

Obituary – Ossie Miller

Well-known Berwick fire-fighter and former Commando, Ossie Miller, whose courage in saving the lives of two local boys was recognised with a gallantry award has died aged 89.

Educated at Spittal Primary School and the former Roman Catholic School in Walkergate, he joined the Grenadier Guards in 1938.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Ossie volunteered for Winston Churchill's new "shock" force – the Commandos - whose role was to take the fight back to the Nazis with raids that crippled many of their advances.

Ossie was recruited into the Commandos' Special Services unit, known as No. 2 Commando and took part in their first opposed raid on the Norwegian island of Vaagso in 1941, during which he "celebrated" his 21st birthday. In less than 24 hours the Commandos achieved all their objectives and returned by sea to the UK with minimal casualties. The success of the Commando raid struck at the very heart of Berlin and Hitler subsequently issued his notorious edict that any captured Commando should be shot.

In 1943 Ossie took part in the Commando raid that spearheaded the successful capture of Sicily from the Fascists. Leading his Section, he was the first Allied force into the enemy's last stronghold, the city of Catania, the fall of which signalled the Allied victory in Sicily. Later that year, he suffered bullet wounds in the Commando landings at Salerno in southern Italy as the Allies moved northwards. He was evacuated to a field hospital in North Africa but returned to active duty less than a month later. He was then selected for special operations to fight alongside the Yugoslav Partisans behind enemy lines to re-capture the Dalmatian islands from Nazi forces.

After the war, Ossie returned to Berwick and joined the Northumberland County Fire Service where he served for almost 30 years. It was in 1947 that he rescued two local boys – Derek Rae and Jimmy Handyside – who were in imminent danger of drowning in the River Tweed because of exceptionally high tides. Using skills honed in the Commandos, he climbed down the ramparts of the Elizabethan Walls and hauled the youngsters to safety. He later received a citation from the Royal Humane Society praising his gallantry. On the 50th anniversary of the rescue in March 1997, Mr Rae wrote to the Berwick Advertiser to express his thanks for being rescued "from a certain death".

A keen sportsman, he had success as a boxer, footballer and athlete before later taking up table-tennis and darts, playing in the local town leagues and reaching the national darts championships in 1968. Ossie lived with his wife Linda in Tweedmouth for more than 50 years. They moved to Hampshire eight years ago to be close to their family. He is survived by his wife, children Charles, Maureen and David and six grandchildren.