Richard Uniacke Denny Townsend [5A22]

Richard on the day of his marriage



Richard's wife Ursula



Announcement of Marriage

TOWNSEND : OAKES.—On March 23, 1943, at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, S.W.1, LIEUT. RICHARD U. D. TOWNSEND, R.N.V.R., only son of Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Denny Townsend, Merton, Queenstown, Co. Cork, to URSULA YVONNE OAKES (W.R.N.S.), only child of the late Lieut.-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes, M.C., N.Z.A. (late R.A.), and Mrs. Oakes, Rye, Sussex, and Auckland, New Zealand.

Marlborough College



Tom Quad, Christ Church College, Oxford



Repton School, Derbyshire



Family Picture – Repton 1962



Richard Townsend
An account of his Experiences in the Second World War

Introduction

I had an odd War. After 10 months in BBC intelligence I joined my sister and her husband who were ferrying gelignite across the Pentland Firth in a 15 ton yacht. This was required for the building of the underground oil tanks in Scapa Flow. Soon afterwards we expanded the business and I commanded a 60ft Scottish East Coast Motor drifter carrying general cargo across the Firth.

When this came to an end in 1941 I joined the Intelligence Corps on the strength of my languages. Having completing my training at Winchester and awaiting posting, the Adjutant received a letter from the War Office asking if I would be interested in being interviewed in connection with a confidential sea-going job. I went up to London and found myself at the War Office standing before a Naval Captain with piercing blue eyes. He was Captain Slocum, the head of the section dealing with clandestine transport. I do not remember much about the interview. He certainly did not give me much idea of what was involved, nor did he, as far as I can remember, ask me about my competence in seamanship or in French. But I must have made a good impression because he offered me a month's trial, at the end of which either I would be commissioned as a Sub Lt, or I would go back to the army.

Joining N51

It was a great relief to get away from the frustrations of Winchester, and in February I was on my way to Dartmouth to join the Navy as an unpaid Lance Corporal on Le Dinan, N51 (MFV 2020).

N51 was a 65ft Concarneau trawler built of 2" oak planks on oak frames, massively strong and a wonderful sea boat. She had a reliable diesel engine which gave a speed of about seven knots and had a belt take-off which powered the trawling winch. She had two masts a main with mainsail and foresail and a mizzen with a riding sail which we regularly set when we were at sea. She was fitted out for trawling with all the necessary gear. The crew lived aft, the galley was on deck abaft the wheelhouse, while the fish hold had been gutted and converted into Officer's quarters. In heavy weather the movement in the wardroom was terrible, while, although rather cramped, the crew had much more pleasant conditions aft.

Le Dinan (N51 MFV 2020) The Crew



The crew consisted of six ratings, a coxswain, a P.O. Engine Room Artificer as engineer, a stoker, a seamen, a cook and a wireless operator. The crew were an experienced lot who had already done one operation, called "Anson" using La BRISE,

sailing from Isles of Scilly on Christmas Day 1941. The skipper was a RNR officer from Aberdeen, his Number 1 was Sub Lt Daniel Lomenech, a Frenchman who had joined the Royal Navy. Daniel knew the local conditions intimately on the Breton coast being himself in the fishing industry and a native of Pont Aven, south of Concarneau. I believe the objective of the operation was to land supplies in the Glennan Islands, west of Lorient. Unfortunately this first venture ended in disaster. The skipper was killed on the outward passage as a result of an accident with a box of hand grenades and Daniel brought La Brise home from the Pointe de Penmarch. The voyage proved that the channel could be crossed in a ship of this description by night, and the French coast approached in safety by day.

Working up Exercise with N51

A lieutenant RNR was appointed the new skipper of N51 and we were ordered to do a trial voyage from Dartmouth to the Isles of Scilly. We sailed in daylight in clear weather so there were no problems with navigation and we anchored off St Marys. The next day we motored over and anchored off Sampson Island. The dinghy was put over the side and Jasper (Coxswain Arthur Lawn) and I took the oars with Lt X in the stern and we rowed towards the land. As we approached it, Lt X raised a tommy gun and directed a whole magazine of bullets at the shore, just past my ear, practically deafening me in the process. The next few hours were spent in wasting enormous amounts of ammunition to no discernible end, and certainly raising questions in the minds of the inhabitants of St Mary's, who would have no doubt heard the noise. Lt X had furthermore compromised our security by going ashore and drinking in the pubs with a tommy gun slung over his shoulder and other armaments about his person.

After the nonsense on Sampson we were to sail to Dartmouth by night. For some reason the plan was to heave-to some 5 miles off the Lizard and at dawn to continue on to Dartmouth. We arrived at the spot about midnight and Lt X stopped engine and said to Jasper "Hoist the main sheet". Jasper looked at me, and I looked at Jasper, and without a word we made a neat coil of the main sheet and hoisted it on the signals' halyard. X was not too pleased. At dawn he started the engine and gave us a course to steer, which was supposed to give us a landfall somewhere around the Lizard. With visibility not very good we continued for an hour or two, but with no sign of land and we all knew that something was very wrong. Eventually X asked me, "Do you know anything about navigation?" "A bit" I answered, which was an understatement because I had had a lot of experience doing long passages in a small craft. I checked over his workings and found that he had made some elementary blunder. I pointed out that our present course would eventually put us on the French coast and that all he had to do was to steer north and make a landfall. So we arrived back in Dartmouth, all of us seething with discontent and total lack of confidence in our CO.

My month's probation was now up and I went up to London for a decision about my future. I must have had a good report for they asked me to stay on and offered me a commission. I knew that the whole set-up was just in my line, and I had been very happy and had totally integrated with the chaps, but there was the snag of X. Summoning up my courage, I said that I would be very happy to stay on, but that under no circumstances was I prepared to serve under X. There was a pregnant pause and I felt perhaps I had spoken out of turn, but I was given a sympathetic hearing as I told all that I have just described. The upshot was that X was sent elsewhere and I was commissioned as Sub Lt. I had no naval training whatsoever, which was perhaps an advantage in the special task of operating these fishing boats but made some difficulties for me on the admin side, especially when I got my own command.

New Skipper, new Home Base

Soon after this we were moved our base from Dartmouth to Falmouth and Daniel Lomenech was appointed CO, with myself as his Number One. He was obviously the man for the job and we all had a great respect for his seamanship and drive. The ship's company was devoted to him and would have done anything with him aboard. There was a very free and easy relationship. Officers and ratings were on first name terms, but there was total efficiency. Every member of the crew knew his job and did it to the very best of his ability. We were, for security purposes, called the In-Shore-Patrol and N51 was painted grey like any warship.

