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The Employment and Development of Britain's Second World
War Commando

1940-1941

by Thomas G. Lea

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Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Chapter One- The Independent Companies	10
Chapter Two- Establishment of the Commandos	26
Chapter Three- Development of the Commandos	46
Conclusion	67
Appendix I	73
Appendix II	78
Appendix III	82
Appendix IV	88
Appendix V	93
Appendix VI	97
Appendix VII	100
Appendix VIII	102
Appendix IX	116
Appendix X	129
Appendix XI	132
Appendix XII	139
Bibliography	147

Introduction

Colonel F. Spencer Chapman's memoir, *The Jungle is Neutral*, charts the history of his experience in guerrilla warfare in South East Asia during the Second World War.¹ In comparison to the 1950 edition, however, a reprint from 1957 omits Colonel Chapman's first chapter, 'In Search of War'.² Within the first chapter, Colonel Chapman depicts his experiences in the first British guerrilla unit, 5th Scots Guards Ski Battalion and his subsequent involvement at the Special Training Centre, Lochailort, Scotland, from February to June 1940.³ The omission of Colonel Chapman's involvement with Britain's irregular warfare developments during 1940, although not totally representative of the Commando historiography, is indicative of the lack of academic attention it has received.⁴ Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to discuss the establishment and development of the Second World War Commando force from 1940-1941.

Historical narrative has come to occupy the majority of the Commando historiography; as Charles Messenger explained, 'an authenticity which I could never hope to reproduce in my own words is achieved through telling a story.'⁵ Academically, secondary sources have focused on the Royal Marine Commandos, with the service adopting 'Commando' duties following the Second World War, thus, post-war interest has focused on the Royal Marines.⁶ For example, Major-General J. Thompson's, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers -to a Special Force*, and J. Parker's, *Royal Marines Commandos: The Inside Story of a Force for the Future* offer a chronological history of the Royal Marines, from their formation by King

¹ *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: Corgi Books, 1957)

² *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: Corgi Books, 1957) see also *The Jungle is Neutral* ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: The Reprint Society London, 1950), pp 13-20

³ *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: The Reprint Society London, 1950), pp 13-20

⁴ *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: Corgi Books, 1957)

⁵ C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp13

⁶ National Archives PRO CAB 1067, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group see also National Archives PRO V699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, The Start of 'Commandos

Charles II on 28th October 1664, to present day operations in Afghanistan.⁷ R. Neilland's, *By Sea and Land: The Story of the Royal Marine Commandos*, and Sir R. B. Lockhart's, *The Marines Were There*, again both narrate the history of the Royal Marine Commandos who were established in 1942, two years after the Army Commandos during the Second World War.⁸

The Special Forces' historiography has also focused on the origins of the Special Air Service (SAS).⁹ In particular, founding members of the SAS, D. Stirling and B. Mayne have had biographies published.¹⁰ Stirling and Mayne were originally in the Commandos and it was this experience that gave them the skills that enabled them to develop the SAS.¹¹ H. Ross's, *Paddy Mayne*, attempts to discuss the early Commandos and SAS simultaneously, demonstrating 'the often blurred dividing line between Commandos *per se* and other Special Forces.'¹² Therefore, this thesis recognizes the need for a precise focus on the Army Commandos from 1940-1941 in order to maintain academic focus and strong analysis. This problem is most marked in P. Warner's, *Secret Forces of World War II*.¹³ Warner discusses numerous Special Forces that operated during the Second World War, with no discernable connections being made between the various forces which results in a disjointed and random

⁷ Thompson, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to Special Force*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2000). Parker, *Royal Marines Commandos: The Inside Story of a Force for the Future*, (Chatham: Headline Group, 2007)

⁸ R. Neillands, *By Sea and Land: The Story of the Royal Marine Commandos*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2004) see also Sir R. B. Lockhart, *The Marines Were There*, (Dublin: Panther Books, 1957) see also National Archives PRO CAB 1067, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

⁹ G. Mortimer, *Stirlings Men: The Inside History of the SAS in World War II*, (Michigan: Phoenix Publishing, 2005) see also G. Stevens, *The Originals: The Secret History of the SAS in their Own Words*, (London: Ebury Press, 2006)

¹⁰ A. Hoe, *David Stirling: The Authorised Biography of the Founder of the SAS*, (USA: Time Warner, 1994), see H. Ross, *Paddy Mayne*, (Stroud: History Press, 2008) see also R. Bradford & M. Dillon, *Rogue Warrior of the SAS: The Blair Mayne Legend*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2003)

¹¹ G. Stevens, *The Originals: The Secret History of the SAS in their Own Words*, (London: Ebury Press, 2006), see also G. Mortimer, *Stirlings Men: The Inside History of the SAS in World War II*, (Michigan: 2005) see also H. Ross, *Paddy Mayne*, (Stroud: History Press, 2008), pp31-34

¹² H. Ross, *Paddy Mayne*, (Stroud: History Press, 2008), pp21-58, see also C. Messenger, *The Commandos* (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp13

¹³ P. Warner, *Secret Forces of World War II*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004)

study.¹⁴ Consequently, to avoid producing an unwieldy study this dissertation will focus specifically on the establishment and development of the Army Commandos from 1940-1941.

The study of the development of the Army Commandos from 1940-1941, as far as this research project can discern, has received little academic attention. A. Mallinson's meta-narrative, *The Making of the British Army: From the English Civil War to War on Terror*, makes no reference to the formation of the Commandos.¹⁵ However, specific work on the Army Commandos has been written, for example, J. Ladd's, *Commandos and Rangers of World War II*, published in 1978, provides an extensive narrative from 1940-1945, but the dual study of both Commandos and American Rangers disjoints Ladd's narrative, similar to P. Warner's, *Secret Forces of World War II*.¹⁶ C. Messenger's, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, published in 1991, is both accurate and well structured in its approach to charting the Second World War Commando, although a discussion of 1940-1941 is truncated into the first two chapters.¹⁷ No academic texts of a comparable focus to Messenger's, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, could be found in, the interest of this study, since its publication nearly twenty years ago (1991).¹⁸ It may be suggested that a broad Commando narrative has not entered the historiography since 1991 because, barring the period of 1940-1941, Messenger's book produced a thorough investigation.¹⁹

In support of this, recent secondary sources entering the historiography have become more specific. For example, N. Cherry's, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, studies raiding operations during the aforementioned period, although both

¹⁴ P. Warner, *Secret Forces of World War II*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004)

¹⁵ A. Mallinson, *The Making of the British Army: From the English Civil War to War on Terror*, (London: Bantam Press, 2009)

¹⁶ J. D. Ladd, *Commandos and Rangers of World War II*, (London: Macdonalds and Jane, 1978) see also P. Warner, *Secret Forces of World War II*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004)

¹⁷ C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: GraftonBooks, 1991)

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*

Airborne and Commando forces have to be examined to constitute enough material to justify a book.²⁰ Cherry's work focuses on the period of 1940-1942, but the initial formation of the Commandos in 1940 is condensed into the introduction of his text.²¹ Thus, again demonstrating the historiographies' lack of material discussing the establishment and development of the Commandos from 1940-1941.²²

Less recent texts such as, *Commando Attack* by G. Holman, first published in 1942, do, however, cover the Commando establishment and development through 1940-1941, especially in regard to training.²³ Holman's work in parts is comparable to War Office propaganda rather than accurate historical commentary, asking, three years before the conclusion of the War, presumptive questions such as, 'Why did the Commandos succeed?'²⁴ *Commando Country* by S. Allan is the only secondary source that this dissertation could locate that addresses the development of training in the West of Scotland, offering a comprehensive historical narrative; it is hoped that this text can be of value in addressing the development of training from 1940-1941.²⁵

The recent entry of more focused texts into the historiography has also seen literature commit to analysis of a single Commando action, rather than a period of time. For example, the raid on St Nazaire is covered by the following: K. Ford's, *St Nazaire: The Great Commando Raid*, J. Dorrain, *Saint-Nazaire: Operation Chariot- 1942*, and J. Cooksey's, *Operation Chariot: The Raid on St Nazaire*.²⁶ In respect of this dissertation, these three examples fail to provide

²⁰ N. Cherry, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, (Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd, 2009)

²¹ *ibid* ppl9-40

²² *ibid*.

²³ G. Holman, *Commando Attack*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1942)

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ S. Allan, *Commando Country*, (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2007)

²⁶ K. Ford, *St Nazaire 1942: The Great Commando Raid*, (Kent: Osprey Publishing, 2001) see also J. Dorrain, *Saint-Nazaire: Operation Chariot-1942*, (Bamsley: Pan & Sword, 2006), J. Cooksey, *Operation Chariot: The Raid on St Nazaire*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005)

adequate context due to their concise structure, reflecting the requirement for this study to cover a period that allows for context to be analysed and criticized.²⁷

Research of secondary sources, therefore, presents the concept behind this enquiry into the establishment and development of the Army Commandos from 1940-1941. The historiography contains literature that is either very broad in its chronology and force focus, or is more precise in its approach, yet has not adequately addressed the establishment and development of the Commandos between 1940-1941. It was therefore felt that there was a valid research project to be undertaken.

There are a number of published primary source materials which discuss the establishment and development of the Commandos from 1940-1941. J. Dunning's, *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, details the training developments and the individuals involved.²⁸ Brigadier Durnford Slater's, *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, is unique in that it discusses the early operations of the Commandos in 1940 and the early adoptions of the force which is unique in the historiography.²⁹ Brigadier Durnford Slater served with the Commandos from their original formation in 1940 until 1945, thus his memoirs give a view of the progression and development of the force with a certain degree of criticism and insight.³⁰

In respect of this dissertation, a substantial part of unpublished primary source material was researched at The National Archives, Kew. The requirements of this dissertation have meant that official correspondence between Churchill and his Aids was of interest as they

²⁷ K. Ford, *St Nazaire 1942: The Great Commando Raid*, (Kent: Osprey Publishing, 2001) see also J. Dorrain, *Saint-Nazaire: Operation Chariot-1942*, (Barnsley: Pan & Sword, 2006), J. Cooksey, *Operation Chariot: The Raid on St Nazaire*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005)

²⁸ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin, 2000)

²⁹ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater, (London: Greenhill Books, 2002)

³⁰ *ibid*

predominantly communicate the administrative problems of the Commandos within the higher echelons of Government and the Military.³¹ High ranking Officers involved with the early Commando establishment through to N. C. O's have also left official accounts of their experiences.³² Commando Unit Diaries also provide a narration of the training, socializing and operations, but the reliability of these sources has, at times, been subject to enquiry as the handwriting of the entries regularly changes.³³

Also of great value are records of official Army meetings on the Independent Companies and the early Commandos.³⁴ The historiography of the Independent Companies has no secondary sources that could be located for the purpose of this study. This may be due to their brief existence between April and October 1940 and their lack of utilization during that time.³⁵ Although, official correspondence, Unit Diaries and Army meeting minutes referring to the early development of the Independent Companies were available at the National Archives, Kew, allowing for an important aspect of this study to be critically covered.³⁶

The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London, has also been used to research the Army Commandos. Specifically the unpublished primary source material from Major-General Laycock, who archived application forms, correspondence and early plans for the Commandos in 1940-1941 as well as his personal essays on 'discipline' all of which were

³¹ National Archives PRO PREM 3/103/1, Organization and Equipment Aug-Sep 1940 see also National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, Prime Minister's Office: Operational Correspondence and Papers

³² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History of Combined Operations: notes, memoranda and interviews with Senior Officers

³³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the late War, 4 Oct. 1915, see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, 'The Start of Commandos' see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early history of Combined Operations: notes, memoranda and interviews by Senior Officer see also National Archives PRO WO 218/12, Major J. R. Paterson, Diary No 4 Independent Company

³⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early history of Combined Operations: notes, memoranda and interviews by Senior Office

³⁵ National Archives PRO DEFE 211134, Minute Sheet dated 24 Sept. 1945.

³⁶ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of an infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archives PRO WO 218/12, Major J. R. Paterson, Diary No 4 Independent Company

located in this archive.³⁷ Specifically, the application forms and correspondence in relation to this study are of research value as no such material could be found at the National Archives, Kew for the purpose of this study.

Online resources have provided access to primary source material. The Commando Veterans Association website allows for access to unpublished memoirs of men who were involved with Commandos from 1940-1941.³⁸ The 'War Experience' website contains a memoir of Parson who served with the Independent Companies in Norway, 1940.³⁹ Parson's memoir is of value because he was a private soldier, whereas all of the official Army Records from the National Archives, Kew are written by Officers or Non-Commissioned Officers.⁴⁰

An interview with a Captain T. Hughes, 47 Commando, Royal Marines has also been included.⁴¹ However, this research study is to focus on the establishment and development of Army Commandos from 1940-1941. The Royal Marines did not take on Commando until 1942, but it is hoped that some degree of value can be derived from the interview for the purpose of this thesis.

Dissertation structure is as follows. Chapter One will critically assess the beginnings of the use irregular warfare, debating the events and importance of the Independent companies operations in Norway. Chapter Two will critique Britain's Commando origins

³⁷ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK, The Papers of Major-General Laycock

³⁸ Veterans Association, *The Memories of Sergeant John Huntington as related to John Mewett* Available: <http://www.commandoveterans.org/site/images/stories/Media/The%20Memories%20of%20Sgt%20John%20Huntingdon.pdf> Accessed 12/08/10

³⁹ G. Parson, 'The Norway Campaign' in *War-Experience* [Online], Available: <http://www.war-experience.org/hisotery/keyaspects/norway1940/pagethree.asp>. Accessed: 10/08/10

⁴⁰ G. Parson, 'The Norway Campaign' in *War-Experience* [Online], Available: <http://www.war-experience.org/hisotery/keyaspects/norway1940/pagethree.asp>. Accessed: 10/08/10

⁴¹ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Headquarters for SCISSORS (Irregular Operations by Independent companies on Norwegian Coast) see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History of Combined Operations, notes, memoranda and Interviews by Senior Officers
T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, see Appendix IX

demographical make-up of the force with, analysis of the Commandos' first raids including Chapter Two. Chapter Three aims to analyse the development of early commando training establishments, progressing into an investigation of life in early commando units and the issues that faced the force until the end of 1941, Finally, the conclusion will seek to critically evaluate the study and its outcomes.

Chapter One- The Independent Companies

During the early months of 1940, the British public's thoughts had turned towards the fate of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France.¹ Efforts to prepare Britain for an imminent German invasion were expressed by Winston Churchill in his defiantly optimistic 'Their Finest Hour' speech, delivered to the House of Commons on 18th June 1940:

'What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our Institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war.'²

Churchill's memoirs, convey the impression that in June 1940 Britain was on the defensive, with a Government resigned to waiting for the Luftwaffe to clear the way for a Nazi invasion, entitled 'Operation Sea Lion'.³ To a certain extent this is true; the defensive actions of the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain were a pivotal moment for Britain's survival in the Second World War.⁴ The 'Battle of France' during May and June 1940 was not, however, the only British offensive against the Nazis.⁵ Army records show that a month before Dunkirk on 4th April 1940, the General Staff met 'to consider the organization of a Special Battalion' to mount offensive operations in Bodo, Norway, to be known as Operation SCISSORS.' (see Appendix I).⁶

It shall be argued, in being the first operational irregular unit, the 'Independent Companies' helped to shape the future development of the Commandos.⁷ This evidence questions N. Cherry's conclusions in *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, that plans for the

¹ *The Second World War*, ed. W. L. S Churchill (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp265- 74

² W. L. S. Churchill, 'Their Finest Hour' on 19 June. 1940., *The Churchill Centre and Museum at the Churchill War Rooms*, London, [Online] Available: <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-1/1940-finest-hour/122-their-finest-hour>, Accessed: 08/08/10

³ *The Second World War*, ed. W. L. S. Churchill (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp343-66

⁴ *The Second World War*, ed. W. L. S. Churchill (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp352

⁵ R. A. C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp38-9

⁶ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of infantry battalion see Appendix I

⁷ National Archhives PRO PREM 3/103/1, letter from Eden to Churchill, 8 Sept. 1940.

irregular units began on '4th June which was actually the last day of the Dunkirk evacuation.'⁸
However, evidence from the meeting held on 4th April 1940, between the Chiefs of Staff, defined the purpose of the new Special Infantry Battalion as follows:

'The unit to be capable of fighting as a battalion but should be so organized that companies and platoons can operate independently for a limited period.'⁹

The parameters set above would continue to dictate the requirements of the Commandos as documented in 'Commando Training Instructions No. 1' that state '...units equivalent in strength to a weak battalion and operate independently...' (see Appendix II).¹⁰ Importantly the ability to 'operate independently for a limited period' can be interpreted as an allocation of the first raiding duties being given to the Independent Companies which would come to inform the main aim of the Commandos 'smash and grab' tactics.¹¹ The record continues:

Possible Theatres of War- Scandinavia and Finland or the Balkans.

