afterwards and Andy Lassen, just two weeks before the war ended in April 1945, also in Italy.

Andy was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his last action, the only member of the SBS to have received the award.

Thankfully Walter and the famous Colonel Gigantes both survived the war, as did George Jellicoe.

So, what became of Patrick and Walter after the war?

Patrick continued to serve until the late 1950's and was based in Northern Ireland for HM The Queen's Coronation Tour in 1953.



Figure 16 Coronation Tour. Patrick as Commanding Officer RNAS Eglinton escorting HRH The Duke of Edinburgh behind HM The Queen.

His last command was HMS Warrior, where the Carrier launched dozens of successful sorties against Communist terrorists in Malaya in 1954/5. After leaving the Navy, Patrick worked for Cadbury Schweppes but he never really settled into civilian life. Patrick and Granny (Elizabeth Milner-Barry) finally

retired to Chalkpit Cottage, Stoke Row.



Figure 17 HMS Warrior entering Valetta en route to Korea

Walter never married, returned to Shell in Saudi Arabia, spent time in Persia and remained great friends with Jellicoe and Gigantes. He was famous in our family for arriving with minimal notice on a Friday, to spend a long weekend, often well-armed with impossible to source Russian Vodka and Caviar and full of stories of his latest adventures.

Walter finally retired to a village in the Itchen Valley outside Winchester.

Thank you for listening.

I hope to talk more about the other brothers in the near future