On the French coast we had to look like any other local fishing boat with our port of registration numbers painted in large and flamboyant lettering on the bulwarks forward. Each port has its own style, and it was necessary to get the design right as well as choose a plausible number. The Breton fishermen who had escaped and were working out of Newlyn were a useful source for such information. The fishing fleet over in France was naturally very short of material, especially paint, so the boats looked incredibly worn and scruffy. We had to paint ours in the bright and cheerful colours dear to the Bretons, but at the same time hide the fact that the paint was new. It is surprisingly difficult to put on fresh paint so that it looks old and I think that probably the first time we went across we appeared rather new. As time went on we worked out a number of techniques for achieving that weather-worn appearance that we needed in order to pass for the real thing. One particularly useful trick was to throw iron filings on wet paint and later hose it down with salt water. The next day there was a wonderfully rusty surface. We also had to paint on a French flag on each bow to comply with the German regulations.

Not only did the ship have to look right; so did we. We were issued with canvas trousers and smocks as well as peaked caps, so that we looked more or less like Breton fishermen. In case of a challenge Daniel would be able to answer in French, and indeed my French was good enough to fool most Germans. In addition we had to be able to behave like fishermen and so we regularly shot and hauled a trawl, washed down, stowed it, and did everything that a real fishing boat would do. We reckoned that if a German craft became suspicious of us we would immediately shoot the trawl to persuade him that we were what we were pretending to be. We were of course scarcely armed. We had Lewis and Hotchkiss guns as AA weapons to protect us when we no longer had air cover, which was normally given us until dusk on our way out and from dawn on the return journey. We were also issued with tommy guns, colt revolvers, hand grenades, commando knives etc. Our only hope, in the case of being challenged, was to get alongside the challenging vessel shoot away its aerial, lob hand grenades into the radio room, wheelhouse, and engine room and take the ship by storm. This plan, luckily, was never put to the test and there was in reality virtually no chance that such a plan would work, but at least it did something for our morale which was always under pressure when on operations from the feeling of isolation and helplessness.

In case of capture our cover-story was that we had been sent over to pick up a party of escaped airmen. The essential thing was to conceal the fact this was the line for conveying agents and information, particularly important in 1942 and 1943 before the RAF had perfected the technique of night landings. We did not think that the Germans would fall for this story line nor did our London HQ do anything to train us to stand up to interrogation. We just hoped that if we were caught we would be dealt with by the Kriegsmarine rather than the Gestapo. It was believed, whether correctly or not, that there was a Gestapo manned trawler similar to ours keeping an eye on the French Fishing Fleet. In doing what we were doing we were not breaking the rules of Naval Warfare. Contrary to the rules of land fighting there is no necessity to wear uniform aboard ship or to show one's true colours so long as one does not open fire under a false flag. We kept a White Ensign handy to hoist in case of such an emergency.

Operation "Pillar West"

Our first operation, in April 1942, was "Pillar West", the objective of which was to plant boxes for posting mail at various points along the coast. We were given submersible steel canisters with chains to attach them to the pillar buoys which are all along the main sea lanes of the French Coast. In carrying out this operation we followed the pattern which became the standard one. The important thing was to pass 20 miles west of Ushant in darkness. In summer this meant that we were uncomfortably far south by dusk, but we did have air cover, usually one or two Beaufighters which would pick us up when we were 30 miles or so from the Bishop Rock Light on the South West corner of Scilly. By early morning we would pick up the Ar Men light at the western extremity of Chausse de Sein and by mid afternoon would reach the area west of the Iles de Glennan where we would rendezvous with the small boat which would come out from Port Manech. This time we followed this route, though there was no question of meeting up with another boat, as the arrangements for this had not yet been set up in Brittany.

On our way down we stopped alongside two or three of the huge pillar buoys which marked dangers. The weather was quite exceptionally calm and we had no difficulty in attaching our canisters. In a swell it would have been dangerous, probably impossible. In addition to the submersible canisters we were to put ashore a steel box about 18" x 12" x 6". Its lid was held on by nuts which had to be undone in a certain order or a charge would be detonated large enough to destroy the contents and kill anyone interfering with the box. This was to be a "poste restante" for intelligence material. We heard subsequently that it killed a couple of local fishermen who had found it and opened it, thinking that it might contain something of value. The idea was to hide this box on the Ile Verte, an islet about three kilometres offshore from Port Manech. Jasper and I were designated to plant this box. N51 stood in towards the shore and about half way between the land and the Iles de Glenan. We put the dinghy over the side, hoisted the sail, and set off. It was a lovely sunny day and there were lots of small boats about, holiday makers we supposed. Inevitably we had to pass quite close to some of them and we exchanged cheery waves, though we did not feel too happy as our dinghy was unmistakably English, quite different from the local craft. However all went well and we rejoined N51 and set course for the Chausse de Sein buoy and eventually returned to Scilly. The operation had been a complete success in that it proved the feasibility of getting across and back with no difficulty. The post boxes on the other hand proved useless and were not tried again.

Le Dinan (N51 MFV 2020) on Operation Pillar West April 1942



Escape of Remy Family

Meanwhile much was happening in France. Remy, the head of the network with whom our organisation was in contact was anxious to get his wife and four children to safety, as the Germans were beginning to close in on him. He had arranged for a fishing boat from Pont Aven to be our contact with the shore. She was called Les Deux Anges and was about 25ft long. She had a cockpit, an engine compartment and a sail locker, as well as a fish hold. It was usual for the German Authorities

to search fishing boats leaving and entering port. This was done by soldiers who had no knowledge of boat construction. They would search the cockpit, engine room and fish hold and not realise that there was some space unaccounted for. A net or some such gear placed over the hatch concealed the entrance to the sail locker, which was about 18" wide and perhaps 3ft high at the centre. This fishing boat was to become an essential part of our line of communication and concealed a large number of agents and their mail and stores from June 1942 to the autumn of 1943 when the last successful operation took place. The three members of the crew of Les Deux Anges were absolutely magnificent and at enormous risk to themselves made contact with us in all weathers. We brought out our agent, the celebrated Remy, and his family during June. In his "Memoire d'un Agent Secret de la France Libre" he gives a full description of this operation and includes a facsimile of his eldest daughter's written account of the crossing.