Mobility- The unit should be capable of long moves over flat country and of shorter moves over mountainous country.

Type of Enemy- 1st Class.

Date by which required- As early as possible.¹²

With the surrender of Finland on 12th March 1940, the General Staff were obviously aware of the nature of the Nazi threat and what was required and where to neutralize the threat to

⁸ N. Cherry, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940- 42*, (England: Helion & Company, 2009, pp 22 see also National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion, see Appendix I

⁹ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of Special infantry battalion, see Appendix I

¹⁰ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940 see Appendix II

¹¹ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion, see Appendix I see also National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

¹² National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

Britain.¹³ Brigadier A. E. Nye immediately references '5th Battalion Scots Guards' who, although it is not disclosed in the meeting, were raised as an irregular force to attack Finland in February 1940.¹⁴ Further research into 5th Battalion the Scots Guards Ski Battalion revealed that a report had been requested by the Headquarters Brigade of Guards, from the Colonel commanding the Battalion, which was received on 3rd April 1940.¹⁵ The evidence contained in the report suggests how unprepared Britain was for arctic warfare; the report concludes that the failure of the Battalion was due to the fact that 'No study had been made of this type of warfare by the British Army.' (see Appendix III)¹⁶

It is clear that Brigadier A. E. Nye had been sent a copy of the report is not stated, yet in citing 5th Battalion Scots Guards he was aware of the parallels with regard to the requirements of the Independent Companies.¹⁷ Evidence from the meeting held on 4th April 1940, to meet the German threat in Scandinavia, suggests an ignorance amongst the Chiefs of Staff with regard to the problems that faced 5th Battalion Scots Guards Ski Battalion, which had been raised specially for arctic warfare, but had failed to mobilize due to a poor level of training.¹⁸ Moreover, on 17th April 1940 evidence from an Army meeting between the Chiefs of Staff gives the establishment of an exact plan for the formation of the Independent Companies and from where the men were to be taken (see Appendix IV):¹⁹

¹³ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion, see Appendix I see also R. A.C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp25

¹⁴ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also, *The British Commandos: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit* ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp&8-9

¹⁵ National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Battalion Scots Guards see Appendix III

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Scots Guards see Appendix III

¹⁸ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Scots Guards see Appendix III

¹⁹ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of special infantry and independent companies see Appendix IV

The following programme was agreed:-

(a) Nol Independent Company from 52 Division :-
to be raised by 22 April
to be ready to move 27/28 April

(b) One Independent Company from 1 London Div.
One Independent Company from 18 Div.

W.O. Conference

D.D.R.O. with G.S.os.I. 18 April

Men to be collected by 24 April

Commanding offices to W.O. 25 April

To complete mobilization by 29 April

To be available to move 30 April

(c) One Independent Company from each of 54 Div.,
55 Div. and 56 Div. as in (b) except:-

Men to be collected by 26 April

To complete mobilization by 1 May

To be available to move 2 May

(d) Remaining four Independent Companies to be
raised one each from 53, 9, 38 and 15 Divisions B
on a similar programme to (b) but probably five
days later, i.e to be available to move 5 May.²⁰

Source documents the variety of recruits ranging from six different divisions (1 London, 52, 54, 55, 56).²¹ It may be suggested that recruitment was spread over such a large number of men because of the imminent requirements of the B. E. F., a point supported by the Chiefs of Staff stating 'that B. E. F. should not be asked to provide any men...'²² The statement referring to the B. E. F further indicates the reason why, by 17th April 1940, the Independent Companies had 'no signals or sappers available to them' despite the Chiefs of Staff stating on 4th April 1940, 'that signallers would be required' and Royal

Engineers

²⁰ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of independent companies see Appendix IV

²¹ ibid

²² ibid

would carry out 'hasty demolition'.²³ As Captain B. G. Pugh documented of his Companies' formation, No 2 Independent Company, there was both a wide selection of backgrounds and as can be noted no signallers or engineers:

'This Company was formed from the 53rd Welsh Division, in April 1940, and mustered at Ballykinler in Northern Ireland. The Company was composed of men from the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the South Wales Borderers, the Welsh Regiment and the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry.'²⁴

The War Office requirement for 'specially fit and intelligent trained soldiers', also resulted in a cross section of divisions and regiments being tapped to recruit the correct type of i.²⁵ To achieve this the Independent Companies were not stringently screened to raise the of men required; in evidence of this the War Office correspondence stated that an aim of nil returns will be rendered if applicable.²⁶

However, as the Chiefs of Staff meeting from 17th April 1940 expresses, the Independent Companies were to be formed and battle ready within one week.²⁷ No 1 Independent Company was to be raised on 22nd April 1940 and operational by 27th/28th April 1940.²⁸ This statement contradicts the Chiefs of Staff's requirements for men to be 'carefully handpicked', especially fit and intelligent trained soldiers...' as there is no allocation within this for a training schedule to prepare the men to fulfil the role required of them.²⁹ The Chiefs of Staff, therefore, contradicted themselves with regards to the level which men would

²³ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940 to consider the formation of independent companies see Appendix IV see also National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held 1940 to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

²⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No2 Independent Company' Account by Captain B. G. Pugh

²⁵ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

²⁶ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Urgent Postal Telegram 22 April. 1940.

²⁷ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of independent companies see Appendix IV

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April 1940 to consider the formation of independent Companies see Appendix IV

be trained.³⁰ Evidence to support this is stated by the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence (D.D.M.I.), Brigadier the Honourable E. H. Wyndham, in the meeting held on the 17th April 1940:³¹

D.D.M.I. CO) pointed out that these companies were wanted as early as possible, and it would hardly be possible to spare the time for this training³²

Furthermore, Brigadier A. E. Nye (D. D. S. D) comments that the training of the Divisions, which the Independent Companies were to recruit from, was 'not so high' and suggests the establishment of a 'training centre'.³³ However, as previously mentioned on the 4th April 1940, Brigadier A. E. Nye (D. D. S. D) had cited 5th Battalion the Scots Guards which, in contrast to the Independent Companies, had followed a training regime but had found that 'the Battalion was quite untrained in the tactics of arctic warfare...' with only twenty five percent able to ski and that a complete lack of research into the skills required had been undertaken.³⁴ Research also suggests that beyond a lack of preparation and rushed mobilization timelines, even had the Independent Companies been allocated, time to train, a training doctrine was yet to be established.³⁵ This is supported by evidence that documents first training instructions for the Independent Companies were not issued by the War Office until 20th August 1940, nearly five months later (see Appendix V).³⁶

³⁰ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

³¹ Military Intelligence Branch 9, War Office' in Your Archives- delivered by the National Archives [Online]. Available: http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Military_Intelligence_branch_9_War_Office, Accessed: 12/08/10

³² National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV see also National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held 17 April 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

³³ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

³⁴ National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Battalion Scots Guards see Appendix III

³⁵ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

³⁶ National Archive PRO WO 33/1669, Independent Company Training Instruction No.1, 20 Aug. 1940. see ; Appendix V National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

The allocation of equipment for the Independent Companies further reflects the makeshift nature of the force and supports the notion that Britain was making a reactive rather than proactive irregular formation.³⁷ A quantitative review of the allocation of weaponry, is in stark contrast to the rhetoric advocated by the War Office in an urgent postal telegram sent on 22 April to the relevant Divisions, stating:

'3. War Equipment, (a)

Personal.

(i) Personnel will be armed, clothed and equipped to normal active service scales of arms, clothing and equipment, (including respirators, anti-gas...)³⁸

It is suggested that the men of the Independent Companies were to receive the standard equipment quota, despite the Chiefs of Staff already suggesting that the geographical areas the men were to operate in were, 'Scandinavia and Finland or the Balkans.'³ However, research shows that a day later, on 23rd April 1940, a private letter that has neither its author or its recipient named, documented the reality of the equipment situation with regard to the Independent Companies:

'It will not be possible to obtain gangster guns for 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 Independent Coys. It is very doubtful whether any will be available for Nos 2, 6, 7 and 9 Coys. Following that Pistols are also not available. Sniper Rifles are being issued at the rate of 1 per guerrilla section.

In my view of the above it will be necessary to modify the scale of equipment for each section to the following:-

1 Officer	Pistol
2 N.C.Os.	Rifles
1 Pte	Sniper Rifle

³⁷ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Authorless letter 'Establishment of Independent Companies'

³⁸ National Archive PRO WO 260/32, Urgent Postal Telegram 22 April. 1940.

³⁹ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940, to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I

1 Pte	Bren Gun and Pistol
1 Pte	Pistol (No 2 of Bren gun)
8 Pte	Rifles ⁴⁰

Evidence shows that in a troop of fourteen men both the Officer in Command and second in man on the Bren gun were not to be issued with a rifle.⁴¹ Even this poor outlook for the Independent Companies' equipment may have been optimistic. On review of the War Establishment's allocation of weapons and ammunition, data states that the Independent Companies were to be allocated two hundred and two 303-inch rifles (see Appendix VI).⁴² The same document proceeds to state that each Independent Company will number two hundred and eighty nine for all ranks, a shortfall of eighty-seven if each man were to be issued with a standard British Army Rifle.⁴³ However, the War Office seems to compensate for this in an itinerary requesting, 'Other, ranks equipped -with rifles will bring these with from their units', further evidence suggesting the shortfall in equipment for the Independent Companies.⁴⁴

To compound the shortfall in standard issue arms, the Chiefs of Staff suggested that the Independent Companies were to operate in 'Scandinavia and Finland or the Balkans.'⁴⁵ Correspondence from the War Office, however, stated, '...special clothing was not required after 1 May' and, 'There were only sufficient rucksacks... for two companies.'⁴⁶ The shortfall of weaponry was matched, therefore, by a similar shortfall in suitable clothing and

⁴⁰ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Authorless letter 'Ref Establishment of Independent Companies', 23 June 1940.

⁴¹ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, 'An Independent Company' War Establishment Amendment No.2 see Appendix VI

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, 'Urgent Postal Telegram' War Office, 22 April. 1940.

⁴⁴ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I

⁴⁵ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁴⁶ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the mobilization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

equipment, all of which is contrary to the Chiefs of Staffs agreement that 'the provision of equipment would not be a limiting factor in raising the special battalion.'⁴⁷ Furthermore, the previously mentioned 5th Scots Guards Ski Battalion which had been issued with the correct equipment for arctic conditions, had been disbanded because 'Having been formed in a hurry the Battalion was quite untrained... in the use of its special equipment.'⁴⁸ This is further evidence of how unprepared the Independent Companies were with regard to the training and equipment provided.⁴⁹

Thus, this evidence supports Messenger's suggestion of the 'muddled' nature of early operations.⁵⁰ On receiving his first mission, the Commanding Officer of No 4 Independent Company, J.R. Paterson, visited the War Office and was given a collection of maps 'which consisted of an illustrated guide to the beauty of Norway' from which he was to plan his companies' first attack on Bodo, Norway.⁵¹ Messenger's analysis is supported by further evidence presented by the hand drawn map in Appendix VII, which was used for planning the Independent Companies' operation in Bodo, Norway.⁵² This map is evidence of the lack of military intelligence and planning; Commanding Officers would not have been able to accurately plan operations because of the estimated heights and depressions of mountains and highly gauged locations of rivers and forest.⁵³

Norway had originally prevented Britain from coming to the aid of Finland in 1939 by forbidding the British Expeditionary Force passage.⁵⁴ The allocation of the Independent

⁴⁷ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of a special infantry battalion see Appendix I

⁴⁸ National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Battalion Scots Guards see Appendix HI

⁴⁹ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁵⁰ C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp23

⁵¹ *ibid*, p.23

⁵² National Archive PRO DEFE 2/699, Hand Drawn Map from Operation SCISSORS see Appendix VII

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Major-General Lund D. S. O., R. A. (M. G. R. A. at H. F.), Interview 8

Companies in the assault on Norway fitted the Independent Companies' remit, they were to operate in 'Scandinavia' and 'operate independently for limited periods.'⁵⁵ On the other hand, evidence previously provided displays a force impeded by a severe lack of training and poorly supplied and would suggest ill-equipped to fight against an enemy described by the Chiefs of Staff as '1st Class'.⁵⁶

On 10th May 1940, Independent Companies 1-5 embarked for Bodo, Norway arriving on the 3th May 1940.⁵⁷ Before the Companies even saw action an administrative error with potentially lethal consequences had been made, described by Captain B. G. Pugh:

'We stayed 4 or 5 days in the town [Bodo]. The spirits of the men were high; they were keen, eager and lighting fit. We remained there 4 days in order to unload the ROYAL ULSTERMAN, a matter of considerable difficulty for there were no derricks. She eventually sailed with some 40 tons of stores still on board. These included all the magazines for our Tommy guns. We had, therefore, the Tommy guns and the ammunition, and no means of introducing one to the other. All the field glasses were also left on the ship. The ship was bombed the day before she left...'⁵⁸

The above account, therefore, shows that what equipment the Independent Companies had acquired became ineffective.⁵⁹ Furthermore, evidence suggests that the men of the independent Companies had not been trained to use the Tommy guns which had been issued, the first mention of automatic weapons training in No 4 Independent Company's diary is on 1st July 1940, '50% Coy introduced to automatic weapons', nearly two months after they died for Norway.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁵⁶ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, 'An Independent Company' War Establishment Amendment No.2 see Appendix VI see also National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Authorless letter 'Ref Establishment of Independent Companies' see also National Archives PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April, 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁵⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No2 Independent Company' Account by Orderly Sergeant Brown. No. 115199/R.A. S. C.

⁵⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No2 Independent Company' Account by Captain B. G. Pugh

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ National Archives PRO WO 218/12, Major J. R. Paterson, War Diary No 4 Independent Company

The Independent Companies had mixed encounters with the Norwegian population as they disliked the presence of the Allied troops, due to the bombing they attracted.⁶¹ Regardless of the War Office grading the enemy in Norway as '1st Class', their tactics and skill were still greatly miscalculated, as was the environment the men were to operate in.⁶² As Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor describes:

'The country, which was wooded and very steep, was difficult to fight in and the German troops opposed to the Independent Companies of the Guards were very good Alpine Troops, especially skilled in the art of infiltration. Some of them consisted of men who had left Germany years before as refugees and established themselves in Norway...'⁶³

Unfortunately, supporting primary source evidence with regard to the German Wehrmacht or Waffen SS could not be resourced due to the majority of material being located at the Exhibits and Publications Divisions of the National Archives, Washington D. C. which for logistic and financial reasons have not been accessible.⁶⁴ Despite the Independent Companies having -to face skilled 'Alpine Troops' the General Staff had suggested that the 'ability to move in snow conditions at varying altitudes, but which will not require skill at mountaineering...' was needed.⁶⁵ In contrast evidence shows, the men, many of whom, as Field-Marshal Auchinleck would later describe as, 'distressingly young' and had 'never fired around in their lives', had never left the city as G. Parsons of No5 Independent Company explained:

⁶¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No2 Independent Company' Account by Captain B. G. Pugh,

⁶² National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

⁶³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Account of 'Independent Companies' by Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor No2 Commando

⁶⁴ G. H. Stien, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp xi

⁶⁵ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

'We landed at this place Mojoen, and imagine how we felt when we saw a towering ice capped mountain in front of us standing about 2,000 feet high, we South London boys who had never seen a mountain before, most of us had never been to sea before.'⁶⁶

In consideration of the evidence presented thus far, suggesting a lack of weapons and equipment and poorly trained men, all of which were to face a highly effective enemy, the poor conduct of operations in Norway is, therefore, not surprising.⁶⁷ Researched first hand accounts of Officers and N. C. O's offer no solid evidence of a cohesively planned offensive.⁶⁸ Evidence to further support this by Captain McLean shows that one company of Scots Guards got lost for the entire three weeks of the expedition and saw no action at all, exemplifying the disorientated nature of the operation.⁶⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel Gubbins, the man in overall command was provided with the following orders:

'Your first task is to prevent the Germans occupying BODO, MO and MOSJOEN. This they may try to do by small parties landed from the sea or dropped by parachute. Later, the Germans may be expected to advance Northwards on MOSJOEN from the TRONDHEIM area via GRONG. You will ensure that all possible steps are taken by demolition and harrying tactics to impede any German advance along this route. Your companies operating in the area should not attempt to offer any prolonged resistance but should endeavour to maintain themselves on the flanks of the German forces and continue harrying tactics against their lines of communication.'⁷⁰

⁶⁶ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'Operations in Northern Norway: 13 May 1940 to 8 June 1940' Document dated Friday, 8 Oct. 1943. see also George Parsons, 'The Norway Campaign' in War-Experience [Online], Available: <http://www.war-e7cperience.org/history/keyaspects/norway1940/pagethree.asp>. Accessed: 10/08/10

⁶⁷ National Archives PRO WO 260/3, 'An Independent Company' War Establishment Amendment No.2 see also National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Account of 'Independent Companies' by Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor No2 Commando

⁶⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R. A. M. C see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Account of 'Independent Companies' by Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor No2 Commando see also National Archives PRO WO 165/55, Norwegian Expeditionary Force Instructions dated 2 May. 1940.

