

MAJOR DENIS BINGHAM REYNOLDS [130586] YORKSHIRE HUSSARS,
ROYAL FUSILIERS,
KING'S ROYAL RIFLE CORPS AND 2ND SAS (HQ SQN)



racing manager

Known to all as 'Denny', Denis Reynolds was born to Irish parents on 21 September 1909 in Cirencester, later living at Corndean Hall, a large household nestled amongst woods close to the Cotswold town of Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. He attended Felsted School in Essex where he was a keen member of the OTC from 1924 to 1927. The outbreak of war found him working as a private secretary to Earl Fitzwilliam at Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire having previously been a racing manager at Malton where he had owned and bred steeplechasers, riding many winners himself. He enlisted into the Yorkshire Hussars in mid September 1939 at Westminster, London, and was transferred to the Army Reserve the following day (service number 327294). When called up that November he joined the Royal Fusiliers but was commissioned into the King's Royal Rifle Corps in May 1940 after attending 161 OCTU at Sandhurst (*London Gazette* 17/05/40). His final report notes: 'The way in which he has worked, his general behaviour, conscientiousness, and ability make him outstanding. He has any amount of character and grit, is cheery with it all, and will make an excellent officer. Grade A.'

Having been posted to the 1st Motor Training Battalion at Chiseldon Camp near Swindon, Reynolds was promoted to captain in January 1941 and appointed Adjutant. Here he was the subject of cartoons drawn by fellow KRRC officer Ian Fenwick. The caption of that seen here notes:

A firm but fair Adjt, who kept 1 MTB together, he had been a pre WWII amateur steeplechaser, and hence was unfit through multiple injuries. Later he was passed fit, learnt to parachute and joined the SAS ... He was a charming shooting companion at Strensall (snipe and partridges) and a perfect team worker with Col Campbell [see

Fenwick's entry within this volume under Chambon-la-Forêt Communal Cemetery, France].

Reynolds was promoted to major in February 1943. He volunteered for the SAS that December, being attached 'pending posting to No.3 SAS Rgt, to No.1 French Para Bn', presumably as a liaison officer. However, when the proposed third British SAS Regiment did not materialise, he joined 2nd SAS at the beginning of April 1944 and was appointed Second-in-Command that June. He subsequently parachuted into the Vosges departement of eastern France for OPERATION LOYTON during the night of 6-7 September with fourteen other men. Len Owens MM, a Phantom signaller already deployed on the operation, later recalled:



Major Reynolds was the one who the signal came through that he was going to drop with his parachuting dog [called 'Tinker' as pictured above], and Colonel Franks [the CO, Lt-Colonel Brian Franks, MC] said 'We don't want a bloody dog here.' So Peter

Bannerman and I had about a mile and half to run up the mountain, get out the set, and it was the only time that we deviated from standard practice that you never sent messages from the area of the camp. You always used to move off 5 or 6 miles in another direction. But we couldn't do anything else but code the message up with a priority on it and send it back to England who would then have to transmit it to the squadron to ask them to contact the aircraft to ask them under no circumstances to drop a dog. But we didn't know whether that had happened or not but of course a dog didn't drop so they must have got through ... evidently he took this dog with him wherever he went and he had taught it to parachute so he decided that when he was coming in he was going to put it in ... Franks nearly went berserk [personal interview, 2010 - see Bannerman's entry under Moussey Churchyard, France].

On landing near Neufmaisons, Reynolds was guided to the SAS base at Xapenamoulin near Pierre-Percee. Franks subsequently recorded in his post-operation report that he sent Reynolds and his Adjutant, Captain 'Andy' Whately-Smith, to look for a new camp location on the morning of the 9th as the current area was being swept by German troops. Two hours later Franks' camp was attacked, the main group being forced to move with the loss of their stores. Lance-corporal Joseph Zandarco, a Frenchman serving in 2 Squadron, 2nd SAS, gave a slightly different version of events on his return to Allied lines:

We were attacked on 9 Jun [sic - September] by the Germans, who had learned of our presence through a French family in a nearby farmhouse. The daughter was enceinte [a French euphemism for pregnant] by a German and the son was a Milicien. We had contacted them in order to get food. They lived at Pierre Percee, south-east of Badonvillers.

The Germans fired on us from all sides before they were nearby. Major Reynolds, in charge of our party, was wounded and later disappeared into the woods. Lt Black was also wounded. We dispersed and ran for it [WO 208/3351].