Escape of Remy and his family



It was beautiful June (1942) weather with short nights so we were rather anxious about passing Ushant. However all went well and we made our rendezvous on the day after our departure. We took on board Remy and his wife Edith and 4 children (Catherine, Jean-Claude, Cecile, Michel) ranging from about 10 years old to 18 months. In addition there was a young man who I believe went back to France and was caught and executed by the Germans. The crew were absolutely thrilled to have the children aboard and made a great fuss of them. I have delightful photographs of this including one of Cookie Nash holding the baby. With aircraft flying over and the possibility of fishing boats being near us, the children and Edith had to remain below until dusk, which was tough on them, for as always there was quite a lot of movement. The next morning we were making our way north across the Channel and they had the run of the deck, thoroughly enjoying themselves though this was marred by one of our beaufighter escort crashing into the sea. She was flown by a Belgian Pilot who, like many of our escort, relieved the tedium by flying low over our masts and then making a tight turn and climbing. He did this once too low, his wing tip caught the sea, he catapulted up and then dived into the water. We steamed at once to the spot where he had disappeared but all we could see was a pair of wheels floating on the surface.

We eventually arrived in Scilly and the family boarded an MGB and sailed for Dartmouth. Not only had we brought back our passengers but also there were several large bundles of papers. These contained extremely valuable information about the German Military. Much of this was brought out by the Inshore Patrol. Particularly important was a document in the form of a plan for the coastal defences of France, which was originally smuggled out of the German HQ by a painter and decorator who concealed it in a roll of wall paper, passed it to Remy who eventually passed it, via one of our boats, to London.

Arrival of P11 (MFV 2021)

In early December 1942 a new fishing boat joined the Flotilla. This was P11 (MFV2021) a Pinnace from Guilvinec. She was about 40 ft long, square sterned with a small wheelhouse aft, and fitted with gallows for trawling but the winch was missing. She was powered by a Kelvin 88 Diesel which gave her speed of 8-9 knots quite appreciably faster than N51. Her fish hold had been stripped out providing very basic living accommodation with bunks, a couple of primus stoves for cooking but, as I remember well, she had no heads. She was intended for summer operations, when her extra speed would pay off and primitive living conditions would be of lesser importance.

There was one particular operation coming up and we were anxious to get going on working her up at sea. There was however the problem of finding a suitable winch; eventually one was found in Newlyn and brought to Falmouth Dockyard by lorry. It arrived on a Saturday afternoon, when the dockyard was closed. We now had the problem of lifting it off the lorry which could not wait over until Monday. There were rails which ran along the quay, and on these were tall mobile steam cranes. One of these had been working quite close and still had a head of steam, so we decided that we would commandeer it. Chief Fryer and I climbed up into the cab and started pulling levers, of which there were several. By experiment, trial and error (mostly error), we found how to operate the crane; the winch rose gracefully from the lorry and was lowered onto the deck of P11, where we bolted it down. A great success we thought. On the Monday morning we had a furious visit from an Admiralty official responsible for work at the dockyard. It appeared that the crane driver’s shop steward was not amused by the invasion of his men's patch and it was with some difficulty that a strike was averted. It took

a lot of calming down and explaining about the important operational requirements that had led us to act as we had, but in the end it was all smoothed over. P11 was able to sail down to the Isles of Scilly, in company with N51 and we got on with working up and finally returned to Falmouth.

P11 (MFV 2021)
New Grimsby, Tresco, prior to Op Guillotine August 1942



Preparations were now made for the most ambitious operation that was ever done by our group. The objective was to deliver a ton of SOE stores, weapons and explosives to a crabber that would rendezvous with us in the area of Ile d'Yeu, some 100 miles south east of the Glennan Islands. The stores were contained in submersible canisters, similar to those we had hung on buoys, each weighing about 50 kilograms. As we started to stow them under the floorboards of the fish hold one of them came open and inside it was an instruction leaflet in Flemish, which did not seem such a good idea, if the destination was Western France. Fortunately, all the rest were in French and in order.

Again we sailed for Scilly and painted up. This was a bit more complicated as we needed Guilvinec numbers for the northern part of the coast and Les Sables d'Olonne numbers further south, requiring a strip of canvas with the Guilvinec number on it to be nailed over the LSID numbers on the bulwarks. It was going to take 48 hours to get to the rendezvous where we were to meet up with a crabber, whose number and description we were given. Having contacted her there was a complicated system of recognition signals something like this: - We were to empty a bucket over the port side. He would reply by luffing up and letting his jib flap, which was then followed by two equally silly signals typical of SOE cloak and dagger stuff.

We made our landfall at Penmarch and sailed down the coast at night keeping well outside the convoy route. As we passed to seaward of St Nazaire we could see flashes and searchlights in the sky as the RAF pounded the port. It not only entertained us as a spectacle but also raised our spirits, as the war was not going particularly well for the Allies at this time. I do not think that any of us gave a thought to the suffering and casualties of the civilian population. The following morning we arrived in the rendezvous area, but there was no sign of the boat we were due to meet. In the distance we could see two or three and decided to investigate the one most like the description we had been given. We gave it a recognition signal but there was no reply, so Daniel decided that we would reveal ourselves and, if we had chosen the wrong boat, we would scuttle her and bring the crew back to the UK. As it turned out she was the right boat, but it was only the skipper who knew anything about the arms we were bringing. There were other fishing boats around and aircraft were likely to fly over at any moment, so we had to wait for darkness to transfer the canisters.

While Daniel and the skipper were making final arrangements Jasper and I rowed over to the crabber and did a bit of trading, fish for bully beef, if I remember correctly. Came the dark, we worked like mad to get the canisters from the bilges, lift them up on deck, then carry them aft and pass them across to the other boat. I remember the skipper, an enormous, powerful man, walking the heaving deck as if it was a solid pavement with a heavy canister, under each arm, as if he was carrying a couple of pillows. The transfer complete we set off for home and arrived back two days later. We felt that we had achieved a lot.

During the summer 1942 we did successful operations with P11 and N51 and became quite familiar with the German naval routine. We knew the Arado seaplanes that passed over every morning, the Norwegian Whalers turned minesweepers and several times came quite close to U-Boats being escorted on their way south from Brest, once being near enough to hear music played over the tannoy. I remember one occasion when fog came down as we were hanging about waiting for darkness to make the passage past Ushant. Daniel decided not to wait for dusk and to use the fog to pass within a few miles of the island in daylight. As we came abeam of the lighthouse the fog cleared and there we were in a flat calm sea bathed in bright evening sunshine. Immediately the lighthouse began to call us with a signalling lamp. There was nothing we could do but carry on and hope that they would not send out an E-Boat to investigate. Nightfall came as a very great relief.