⁶⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R.A.M.C.

⁷⁰ National Archives PRO WO 165/55, Norwegian Expeditionary Force Instructions, 2 May. 1940.

The Norwegian Expeditionary Force Instructions are strategically ambiguous offering no cohesive plan between the separate Independent Companies over a large geographical area.⁷¹ Furthermore, the instructions offer no clear military objective, only to 'maintain themselves' and to use 'harrying tactics', language that suggests the Independent Companies were on the back foot before they had even embarked.⁷² This point is further supported by the retreat of the Independent Companies, as described by Captain McLean, No 1 Independent Company:

'In my opinion our withdrawal began to savour of a rout and I put this down to the fact that the Scots Guards had no proper control over their formations ... I should make it clear that the men were in no kind of a panic., but they did not know what to do, because no one had given them orders. I should say that the absence of orders during the withdrawal was most marked.'⁷³

The above account of Captain McLean supports previous evidence of poor organization and a lack of planning of the Independent Companies' operations in Norway. By 10th June 1940, all five Independent Companies were back in Scotland.⁷⁴ The shortcomings of Independent Companies covered in this chapter are most marked by Captain McLean and No1 Independent Company, which alone accounted for twenty-five percent of all force casualties.⁷⁵ However, it may be suggested that the casualties of the Norwegian campaign were not in vain. This is because Britain realized that she had neither the men nor the equipment to mount immediate operations on this scale, especially after Dunkirk, evident from the fact that a large scale force would not leave Britain until March 1941 in the form of

⁷¹ National Archives PRO WO 165/55, Norwegian Expeditionary Force Instructions, 2 May. 1940.

⁷² National Archives PRO WO 165/55, Norwegian Expeditionary Force Instructions, 2 May. 1940. see also National Archives PRO WO 260/3, 'An Independent Company'. War Establishment Amendment No.2 see Appendix VI see also National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider 5 formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁷³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R.A.M.C

⁷⁴ G. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp25

⁷⁵ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R.A.M.C

LAYFORCE to the Middle East.⁷⁶ Further evidence to support this is documented in the 'Independent Company Training Instruction No.1' which states that from 20th August 1940 one of the roles of Independent Companies will be '...carrying out small raiding operations...'⁷⁷

Consequently, because of the shortfalls in equipment and trained men what would become known as 'pinprick raids' became the main focus of the Independent Companies' successors, the Commandos and, as Colonel Dudley Clarke later stated, 'the purpose for which they were created was solely to make cut and run raids.'⁷⁸ On the other hand very little evidence suggests that the issue of equipment for the Independent Companies was immediately addressed.⁷⁹ Evidence shows that it was not until 3rd October 1940 that the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, wrote to Winston Churchill, 'I have now made stringent enquiries into the matter of the equipment of the Independent Companies...'⁸⁰

On the other hand, the Unit Diary of No 4 Independent Company provides a consistent training and lecture schedule on survival, fitness and firearms, in an attempt to amend the mistakes of Norway.⁸¹ The regularity of the diary entries noting constant training-exercises, suggests that at least No 4 Independent Company felt that its force had permanence and an imminent operational requirement; as can be noted throughout this chapter, the difference between the rhetoric and reality was stark.⁸²

⁷⁶ National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/1, letter from Ismay to Churchill, 14 June. 1940. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁷⁷ National Archive PRO WO 33/1669, Independent Company Training Instruction No. 1, 20 Aug. 1940. see Appendix V

⁷⁸ National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, letter from Churchill to Ismay, 23 July. 1940. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁷⁹ National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, letter from Keyes to Churchill, 3 Oct. 1940.

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ National Archives PRO WO 218/12, Major J. R. Paterson, War Diary No 4 Independent Company

⁸² *ibid*

In conclusion, a study of the administrative problems facing the Independent Companies has been documented and assessed, as has the impact of these problems for the force in the theatre of war.⁸³ Furthermore, the contradictions of the General Staffs views on equipment, training and recruitment have been criticized so as to present and expose how unprepared Britain was with regard to irregular warfare, a key aim of this chapter. The contextualization of the Independent Companies also allows for comparative analysis in both advancements and shortfalls within the Commandos' equipment, training and organization, which will form part of the critical analysis as this work develops.

⁸³National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R. A. M. C see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix

Chapter 2- Establishment of the Commandos

In response to the Independent Companies' actions in Norway, official British Army Records show General Auchinleck saw the operation as 'not reassuring for the future unless our methods of man-mastership and training for war can be made more realistic and less effeminate.'¹ General Auchinleck's comments support the evidence that has been presented in Chapter One and the argument that the Chiefs of Staff and members of the Independent Companies were under-prepared because of lack of training, poor equipment and little prewar planning.² Chapter Two will assess the steps taken to amend the shortcomings of the Independent Companies via the formation of the Commandos. Analysis of evidence will focus on the restructuring of recruitment and the requirements for joining the Commandos.

Winston Churchill had exclaimed to the House of Commons on 4th June 1940 'We shall not be content with a defensive war.'³ On the same day he asked General Ismay for 'specially trained troops of the hunter class who can develop a reign of terror down the enemy coast', evidence of Churchill's belief in the need for an 'offensive' posture.⁴ Evidence from the War Office in June 1940 shows a huge increase in the volume of correspondence from the General Staff, propelled by Churchill, with regard to organizing 'irregular volunteers.'⁵ Furthermore, recognizing the complexities of the Commando's duties, Churchill appointed General A. Bourne, Royal Marine, to be 'Commander of Raiding Operations', a position which would

¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'Operations in Northern Norway: 13 May 1940 to 8 June. 1940.' Document dated Friday, 8 Oct. 1943.

² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'Operations in Northern Norway: 13 May. 1940. to 8 June. 1940.' Document dated Friday, 8 Oct. 1943. see also National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4th April, 1940, to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

³ W. L. S. Churchill, Speech given to the House of Commons 'We Shall Fight on the Beaches', 4 June. 1940. *Centre and Museum at the Churchill War Rooms London*, [Online] Available: <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/1940-finest-hour/128-we-shall-fight-on-the-beaches>. 10/10/10.

⁴ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Dumford-Slater, (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp14

⁵ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Memorandum by the D. M. O & P. on the Employment of Irregular Commandos now being raised in the United Kingdom, 13 June. 1940. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, War Cabinet. Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes of Meeting to discuss 'Offensive Operations' held on 11 June. 1940. at 10am see also 2/699, War Cabinet. Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes of Meeting to discuss 'Offensive Operations' held on 13 June. 1940. at 3pm

eventually develop into 'Commander of Combined Operations'.⁶ General A. Bourne's main role was to fulfil Churchill's demands that raiding operations would 'harass the enemy... to create material damage... from Northern Norway to the western limit of German-occupied France.'

However, despite the increase in correspondence and debate over the formation of the Commandos, research suggests the lessons of poor training and equipment with regard to the Independent Companies had not been taken into account. For example, on 11th June, 1940, the Chief of the Air Staff, C. L. N. Newall explicitly informed Churchill that 'special equipment for offensive operations should be given a very high priority...'⁸ Evidence from four months later (October 1940) has the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden informing Churchill, 'I have now made stringent enquires into the matter of the equipment of the Independent Companies and Commandos...' suggesting that equipment and resources were still problematic, however the exact reason why is, unfortunately, not documented⁹

The 'offensive' spirit originated because as Colonel Dudley Clarke suggested, Britain's attention 'had been turned violently to the defence in exclusion of all else.'¹⁰ After the evacuation of Dunkirk the Chiefs of the General Staff immediately called for Colonel Dudley Clarke because he had been in charge, of a 'cloak and dagger' branch of the British Intelligence Service, known as M. O. 9.¹¹ In an official Army interview Colonel Dudley

⁶ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Major-General Alan Bourne, R.M., Early History of Combined Operations see also B. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, (London: Collins, 1961), pp16

⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Directive to A. G. B. Bourne on Raiding Operations, 13 June. 1940.

⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, letter from C. L. N. Newall (C.A.S.) to Churchill, 11 June. 1940.

⁹ National Archives PRO PREM 3/103/1, letter from Eden to Churchill, October 1940

¹⁰ *The Second World War*, ed. W. L. S. Churchill (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp 333- 337 see also Sir W.L.S. Churchill, Speech given to the House of Commons "Their Finest Hour", *The Churchill Centre and Museum at the Churchill War Rooms London* [Online],

Available:<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/1940-finest-hour/122-their-finest-hour>, Accessed: 08/08/10 see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, "The Start of Commandos"

¹¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke see also National Archives Pro DEFE 2/699, Major-General O. M. Lund, D. S. O., R. A. (M. G. R. A. at H. F.), Interview 8 May.

Clarke indicates further the offensive motivation of the General Staff, requesting that immediate means be found, 'whereby the offensive spirit of the Army could be fostered until it was in a position to resume the offensive.'¹² Evidence suggests that Colonel Dudley Clarke viewed irregular warfare as the correct offensive reaction to military isolation, stating:

'Guerrilla warfare was always in fact the answer of the ill-equipped patriot in the face of a vaster though ponderous military machine; and that seemed to be exactly the position in which the British Army found itself in June 1940'¹³

Thus, Colonel Dudley Clarke was tasked with creating the initial plans of the Commandos' as he had acted as a General Staff Officer in Palestine during the Arab Rebellion and had gained much experience during the conflict with regard to 'guerrilla' warfare.¹⁴ Colonel Dudley Clarke also referred to Deniz Reitz's memoir *Commando: a Boer Journal of the Boer War*, set against his own experience growing up as a child in South Africa considering the way in which 'guerrilla tactics by the Boer Kommandos snatched victory for many months from the British Army vastly superior in numbers and arms.'¹⁵ The Boer Kommandos mounted a campaign of 'hit and run' raids against the British in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), very similar to the 'nimble forces accustomed to work like packs of hounds' as asked for by Churchill.¹⁶ Churchill had fought against and been the prisoner of the Boer Kommandos and consequently developed an appreciation of irregular warfare, as evidenced from one of his *memoirs Early Life: A Roving Commission* details.¹⁷

In contrast to the Boer Kommandos who

¹² 1942. see also 'Military Intelligence Branch 9, War Office', Your Archives- delivered by the National Archives [Online], Available: mraichives.nationalarcMves.eov.uk/index.php?title=Military_Irjtelligence_branch_9._War_Office. Accessed: 12/08/10

¹³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke

¹⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, The Start of Commandos'

¹⁵ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, 'The Start of Commandos' see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke, Colonel Dudley Clarke, *Seven Assignments*, (London: John Cape, 1948), pp207

¹⁶ *Commando: a Boer journal of the Boer War*, ed. D. Reitz (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929) see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Clarke, 'The Start of 'Commandos' National Archives PRO PREM 3/103/1, letter from Churchill to Eden, 25 Aug. 1940.

¹⁷ *Early Life: A Roving Commission*, ed. W. L. S. Churchill (London: McMillan, 1944), pp243-312

recruited men from the local neighbourhood, the British Commandos originally sourced men from the regular Army as the proceeding research shows.¹⁸

The exact date that Commando recruitment began is a point of contention. Major-General Laycock recalls that 'the word "Commando" being used immediately after the disbanding of the Independent Companies' in October/ November 1940.¹⁹ Major-General Laycock referred to the creation of the Special Service Battalion, whereby the Commandos and Independent Companies' were merged into one force.²⁰ Official records show that recruitment paperwork for the Commandos was distributed to designated battalions before the Independent Companies had returned from Norway.²¹ This evidence continues to suggest that Britain was prepared for offensive operations and considering the previously documented failure of the Independent Companies, it may be suggested an immediate replacement was needed. Evidence in support of this from 9th June 1940, the day before all of the Independent Companies' returned from Scotland, document Major-General Laycock receiving the following letter from the War Office:

'Volunteers for Special Service

1. It is proposed to raise and train a special force of volunteers for independent mobile operations
2. You are required to collect the names of up to 40 officers and 1000 other ranks in our command, who volunteer for this special service and whom you consider suitable for it.
3. Volunteers will be employed on fighting duties only, and Commanding Officers id be assured will require only the best type of Officers and men... Officers and

¹⁸ *Commando: a Boer journal of the Boer War*, ed. D. Reitz (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), pp19 see Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9th June 1940

¹⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Combined Operations see also National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Notes on the Re-Organization of Special Service Brigade

²⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Account of 'Independent Companies' by Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor

²¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

men who are approved for the force will be taken off the strength of their units and trained in the United Kingdom. Individuals are not likely to remain in the force for more than a few months.²²

Firstly, it must be noted that the term 'Special Service' was used instead of 'Commando' which evidence from Colonel Dudley Clarke states as 'scarcely an appropriate title to appear in the formal nomenclature of the Ministry...'²³ The two terms 'Special Service' and 'Commando' are to be used interchangeably and represent the same unit throughout this study. The linguistic parallels between the above document and the discussions of the General Staff with regard to the Independent Companies held on 4th April 1940 are strikingly similar.²⁴ As with the Independent Companies' the Commandos also required only the 'best type of men' for 'independent mobile operations.'²⁵ Evidence to suggest that measures had been taken to improve the equipment and training for the Commandos could not be found for the purpose of this argument. However, official records show that the Independent Companies had not yet returned from Norway, thus making improvements in equipment and training unlikely.²⁶ Additionally the evidence documents the fragility of the Commando organization, shown by the War Office stating that service would only be for a 'few months'.²⁷ The implication that the Commandos were temporary may have been an attempt to convince Battalions to send their best men, because as Major-General Lund stated Commanding Officers unhappily, 'lost their best men' to the Commandos.²⁸ In support of Major-General Lund's point, for example, the Officer Commanding 1st Battalion Scots

²² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

²³ *Seven Assignments*, ed. Colonel Dudley Clarke, (London: John Cape, 1948), pp 219

²⁴ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940. see also National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I

²⁵ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

²⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940. see also C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp25 see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R. A. M. C

²⁷ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

²⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Major-General O. M. Lund, D. S. O, R. A. (M. G. R. A. at H. F.), Interview 8 May. 1942.

Guards, in reply to the recruitment of his men to the Commandos, as early as 18th July 1940, wrote:

'In accordance with instructions received from Lieut. Col. Commanding Scots Guards, who states that he is not prepared to send any more Officers and that he was not in a position to spare other ranks. In view of existing commitments a NIL return is rendered.'²⁹

This correspondence was sent five and half weeks after the original request for Special Service Volunteers, indicating the potential lack of support from Commanding Officers very early in the Commando recruitment process.³⁰ To gather a further understanding of the problems of recruitment and the high calibre of men that the Commandos were seeking to recruit, it is beneficial to analyse the recruitment form of Officers wishing to join the Commandos in June 1940.³¹

No secondary source analysis with regard to the specifics of the application process has been found for the purpose of this study. On the other hand, Major General Laycock archived documentation showing the Special Service application of Officers and Other Ranks to the Commandos and to what was known originally as the 'Special Service'.³² This is of interest from a research perspective because it documents those who thought themselves Commando material and also demonstrates the qualities the Commandos required.³³ The questions asked are a combination of commonly asked questions (name, date of birth, nationality) while other questions suggested that men were applying for something out of the ordinary and about which the 'Special Service Training Instructions' would go onto state:

²⁹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Letter replying to 'Volunteers for Special Service' from Officer Commanding 1st Battalion The Scots Guards, 18 July. 1940.

³⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, The War Office, 9th June. 1940, Letter Addresses to Officer Commanding All Companies 1st Battalion Scots. Guards

³¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

'Mental as well as physical alertness. As a general definition: what is required is the man who is quick in thought and, quick on his feet. Rather than a man who, though he may be exceptionally strong, is slow in his mental reactions and in his movements.'³⁴

Therefore, in conjunction with evidence from the 'Special Service Training Instructions', applicants within the evidence all, in theory, exhibited the qualities of 'mental as well as physical alertness.'³⁵ Firstly, a high level of education had been undertaken by all sixty eight recruits in the provided material; individuals had attended an established Public School and then continued on to Oxbridge. For example, Second Lieutenant J. Griffith-Jones of the Coldstream Guards had attended Eton from 1923-28 and then followed on to Trinity Hall, Cambridge from 1928-31.³⁷ Second Lieutenant Earl Jellicoe of the Coldstream Guards had been educated at Winchester for five years and then studied at Trinity Hall, Cambridge for three years and Second Lieutenant I. Collins also of the Coldstream Guards had studied at Harrow from 1917-22 and then at Magdalen College, Oxford between 1922-25.³⁸ Therefore, the sample of Officer Recruits shown here supports the evidence that most Officers were drawn from highly educated Oxbridge Graduates.³⁹

Another focal point of the Special Service applications was a heavy emphasis on an individual's involvement and ability to play sports or games to a high level, because as Commanding Officer of No 3 Commando, Brigadier Durnford Slater noted, 'a good physique was important.'⁴⁰ Thus, it can be stated from the evidence that a high level of physical fitness was demanded from the start of the Commandos' recruitment. In an attempt to source men

³⁴ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940

see Appendix VIII

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII see also *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp 15

who would be suited to the exercises early training instructions for the Special Service described:

'Physical fitness and endurance will be an essential element of every operation, not only because of the difficulties of the terrain over which the troops may be called upon to move, but because great speed in reaching the objective will almost invariably be required.'⁴¹

Therefore, it is not surprising that the 'Special Service Application' forms document men with strong sporting backgrounds.⁴² For example, Lieutenant J. Kauntze of the 7th Devon Territorial had played rugby for Cambridge University, Exeter, Harlequins and Devon as well as playing squash and golf.⁴³ Lieutenant N. Setten of the 8th Battalion The Devonshire Regiment engaged in swimming and had represented the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) at rugby and boxing.⁴⁴ The evidence further supports the point that applicants had a strong sporting background and met the requirements of the 'Special Service Training Instructions'.⁴⁵ Similarly, applicants are again asked about their physicality in question sixteen and whether they, ride, swim, mountaineer, ski, shoot, run, bicycle long distances and box with question twenty again asking if they are 'fit'.⁴⁶

As mentioned previously, the above evidence suggests potential Commando Officers were of a certain social status and educational background. However, in criticism of the evidence thus far, Major-General Laycock's No 8 Commando was known as the 'Blue (blood) Commando' due to the upper class background of its recruits, mainly from the London area.⁴⁷

⁴¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions

⁴² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VHI

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

⁴⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 Appendix VIII

⁴⁷ *The British Commandos: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp11

It is, therefore, not surprising that the evidence indicates Oxbridge backgrounds and consistent access to what may be considered sports of privilege, such as rugby, golf and squash.⁴⁸ Research supports further the notion of elitism in No 8 Commando, with regard to recruitment as Major-General Laycock commented, 'I had a list of volunteers given me, but I did not rely on it. I called on my friends whom I could trust ...'⁴⁹ The evidence suggests that Major-General Laycock appears to have ignored formal recruitment channels. Additionally it cannot be judged whether any of the potential Officers named so far were commissioned, as the information as to who was selected was not available for further comparative analysis. The recruitment paper evidence is thus highly subjective despite consistent traits of academic excellence and sporting prestige, evidence of Major-Generals Laycock's bias and further evidence of who was commissioned makes conclusive findings unattainable in this instance.

However, the Special Service application forms do hold historical value as the Officers previously mentioned and the other sixty eight applicants documented in the evidence, possessed what were known as, 'emergency commissions' from the Army Reserve.⁵⁰ As has already been documented, the Regular Army quickly stopped its men joining the Commandos because it stripped a battalion of its best men.⁵¹ Thus, the Commandos had to turn very quickly to the Army's Reserve forces to source their recruits.⁵² To a certain extent, this allowed for a consistent supply of men, although none of Reservists document having seen active service when asked of their 'Military Experience'.⁵³ For the paperwork to be under the

⁴⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

⁴⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁵⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix yin

⁵¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Letter replying to 'Volunteers for Special Service' from Officer Commanding 1st Battalion The Scots Guards, 18 July. 1940. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Major-General O. M. Lund, D. S. O., R. A. (M. G. R. A. at H. F.), Interview 8 May. 1942.

⁵² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

⁵³ *ibid*

remit of Major-General Laycock meant that the Officers would have been applying to become Troop Leaders, with no prior combat experience. The evidence can be deduced in such a manner as the only part of Commando selection in which Commanding Officers' took part was in the selection of Troop Leaders.⁵⁴ Therefore, because evidence has suggested that the majority of Officer Recruits had no combat experience, research indicates that Commandos valued men with operational experience from a very early stage.⁵⁵ In support of this a letter from the War Office on 9th June 1940, to all Battalions concerned with the recruitment of Commandos stated, 'Those who have already seen active service are especially valuable'.⁵⁶

The only exceptions in the archive material with regard to the 'military experience' of Officer Recruits were four Royal Marine applicants.⁵⁷ This research finding is interesting because the Royal Marines did not officially assume Commando duties until the formation of the Royal Marine Division in February 1942.⁵⁸ It was suggested by Colonel Pollock in a review of the Commando history that the criticisms of recruitment against the Commandos could have been subdued if the Royal Marines had adopted raiding duties.⁵⁹ Evidence from the study of 'The Special Service Applications' suggest that elements of the Royal Marines were applying to the Commandos two years earlier than was previously thought, such was the need for men.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Extract from Eastern Command C. R. E. C. C/31973 (A1) date 12 July. 1940. See also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁵⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see (Appendix VIII)

⁵⁶ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, The War Office, 9 June. 1940, Letter Addressed to Officers Commanding all Battalions concerned with the recruitment for 'Special Service'

⁵⁷ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 Appendix VIII

⁵⁸ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group see also C. Messenger, *The Commandos, 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp122

⁵⁹ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

⁶⁰ *ibid*

Lieutenant N. Beal, Royal Marine, applied, having served four months in China and two months in South Africa, while aboard HMS Cornwall.⁶¹ Lieutenant A. Forrest, Royal Marine, had four and a half years' experience, one year as 'Aide de Camp to his Excellency the Governor of Queensland' and three years and two months in Palestine.⁶² Lieutenant G. Blake, Royal Marine, had four years' service at sea as a Heavy Armament Control Officer.⁶³ The military experience of the Royal Marines is evidently far greater than that of the Army Reserve Officers previously mentioned.⁶⁴ However, a comparable analysis of whether this made the Royal Marines more successful than the Army Reservists in their application is again not possible due to a lack of available evidence.

Documented below is an example of the list of Officer Recruits that Major-General Laycock '...did not rely on.'⁶⁵ However, this evidence is of value because it distills the information from the Special Service recruitment forms into that which the Commandos required, which was, '...only the best type of officer.'⁶⁶

Lt A. H. Barclay:	He has knowledge of Norwegian and German language and can speak Swedish fluently.
2Lt R. E. Stone (R. A. S. C.):	Age 23. Physical fitness grade 1. Swimmer able to drive car, lorry or m/c [motor cycle]
Capt F. H. Harris (1st n/ Hunts Yeo):	Age 31. Single. Fit. Athletic. Good swimmer; does not suffer from seasickness. Able to drive wheeled or tracked vehicles.
Capt W. Williams (R. A. S. C.):	Age 40. Active Service South Africa Bgd 1918 ⁶⁷

61 The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

62 ibid

63 ibid

64 ibid.

65 National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History; The Origin and Work of the Commandos

66 The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

67 The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Volunteers for Commandos (Officers), London Area, July 1940.

Within this sample, there are a number of traits for which the Commando recruiters were looking. As the application form requested, men were to be young and at the peak of their physical fitness.⁶⁹ In contrast, Captain W. Williams at the age of forty has no mention of his physicality noted although, it may be suggested, because of his operational experience he had been shortlisted.⁷⁰ Therefore, it may be suggested that experience was equal if not favoured over fitness because of the general lack of experience amongst recruits. Swimming was a particularly important requirement as was the ability to operate a variety of vehicles; this is because of the amphibious mobile nature of the Commandos' role.⁷¹

However, in challenging the value of recruitment documents still further, issues with regard to historical analysis again become apparent. As Brigadier Dumford-Slater explained of his methodology for selecting Officers, 'I wanted cheerful officers, not groaners... I looked for intelligence and keenness.'⁷² To judge whether a recruit was 'cheerful' or whether he was 'keen' from the recruitment data available to this study is not possible. Furthermore, the subjectivity noted in Major-General Laycock's selection techniques is again apparent with Brigadier Durnford-Slater, to say whether someone is 'cheerful' or not is matter for the individual to decide. However, evidence from a letter extract from Eastern Command on 12th July 1940 suggests why Commanding Officers may have been biased in their selection of Troop Leaders:

⁶⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Volunteers for Commandos (Officers), London Area, July 1940.

⁶⁹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

⁷⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Volunteers for Commandos (Officers), London Area, July. 1940.

⁷¹ *ibid*

⁷² *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Dumford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp 15

'As soon as the troop leaders are selected they will arrange to visit those aforementioned units as specified by Commando leader from which their troops are to be selected and will interview and select other rank personnel.⁷³

Thus, the motivation behind Commanding Officers ensuring that Troop Leaders were of the required standard was due to the fact that once this process had happened the formation of their Commando was taken out of their hands.⁷⁴ Troop Leaders then selected their own troop, a process that was designed to encourage bonds between the men.⁷⁵ Before the selected Officers viewed the men they were privy to reviews of individuals sent from their respective Commanding Officer.⁷⁶ In support of this the following information is from the Officer Commanding 1st Battalion Scots Guards, dated July 1940:

'The following N. C. O.'s and men of the company under my command have volunteered for No 8 Commando and are recommended or otherwise shown:

2695444	Sgt. Kay, W. F.	Strongly recommended
2692673	L/Sgt. Stone, S.	Strongly recommended, drives car and is a mechanic, has seen active service
2694243	Cpl Wallace, W.	Not sufficiently intelligent
2696266	C/Cpl McDonald, R.	No active service experience. Not tough enough in my experience.
2692921	Gdsm Boyd, F.	Not recommended, a good man but too old. ⁷⁷

From the above evidence, it is difficult to determine the choices made by the Officer Commanding 1st Battalion the Scots Guards when selecting the above men for Commando

⁷³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Extract from Eastern Command C. R. E. C. No. C/31973 (A1) date 12 July. 1940.

⁷⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Memorandum by the D. M. O. & P. on the Employment of Irregular Commandos now being raised in the United Kingdom, 13 June. 1940.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July. 1940.

⁷⁷ *ibid*

duties.⁷⁸ Much of the accusation of poor 'discipline' as suggested by Colonel Pollock was due to Commanding Officers offering 'trouble-makers' to the unsuspecting Commandos.⁷⁹ However, as was noted previously, the aforementioned Commanding Officer gave a 'NIL' response to requests for men on the 18th July 1940, suggesting that the above-listed men were potentially the best soldiers in the 1st Battalion the Scots Guards.⁸⁰ Therefore, a certain degree of historical accuracy can be assumed. The requirements of Other Ranks appears similar to that of the Officers, that is, the men who had seen active service appear to be recommended, such as L/Sgt Stone whose ability to drive vehicles is also favoured.⁸¹

Therefore, a Commando troop was made up from 'one Captain, two Subalterns and forty seven other ranks.'⁸² Thus, with ten troops in a Commando and thirty six based at headquarters, an original Commando was, therefore, five hundred and thirty six at full strength.⁸³ What is striking about this, is the high ratio of men to Officers, demonstrating the extent to which other ranks were expected to show a high level of intelligence and individualism, exhibited in the rejection of Cpl Wallace's application due to him being 'Not sufficiently intelligent.'⁸⁴ On the other hand Guardsman F. Boyd's age is questioned, unlike the previously mentioned Capt W. Williams, suggesting that the need to recruit a high quality of Officer was greater than within the ranks.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July. 1940.

⁷⁹ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

⁸⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Letter replying to 'Volunteers for Special Service' from Officer Commanding 1st Battalion The Scots Guards, 18 July. 1940.

⁸¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July. 1940.

⁸² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July. 1940.

⁸⁵ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July 1940 see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/2, Volunteers for Commandos (Officers), London Area, July. 1940.

Thus, by July 1940, the following was formed; note the absence of No-1 Commando which would eventually be formed when the Independent Companies were disbanded in October 1940:⁸⁶

No 2 Commando: Specialized parachute unit

No 3 and No 4 Commandos: Southern Command

No 5 and No 6 Commandos: Western Command

No 7 Commando: Eastern Command

No 8 Commando: Raised from the Household Division and London District but serving under Eastern Command

No 9 and No 11 Commandos: Scottish Command

No 10 Commando: Northern Command⁸⁷

Recruitment evidence presented in this chapter indicates that the formation of the Commandos appears to have gathered pace throughout June and July 1940.⁸⁸ However, evidence suggests a potential lack of support amongst Commanding Officers, leaving a shortfall in experienced personnel.⁸⁹ Despite this, evidence suggests Commandos were being established nationwide but, the reality of the Commandos' situation was documented by the of Head of Combined Operations, General A. Bourne, suggesting in contrast the Commandos were in an embryonic state during these months:

'I was told that I had available for offensive operations, 6 Independent Companies', 10 Commandos in the process of being raised, one Infantry Brigade Group, possibly the Royal Marine Brigade which was earmarked... and a number of parachutists... In

⁸⁶ C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp29-30

⁸⁷ National Archives PRO CAB 106/3, History of the Combined Operations Organisation, 1940-1945 see also Great Britain, *The History of Combined Operations 1940-1945*, (London: Amphib Warfare Headquarters, 1956), ppl08-9

⁸⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July 1940 see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII .

⁸⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier A. H. Hornby, M. C. (C. R. A. 43/Div. H. F.), Notes 28 May, 1942.

fact what existed at the time, were 350 odd men from the Independent Companies' who were drawn from every conceivable source.⁹⁰

General Bourne's comments support the evidence presented in this dissertation thus far, demonstrating the difficulties with Commando recruitment.⁹¹ The evidence shows that all ten Commandos were not operationally ready during June 1940 (the date of General Bourne's appointment) due to the problems of experienced Officers and men not being submitted from the Regular Army.⁹² Furthermore, the previous Chapter assessed the confused establishment of the Independent Companies, of which some, like Captain McClean's No 1 Independent Company, had taken twenty five percent casualties in Norway and from which they had only just returned and were still recovering.⁹³ Nevertheless, the Commandos would be sent into action at Boulogne on 24th/ 25th June 1940 and at Guernsey on 14th July 1940 and no counter evidence could be found, to suggest that these problems had been addressed.⁹⁴

Comparisons can be drawn from both the establishment and 'deployment of the Independent Companies and the Commandos from the evidence available. The Independent Companies were formed incredibly quickly: for instance No 1 Independent Company was raised on 22ⁿ April 1940 and moved on 27th/ 28th April 1940.⁹⁵ Brigadier Durnford-Slater recalls in his memoirs that he was appointed Commanding Officer of No 3 Commando on 28th June and 'by 5th July No. 3 Commando was in existence.'⁹⁶ In contrast to the Independent Companies'

⁹⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Major-General Alan Bourne, R.M., Early History of Combined Operations

⁹¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VEII see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, July 1940

⁹² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Letter replying to 'Volunteers for Special Service' from Officer Commanding 1st Battalion The Scots Guards, 18 July. 1940.