Whatever the case, Reynolds and Whately-Smith were separated from the main group, 'Missing Parachutists' (the SAS War Crimes Investigation Team's final report) noting that, despite repeated broadcasts of a revised RV contact could not be re-established with the pair. It concludes: `Maj Reynolds, who had been wounded in the hand and the head during an ambush against German transport, remained at Pierre Percee with Capt Whately-Smith hidden by [the] Le Rollands' (WO 218/222). According to her own diary Myrhiam Le Rolland, an experienced nurse, was fetched to attend to the pair by a Monsieur Michel, on the afternoon of the 10th. Michel was harbouring the men at his house at Xapenamoulin. Myrhiam diagnosed Reynolds' forearm as fractured, with gangrene already present. She considered amputation whilst continuing to make daily visits over the next three days, during which time the men slept in a

log cabin. They were seen in the woods by a woman liable to talk and Myrhiam and her husband Freddy therefore moved them closer to Pierre-Percee and hid them in a small and dank 1914 shelter carved out of the Roches d'Orthomont on the wooded hill above their house. The Le Rollands looked after them as best they could from 6 September until 30 October at great personal risk, mindful that German troops were billeted in their property.

Once Reynolds had regained strength the pair attacked German transport before returning to their cave. They attempted to cross through the lines near Senones but were forced to return. According to Madame Le Rolland they then managed, by means of a messenger, to receive instructions from Franks to stay hidden until called upon. 'Missing Parachutists' continues:

On the 30th October, a Mme Le Blanc [*sic* - Leblanc] of Raon L' Etape offered to show these two officers a safe way, avoiding German posts, to reach Raon L' Etape which was then almost in the front line [the Le Rollands stated that Leblanc was sent, with weapons and civilian clothing, by a Marie Renault with whom Reynolds and Whately-Smith had sheltered during their previous attempt to cross the lines].

After some discussion, Mme Le Blanc is said to have succeeded in persuading them that the safest way was by the main road 'because all the Germans were in the woods, and she had come by the road without seeing a German soldier' [the men were given a rendezvous at 1800hrs that evening at the La Cense de Coeur, a large house on the outskirts of Raon-L'Etape]. They took the main road and both were captured outside the Wehrmacht unit HO La Trouche, on the afternoon of 30th October [WO 218/222].

The report notes that 'to determine whether Madame Blanc was treacherous or merely stupid would require an investigation to itself' although Corporal Kubiskie later reported that she had given him considerable help and that he believed that she had been shot by the Germans after being caught at La Trouche. Whatever the case, German troops arrived at the Le Rolland house soon after, completely ransacking and setting fire to it. Both the Le Rollands were beaten,

Freddy being taken to Cirey-sur-Plaine for interrogation. Here he was confronted with Reynolds, Whately-Smith and Leblanc who initially admitted to Freddy that she had denounced him under pressure. The four were taken to the Kommando Pullmer's outpost at Allarmont and separated. Rudolf Krause, who was present at the interrogation of both men at Cirey, later stated:

On the 31st October or 1st November 44, two officers of the British Army were brought to the German police post at Cirey as prisoners. A little later I was asked to act as interpreter for the interrogation of these officers. The interrogator in charge of this affair was Breuer, St HauptscharfOhrer (Oberfeldwebel of the SFP).

Before we started with the interrogation Breuer told me that these two officers belonged to the 2nd SAS Battalion of the British Army/Air Force, which had been parachuted in the Vosges mountains about six weeks earlier, but had been almost completely taken prisoners in the meantime.

As one could see that the officers had had a rather hard time in past weeks I asked for the permission to let them refresh themselves and Breuer gave me a free hand to talk with them and to give them everything I thought necessary. I took them into my own room, gave them necessities to wash and refresh themselves, and had a good breakfast brought to them, including wine and cigarettes.

Afterwards we talked together about things in general and the officers, a major and a captain, told me the story of their hard life they had had during the last six weeks, whilst they were hidden in the Vosges forest in the south of Cirey. They had been parachuted with their group of men at the beginning or middle of the month of September. Whilst looking for a better suited camping place their men had been attacked by a group of German soldiers and taken prisoners. On their return they had also been shot at and the major was wounded on his left hand, but they hid themselves before they were taken prisoners. With all their personal belongings taken away they then led a rather hard life in the forest helped now and then by the French population. In the meantime the American troops had advanced up to the fringe of the Vosges Mountains and the two officers intended to cross the front line to join the Allied troops. On the

way to the front line they had been taken prisoner by a patrol of the German Army. As they had hidden their uniforms under civilian overcoats the two officers were suspected to be spies and therefore handed over to the nearest police post, which was an outpost of the German police at Cirey.

During the following two days, whilst these officers were interrogated Breuer had a rather detailed report of the capture and declarations of the other men and officers of the same group (2nd SAS Battalion). They were treated in every way possible as officers by Breuer and myself. They had their meals with us and we walked several times in the park to give them fresh air and a little exercise.

The chief of our police station at Cirey, SS-Sturmbahnführer Barnek, told Breuer that he regarded the two officers as spies as they had been taken prisoners clad in civilian overcoats and that he intended them to be shot. As result of our interrogations and personal talks with them Breuer and myself were convinced that both men were really officers, though administration officers of the British Army and ought to be treated as such.