High Speed Fishing Boat, MFV 2023

It was obvious that the slowness of the fishing boats added greatly to our difficulties, and it was decided to build a special craft that would have the appearance of a Pinnace like P11 but would be in fact a high speed craft capable of some 20 knots. In addition to twin engines for speed she would have a smaller central engine to enable her to cruise like a fishing boat at about 7 knots. The new Pinnace (MFV 2023 as she was called) proved extremely useful for nipping in and out quickly in summer months. With this craft due for delivery in 1942 it was decided that Daniel would command her and that they would bring into the flotilla a vessel similar to N51, which I would command.

President Herriot, A04, MFV 2022

In October 1942 I was sent to Shoreham by Sea to oversee the restoration of my new command in the Lady Bee Yacht Yard. She was a sad sight, dirty, neglected and disfigured by an enormous rusty superstructure. She had been used in the Thames Estuary for spotting sea mines dropped by parachute. Despite her bedraggled appearance, I fell in love with her immediately. A 66ft Concarneau trawler, she was built of stout oak similar in design to N51, but with sweeter lines and somewhat bigger and more powerful. She was called President Herriot, but had been given the number A04. Eventually she was designated MFV 2022 in keeping with the rest of the flotilla, but I shall refer to her as A04 as I have done with N51 and P11.

I made contact with Mr Burgoyne the manager of the yard, who was extremely interested in the conversion and most helpful, as was Mr Webb the Admiralty overseer. A04 was the only traditional craft in for repair, the others being Coastal Forces vessels. I discussed in detail with our London Office what was needed and they gave me a free hand in the restoration. A04 was put in dry dock, thoroughly checked over and re-caulked. The fish hold was gutted and the space was turned into a wardroom and wireless room. It made comfortable living quarters and had plenty of bunks for the use by the agents we would be carrying in and out. The crew's quarters, contrary to normal naval practice were aft of the engine room and reached by a hatch leading down from the galley, forward of which was the wheel house. I was determined that the crew should have the best possible conditions to live in, and to the surprise of the contractors insisted on a dove-grey colour scheme with bunk boards picked out in scarlet. When the crew finally joined they were amazed at the cheerful appearance of the mess deck and I have absolutely no doubt that it was an important factor in creating good morale.

There were a load of details to see to, finding and replacing all the trawling pulleys, gallows etc., designing and making stands for our four pairs of AA Bren guns which could be quickly mounted during the hours of darkness when we were on operations and hidden in the nets in daylight. There were also sails to be supplied, a foresail, a mainsail and a mizzen which ultimately were to be our salvation. There was also special radio equipment being fitted in order to enable us to communicate direct with the Intelligence Radio Centre at Bletchley. A "wizard of the wireless" (Captain "Tommy" Tucker, Royal Signals) would come down from there from time to time to fit us out with the latest gadgetry, all requiring an extra aerial channelled into the mast, as obviously we could not be seen to have a radio aerial when masquerading as a fishing boat on the French Coast.

President Herriot, A04, MFV 2022 undergoing overhaul in Shoreham



When the conversion was nearly complete, the crew arrived from the Patrol Service depot at Lowestoft. The Coxswain was Ralph Hockney, from Lowestoft and the Chief Engineer Johns, from Milford Haven, both fishermen. They were quite

superb in their calm quiet efficiency and very soon became real friends to me. The rest of the crew consisted of 2 seamen, a stoker, a cook and a radio operator. They all turned out to be first class. Especially good was a Breton rating Raymond Leroux, on loan from the French Navy, who was a mine of local knowledge and a fine seaman. He integrated perfectly with the others and I do not think that he ever felt an outsider. Sub Lt John Garnett joined us in November 1942 as First Lt, his first appointment after training at King Alfred. Tall boyish and enormously enthusiastic, he had a loud voice and earned himself the nickname "Foghorn", in the flotilla. He became a great friend and we have kept up over the years.

All was now ready and we started out for Falmouth forming part of a convoy. However we soon developed engine trouble and after a number of unscheduled stops arrived in Falmouth in early December 1942. A04's engine was a Deutz, German made, and spares were extremely scarce in Britain. The agent for Deutz in London had overhauled the engine in Shoreham and he was now summoned down to Falmouth and after a struggle managed to get it to perform properly. However it never was easy but Chief Johns got to know its idiosyncrasies and was able to keep it going. When it was running well it was very good, but it had nasty habits, one of which was for the exhaust system to catch fire, throwing sparks high into the air from a pipe which ran up on the starboard side of the wheel house. This happened one night on the French coast, when we had two agents aboard, who were somewhat shaken. It must have been visible for miles. To contain the sparks we commandeered the cook's colander and held it down with a wire, which was fine until the solder melted. The bowl was blown off into the sea whilst the two handles dangled forlornly from the wire. Clearly this was an operational hazard, so when we got back to Falmouth, Mr Burton the Civilian engineer attached to HQ, came down and prescribed a remedy. This was to run the exhaust through a box into which water could be pumped from the cooling system. It worked admirably as a fire extinguisher but unfortunately at the cost of covering everybody and everything with sooty drops. When the water was not on Raymond and I used it for baking squid, quite delicious!

New Grimsby, Tresco, President Herriot (A04 MFV 2022)



A present for General de Gaulle

We now worked hard to become ready for operations, and in February 1943 went down to Scilly for operation "Hawkins", the objective of which was to put in two agents and gear and bring out two other agents and their mail. The first attempt was called off after we hit bad weather, but a few days later we set out. Our orders were to go to the usual rendezvous to meet up with Narval, a much larger vessel into which had been built a secret compartment to hide agents and gear. We were told that there was a chance that we might be seeing our old friend Les Deux Anges. We came to the position in pretty awful weather with a strong south east wind and heavy swell and waited about until the RV time had expired at mid-day. The question now was whether to go on waiting in case either Les Deux Anges or Narval would turn up or to go and see if one of the several fishing boats we could see within a radius of 3 or 4 miles might be Narval, not in position, as quite often happened with fishing boats who were not very fussy about the exact position for rendezvous. We decided on the latter course and went to investigate two or three boats none of which turned out to be Narval. In the meantime Les Deux Anges, which had made a late start and was greatly slowed down by a head sea, saw us move away and was forced to return to Port Manech. Realising too late what had happened, we prepared to make the rendezvous on the following day. We sailed out to sea to get seaward of the convoy route and shot our trawl. This was our usual pattern, as it was a more comfortable way of spending the night and provided fish for us and for Les Deux Anges, for in meeting us she had little time for fishing.