⁹³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R. A.M. C

⁹⁴ National Archives PRO WO 106/1740, OC No 11 Independent Company report on Operation Collar see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke

⁹⁵ National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

⁹⁶ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp 15

lack of training, the Special Training Centre (STC) for the Commandos was established in June 1940 at Inverailort Castle, Lochailort, although evidence from Brigadier Durnford-Slater suggests that No 3 Commando had no time to attend this training facility because it was based in Dartmouth preparing for the raid on Guernsey.⁹⁷

The raid on Guernsey was, therefore, conducted with a similar level of preparation to the Independent Companies' attack on Norway. For example, the Motor Launch boats (ML's) initially headed towards the wrong beach, poor landing techniques resulted in every soldier's weapon becoming wet before the Commandos had reached the beach.⁹⁸ Thus the Commandos were in a similar situation to the Independent Companies in Norway, having no magazines for their Tommy guns after the Royal Ulsterman had sailed with them on board.⁹⁹ No 11 Independent Company failed to make it to Guernsey, with two boats breaking down in the Channel, one boat ran into rocks and one boat landed on the Isle of Sark instead of Guernsey.¹⁰⁰ This is comparable to the Company of Scots Guards who became lost on the Norwegian expedition and turned up three weeks later in time to sail back to Britain.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the Independent Companies., in Guernsey there was no enemy present, with the machine gun nests and barracks which No 3 Commando were assigned to neutralize, being empty.¹⁰² Had enemy forces of a similar standard to that in Norway been present, the result may have been similar to that of the heavy casualties sustained by the Independent Companies in Norway, as Brigadier Durnford-Slater described 'a youth in his teens could

⁹⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the late War, 4 Oct. 1945 see also *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp 23

⁹⁸ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp26

⁹⁹ *ibid*, pp26

¹⁰⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Lieutenant Evill, No.9 Independent Company and Company Sergeant Major Parker, No.8 Independent Company, see also, *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp31-32

¹⁰¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, 'No 1 Independent Company' Interview with Captain McLean of the R.A.M.C

¹⁰² *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp26-28

have done the same.¹⁰³ Thus, evidence shows that both forces had not received training and had been quickly placed on operational duties, with both consequently showing poor military skills with regard to navigation, seamanship and weapons handling. Winston Churchill described Guernsey to General Ismay on 23rd July 1940, as a 'fiasco'.¹⁰⁴

Evidence from the raid on Guernsey also exposed the fragility of the recruitment process. Previous evidence from Commando selection noted the requirement of men to be swimmers.¹⁰⁵ This requirement was also communicated in the original letter from the War Office to the Commanding Officers in respective battalions stating, 'They should be able to swim and be immune to sea sickness.'¹⁰⁶ When the men began to return to the beach, the Motor Launch boats were unable to come ashore, due to rough conditions.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the men had to swim out to the Motor Launches.¹⁰⁸ On news of this, three men announced they were non-swimmers, having lied on their application forms. One of the three men, F. Drain, 'was never a swimmer at any time.'¹⁰⁹ The three men stayed on Guernsey intending to be picked up the following day.¹¹⁰ However, these three Commandos were eventually captured by a German patrol and spent the rest of the war as prisoners.¹¹¹ Based on this evidence, it can be suggested that the Commando application process may, as early as June 1940, have been allowing men to join who were not of the required standard.¹¹²

¹⁰³ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp26- 32

¹⁰⁴ National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/0, letter from Churchill to Ismay, 23 July 1940.

¹⁰⁵ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

¹⁰⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

¹⁰⁷ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp29

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*: pp29-32

¹⁰⁹ Channel 4, 'Commando'1 [Online], Episode 1. Available:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKmsZYmNQlk>. Accessed: 12/07/10

¹¹⁰ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp29

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives LAYCOCK 1/3, Communication to War Office regarding Special Service N. C. O.'s and O/R's, My. 1940

In conclusion, the evidence presented suggests the formation of the Commandos and the beginning of a doctrine that required certain physical and mental standards.¹¹³ However, in contrast to the centralized requirements of the War Office, the recruitment structure was independent with regard to each Commando and this appears to have allowed for an amount of personal influence and interest on the part of the Officer Commanding.¹¹⁴ As evidence has shown the Commandos were devoid of central operational control (War Office) and as Colonel Pollock suggested, this brought about a 'lack of any clear perception of how the forces were to be organised, trained and employed' which has been documented in the 'fiasco' of the raid on Guernsey and a failure to learn the lessons of the Independent Companies in Norway.¹¹⁵ This is most poignantly described by J. Dunning of No 4 Commando:

'The Commandos were raised with the purpose- and hope- of immediately sending them off on raids across the Channel, and this short-term intention precluded a thorough and systematic build-up from individual training to collective and amphibious training.'¹¹⁶

In criticism of J. Dunning comments, there had been a systematic build-up of training occurring at the Special Training Centre (STC) at Inverailort Castle, Lochailort, since June 1940 and this topic will constitute the following chapter.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, Volunteers for Special Service 9 June. 1940.

¹¹⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

¹¹⁵ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group see also National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, letter from Churchill to Ismay, 23 July. 1940.

¹¹⁶ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp 33

¹¹⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945.

Chapter Three- Development of the Commandos

The evidence presented thus far has critiqued the confused efforts of Britain's irregular warfare during 1940. The discussion of training and development in Commando doctrine has, so far, only been mentioned with regard to developing an argument to demonstrate the shortfall in the preparation for operations in Norway and for the raid on Guernsey.¹ This chapter will critique the training of Commandos through 1940-1941 and seek to look further at problems that emerged within the Commandos Units throughout this period.

The Official Army Record entitled, 'The Training of the Commandos in Scotland during the Late War', documents that the Special Training Centre was established in June 1940 at Inverailort Castle, Lochailort, Scotland but fails to explain beyond this.² Brigadier A. H. Hornby states that the reason for basic Commando training being situated in Scotland was due to the fact that 'Portsmouth was getting a bit too hot to be comfortable.'³ In contrast Colonel F. Spencer Chapman's memoir, *The Jungle is Neutral*, provides a detailed account of how the Special Training Centre at Lochailort was formed.⁴ Colonel Chapman states that a secret operation to sabotage the Norwegian coast had embarked in May 1940.⁵ However, the submarine had been depth-charged in the North Sea and the men had had to return to Britain.⁶ The three men on board the submarine, B. Mayfield second in command of 5th Scots Guards I Ski Battalion, referenced in Chapter One, J. Gavin, a Company Commander in 5th Scots (Guards Ski Battalion and B. Stirling had returned to Stirling's family home at Lochailort to

¹ National Archives PRO WO 260/32: Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940, to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April. 1940. to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV see also *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Durnford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books.2002)

² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1 134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 45.

³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1 134, Training Policy for Combined Operations, 4 Oct. 1945. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier A. H. Hornby, M. C. (C. R. A. 43/Div. H. F.), Notes 28 May, 1942

⁴ *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: The Reprint Society London, 1950), pp17-18

⁵ *ibid*, pp.17

⁶ *Ibid*, pp.17

recover.⁷ Consequently, due to the fact that 5th Scots Guards Ski Battalion had been disbanded in March because of the poor skill of recruits under arctic conditions, the three men had decided to start the Special Training Centre at Stirling's home, to train men in 'smash-and-grab' raids because:⁸

'...the hills and valleys of Inveraray, the flatter countryside of Ayrshire, the Isle of Bute and the Shores of the Fifth of Clyde became practice grounds for the battles of Africa, Sicily and Italy, and later for D-day and North West Europe'⁹

The above source documents the geographical benefits of the west of Scotland, where 'hills and Valleys' would make for strenuous physical training and the 'Firth of Clyde' would be perfect for practicing amphibious landings.¹⁰ The choice of geography relates to evidence from the 'General Objectives of Training' that outlined, 'Irregular warfare demands the highest standards of initiative, mental alertness and physical fitness together with the maximum skills at arms'; thus a diverse and experienced training team was assembled to meet these requirements.¹¹ In response to the requirements of training, Official Army Records show the following men creating the first training team:

'Surgeon Commander Murray Levick, R. N., who was with Scott at the South Pole; Major Jim Gavin, R. E., the Everest Climber; Major Scott, R. A., who was with Gino Watkins in the Arctic; Capt. Edward Chapman, Scots Gds., the famous Bisley Marksman; and Capt. Annand, V. C., D. L. I.'¹²

The above source documents the Commandos' emphasis on the training team's endurance background; the above men are arctic explorers or climbers used to harsh conditions as evidence from the 'General Objectives of Training' which stated, '...endurance will be

⁷ *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: The Reprint Society London, 1950), pp17-18

⁸ National Archives PRO WO 166/41 10, Formation of 5th Battalion Scots Guards see Appendix III

⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1 134, Training Policy for Combined Operations, 4 Oct. 1945.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940

¹² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1 134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945

essential elements of every operation...¹³ Unfortunately, other than Major J. Gavin who was previously mentioned, information to suggest the exact means by which these men came to be involved with the Commandos could not be located. However, in his memoir on Commando training, J. Dunning of No 4 Commando recounts a training structure from the Special Training Centre, Lochailort that documents the syllabus for military skills:

'...field craft (directed by Lord Lovat), demolitions (Mike Calvert), close-quarter combat (Fairbairn and Sykes), weapon training (Wally Wallbridge) and the signals wing organized by Peter Fleming, famous author, explorer and brother of Ian Fleming, the post-war creator of 007 Bond'¹⁴

On analysis of the above evidence, it may be suggested that the Special Training Centre was looking to amend the problems of the Independent Companies' and Commandos' early actions: poor navigation, weapons handling and communication.¹⁵ Thus, in relation to 'The General Objectives of Training', field craft and signals training was to prepare the Commandos for the fact that they 'may frequently be called upon to act on their own without outside assistance...'¹⁶ Furthermore, "The General Objectives of Training' with regard to demolition and weapons training also state, 'it cannot be stressed too strongly that everyman must be conversant with and skilled in every weapon with which the Battalion is armed.'¹⁷ Therefore, comparative evidence documents the links between the syllabus of skills taught at

¹³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940

¹⁴ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp90-1

¹⁵ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Dumford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp29-31 see also National Archive PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4th April, 1940, to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also National Archive PRO WO 260/3, Notes on a meeting held on 17 April, 1940, to consider the formation of Independent Companies see Appendix IV

¹⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940 see also *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp90-1

¹⁷ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940 see also J. Dunning, *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp90-1

the Special Training Centre (STC) in trying to achieve 'The General Objectives of Training'¹⁸

J. Dunning's evidence does not, however, state that sniping and stalking was taught by a group called Ghillies, who based their training on stalking deer, as research from the Army Records, 'The Training of the Commandos in Scotland during the Late War' indicates.¹⁹ The Ghillies (part of the Lovat Scouts) were famed for their sharpshooting capability and these men 'proved highly successful in imparting their patience and knowledge to soldiers who had never seen deer before in their lives except perhaps in the London Zoo.'²⁰ In further support of this the 'Commando Training Instructions No1' states that Commandos were to develop a '...hunter's cunning.'²¹

Furthermore, the addition of 'close-quarter combat' to the training schedule demonstrates a refinement of the Commandos' 'purpose' which as Commando Training Instructions No1' states was to '...operate independently...'²² Thus, the instruction of Martial Arts allowed the Commandos to deal with 'circumstances which may be entirely different to those which were anticipated' and which aimed to achieve the 'capability to operate independently for 24 hours', as stated in the main aims of 'The Employment of the Commandos.'²³ The nature of Commando 'smash and grab' operations also necessitated the need to get within close proximity of the enemy.²⁴ As Sergeant J. Huntington notes in his memoirs, 'Queensbury

¹⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940 see also *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp90-1

¹⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945.

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

²² *ibid*

²³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, War Office 1940, The Employment of Commandos

²⁴ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

Rules' no longer applied against the enemy they were fighting.²³ Further research shows that the two men who were recruited to found the Commando unarmed fighting skills section were Captains Sykes and Fairbairn and their suitability stemmed from their service in the Shanghai Police and the latter's foundation of the Shanghai Riot Squad.²⁶ J. Dunning additionally claims that Fairbairn was the 'first foreigner outside of Japan to be awarded the Black Belt degree by the Kodokan Ju-jitsu University of Tokyo.'²⁷

Applied to the Commando training process was what became known as Returned to Unit (RTU) if a recruit did not make the grade.²⁸ This process allowed not only for the setting of an elite standard, but also for the immediate removal of weakness, as J. Dunning of No 4 Commando explained, a 'system of selective culling was a prerequisite to the maintenance of the highest standards of military efficiency.'²⁹ Primary sources such as J. Dunning's assume that RTU originated with the Commandos with research of secondary sources offering no contradictory evidence to suggest otherwise.³⁰ However, research shows that 'RTU' was first used with regard to irregular units in the Unit Diary of 5th Scots Guard Ski Battalion on 29th February 1940, when ninety six of the four hundred and sixty applicants were rejected.³¹ This evidence further demonstrates the lessons Majors Mayfield, Gavin and Stirling learnt from

²⁵ Commando Veterans Association, *The Memories of Sergeant John Huntington as related to John Mewett* [Online], Available:

<http://www.commandoveterans.org/site/images/stories/Media/The%20Memories%20of%20Sgt%20John%20Huntingdon.pdf>. Accessed: 12/08/10

²⁶ Commando Veterans Association, *The Memories of Sergeant John Huntington as related to John Mewett* [Online], Available:

<http://www.commandoveterans.org/site/images/stories/Media/The%20Memories%20of%20Sgt%20John%20Huntingdon.pdf>. 12/08/10 see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in

Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945. see also *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp93

²⁷ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp93

²⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945.

²⁹ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp6

³⁰ C. Messenger., *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp742 see also N. Cherry, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, (Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd, 2009), pp19-40 see also *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp6

³¹ National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, 5 Scots Diary Feb-Mar 1940

their time in 5 Scots Guards Ski Battalion and it appears that this system was used at the Special Training Centre, Lochailort.³² A great number of recruits dropped out because of the high physical standards required, as Captain T. Hughes, 47 Commando, Royal Marines explains:

'... it was a bit rough at times, but you were expected to be able to do anything and to be honest, I think there was a certain amount of over expectation at times.'³³

'Over expectation' manifested itself in speed marching which involved marching at pace across large distances in full kit.³⁴ Captain T. Hughes recalls that these marches tended to be around 'eight miles'; however. Official Army Records state that one of the training staffs favourite routes was to 'retrace the steps of Bonnie Prince Charles on his way to the coast from Glenfinnan.'³⁵ The skill of speed marching was practiced so that the Commandos could cover great distances, quickly, by foot, supported by evidence from "The General Objectives of Training' which stated, 'because of the difficulties of terrain over which the troops may be called upon to move...' and 'great speed in reaching the objective will almost invariably be required.'³⁶

Statistics from the Official records of Commando deaths between May 1941 and June 1945 document one hundred and ninety eight Army Commando Officers and eight hundred and twenty five Other Ranks were killed.³⁷ Of these deaths seventeen were during training with

³² *The Jungle is Neutral*, ed. Colonel Spencer Chapman (London: The Reprint Society London, 1950), pp 13-20 see also National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, 5 Scots Diary Feb-Mar 1940

³³ Captain T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX

³⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945. see also Captain T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix DC

³⁵ Captain T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945.

³⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions, The General Objectives of Training, 1940

³⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/843, Commando Casualties 1941-45

twelve incidents of drowning.³⁸ Although the evidence does not give specific detail as to how the twelve recruits drowned, it may be suggested that even until 1945, men who were not strong enough swimmers were either lying on their application form or being allowed to join regardless of the risks as discussed in Chapter Two.³⁹

Independence and initiative was not only encouraged during training but also in established Commando Units. This was shown by the introduction of billets to Commando life, a stark contrast to the culture of Regular Army barracks.⁴⁰ This was documented by the 'General Objectives of Training' which stated:

No Special Service Battalion, or any part of one, can feel confident of success unless all ranks are capable of thinking for themselves; of thinking quickly and of acting independently...⁴¹

There is more to be evaluated from evidence of the fiscal dimensions of Commando service, with Officers being given 13s 4d a day and Other Ranks being given 6s 8d a day to sustain themselves.⁴² The allowance was expected to cover the following:

- (i) Ration Allowance
- (ii) Accommodation
- (iii) Fuel and Light
- (iv) Field Allowance (Officers and W. O.'s if applicable)
- (v) Upkeep of plain clothes, (other ranks)
- (vi) Travelling expenses in connection with training
- (vii) Servant Allowance (Officers)

³⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/843, Commando Casualties 1941 -45

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early history of Combined Operations: notes, memoranda and interviews by Senior Officers

⁴¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade Training Instructions: The General Objectives of Training, 1940

⁴² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, War Office 1940, The Employment of Commandos see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

(viii) Kit Allowance (Other Ranks)⁴³

This functional and administrative innovation allowed for the Commandos to avoid the domestic requirements of barracks that J. Dunning suggested diverted around twenty per cent of a battalion's strength per day.⁴⁴ As the above source indicates, each individual was to manage his own rations and accommodation, this allowed for a huge amount of administration to be removed from the Commandos as a unit.⁴⁵ This is supported by evidence from the 'Commando Training Instruction No. 1' that suggested barrack life led men, 'not to learn to look after themselves.'⁴⁶ As evidence from James Dunning memoir continues to explain:

'...clearly this situation [barracks] imposed considerable limitations on training and progress towards optimum fighting efficiency. But worse still, these irksome and tedious 'necessities' not only sapped morale they also stifled initiative.'⁴⁷

Evidence to contest J. Dunning's claims that billeting was purely beneficial to the Commandos can be presented. Captain T. Hughes recalls the gamble of selecting a billet, 'If you were fortunate you found nice people to stay with. There were many advantages one way or another'.⁴⁸ There were advantages to living in billets, as T. Sherman, No 2 Commando, recounts:

'I found a magnificent billet in Ayr. They still had servants and my friend and I ended up having our boots cleaned and when we were going on exercise we were given game pie and very exotic bag rations'⁴⁹

⁴³ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp23

⁴⁶ National Archives PRO WO 33/1:669, Commando Training Instruction No 1, 15. Aug. 1940 see Appendix II

⁴⁷ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp23

⁴⁸ Captain T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX

⁴⁹ Channel 4, 'Commando', Episode 1. [Online], Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKmsZYmNQ1k>, Accessed 12/07/10

Evidence shows that having one's boots cleaned and rations prepared, may not have been the process of 'initiative' and 'discipline' that Commanding Officers had in mind from billeting.⁵⁰ The issue of 'discipline' is regularly propounded in the essays and correspondence of Major-General Laycock, as he stated, 'I do not believe that I myself fully realized the paramount importance of discipline in those early Commando days...'⁵¹ Research indicates that Major-General Laycock recognized that the lack of operational activity the Commandos were experiencing, combined with the domestic freedom of billets was leading to discipline issues.⁵² Evidence to support this can be noted in the instructions on the 'Points of Discipline' sent to Officers of each Special Service Battalion during December 1940:

'I realise and understand the psychological effects of bringing people to a state of excitement and anticipation and then pricking this bubble. On the other hand advantages and privileges do exist, barrack guards- daily fatigues and the petty restrictions of barrack life do not have their being in anything like the same degree. Neither is it appreciated that the degree of comfort hi which the majority have lived this summer is in quite a different category to that which has been enjoyed by most battalions.'⁵³

Major-General Laycock's comments suggest that the Commandos may have become spoilt and unappreciative of their life styles, but as previous evidence has shown, billeting could have its advantages.⁵⁴

A compounding factor in the issue of discipline was the amalgamation of the Independent Companies and Commandos into five Special Service Battalions in October 1940.⁵⁵ Evidence

⁵⁰ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade Training Instructions: The General Objectives of Training, 1940 see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 8/8, Essay on 'Discipline and Moral', 24 Aug. 1942.