We opposed the opinions of Barnek and sent a wireless report of the affair to the competent police headquarters at Frankfurt a/m of the SS-Obersturmbahnführer Kieffer who had been Chief of Section IV Espionage and Terrorism in Paris [Hans Kieffer, later hanged for ordering the murders of members of 1st SAS engaged on OPERATION GAIN see multiple entries within this volume under Marissel French National Cemetery, France]. As a result of this wireless report Kieffer came to Cirey two days later in his car, and took the two British officers with him [to Schirmeck] after he had talked things over with Breuer and Barnek. Breuer told me afterwards (I was not present at the interview of Kieffer with Barnek and Breuer) that he was very pleased with this result, as the officers would now be brought to a camp for prisoners of war (Oberursel?) [a town in Germany] and that Kieffer had taken personal charge of this affair. He was convinced that we had by our opposition saved the two officers from being shot as spies.

With regards to the persons concerned I can give these descriptions
- The British major was a man of about 1.65 to 1.70m with reddish hair, fair complexion, and his left hand severely wounded but practically

healed. He had been as far as I remember the officer in charge of the provisionment of the 2nd SAS Battalion and had a Scottish name: - Mac Douglas or something similar? [sic]

The British captain was at least 1.80m, dark hair, darker complexion (both had long beards as a result of their life in the forest). He spoke a little French and German, and had also some administration post with the 2nd SAS Battalion. His name if I remember it correctly was Whately-Smith ...

I may remark that both British officers were very pleased with the treatment accorded to them by Breuer and myself, and both hoped to see us after the war. What became of them after they were taken by Kieffer in his car I have no idea [WO 309/539].

There was to be no POW status. Taken by Kieffer to Schirmeck Concentration Camp on 4 November, Reynolds and Whately-Smith were placed in cells alongside that of Lieutenant David Dill (see Dill's entry above). The three officers were then collected for interrogation by SS-Sturmscharführer Schossig and subsequently ill-treated at the Maison Barthlemy, the HQ of the Kommando Ernst in Saales. Abbe Hett, a fellow prisoner, stated that Reynolds had been hung up by his hands and beaten so severely that bones became visible. He subsequently told Hett that he would not have thought it possible for the body to withstand such pain without death occurring. Soon afterwards, the three officers were returned to Schirmeck along with Captain Victor Gough of SOE's JEDBURGH Team JACOB, who had also been beaten after his capture on 3 October. An American Red Cross representative later noted:

I'm sending you a list of names of American and British prisoners of war held by the Gestapo at the Concentration Camp of Schirmeck-la-Broque in Alsace. I was able to talk with them and promised to advise their families ... These officers were living on 6 November, 1944 [WO 311/270].

Reynolds' name is on this list. However, he and the other prisoners were subsequently transferred to Rotenfels Camp in Germany and

murdered in a wood near Gaggenau on 25 November 1944 (see Dill's entry above for full details).

Having disappeared, Franks contacted Major 'Bill' Barkworth, commander of the SASWCIT, asking: 'have you any more clues Denny etc? Write Col Thynne Dill's stepfather if you have any clue.' Barkworth's team replied: 'bodies of Denny and Andy identified. He is now examining remaining bodies'. Barkworth himself reported:

In Grave 3, row III [by this time the remains had been reinterred at Gaggenau's Waldfriedhof civil cemetery] I found a body wearing an American pattern shirt with a British Army face-veil around the neck. Sergeant Rhodes, a member of my party, found two identity discs in this grave which he showed to me. The identity disclosed the following lettering: REYNOLDS BD CE and a number commencing with the numerals 130. There appeared to be some additional numbers but I could not decipher them. The identity discs were standard British Army pattern. The US Pattern shirt was similar to those issued to members of my regiment. Madame Chalopin [a French Army nurse assisting in the case] also gave me a shoulder strap bearing the insignia of a crown as worn by a major in the British Army, also a black button bearing the insignia of the King's Royal Rifle Corps which was Major Reynolds' parent unit. She said she had found it on the clothes of one of the bodies but could not remember from which body she had taken it. I have seen Major Reynolds wearing similar badges [WO 311/270].

German forces, which had attacked SAS men deployed on OPERATION PISTOL between 14 and 18 September 1944 at nearby Autrepierre, retreated, leaving behind a parachute smock with 'D.B Reynolds' inscribed on the collar. This is thought to have come into their possession after the capture of the SAS camp near Pierre-Percee on the 9th.

Franks later wrote: 'everyone in the SAS Regiment who knew Denny has a sense of personal loss. He was the best 2nd in Command anybody could possibly wish for and he was a great friend and it is difficult to say how much I miss him.' Meanwhile, Reynolds' former KRRC Commanding Officer, Lt-Colonel Campbell, wrote: 'Denis will