Next morning we arrived on time at the RV and soon Les Deux Anges appeared making pretty heavy weather of the swell. We had our two agents to put aboard her as well as a large number of packages. There was no question of Les Deux Anges being able to come alongside, as our rolling would have smashed her side in. We steamed slowly ahead while her skipper steamed a parallel course and people jumped across as best they could. The packages were flung across as was the enormous amount of mail that les Deux Anges was bringing out. There was a good deal of confusion, but in the end everything was sorted out and both boats parted. The agents we had picked up were Remy, who had gone back to France by air, and was now coming out with the Gestapo on his heels and with him was Fernand Grenier a highly placed member of the French Communist party, who had been in hiding for months and was in very poor health. He was clearly a very sick man and his state of health was not helped by the weather conditions.

Remy was clearly displeased at the failure of the previous day's rendezvous. I explained to him that I was expecting Narval. He replied that Narval had been destroyed by a RAF raid on Lorient a fortnight before and that this information had been sent to London. How or why it had never been passed on to me, I cannot say. The failure to do so almost ended in disaster. Remy was particularly bothered about a very large parcel that he had brought out. This was eventually carried down to the Wardroom where with a fine flourish he undid the wrapping to reveal an azalea over 2 ft high covered with red flowers. My first reaction was to think,"Why all this fuss over a bloody plant when conditions are like this?" Remy then told us how before going back to France he had met General and Madame de Gaulle and asked them what they would like him to bring back to them when he returned. The General asked for a box containing some of the soil of Lorraine and Madame de Gaulle asked for a flower growing in French earth. He brought this out under the noses of the Germans, who were looking for him, risking his life to make such a gesture. This was typical of the courage of the man. He then showed us a beautiful inlaid wooden box containing some of the soil of Lorraine and, as a make weight, two bottles of 1807 brandy.

We set off north, the weather conditions continuing poor, which in a way suited us, because we felt that the Germans would not have been inclined to inspect us, but was very tough on our sick passenger. Once Ushant was abeam I went below for a few hours sleep after being on deck since 4 am that morning - my usual pattern on operations. Soon after falling asleep I became aware of the alarm ringing for action stations and the sound of running feet as the men rushed to man the AA guns. An aeroplane had flown over illuminating us with a brilliant searchlight. We had no idea as to its identity and waited anxiously to see whether it would return to bomb or machine-gun us. Nothing further happened and we made a safe return to Scilly in a heavy sea and very poor visibility. We had not been able to make radio contact with the result that we had no air cover. An MTB was awaiting us at Scilly to convey our passengers and mail to Dartmouth, but the sea was so rough that they could only make much reduced speed and so put into Falmouth instead. We later learned that an anti-submarine Whitley of Coastal Command had reported an unlit fishing boat off Ushant. We felt pleased that a new boat and a new crew had carried out a successful operation under difficult conditions.

During the spring we did some successful operations, luckily in better weather. There was now a new complication in the form of a large minefield south east of Ushant, from the approaches to Brest down to West of Penmarch. It had been laid by our submarines to catch the U-Boats that were constantly passing up and down the coast between Bordeaux, Lorient, St Nazaire and Brest, as we had often seen from close to. This meant that we had now to keep well out to sea for much longer than before and it made the navigation that much more difficult, as we could not pick up a landfall until we were near our RV point.

Inshore Patrol Flotilla at Helford

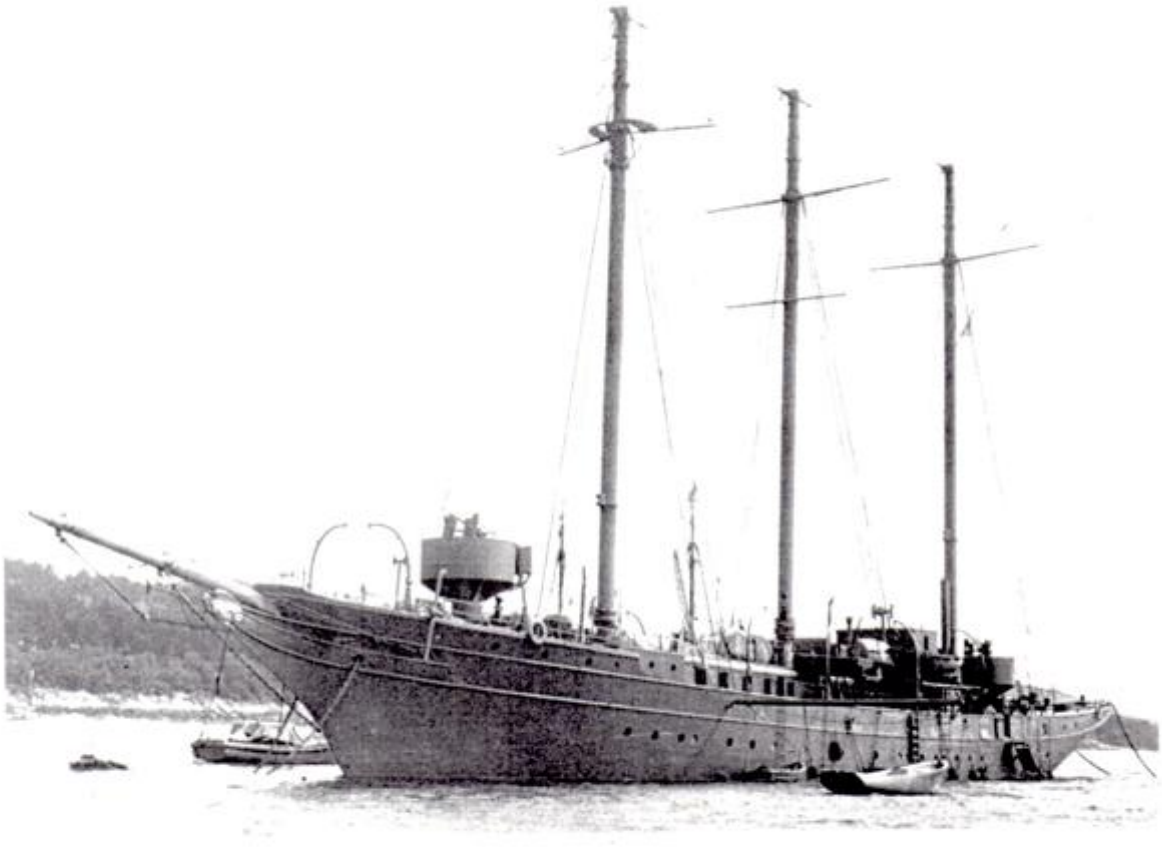
In June 1943 the flotilla which now included N51, P11, A04, MFV2023, and a tunny boat as a store ship was moved to the Helford River from its base in Falmouth. Our HQ was HMY Sunbeam II, a magnificent three-masted schooner owned by Lord Runciman, the shipping magnate. Communications were maintained using special SIS W/T to give additional security. Sunbeam acted as the communications centre for ships at sea, making the IPF a self contained unit, connected to DDOD(I) HQ by "scrambler" telephone. SOE had offices ashore.