⁵¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 4/17, Major-General Laycock, Special Service Brigade, 1943

⁵² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Major General Laycock, Training Instructions issued shortly after Special Service Brigade was formed

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Channel 4 on Demand, '*Commando*' [Episode 1] [Online], Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKmsZYniNQ1k>. Accessed: 12/07/10

⁵⁵ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

from a War Office paper by the Commander of Special Service Battalion, Brigadier J. C. Haydon states that, 'Special Service Battalions started their careers under distinctly unfavourable psychological conditions.'⁵⁶ This structural shift from Brigade to Battalion was an attempt to solve control problems but further evidence from Brigadier Haydon explains that this produced a '...most difficult body to control or to knit into a cohesive whole.'⁵⁷ Supporting evidence shows that Major-General Laycock viewed this move as making the issue of discipline worse. Commenting on the new Special Service Battalion's organization, he stated, "These wholly uncontrollable units each of 20 sub-units comprised of 72 officers and over 1,000 other ranks..."⁵⁹ Major-General Laycock, therefore, became responsible, as Commanding Officer, for both No 3 and No 8 Commando under¹ No 4 Special Service Battalion.⁶⁰ How disruptive this structural change was is open to debate as the Special Service Battalion was disbanded in March 1941 and in a paper entitled 'Commando Training' from 10th January 1942, Major-General Laycock described the- Commandos as still being an 'undisciplined rabble', evidence that suggests that little in his opinion had changed.⁶¹

Additionally, Major-General Laycock's claims of the Commandos persisting in their lack of discipline can be supported by evidence documenting the Commandos social lives.⁶² The material which supports this is contained mainly in Commando Unit diaries and suggests that some of the Commandos' behaviour may have been anti-social.⁶³ Due to a lack of military operations the Commandos socialized in the clubs and bars of the holiday towns in which

⁵⁶ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Brigadier J. C. Haydon; Notes on the Re-organization of Special Service Units, 1st February 1941

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Commando Training, 10 January 1942

⁶² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37, No 2 Commando Unit Diary

⁶³ *ibid*

they were stationed.⁶⁴ However, research suggests the less desirable, but somewhat predictable, product of regular socializing and drinking was violence.⁶⁵ This appears to have happened with some frequency as the Diary of No'2 Commando, written by Lieutenant Colonel Newman, exhibits the contrasting fortunes of his Commando, and the on-going struggle that Officers had with controlling unoccupied troops:⁶⁶

'3rd October 1941- A quiet day that ended up in a famous night. A party of SS (Special Service) visited the York House Dance Hall and a fight ensued between Commando men and Poles. No person seems to have started the fun- but people here voted the fracas highly successful. Chairs and unfortunately knives were used as missiles, and one Pte soldier was knifed in the back and had to receive hospital treatment. It appears the Commando knowledge of unarmed combat was practised.⁶⁷

This source provides evidence as late as October 1941, of the social difficulties the Commandos were encountering in the face of operations being cancelled at the last moment. In this instance, even the Commanding Officer, recounts the 'fun' of the fight and how 'successful' it was, despite one of his own soldiers being knifed.⁶⁸ The strict pursuit of 'discipline' that had been shown in the evidence from Major-General Laycock, was evidently not felt across all Commandos and amongst all Commanding Officers, further demonstrating Colonel Pollock's suggestion of the Commando's problem of 'operational control.'⁶⁹ The opportunity to exhibit the skills of unarmed combat appear to have outweighed all other consequences.⁷⁰ However, the diary evidence documents Lieutenant Colonel Newman losing his enthusiasm, when the Commandos' thirst for action continues into the following evening:

'4 October 1941- The Commando and local Police were rather concerned about the previous night's incidents. It was arranged to picket the town at night and put the

⁶⁴ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37, No 2 Commando Unit Diary

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37, No 2 Commando Unit Diary see also National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/1, Major-General Laycock, Essay on Discipline, 1932

⁷⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37 No 2 Commando Unit Diary

dance hall out of bounds. In spite these precautions 2 SS men beat up Polish Soldiers in a chip shop and had to be taken to hospital. As a result of this one man received 28 days' detention and was RTU.

10th October 1941- Various incidents of an unsatisfactory nature took place in a Dance Hall where a civilian was injured'⁷³

The Unit Diary entries of No 2 Commando, therefore, present a pattern of violence on successive weekends, with Colonel Newman documenting another fight the following weekend (18th October 1941).⁷² The extent of the seriousness of this violence is indicated by Colonel Newman documenting the establishment of a 'picket' and that the men were banned from the dance hall and this implies that many Commandos must have been involved.⁷³ On the other hand, there was little opportunity for entertainment in wartime Britain, as Captain T. Hughes explained, 'there were occasional radio programmes that you might have heard but there was nothing to do... So boredom was quite a serious matter...'⁷⁴ The evidence of the behaviour of all Commando Units between 1940-41 was not possible to collate due to time and resource constraints on visits to the National Archives, Kew. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Major-General Laycock viewed anti-social behaviour in December 1940, as seriously harming training and discipline, commenting:

'...now turn to another on which I harp continually because I am convinced of its vital importance and necessity...! consider that discipline is lax. Drunkenness is common. It is without doubt the cause of many other offences... People are not fit, either physically or mentally!'⁷⁵

It may be suggested from this evidence that by December 1940, within Major-General Laycock's, No 4 Special Service Battalion (No 3 and No 8 Commando), drunkenness was

⁷¹ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/3 7 No 2 Commando Unit Diary

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Captain T. Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX

⁷⁵ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Major-General Laycock, Points of Discipline | and Training Lecture, Dec. 1940.

widespread as is comparable to evidence from the Unit Diary of No 2 Commando.⁷⁶ Research suggests that 'Discipline' was an important element in creating effective Commandos.⁷⁷ In support of this Major-General Laycock published a number of documents and essays with regard to the subject of 'Discipline'.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the evidence of the actions of No 2 Commando mentioned in their Unit Diary pinpoints the main source of the problem of 'discipline' within the Commandos as 'toughness', as Major-General Laycock stated:

"There was a misconception of the term "toughness". A certain type of both Officers and men thought they were "tough" if they looked tough. We explained it took years to make a soldier, whereas any fool could learn to be a gangster in a few weeks"⁷⁹

As evidence throughout this dissertation has suggested, both Independent Companies and Commandos had been established in a matter of weeks in 1940 and it is, therefore, not surprising that the time scales suggested by Major-General Laycock had not been available to create high quality soldiers.⁸⁰ In response, each unit began a process of 'progressive' training with 'eradication of the unfit' one of its primary objectives.⁸¹ Therefore, training was not confined to the Special Training Centre, Lochailort through 1940-41, because of a lack of operations and a need to keep the men 'tough'.⁸² Unlike the Regular Army, each Commando Unit and the Officers within it, were responsible for formulating their own training as there

⁷⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Major-General Laycock, Points of Discipline and Training Lecture, Dec. 1940 see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37, No 2 Commando Unit Diary

⁷⁷ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Major-General Laycock, Points of Discipline and Training Lecture, Dec. 1940. see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/1, Major-General Laycock, Discipline, 1932

⁷⁸ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/1, Major-General Laycock, Discipline

⁷⁹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Commando Training, 10 Jan. 1942. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Reorganization of the Commandos

⁸⁰ National Archives PRO WO 260/32, Record of meeting held on 4 April. 1940. to consider the organization of special infantry battalion see Appendix I see also *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Dumford-Slater (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), pp 15

⁸¹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Commando Training, 10 Jan. 1942.

⁸² National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945. see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Commando Training, 10 Jan. 1942. see also National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

was no single training initiative.⁸³ This is supported by the 'Commando Training Instructions No 1.' issued on the 15th August 1940 which outlines requirements, for example, of 'Silence and Secrecy' without explaining how these requirements were to be achieved.⁸⁴ Furthermore, 'Regular Training' is documented most weeks in the Unit Diary of No 2 Commando, with each Commando responsible for its own training and development with information only being exchanged between Officers when circumstances permitted; this is further evidence of the administrative restrictions within the early Commando organization.⁸⁵

According to J. Dunning of No 4 Commando, the majority of early training lists compiled by Commanding Officers have failed to survive and in relation to this study no such primary documents were found.⁸⁶ Although, Dunning has seen one list that did survive, written by Colonel Newman of No 2 Commando which he has recounted from memory (see Appendix X).⁸⁷ On the evidence provided by Dunning it would appear from comparative analysis that Commando Unit's training was based on the doctrine instilled during basic training. Comparison between the initial training directive to the Special Service Brigade from the War Office, and point four of Colonel Newman's training directive, document very similar training requirements:

Special Service Brigade Training Instructions:

'Physical fitness and endurance will be an essential element of every operation, not only because of the difficulties of the terrain over which the troops may be called

⁸³ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin 1 Press, 2000), pp 34

⁸⁴ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

⁸⁵ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp 34 see also National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando I Group

⁸⁶ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. I. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp34

⁸⁷ *ibid*, pp 34-6

⁸⁸ *ibid*, pp 34-6

upon to move, but because great speed in reaching the objective will almost invariably be required.⁸⁹

Colonel Newman No 2 Commando, Training Directive:

'Physically. The highest state of physical fitness must at all times be maintained. All ranks are trained to cover at great speed any type of ground for distances of five to seven miles in fighting order.'⁹⁰

These two strikingly similar documents indicate that the 'embryonic' structure of the Commandos, suggested by Colonel Pollock, was not so diverse.⁹¹ The similarities between the two directives show that the lessons from the Special Training Centre, Lochailort may suggest that they were being used as a template and being carried through into active Commando Units.⁹² Colonel Newman's training directive looks also to build upon the skills of unarmed combat (point 6), demolitions (point 11), signals (point 10) and field craft (point 14), four key areas of the syllabus previously mentioned that were taught at Special Training Centre, Lochailort.⁹³ Thus, there may have been more cohesion between individual Commandos than was previously suggested.

Evidence to suggest the further cohesive effect that training had is found in the emphasis on competition within and between Commandos.⁹⁴ Evidence from the 'Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions' suggests Commandos should compete in 'Map Reading', 'Forced Marches', 'Climbing' and 'Football and Boxing'.⁹⁵ However, further evidence reveals that competition via training developed far beyond the basic training skills suggested by the War

⁸⁹ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions

⁹⁰ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp35, see Appendix 'C'

⁹¹ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

⁹² *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp34-36 see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/1134, The Training of Commandos in Scotland during the Late War, 4 Oct. 1945.

⁹³ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000), pp34-36

⁹⁴ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training Instructions

⁹⁵ *ibid*

Office. The 'Inter-Commando' training exercise (see Appendix XI) is evidence of the scale on which elaborate training exercises were being undertaken.⁹⁷

Evidence from the 'Inter-Commando' training exercise brief for 7th- 8th July 1941, between No 2 and No 9 Commando firstly documents the resources and manpower available for training suggesting the Commandos' lack of combat activity stretching into 1941.⁹⁸ Furthermore, it may be noted that three Officers from each of No 4 and No 12 Commando are also listed as present, once more demonstrating the growing level of co-operation between individual Commandos.⁹⁹ The Commandos' progression from individual or section based training, to 'Inter-Commando Training' exhibits not only the importance of competition but also the value gained in training together.¹⁰⁰ As the brief shows these sophisticated exercises took place over many square miles, as the grid-references of rendezvous, rivers and frontiers document.¹⁰¹ However, the aims of the 'Inter-Commando Training Exercise' were to 'practise patrolling and watchfulness' and 'practise the maintenance of a Commando in the Field for a period of 24 hours or more' are evidence of the changing role of the Commando in 1941.¹⁰² The initial role of the Commandos was to 'raid' not to 'patrol' and, as the War Office stated, to have a 'capability to operate independently for 24 hours' and not in excess of this time frame.¹⁰³ In contrast, as the training brief suggests, the 'Inter-Commando Training

⁹⁶ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 2/3, Special Service Brigade: Training, Instructions

⁹⁷ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Inter- Commando Training Exercise (7-8 July 1941) between No 2. And 9 Commando see Appendix XI

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ *ibid*,

¹⁰² *ibid*

¹⁰³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, War Office 1940, The Employment of Commandos see also National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Inter- Commando Training Exercise (7th-8th July 1941) between No 2. And 9 Commando see Appendix XI

Exercise' was to take place over a three day period, a role far more suited to the Regular Army.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, 'Inter-Commando Training Exercise' appears to have encompassed elements beyond the Commandos themselves, with the brief also circulated to Officers from the Royal Navy, Royal Marine Division and Royal Air Force.¹⁰⁵ This is evidence of the Commandos' integration into Combined Operations which was seen by the Government as the main way that 're-entry in the continent of Europe' could be achieved.¹⁰

As Brigadier A. H. Hornby wrote, 'The winter of 1940-1941 was a chapter of disappointments. Raid after raid was planned and none of them came off...'¹⁰⁷ Research suggests that one of the reasons why raids were cancelled or postponed in 1940 was still due to a lack of training, despite the establishment of the Special Training Centre, Lochailort. This is supported by evidence from a War Office paper by Brigadier J. C. Haydon, who stated that Commandos were being taken with 'only eight weeks training behind them' but a Commando was not ready for operations for 'four to five months.'¹⁰⁸ Therefore, despite the evidence documented earlier in this Chapter, Britain was still struggling to produce

¹⁰⁴ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Inter-Commando Training Exercise (7-8 July 1941) between No 2. And 9 Commando see Appendix XI

The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/3, War Office 1940, The Employment of Commandos see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Directive to A. G. B. Bourne on Raiding Operations 13 June. 1940. see also National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Early History, Interview with Colonel Dudley-Clarke

¹⁰⁵ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Inter-Commando Training Exercise (7-8 July 1941) between No 2. And 9 Commando see Appendix XI

¹⁰⁶ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brief History of the Combined Training Centre Inveraray

¹⁰⁷ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/699, Brigadier A. H. Hornby, M. C. (C. R. A. 43/Div. H. F.), Notes 28 May 1942. ...

¹⁰⁸ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Brigadier J. C. Haydon, Notes on the Re-organization of Special Service Units, 1st February 1941

Commandos capable of fulfilling the 'smash and grab' role that the 'Commando Training Instructions Nol.' outlined in August 1940.¹⁰⁹

Raids that did occur, such as the raid on the Lofoten Islands on 4th March 1941, turned into a publicity stunt rather than a military operation.¹¹⁰ Evidence to support this over a year and a half after the raid is documented in the Unit Diary of No 1 Commando from 23rd October 1942, 'Allied Newspapers were persuaded not to publish an article... giving a fictitious account of the Lofoten Raid...'ⁱⁿ For the media still to be interested in the raid after so long shows just how little operational activity the Commandos were experiencing throughout 1942.

