



Remembrance

“The volunteers knew the risk and shown upmost bravery and were valiant when raising their hand knowing death was almost certain.”



It is important to remember that, as REME soldiers, our own history is rich with involvement in a number of significant battles ever since the Corps’ formation. Not least amongst them are those fought by Commandos and 1st Airborne Division Workshop in World War 2. As serving tradesmen and women, we can be proud of the Corps and do our best to maintain its high regard and professionalism.

WW2 Commandos

Scribe: WO2 Gaz Hooson

Formation

June 1940, well into WW2 the British established a new raiding and reconnaissance force, directed by Sir Winston Churchill. After the disaster at Dunkirk the Commandos were assembled and equipped to inflict casualties on the Germans and bolster British morale.

The first recruits were all volunteers selected from existing regiments of the British Army, including REME. It wasn’t until 1942, the Royal Navy’s Royal Marine battalions were also reorganised as Commandos. They joined the Army Commandos in combined Commando Brigades.

At the end of the war, and without notice, a decision was made to disband the Army Commandos. Demobilisation commenced almost immediately with some Commando Units being merged for short periods as numbers dwindled. The Commando role would now be for the Royal Marines.

Operations

Throughout WW2 the Combined Commando Brigades carried out some of the most daring and dangerous raids of the war. They were so effective Hitler himself issued the ‘Commando Order’ which instructed the immediate execution for anyone involved.

“From now on,” he ordered, “all men operating against German troops in so-called Commando raids in Europe or in Africa, are to be annihilated to the last man.”

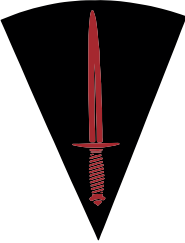
“The Commandos were so effective that Hitler himself issued the ‘Commando Order’, which instructed the immediate execution of anyone involved.”

Cfn William Meek
Royal and Electrical
Mechanical Engineers
Number 5 Commando
Died of his wounds suffered on Wednesday, March 15, 1944, aged 20, whilst carrying out a raid against the Empire of Japan, in what was Burma.



So far I have found 32 names of REME soldiers, such as Cfn Meek, who volunteered to become a Commando during WW2. Working with the REME Museum I hope to obtain the history and photos of all the names of those WW2 REME soldiers who selflessly became Commandos.

To this day Army Commandos still provide support the Royal Marines on Operations. There are two Army Commando Regiments within 3 Commando Brigade; 24 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers and 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery. Having completed the All Arms Commando Course REME personnel can be expected to be attached to these Very High Readiness Regiments, safeguarding mission success across 3 Commando Brigade all over the world, be it in the jungle or in arctic environments. For more information visit the Regimental Headquarters REME SharePoint page.



Roll of Honour

Those REME Soldiers Who Became Original WW2 Commandos

‘United we conquer’

Number 1 Commando	Number 5 Commando
Sgt Edward Keymer Edwards REME	Sgt George William Kelly REME
Cpl B H Laycock REME	L/Cpl A M Harvey REME
Number 2 Commando	Cfn William Meek REME
Sgt Dennis Harry (Todd) Slaughter REME	Cfn Edward Holland REME
L/Cpl Henry Finn Hughes REME	Cfn H Or M Hopper REME
Cfn George Picket REME	Cfn Anthony Lovering Green REME
Cfn Peter Smith REME	Cfn James REME
Cfn Thomas R W Heard REME	Cfn Raymond Hardacre REME
Number 3 Commando	Number 6 Commando
Sgt William Twohig BEM REME	Cfn ‘Jock’ Sheppard REME
Cfn W M Rowley REME	LCpl Harry James REME
Cfn Patrick George Tynan REME	Number 9 Commando
Cfn C R Hemp REME	SSgt A Mitchell REME
Cfn G Varley REME	L/Cpl G McLachlan REME
Number 4 Commando	Cfn Ralph Nothard REME
Sgt Arthur Driscoll REME	Cfn R Nottingham REME
Cpl R Hooper REME	Cfn Henry Bowley REME
Cfn L Cocker REME	Cfn John Stuart Thomas REME
Cfn Arthur Leatherland REME	

The 1st Airborne Division Workshops REME soldiers who paid the ultimate price

Cfn C W Ware	Cfn I J Brewster
Cfn A Gibb	Cpl J W Murphy
Cfn V J Harvey	

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN - 1st Airborne Division Workshops, REME

Scribe: SSgt Jonathan Payne

September 1944

With war raging on throughout the world, plans for the biggest airborne invasion were underway. Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery proposed a plan to General Dwight D Eisenhower: to bypass the main enemy defences of the Siegfried Line; entering northern Germany through the Netherlands. Defying Eisenhower’s formal strategy plan, of distributed wide front defences along the entire German border, Montgomery’s plan would be to create a narrow corridor for further military advances. When progress slowed along the entire German border, Eisenhower agreed for an adapted, small-scale version of Monty’s plan to go ahead. Operation Market Garden had been endorsed and was to proceed on the 17th Sept 1944. The operation would comprise of two elements: Market- an airborne assault- and Garden- a large scale advance of armour. The outline of the mission would be to secure territory and bridges; in and around the towns of Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem.

The division to drop into the Netherlands would be the 1st Airborne Division, commanded by General Roy Urquhart; the drop zones (DZs) were to the west of Arnhem. Although associated with Parachute regiments, tradesmen of the 1st Airborne Division Workshops (REME) would parachute onto the drop zones; advance to Arnhem, fighting alongside their airborne counterparts and secure the Rhine crossings. REME trades such as Armourers and Telecommunications Technicians would be utilised to repair and maintain weaponry as well as radio equipment. The other tradesmen, who also formed the remainder of the Advance Workshop Detachment (AWD), would arrive via Horsa glider equipment with Jeeps, trailers, motorcycles and folding bicycles. They would be located in the nearby town of Oosterbeek to protect the DZs and surrounding areas.

Due to unexpected elements of the German Ninth SS Panzer division, the airborne troops could not use the element of speed and surprise against the awaiting forces. The accuracy of the parachuting troops onto the DZs compromised the allies and assisted the German response. As the invading troops were not scattered, the Germans were able to pinpoint the landing areas and make quick deduction of likely objectives. Despite the division being out-matched by the German armour, Urquhart’s men established divisional headquarters in Oosterbeek. Only 750 men of the 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lt-Col John Frost, were able to make it to the objective bridges. However, the second objective, a railway bridge, was destroyed upon their arrival; Frost then proceeded to the main objective, Arnhem Bridge. Without even realising, Frost’s men were cut-off from the remainder of the division. Outnumbered, out gunned and growing desperate for supplies, Frost and his remaining soldiers only occupied 10 houses on the north side of Arnhem Bridge.

Whilst the fighting continued for the coming days, the armoured advance had been severely delayed and unfortunate weather conditions added to reinforcement problems. A final transmission was made “Out of ammunition, God save the King”: the 2nd Battalion were wiped out by German forces, ending an impressive hold out. It is believed 1984 men were killed and 6854 were captured, including Frost. The Germans now have surrounded the town of Oosterbeek. With German snipers adding to the pressure, this was to be the unfortunate fate of Cfn Alex Gibb. A willing volunteer to take action against the enemy snipers, he was fatally wounded. This selfless act is evidence that our Corps values stem from the very first generation of REME soldiers. The book ‘With spanners descending’ was written by a surviving REME soldier from Arnhem, Cfn Joe Roberts.

The Battle of Arnhem was fought and lost within the 9 days of conflict. On 25 September 1944 the 1st Airborne Division, under the code name ‘Berlin’ began their retreat across the Rhine and into safe territory.