MFV 2023 had by now been commissioned and between May and September successfully completed five operations. Her performance was admirable, and her high speed enabled operations to continue through the shortest nights of summer in spite of heavily increased German air patrols north and west of Ushant. Daniel Lomenech was her CO, until he went off to join submarines in the late summer, and a French officer, Jean-Jacques Tremayne, took over. . It was the task of A04 to go down to Tresco and act as back-up. In addition to this we did regular training in fishing and practising what we would do in case we were challenged by a German patrol.

Sunbeam II before The Second World War



Sunbeam II anchored in the Helford River July 1943



Operation Inbred

In September 1943 MFV 2023 went on operation "Inbred I" in order to pick up agents and mail, but Les Deux Anges did not turn up. In October A04 was sent down to try "Inbred II" which had the same objective as "Inbred I". The weather was bad with strong south west winds. We left Tresco, with the plan of going as far as the Bishop Rock and reviewing the situation when we got there. As we got out to the open sea the engine decided to stop due to a clogged filter, but the Chief, quite unmoved, managed to clear it as we looked somewhat apprehensively at the foaming rocks under our lee. We then turned into the wind and punched our way against massive swells until we reached the lighthouse. Clearly there was no hope of getting across, so HQ told us to return to Tresco. A fortnight later on October 18th 1943 "Inbred III" was set up. We set off in very unpromising weather with a rapidly falling glass and a south east wind, but we made reasonable speed in spite of the big swell and continued south until we were ready to turn east to close the land. Soon after we had turned the wind rose reaching a speed that we estimated to be between 70 and 80 knots. There was now no realistic chance of making the rendezvous, as the swell would make it impossible for at least three days, by which time the deadline would be passed. Furthermore, we were in considerable danger since obviously we could not run to leeward for shelter. The security of the line was therefore under threat. With these points in mind I decided to turn back.

We first had to make our offing to clear the mine field, which meant driving straight into the eye of the wind. The seas were huge and the wind so strong that in the squalls the sea went flat, then as the wind eased the sea rose higher than before. A04 was magnificent, she rose like a duck to the waves throwing the spray higher than the masthead, shuddered, checked and then forged ahead until after what seemed an eternity we had made sufficient offing and at last we could bear off away and bring the wind onto our port quarter. Almost immediately there was an almighty crash, the engine started to race and the whole ship vibrated. We had struck submerged wreckage and damaged our propeller, losing, it afterwards transpired, the whole of one blade and about half another. Even at greatly reduced speed the engine appeared to be losing oil and the Chief was worried that the extreme vibration might fracture the tail shaft. There was nothing for it, but to stop engine and to use our sails to get home. Foresail, main and mizzen gave us a speed of about 2 to 3 knots but greatly cut down the violent movement. The first thing was to keep outside the mine field and to pass clear of Ushant. After that, we could make for Helford.

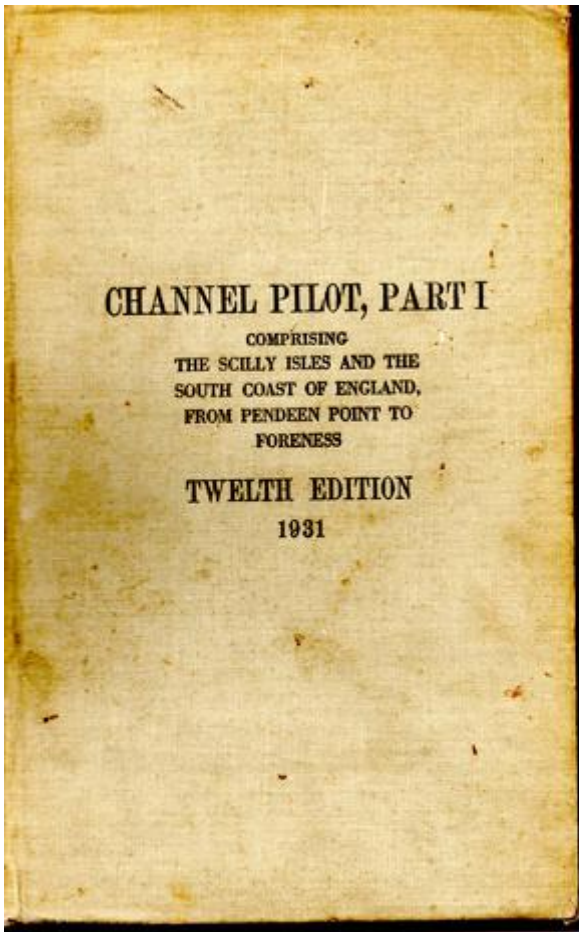
At 3 knots we were able to make about 70 miles a day. That is to say that it took us about 24 hours to get to the west of Ushant and 3 more days to reach the coast of England, so that by the time we made a landfall we were 5 days out from the Bishop Rock without any possibility of getting a fix. When ultimately we sighted land we found ourselves approaching St Austell Bay, wind and drift having pushed us further east than we had reckoned on. However, by now, the wind had eased a little and we were feeling the shelter of the Lizard, so we were able to start the engine and limp painfully slowly to the Helford River. It was with great relief that we picked up our moorings, totally exhausted but rather proud of the fact that we were one of the very few of HM ships that had returned under sail from an operation in World War Two.