Consequently, the Commandos were given ever larger operational tasks, with No 7, 8 and 11 Commandos deploying to the Middle East under Major-General Laycock, known as LAYFORCE in February 1941.¹¹² This mass role, however, was not what the Commandos had been designed for as Colonel Pollock wrote, 'a Commando possessed no close support weapons and no administrative organization for its own maintenance in the field.'¹¹³ In support of this Major-General Laycock wrote to H. Q. LAYFORCE on 1st May 1941, '...considerable administrative difficulties are constantly experienced' and on disbandment of LAYFORCE wrote of... the shortage of manpower..',¹¹⁴ In this role critics claimed that the Commandos' role 'could have been better done by a unit of the Field Army' as General Paget

¹⁰⁹ National Archives PRO WO 218/19, Brigadier J. C. Haydon, Notes on the Re-organization of Special Service Units, 1st February 1941 see also National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

¹¹⁰ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/4, Unit Diary No 1 Commando

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 3/4, Letter to Lieut. Colonel Laycock from War Office, 31 Jan. 1941.

¹¹³ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

¹¹⁴ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 3/10, Lieut. Colonel Laycock letter to H. Q. Layforce, 1 May. 1941. see also The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 3/19, Lieut Colonel Laycock, 'Events Prior to the Disbandment of Layforce', 16 Sept 1941.

stated.¹¹⁵ Due to the failure of LAYFORCE, Churchill informed the Chiefs of Staff that the Commandos had been '...frittered away. ...'¹¹⁶ N. Cherry's, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, concludes his study in 1942 because it is claimed that '...at this point the use of these troops as "raiders" virtually stopped.'¹¹⁷

Conversely, sometime after 1942 research shows that the Commandos were still deployed on raiding duties.¹¹⁸ Evidence from Lord Louis Mountbatten on 15th June 1943⁵ shows the Americans questioning the 'number of raids carried out...', as the document states over twenty raids had been mounted and thirty six were being planned since the Dieppe Raid in August 1942.¹¹⁹ Further evidence to support the continuation of a 'raiding' strategy even at the end of the War can be seen in the large volume of raids listed in a War Office paper from 1945 (see Appendix XII).¹²⁰

The evidence suggests, therefore, not that the Commandos-stopped their 'raiding' role but that Britain was no longer a 'guerrilla' nation, as Colonel Dudley Clarke had envisaged in 1940 and 1941.^m The support of America allowed for both raiding and a more general employment of the Commandos due to the increase in equipment, specifically ships. Lord Louis Mountbatten documents that between December 1941 and June 1943 the number of Landing Ships increased from twenty two to one hundred and thirteen and Landing Craft from five hundred and nine to three thousand and seventy nine.¹²² The mobility and

¹¹⁵ National Archives PRO CAB 106/7, Colonel Pollock, Commando Group

¹¹⁶ National Archives PRO TREM 3/330/9, Churchill letter to C. O. S., 7 Oct. 1942.

¹¹⁷ N. Cherry, *Striking Back: Britain's Airborne and Commando Raids 1940-42*, (Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd, 2009), pp289

¹¹⁸ National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, letter from C. C. O. Lord Louis Mountbatten to Churchill, 15 June. 1943

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

¹²⁰ National Archives PRO, WO 203/4090, Possible Targets for Commando Raids, 1945 Jan.

¹²¹ Colonel Dudley Clarke, *Seven Assignments*, (London: John Cape, 1948), pp207

¹²² National Archives PRO PREM 3/330/9, letter from C. C. O. Lord Louis Mountbatten to Churchill, 15 June. 1943.

capability of the Commandos, therefore, greatly increased and, thus, operations in North Africa and Sicily were not unsurprising.

In conclusion to this Chapter, it can be suggested that the introduction of America and Russia as Britain's allies by the end of 1941 effectively alleviated the isolationism from which the Commando 'spirit' had been born. Evidence presented in this Chapter shows that Britain never successfully used its Independent Companies or Commandos through 1940-1941, as Dudley Clarke originally envisaged.¹²³ As this study has argued, a lack of inter-war planning and a rushed formulation consequently meant the Commandos struggled to address a cohesive training doctrine and organization and this may have impeded their ability to fulfil their envisaged role.

¹²³ National Archives PRO. DEFE 2/699, Brigadier Laycock, Early History: The Origin and Work of the Commandos

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study has followed the line of enquiry originally outlined in the Introduction, providing critical and comparative analysis of the establishment and development of the Commandos from 1940-1941 based on original research. A summary and assessment of the academic outcomes of this research project will now evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

Firstly, the study of secondary sources from which the research project was identified, was the cause of some research difficulties. As discussed in the Introduction, academic study of irregular warfare from the Second World War is extensive and this, theoretically, resulted in a great many potential research opportunities. Initially, a study of an entire Special Force was to constitute this thesis, specifically 40 Commando, Royal Marines. However, research revealed a large volume of secondary source material with regard to the Royal Marines and this made the location of a valid and original research opportunity difficult. With regard to this, a research trip to the Royal Marines Archives at the Royal Marines Museum, Southsea was conducted in an attempt to identify a research topic through the primary source material located there. Yet again, little in the way of academic opportunity presented itself and the material that was collated has had no impact on this study. However, the assistance of Matthew Little, the Royal Marines Archive Curator was greatly appreciated.

In contrast, the decision to undertake a research project focusing on the Army Commandos from 1940-1941, was made after research into the secondary sources revealed a lack of academic attention to this particular area in the historiography. Research suggested that J. Ladd's, *Commandos and Rangers of World War II*, and, C. Messenger's, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, were the only two secondary sources that attempted to address the Commando's

establishment and development during 1940-1941.¹ This offered an academic opportunity to contribute to the historiography and this is shown from the learning outcomes of this research project. Research into, and critical analysis of, 5th Scots Guards Ski Battalion and the Independent Companies provided evidence of their contribution to the establishment and development of the Commandos and illustrated how Britain was unprepared for irregular warfare.² The study of 5th Scots Guards Ski Battalion and the Independent Companies further contributed to the historiography as research suggested that there was no published material specifically on either of these formations.

The critique of the original application forms of the Commandos in 1940 allowed for a close investigation, thus enabling this thesis to document the shortcomings of the original Commando organization. This research was of value because it provided credible evidence that exposed deficiencies in a broad spectrum of the recruitment processes.³ Research also demonstrated the Commandos' failure to effectively deploy in the 'smash and grab' role originally envisaged for them in 1940.⁴ This dissertation's research outcomes, as far as could be discerned, were not critiqued at any great length in any published secondary source and thus contribute to the historiography.

However, in criticism of the research approach, it was thought that a great deal of detailed material with regard to the Commandos from 1940-1941 would reside at the National Archives, Kew, although, as was found to be the case, almost no training information from the focus period was available from that location. For example, all that resided in the National Archives, Kew regarding Commando training from 1940-1941 was a small three

¹ J. D. Ladd, *Commandos and Rangers of World War II*, (London: Macdonalds and Jane, 1978) see also C. Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946*, (London: Grafton Books, 1991)

² National Archives PRO WO 166/4110, Formation of 5th Battalion Scots Guards see Appendix HI

³ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK 1/1, Application forms for 'Special Service' 1940 see Appendix VIII

⁴ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

page pamphlet titled, 'Commando Training Instructions No1' from 1940 (see Appendix II).⁵ Research at the National Archives, Kew into Commando Unit Diaries attempted to compensate for this but, for the most part, little more than brief comments were gleaned from the diary entries.⁶ However, a substantial amount of primary research material was sourced from the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.⁷ Furthermore, a great deal of supporting evidence with regard to training was obtained from J. Dunning's, *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, and this primary published work supplemented archival research.⁸ Thus, a possible further line of enquiry with regard to the development of training during this period could potentially constitute further lines of enquiry.

On further analysis of the research approach, alternative conclusions could have been drawn if more consistent visits to the National Archives, Kew or the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London had been possible. However, the research time that was allocated to these establishments received a stringent process of document prioritisation in preparation for the visits, so that the maximum benefit could be derived.

Access to some of the published primary sources also required visits to the British Library, London as some texts are no longer in print, for example, Colonel Dudley Clarke's, *Seven Assignments*, and this further limited access to primary data for logistical reasons.⁹ It is acknowledged that access to a greater number of primary published sources would have allowed for more research opportunities and potentially added greater value to this dissertation. However, a great deal of value was derived from published primary source that

⁵ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No1, 15. Aug. 1940, see Appendix II

⁶ National Archives PRO DEFE 2/37, No 2 Commando Unit Diary

⁷ The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, LAYCOCK

⁸ *The British Commando: The Origins and Special Training of an Elite Unit*, ed. J. Dunning (Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000)

⁹ *Seven Assignments*, ed. Colonel Dudley Clarke (London: John Cape, 1948)

was obtained for research purposes, such as, Brigadier Durnford-Slater's, *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*.¹⁰ The shortfall in published primary source material is evidence of the difficulties involved in creating an original research project focused on this part of the Commandos' development, where the individual Commando Units were encouraged to be 'as loose as possible...'¹¹

It is also acknowledged that certain aspects of the Commandos' establishment and development through 1940-1941 has not been addressed in any great detail. Most prominent in this respect was the Commandos' role in Combined Operations; however, this topic was thought to be so expansive as to be detrimental to the focus of this dissertation. Examples of literature that address the issues of Combined Operations can be found in B. Fergusson's, *The Watery Maze*, and a book published by the War Office, *The History of Combined Operations 1940-1945*, and again this area could constitute a further line of research enquiry¹²

The oral history provided in an interview conducted with Captain T. Hughes, 47 Commando, Royal Marines has also had little impact on the evidence and arguments presented in this research project.¹³ Again, this is due to the fact that much of the information obtained was associated with Royal Marines. The decision to conduct a research project which focused on the Army Commandos from 1940-1941, had already been finalised and was in the process of being researched when the opportunity to interview Captain T. Hughes presented itself. The prospect of conducting an interview with Captain T. Hughes could not be turned down, because of the chance to gain experience in interview techniques and also due to the fact that valuable research material might have been obtained. Only small elements of Captain T.

¹⁰ *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commando in World War Two*, ed. Brigadier J. Dumford-Slater, (London: Greenhill Books, 2002)

¹¹ National Archives PRO WO 33/1669, Commando Training Instruction No 1, 15. Aug. 1940 see Appendix II

¹² B. Fergusson, *The Water Maze*, (London: Collins; 1961), see also Great Britain, *The History of Combined Operations 1940-1945*, (London: Amphib Warfare Headquarters, 1956)

¹³ Captain T. Hughes, (2010) Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX

Hughes's interview were used as evidence, mostly in relation to topics that transcended all elements of the Commandos, for example, billeting. In criticism of the interview technique, information regarding the Army Commandos and their association with Royal Marine Commandos of which Captain T. Hughes was a member should be investigated. Furthermore, even if Captain T. Hughes was not involved with the Army Commandos during 1940-1941, some form of research evidence may have been derived that was of academic value. However, this interview would still be of great value to a thesis focusing on a similar line of enquiry to this dissertation but concentrating on the Royal Marines Commando, 1943-1945.¹⁴

The research project has, therefore, made some strong contributions to the historiography whilst also recognizing that both the aims of the project and a certain degree of restriction to archive material have influenced the research findings and presented further areas for potential academic study. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of conducting an original research project have been academically testing, presenting alternative methods and requirements of study. It is hoped the endeavours of this research study are represented in both the strength of evidence and the argument underpinning this assessment of the establishment and development of the Second World War Commando.

¹⁴ Captain Trevor Hughes, (2010) *Discussion of 47 Commando Royal Marines*, [Interview], Rotherham, Thomas Lea, 11/07/2010 see Appendix IX

Appendix IX

I, TREVOR L HUGHES, MBE

[PRINT NAME]

Hereby give Thomas Lea permission to use the interview given on the 18th July 2010 in relation to and accordance with his research dissertation for his MA Military History being studied at Chester University 2009/2010.

Signed:-

Transcript- Interview with Captain Trevor Hughes MBE, 47 Commando, Royal Marines, held on the 18th July 2010:-

Me- Hi Trevor could you just tell me who you served with?

Trevor-I was with 47 Commando Royal Marines from the beginning, so 1940 until they were disbanded. I thought I would get these out for you, these are my medals including the MBE.

Me- Wow, my Granddad left me his medals when he past away, this is the defence star isn't it?

Trevor- Yes that is correct.

Me- My Granddad also has the Italy and the Africa stars.

Trevor- These bring a back a few memories, I haven't had them out for a while, I thought you might like to look at them.

Me- Do you still have your Fairburn Sykes Commando Dagger?

Trevor- No one of my lads has it, ummm yes that's right lan's got it. Now this is also not my original berry.

Me- What happened to your original?

Trevor- The lads used it for scouting, so it got a bit tatty, so now I have this brand new berry

Me- So how did you end up serving with the Royal Marines? Were already serving, or did you join up during the war?

Trevor- No I was too young to be in the services when war broke out. Thinking back I would have been called up in the very late part of 1940, maybe early 1941. I had already joined the Home Guard locally, ummm and I had learnt the basics of drill, which is very good in the home guard actually. I had been invited to join by a pal of my Fathers, but he lived on the other side of Chester from where I lived. So I used to bicycle three miles each way, most of the time with a rifle slung over my back, of course we didn't drive cars back in those days. So when I did go to the Marines I had the advantage that I already knew some drill, even though it was an Army drill, the Marines did something different. I went with one advantage, enormously, if you were in something like the Territorial Army or the Home Guard, you kept your uniform and went in your uniform rather than being fitted out when you got there. So I arrived in the uniform which was very impressive. There were thirty... yes about thirty odd people in this... well it was an advanced training cadre, which if you had a matriculation, which in those days was something you didn't automatically get, that meant you had been to a grammar school. By the time I was sixteen and a half, I had qualified and been given an open scholarship to Oxford, which you couldn't go to until you were eighteen.

Anyway, I would have been called up, so with some help from some pals I volunteered [for the Commandos] and because I went in uniform, I didn't have the right cap on but anyway. I got an advantage over most people, so instead of doing the usual twelve weeks on the parade ground, I did only six weeks. So I was sent from near Topsham in Devon, the Marines are still there now, and I was sent to Thurstone Hotel which was the Royal Marines Military School. Absolutely beautiful place to be and I have been back many times since incidentally, we have often been down that way camping or caravanning.

Anyway, I managed to get there and I did very well, although I arrived halfway through a course, I still managed to finish all that was necessary in the course and I was discharged at the end of it with a Second Lieutenants rank. But you had a basic uniform, battle dress, you know the kind I'm talking about?

Me- Yes there called Combat 95's now.

Trevor- Well we were required to have an Officers kaki service dress so we could look decent. But it cost twenty three pounds!

Me- What is that equivalent to today?

Trevor- Oh a good thousand pounds I should think. Well I had about two and six pence, luckily I managed to get in a que for a telephone box outside the Thurlstone Hotel. I got through to my Farther and he said 'Oh I will have a word with your Grandpa and we will see what can be done anyway and commit yourself to whatever you have to we can manage twenty five quid between us'. The next morning in a first class mail, which wouldn't happen these days, a cheque arrived for fifty pounds, signed by a bloke I know all too well called Don Duncan from the Linden Bank in Dale Street, Liverpool. It had just a little scribbled note on a card, saying 'your Father asked me to send this' and at the same time 'you have an account number 1234567 and if you need a bit more don't hesitate to sign a cheque or two.' He sent me about another four cheques and a cheque book in the post. Now this was brilliant and it wasn't until I got back after the War, many years after, and I went to see my Grandfather and said 'what are you doing on Friday' and I said 'well nothing Grandpa', well he said 'I have had a word with your father and your coming into our Masonic Lodge'. Now they had been in many years and I knew nothing about it, now am a very senior Free Mason and I have been all over the place. When I got to the lodge, the Secretary of the Lodge was waiting for me and his name Don Duncan and you realise then its not what you know its who you know. Bloody marvellous it really was, but that's an odd little story on its own

Me- So when you decided to volunteer was that influenced by anything in particular? You read panic over a German invasion and German Paratroops being dropped into Britain

dressed as nuns and butchers.