President Herriot (A04 MFV 2022) Painting up for Op Inbred October 1943



This was my last operation and in November I went to Fishguard to take command of Motor Yacht "Anne" which was acting as escort to SOE experimental underwater craft. It was also, as far I know, the last operation undertaken by the Inshore Patrol on the west coast of Brittany, though the Coastal Forces section in Dartmouth continued to do daring and brilliant crossings to the north coast of Brittany. By now the RAF had perfected their technique of night landings and could do in one night what at best took us three days. In the 21 months, during which the flotilla was operating a crossing had been made almost once a month. A large number of agents were carried in and out and the mail included intelligence of the highest importance. All this was done under the noses of the Germans without any loss of life. This was achieved by meticulous planning and attention to detail on the part of all concerned not only those who manned the boats but also the HQ staff the RAF reconnaissance and escort, engineers, radio experts, dockyard workers and all the others who contributed in so many ways to ensure our success.

Channel Pilot – Inside the Front Cover is written “On Loan from MFV 2022”



Commemorative Plaque, New Grimsby Sound, Tresco
Isles of Scilly



N51 Le Dinan

This anchorage of New Grimsby Sound

served as a base for a secret naval flotilla from April 1942 to October 1943. British vessels, disguised as French fishing boats, penetrated deep into enemy waters off the Brittany coast to contact the **'Confrèrie-Nôtre-Dame,'** the most productive of the intelligence networks in German-occupied France.

In this secluded channel, the vessels exchanged their grey naval paintwork for the characteristic brilliant colours of South Breton fishing boats, taking care to avoid a freshly-painted appearance.



Daniel Lomenech

This sea-line of communications was devised by **Daniel Lomenech**, a 21-year-old Breton intelligence agent with excellent knowledge of the south Breton fishing industry. In June 1942 **Colonel Rénault**, head of the Confrèrie and his family, who were in extreme danger, were rescued in the vessel N51 'Le Dinan'. This expedition, commanded by **Lt. Steven MacKenzie RNVR** with **S/Lts. Richard Townsend RNVR** and **Daniel Lomenech RNVR**, also brought back a detailed plan of the coastal defences that the Germans were constructing along the Normandy coast. This information became the basis of the **D-Day Landings** of 1944 and ensured minimal loss of men and materials in that operation.

Holdsworth Special Forces Trust 2 July 2000

Announcement of Richard's death in The Daily Telegraph

TOWNSEND.—RICHARD UNIACKE DENNY, aged 85, passed away peacefully with his family around him at Rimpton, Somerset on September 4, 1999. Adored husband of Ursula, beloved father of John and Desmond and much loved grandfather of Tiggy and Richard. Sadly missed by family and friends. Funeral Service to be held at the Church of St. Mary The Virgin, Rimpton on Tuesday, September 14 at 2.30 p.m. Family flowers only, but donations to the Cancer Research c/o Eason Funeral Services, Newell, Sherborne.

Distinguished Service Cross



Extract from *Old Reptonian Newsletter* No. 296 dated May 2000.

Former Staff. RUD Townsend DSC (Staff 1946-64).

Richard Townsend, whose death at the age of 85 was reported in the October *Newsletter,* was one of those very talented and able men whom Lynam Thomas appointed to the staff in the immediate post war years; their personalities and influence helped to make Repton the thriving all round school it soon became.

Richard had been educated himself at Marlborough and Christ Church College, Oxford, where he took an honours degree in Modern Languages. After university he worked for the British Council, teaching English in Poland, taking every opportunity to holiday in France to perfect his French.

As an Irish citizen, Richard was not eligible to join up on the outbreak of war and spent some time ferrying ammunition around Scapa Flow in a sailing boat, but he was eventually accepted into the Intelligence Corps. In 1942 he was transferred as an R.N.V.R. Lieutenant to a clandestine unit (part of SOE.), the Inshore Patrol Flotilla, which operated from The Isles of Scilly. Ships of this flotilla were used to maintain contact with western France, sailing under French colours under the pretence of fishing. Secret agents were carried in both directions, and on two occasions Richard landed on the French coast in daylight dressed as a French fisherman in order to collect secret mail from a "postbox" onshore. The official history speaks of his "outstanding efficiency" and goes on to say that, given his own command, he displayed "initiative and leadership of a high order including efficient seamanship in exceptionally bad weather. His calm and courageous conduct was an example to his crew." For his part in these highly dangerous operations, which "demanded cool deliberate courage" and which carried the risk of being shot for espionage if caught, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

After all this excitement, the life of a rural Public School might have seemed pretty small beer, but Richard and Ursula, whom he had married in 1942 when she was stationed at Falmouth in the W.R.N.S., soon made Latham Cottage their home and began to make an enthusiastic contribution to Repton life as well as bringing up their two sons, John and Desmond, whom many O.Rs. will remember as attending Foremarke before going on to other schools. Richard loved teaching and taught French and German with skill and imagination. Out of the classroom, he founded and ran the Sailing Club; he was master in charge of the Fire Squad; he ran the Woodwork Society in the days before such activities were thought of as part of the School curriculum, and he left a legacy of his own skill in the hymn boards which still hang in the chapel; he produced plays, as well as acting himself in Staff productions (as did Ursula too) and The Pedants; he reassumed naval uniform to serve for a time in the C.C.F. in charge of the Commando section with its emphasis on the "arduous" type of training. However, his most important contribution to out of school activities was his enthusiastic direction of the Mountaineering Club. Many boys had cause to be grateful to him for their introduction to the sport of rock climbing - at which he had made himself such an expert - and under his sympathetic guidance and encouragement, many boys were able to discover qualities and skills in themselves which otherwise might have remained hidden

In 1955 he was appointed to succeed Henry Davidson as Housemaster of The Mitre. The following tribute from a member of the house captures admirably the impression he made on the boys:

"*R.U.D.T. was unique. His unoiled bicycle, his suits, his hair, his detestation of Houses where sport was king, his forgetfulness, his refusal to countenance the slightest bullying were all part of a legend. He read the Trafalgar Day prayers on the House lawn as if the French and Spanish fleets had just floated up the Trent. No one ever doubted his integrity, valour or liberalism. Richard encouraged the ablest scholar, the feeblest clarinettist, the fledgling artist, the most cowardly mountaineer and the third form reprobate in exactly the same "laid back" style. He kindly tolerated a generation of Sixties*

rebels and worked his own inimitable magic to civilise us all."

It is not surprising that a man of such varied interests and talents should have made such a good Housemaster. Essentially friendly and approachable, he took immense pains to know and understand each individual boy in his House. He achieved a balance between a liberal policy and firm discipline by being absolutely fair and consistent: every boy knew where he stood with his Housemaster. He encouraged the House to do its best in all activities and competitions, and although he patently had no interest in ball games himself, he was a punctilious presence on touchlines and boundaries, accompanied by his Pyrenean mountain dog, Louis, who often showed his disapproval by sitting with his back to the game. No one was more delighted, however, if The Mitre was successful, and I remember particularly his pleasure when the House won the Football House Matches in 1962 with a "league" team with no School players, beating a teamer-studded Brook House on their way to the final. He, with Ursula's constant support, made the Mitre a pleasant community to live in, always friendly, tolerant and, though successful, modest. I think he would have preferred to be more liberal than he was: he once said to me that he was tired of saying "no" and that in future he intended to say "yes" to any reasonable request. Perhaps this had something to do with his decision, after nine years in The Mitre, to accept the job of Head of Modern Languages at Portree Grammar School on the Isle of Skye.

Richard and Ursula spent the next 35 years on Skye, becoming very much part of the community. They cultivated a beautiful garden which they opened to the public to raise funds for the local church (it was considered good enough to be featured on a television gardening programme); Richard developed his skills as a maker and repairer of furniture; and he was a very active member of the island's Mountain Rescue Service. All this kept them extremely busy, and they were able to return to Repton only rarely, though they were visited on Skye by many O.Rs. and former colleagues. The sympathy of all Reptonians will go to Ursula, but she will be comforted by the fact that Richard will always be remembered at Repton by pupils and colleagues alike as a kind and generous friend and as a lasting influence on their lives. J.F.MW

Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Oakes MC*
Obituary



IBER 8, 1941

AUCKLAND MEN

UNIT COMMANDERS

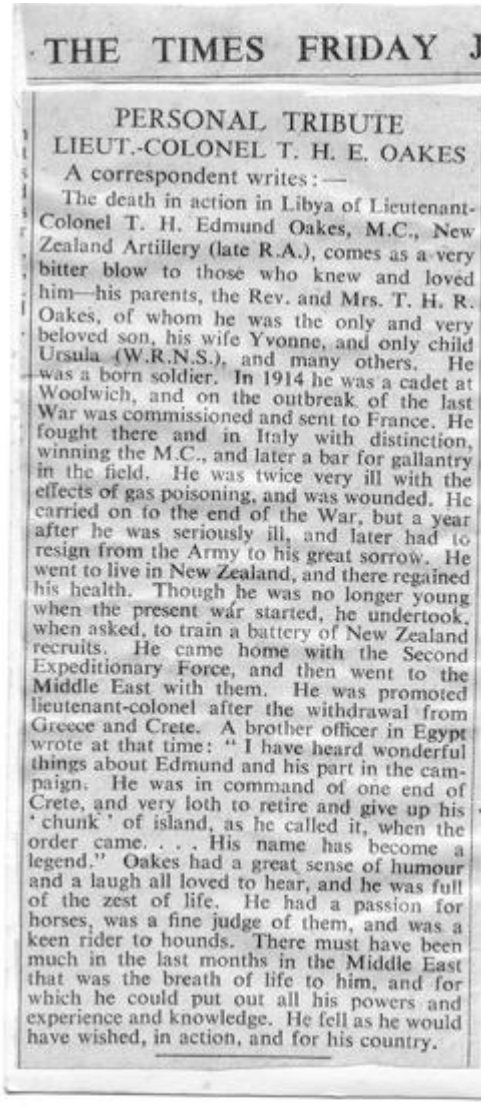
DEATH OF COLONEL OAKES

ALL BLACK AMONG MISSING

Reported killed in action, Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes, M.C., was a well-known Auckland business man. His sister is the Countess of Orford, whose New Zealand home is at Manurewa.

Educated at Lancing College and the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, Lieutenant-Colonel Oakes served in the Great War with the Royal Artillery. He later went to India with his regiment, but retired from the Army about 1926. He came to Auckland in 1928 and entered business. On the outbreak of the present war he enlisted and for a period was officer commanding the 5th Field Regiment, Royal New Zealand Artillery. He went overseas with the Second Echelon and recently was in command of an anti-tank regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Oakes was keenly interested in horses and hunting, and was a prominent member of the Pakuranga Hunt.

The well-known Rugby All Black, Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Page, is reported as wounded and missing in operations in Libya. He was promoted to the acting rank of lieutenant-colonel in February, 1940, and was posted to command the 27th (Canterbury-Otago) Battalion temporarily. He represented New Zealand at Rugby football in 1931-32-34-35, touring Great Britain with the 1935 team. After playing in three games he was injured and in the opinion of prominent critics his absence weakened the attacking combination of the side.



THE TIMES FRIDAY J

PERSONAL TRIBUTE

LIEUT.-COLONEL T. H. E. OAKES

A correspondent writes:—

The death in action in Libya of Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. Edmund Oakes, M.C., New Zealand Artillery (late R.A.), comes as a very bitter blow to those who knew and loved him—his parents, the Rev. and Mrs. T. H. R. Oakes, of whom he was the only and very beloved son, his wife Yvonne, and only child Ursula (W.R.N.S.), and many others. He was a born soldier. In 1914 he was a cadet at Woolwich, and on the outbreak of the last War was commissioned and sent to France. He fought there and in Italy with distinction, winning the M.C., and later a bar for gallantry in the field. He was twice very ill with the effects of gas poisoning, and was wounded. He carried on to the end of the War, but a year after he was seriously ill, and later had to resign from the Army to his great sorrow. He went to live in New Zealand, and there regained his health. Though he was no longer young when the present war started, he undertook, when asked, to train a battery of New Zealand recruits. He came home with the Second Expeditionary Force, and then went to the Middle East with them. He was promoted lieutenant-colonel after the withdrawal from Greece and Crete. A brother officer in Egypt wrote at that time: "I have heard wonderful things about Edmund and his part in the campaign. He was in command of one end of Crete, and very loth to retire and give up his 'chunk' of island, as he called it, when the order came. . . . His name has become a legend." Oakes had a great sense of humour and a laugh all loved to hear, and he was full of the zest of life. He had a passion for horses, was a fine judge of them, and was a keen rider to hounds. There must have been much in the last months in the Middle East that was the breath of life to him, and for which he could put out all his powers and experience and knowledge. He fell as he would have wished, in action, and for his country.

Ursula celebrating her 100th Birthday

Card from Her Majesty The Queen





Cake



With son John and granddaughter Tiggy



Richard and Ursula's headstone in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin Rimpton Somerset