Trevor- [Laughter] No they were looking for volunteers and I had the requisite knowledge from the Home Guard and the local Captain of the Home Guard said 'oh yes I will put your name forward'. I got in immediately without any effort at all and the first thing I knew there was a train ticket waiting for me to take me from Chester to Exeter and then on to Topsham. It only took a couple of days, obviously I didn't know they were short of people. So yeh then it was sixteen weeks and I was commissioned and I never really looked back. I was posted then to a Royal Marine Battalion who were to go and invade the Azores somewhere around Portugal. I was

then sent to a place near Christchurch, Hampshire to do what turned out to be Landing Craft Training and then that got me sent to Scotland to do some advanced training. But then the Portuguese realised they were going to lose the Azores so they gave up and we just moved in, thank God. Because I was already in the Mobile Company, there were already three Army Commandos, oh and there was one other 10 Inter-allied Commando, which consisted of a bunch of Norwegians and all sorts of other foreigners. It was then decided that the expansion of Commandos couldn't possibly be done by training, training, training more and more men, it would simply take too long. So they already had these Royal Marine Battalions so almost overnight they transformed them into Royal Marine Commando units, getting rid of a lot of people in mean time.

Me- Were a lot of men Return to Unit (RTU)?

Trevor- Yeh, there was nothing wrong with them, they just weren't fit enough. We therefore became the founders in 1942. There were No 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and then 47, never found out why they chose those numbers. And so everything moved on from there.

Me- There was a lot of argument over Royal Marines becoming Commandos at one point, do you remember anything about that?

Trevor- Well yes they were already at sea a lot of them. They couldn't reduce any of the Royal Marine detachments on any of the boats, big boats especially, cruisers and above, because the Marines used to man one of the turrets, they would man X turret out of A, B, Q and X. They already did water training it was part of the job so they eventually had to be chosen.

Me- So what was training like, you hear of fake grave stones being put outside of the gates?

Trevor- Certainly, I haven't been back since, were fairly well trained already, but we had no idea of what was waiting for us there. I had never speed marched until I got there and that was the first day. We did speed marching very nearly everyday, it was only eight miles usually, but in full battle order in about two hours. The Commando memorial at Spean Bridge near Achnacarry is one of my favourite places now. When

ever I go up to Scotland on holiday I like to go and have a little look. Yeh it was a bit rough at times, but you were expected to be able to do anything and to be honest I think there was a certain amount of over expectation at times. But D- Day and particularly the attack on Port-en-Bessin was quite something., we lost a lot of people.

Me- Did the training make you feel like you were prepared for action, did it make you feel ready?

Trevor- Oh yes, if you didn't have the right attitude there was no point in joining the bloody thing. The one thing that we aren't is aggressive, the British are not aggressive by nature, but the one thing we had to be was aggressive. We were issued with, and I had up until about, oh say twenty years ago, I still had my original Colt .45 automatic, but everybody got very uptight about private guns, so it ended up in a river. It was the only sensible thing to do, it was a river in Scotland. Yeh we had a fairly rough time until the 1st November 44' and that was really it, the invasion of Walcheren. Now we went in a full gale, in an ordinary LCA Landing Craft from Oostende all along the Belgium coast, you couldn't go out, you had to stay with five hundred yards of the shore. Then they cleared the mine field and we shot across the shelf, but by god it was rough and people were... no wait am quite wrong we didn't go in LCA's there we went on a Landing Ship, the Belgium Mail Steamer Josephine, which had Landing Craft hanging from its galleys. We had practiced in and around Scotland and we eventually in the middle of the night in a full gale, got in to these bloody things and they were seriously in danger of sinking and we lost umpteen people on the way into shore.

Me- So if you fell in the weight of the equipment you were carrying would drown you?

Trevor- Oh yes, if you ended up in the water you didn't have a chance, we were wearing blow-up Mae West's, but we were carrying all of our ammunition with us, everybody from officers down to the few cooks and people like that we had we had with us, everybody loaded to the gunnels with ammunition. Particularly 'Mills Bombs', which were not big but if you put half a dozen around you they are bloody heavy an don't stay together. Anyway we got ashore and the Germans were in concrete emplacements in massive sand dunes all the way down to the shelf. And I am talking about massive, they were two hundred and fifty feet high, however we got them out eventually, we shot a lot of them and then we liberated Middelburg the town. There were more Dutch traitors in Middelburg than anywhere else and all the Dutch were shooting their own people so then we were busy stopping the Dutch

shooting their own people ohh bloody hell. It was just one of those things, you just had to do it it was a job you had to do. Then I had the adventure of a life time, a week before the crossing of the shelf they discovered they didn't have enough Airborne people. I had been to Hum Airport which is along side Bournemouth and they had been doing parachute training. Parachute training consisted of being let up in a balloon and jumping out of basket from about seven hundred or eight hundred feet. Jumping out the basket was no trouble but landing on the bloody floor was the problem, oh god it was hard. But I managed it and I got parachute wings, which I never wore.

Me- Why not?

Trevor- Because we were warned that the Paras were always short of recruits, they were subject to too many accidents. It turned out after we had done the invasion and capture Port-en-Bessin, Montgomery came to review the Commando and what was left of another one, near Bayeux. And there was a bloke going down following him, very aimiable saying 'Sir are you alright Sir' and the bloke was coming down and taking the notes of people with parachute wings on their shoulders, just, 'oh you name please?', 'Jones', 'Thank you', and in the end about twenty or more were suddenly wisked away and 'oh your going parachute jumping'. By this time I had become a troop officer of the headquarter troop, because early on in the war I had been sent to, just as I was commissioned, I was sent to Saundersfoot in South Wales. Well up on top of the hill by the harbour is the Saundersfoot Hotel, which was the Royal Marines Signals School for the war. So I was sent there and I thought, this is a bloody good job to have, all we did was half a days signal training, all it was- de dar dar dar de de darr dar [laughs]. I can do Morse now in my sleep, course you had a maximum range of about two miles on a number eight set. Anyway, I went down there and I was very fortunate to be down and I was posted from there to 47 because they were short of a signals officer. I eventually became Headquarters Troop Commander, but in the mean time I had had four weeks at Catterick on a Royals Signals course, which was completely useless because I was the last four weeks of a twelve week course. But hey it was nothing more than a bit of luck and a bit of a laugh and there was a lot of nice girls in Catterick so that was about it.

Me- They found that Signals became a very prevalent thing didn't it, when they realised the need for communication in a raiding part.

Trevor- Well it was astonishing, it really was, because we lost a lot of communications on D-day and were, if this was us going ashore on D-day [Trevor

pushes his figure up a table mat], Port-en-Bessin was seven miles away, half between us and the Americans coming ashore here [Trevor points to the right of the mat]. Port-en-Bessin stuck out into the sea, have you ever been to Whitby?

Me- Yes

Trevor- Just like Whiby sticks out into the sea Port-en-Bessin stuck out into the sea and it was vital that it wasn't damaged, because they were bringing PLUTO under there, 'Pipe Line Under The Ocean', from Southampton. There was an oil refinery set up there and they needed the place undamaged so they could get it ashore in a safe harbour. So we attacked it from inland, that's where those photo graphs were taken in actual fact when we went back there, so we captured it from inland without causing any damage. Either side of Port-en-Bissen were big coastal cliffs and the cliffs were full of German batteries all facing out to sea and our job was to get those batteries from inland. So we dropped down there and we did that quite well.

Me- So you must have been trained as quite an advanced climber then after all the training?

Trevor- Well yes, but to be honest this was nothing more than a steep pass and when the first dozen people got up their I started shooting seriously at everyone. The Germans just came out, bang. Really I was quite astonished, well they weren't really German Army troops they were locals who had been drafted in and told to get on with the job.

Me- So what was your relationship say with the Army Commandos, you hear of a lot of rivalry between the Army and Royal Marine Commandos?

Trevor- No, we never met, you never got within a hundred mile of another Commando, it was just one of those things. The only excitement I had was really ummmm gone. We did two raids just after we finished training, we went to New Haven on the South Coast and did two raids from New Haven on Fecamp. Direct raids on the beach in the dark, I only went on one of them and the intention was to pick up the first two or three Germans we could get hold of who would be out on foot patrol. We found some down the beach and there turned out to be about half a dozen of them, they were all Flemish, Dutch they had been forced into service and they were

delighted, 'oh yes Sir', they could speak a little English as well. But we had several Dutchman with us no they weren't they were Belgium's who were bilingual. We weren't ashore for no more than twenty to twenty five minutes, something like that and then back again. It was rough stuff and we were in more danger from the weather than we were from the Germans really or from mines on the beach. Mines were bastards because you couldn't... you couldn't detect them. You could if you took a bloody great big sweeper with you .

Me- I guess you didn't have time for all that business

Trevor- No you didn't, but I suppose that was about it. It was an exciting time, but nothing compared to the 1st November gales going onto Walcheren and then crossing of the shelf s well that was only killing Germans. We kept going until the end of the war and then by the end of it we found ourselves on the North German coast, where was it Danzig or somewhere like that. The greatest surprise of all was getting to Germany and we thought the Dutch were pretty badly off, there was a lot of emaciated looking people. Then we got to bloody Germany and know one could stand up. Thin, haggard, didn't matter what they were police men, officers, they had been pretty much starved into submission I should thin,. I was delighted, bastard Germans. Although, I have done a lot of business with them throughout my business career and I have been to the Hanover Fair with a..... we were selling various items but I never got round to thinking anything of Germans, they were just a bastard nuisance. So other than that, that's the story.

Me- I have been down to Kings College London recently and have read a lot of Major General Laycock's documents and he seems to place an a lot of emphasis on and worry about not so raiding but not getting to go on a raid and the problems with moral and discipline When there's nothing to do

Trevor- Yes, hanging about do nothing.

Me- Did you witness any of this?

Trevor- Oh yes, terrible boredom, in the mobile company, waiting for the invasion, this is long before D-day, waiting for the invasion of the Portuguese territories. We were just in Bournemouth, billeted in private housed, who didn't want us, but they

had no options and our parade ground was just the street. We would try and pass time, •bloody hell, we couldn't take anything on to the sea and if you attempted to go speed marching there was some poor old fellow in a horse and cart in front of you or some of the traffic that was still running. Bearing in mind there wasn't all that much on the road but you would get a bus that was restricted to fifteen miles an hour, oohhhh god. I think the sense of being under a constant obligation to go somewhere, there were some exciting bits in the middle. About thirty, thirty-five of us were, incidentally Doc Foresith who is mentioned on that news letter I gave you. We went to the Orkneys, now this was a foreign country virtually and we went to the Orkney's because there was some thought that there was going to be an invasion led from Norway.

Me- Around Narvik where the early Independent company raids were?

Trevor- Yes, come across from there and there was a danger 'that somebody, we never knew exactly who, would cease the Orkneys because there was a big problem with the bloody Russians. Now theoretically they were on our side, but all they were looking for was, what can we get out of this? So yeh, we went to the Orkneys, well we had a super time up there, about five or six weeks I suppose. We were treated like royalty, they were delighted to see us. I had never been to the Orkneys and neither had many of the people in actual fact and then in-between times we spent two days on Shetland. Now Shetland was completely uninhabited or virtually and we went there to really search out whether there were any spies or find out what we could do, there were a few police people there but very very few. Anyway that was in-between times, so, before the end of 43', winter time 43' and the only reason we were there we had just been up in Scotland anyway so umm.

Me- So what about the billets you mentioned previously? You all stayed in just normal houses with an allowance and you were told to go and find yourself somewhere to stay. Was that beneficial or would you have preferred to have been in barracks? '

Trevor- [Shruggs his shoulders]

Me- So it didn't make any difference at then?

Trevor- If you were fortunate you found nice people to stay with. There were many advantages one way or another but you didn't hear people say 'I was sat in front of the television last night bored to tears'. There wasn't any, there were occasional radio programmes that you might of heard but there was nothing to do. Where as I now spend my time doing *The Telegraph* cross word you couldn't get a *Telegraph*, in many parts of the country they weren't available. So boredom was quite a serious matter, but we had an adventurous time, going across there [Orkney/Shetland Islands]. I quite enjoyed the Shetland bit. We did a raid on Norway and I didn't get within ten miles of the coast. No one every told us why we just turned around and came back. We were on an LCV, Landing Craft Vehicle in those days.

Me- So was that a disappointment more than anything, a feeling that you had wasted your time?

Trevor- No not really it was all very enjoyable. More to the point we were on a ship with Naval Officers who had a Mess. As an Officer I could live in their Mess [Trevor imitates a drinking motion]

Me- Drinking then?

Trevor- Well yes, they hardly paid anything for their stuff, so there were things that got away [laughter]

Me- So did you involve yourself in any activities prior to the War that prepared you for any of the activities that you had to undergo hi the Commandos?

Trevor- I was at school in Liverpool at a Grammar School, an old fashioned Grammar School. Where as nowadays a teacher dare not been seen out .with a boy, we had wonderful teachers who took us on marvellous weekends and marvellous holidays. And we used to drive up in an Austin 7, three of us with our kit, with a guy called Gus Burdenson who taught geography nominally when he was really a graduate of English literature and finished up as a professor of English literature at the University of Winnipeg. He went on the last boat to cross the Atlantic at the end of the war. No reason for it that was just when he was booked to go. Yeh we had a lot of wonderful tours all around Buttermere, Red Pike, High Stile, High Crag, Great Gable, Green Gable, Skidor

Me- So that set you up well for the speed marching then?

Trevor- Absolutely right, bloody marvellous and when we went to Achnacarry I could wizz up bloody Helvellyn without any effort at all. Now a lot of people found it very difficult. I was not all that good at speed marching but I have no idea why just quite a few fellas were faster than me that was all.

Me- Did you feel at the time that you were involved in something revolutionary or cutting edge training for the time?

Trevor- Umm [shruggs his shoulder] to be honest I enjoyed the actual parade ground stuff, I really did. It was wonderful though going back to Achnacarry and being call 'Sir', 'Yes Sir over there Sir', 'what can I get for you Sir?', bloody marvellous.

Hey it didn't really matter as long as you got the right numbers. So what exactly are you studying at university?

Me-I am doing a Masters in Military History.

Trevor- Ah well, its no effort to talk about.

Me- Yen I really enjoy it, I think to be honest in my generation, well its not as bad I as it used to be, partly because of the expose that current wars have given to the forces. But I think there is a huge under appreciation of peoples sacrifices in the past.

Trevor- Its true, but then it was no different with our generation in terms of the First World War. Nothing was ever said about it, my Father certainly never talked about it. It may as well have not happened it was talked about so little.

Me- There's a fella who writes in The Times called Colonel Kemp and he stated that three hundred and twenty one people have died in Afghanistan so far and then went

on to say that those numbers used to occur every day in World War 2. Three hundred odd blokes lost their lives every day.

Trevor- Yes, there was a list published every day, which I got as the Headquarters Troop Commander and you could only go so far down. But you didn't look at the names, you looked at the units they were with. Thinking oh gosh they will be wanting some men.

Me- So how did looking at all those names everyday make you feel?

Trevor- [Shruggs his shoulders] Survive, a totally wrong attitude really, sympathy up until a point but. Well my names not on that list so...

Me- So what about your supply of equipment? You here of the original Independent Companies being hugely underequipped. I heard of a one Major in an Independent Company who had to plan a raid on Norway with a holiday brochure as his guide.

Trevor- No we were very well equipped I have to say. I got sent on a Bren Carrier course so I could learn how to carry a Bren. I went there for oh, am not sure how long it was I went there for three weeks. The Carrier was super manoeuvrable , but the problem was getting in to it. It had high armoured sides and the engine was at the back and you drove it from the front on the right hand side. Now nearly everything was being drive from the left in those days and there was an armoured plated front that you could just about see over. The seat had about three different driving positions so you could either drive without being able to see anything or you could drive with the possibility of being shot. So yeh, that was at Keswick. a four week driving course for a Bren Carrier in one of my favourite places. And we were hi the Derwentwater Hotel, there is an Officers Mess, yeh so I was very fortunate.

Me- So if you could describe your War in a couple of words what would you say. Would it be words or excitement, regret... ?

Trevor- One word- lucky. Of course there was an awful lot of blokes who weren't. I had a bullet skim my small finger on my left had, I have a piece of shrapnel in my left arm, my left leg got blown up but they did a good job putting it back to gather again.

Worst of all, I was luckily in one of the Commandos that wore helmets, some fellows just wore there berets in action. A bullet entered the top of my helmet at an angle so it just scraped the top of my head and entered out the back of my helmet, very lucky. It sounds like a terrible thing to say, but the war came at just the time for me. I can say I had a marvellous time and I got a decent set of medals from it.

Me- Thank you so much for talking to me Trevor its been a great experience

Trevor- No problem at all.

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