

Obituaries

John Eliot Tonkin, deputy base commander at Stonington Island during Operation 'Tabarin,' died on 10 June 1995, aged 74 years. He was born 21 July 1920, in Singapore, because, as he used to say with pleasure, 'that's where me mum was at the time.' He was educated at King William School on the Isle of Man.

It was only after Tonkin's death that I picked up a book by Max Hastings, *Das Reich*, the story of the attempt by the crack German SS Panzer division of that name to move across France to oppose the invasion by the Allied forces in Normandy in 1945. Looking through the index, I noticed the name John Tonkin appeared on some 10 pages. It was a truly remarkable story of what was, in retrospect, an ill-conceived military project that was turned into moderate success by the leadership of a truly remarkable man and very brave officer: John Tonkin.

In the early years of the war, Tonkin joined the Long Range Desert Group from his regiment in North Africa and took part in raids behind the German lines. As part of the embryo SAS, he carried out raids with his squadron in support of the landings in Sicily. He landed with his squadron at Termoli on the Italian mainland and was captured. On the night of his capture, he dined, as a fellow parachutist, with a general who advised him, in veiled language, to escape, since, as a commando, he was to be sent to Germany for execution. Tonkin took the advice, escaped from a truck, and walked half the length of Italy to rejoin his unit, only to find he had been reported as missing and, as was the custom, all his effects had been auctioned and the money sent to his 'next of kin' together with a 'missing in action, assumed dead' notice. He returned to the UK and became involved in commando/SAS/SOE plans to be dropped behind the lines on or before the invasion (which was not to happen for almost six months).

After many changes of plan, he and two others were dropped as an advance party into occupied France the day before D-Day, to prepare for his unit of 55 SAS men. Although at 24 he was one of the youngest in his squadron, he was in command of it. In retrospect, it appears to have been a somewhat over-ambitious plan, complicated by the difficulties of mixing uniformed soldiers with the Maquisards and their various factions, who were infiltrated by agents and traitors. After some abortive acts of disruption and sabotage by his squadron, Tonkin was able to direct a massive air strike that virtually destroyed all the fuel designated for the movement of the Das Reich SS Panzer division.

On 7 July 1944, almost a month after they had landed, Tonkin's unit was betrayed and ambushed, and 31 of his commandos were executed by the SS and buried in a mass grave in the forest of St Sauvent. At the ambush, after he had told his men to scatter, Tonkin remained in order to

destroy all the code books, and then he camouflaged himself. He managed to escape and to carry on his disrupting activities for a further month, before he flew back to the UK with the last five members of his squadron, together, he told me years later, with the person who, he suspected, had betrayed them, and who was being returned for court-martial. Soon after this, when the unit was enjoying Norwegian hospitality, and the future of the SAS was uncertain, he heard about 'an unusual and interesting job in Antarctica.' He applied, and I first met him in November 1945, when a group of some 25 of us were part of Operation 'Tabarin,' which took us to the Antarctic.

We all had played active parts in the prosecution of the war, and, in retrospect, perhaps our reasons for volunteering to go south were forms of escapism. For us, the war had undoubtedly been exciting, in its own way, and we wanted to find some way to continue that excitement while we found our feet in the new world.

We had very little idea what was involved when we joined 'Tabarin.' We had largely been selected from the service records that existed. Few of us had ever met each other before, and it never ceases to amaze me how well we all fitted together as the years passed. Although we did not talk much about our previous four years, it was soon clear that if a cat has nine lives, John was a 'cat of all cats.' We knew that he had escaped from the Germans as a prisoner of war, that he had been dropped by parachute with 40 SAS men — mostly older than himself and of whom he had been in command — that he was among the first people into Belsen, and very little else.

Our party of 25 travelled by tramp ship from Lisbon to Montevideo and Port Stanley. We spent the Antarctic summer visiting and replenishing the existing bases, and finally building and occupying our new one at Stonington Island in March 1946. Tonkin, besides being an incredibly hard worker, was always involved in the more memorable and hilarious moments. There was the occasion, for example, when we visited Port Lockroy, where there was an excess of naval rum due to an ordering error the year before. It seemed a pity to waste it, and a party developed. Being bombarded by outdated and frost-damaged tins of potatoes as we returned to the ship by dinghy in the dark contributed to make it a memorable visit.

Tonkin was a great person for practical jokes, never unkind and always effective. One of the party had the reputation for always picking up the smallest, and this usually meant the lightest, of boxes when carrying stores from the landing place to the dump. Tonkin organised that the smallest item was a 5-gallon drum of red lead paint, weighing something like 450 pounds, and we all watched with delight as it proved impossible to lift, and a lesson was learnt.

In a nine-man hut with no privacy except one's bunk, Tonkin developed a great ability to completely relax when immersed in a book. He could be reading, yet always was aware of what was going on around him. I recall his habit of apparently paying no attention to repeated interruptions, and, after completing a page or even a complete chapter, he would in one short sentence answer all the questions that we had fired at him in the previous five minutes.

He loved the fun of an argument, never got heated, and provoked them just for the hell of it. But he always felt that solving an argument by referring to a dictionary or encyclopaedia was cheating.

Tonkin had brought with him BBC recordings of himself singing, often bawdy songs, which were used when he was behind the lines to authenticate messages directed specifically to him. He would leave these on the base record player, leaving us to think that he was still in the hut, while he was, in fact, enjoying himself exercising his dogs. The song that I remember most was 'I'm the man, the very fat man, who waters the workers' beer.' Small wonder that it was used by military intelligence to identify him in France. I had never heard it before or long since.

He certainly added to his score of 'cat lives' in the time that he was in the Antarctic. In the first year, he took over a team of dogs that would follow him anywhere, and in some measure this could have been his downfall. At the start of a reconnaissance trip in 1946, his dogs were more intent on turning back on their tracks towards the sounds of the dogs still at base than in following the path he wanted. In desperation, he inadvisably walked out in front and dropped from sight down a very narrow crevasse. In my diary that night I wrote:

It was John who saved himself today. I know that I had given up completely and could see no way of ever getting John out and could sense that the pressure on his chest was slowly throttling him; he never lost hope, and it was this infectious optimism more than anything that resulted in his lucky release.

Even when we were in the crevasse, I remember thinking to myself, 'what a way to die after all that he went through in the war.' With his hands and fingers paralysed from the rope slings that had been under his armpits, we saw a side of John that was a tonic to us all. Being non-medical, we honestly thought that damage of this sort was irreversible, but John thought differently and by sheer persistence he taught his extremities to recover. As therapy, he would painfully sort out item by item a tray of hundreds of assorted nuts and bolts, putting them back into the 36 compartments of a storage box; he then would pick up the box, empty it, and restart. If he were ever depressed, it never was apparent.

There was another occasion a year later, after he had fully recovered, when he certainly lost another 'cat life.' He was leading a group of four of us on a 30-day route-finding trip on the plateau. It was a day of whiteout, where there was good visibility but no shadows. We were looking for a route and were looking down into the valley below us plotting the route through crevasses that were

seemingly just a few yards in front of us. Something distracted us — I think it was the sudden disappearance of a chocolate paper that someone had dropped — and we realized that we were all standing on the very brink of a cornice, the edge of which was lost in whiteness; the crevasses that we had been examining were hundreds, if not thousands, of feet below us. John quietly remarked, 'I think we had better step backwards, *very slowly*,' and we did.

Three days later, I was left in camp to look after the dogs, and the other three — Tonkin, Doug Mason, and Dick Butson — took one dog team on a 'reccy towards the edge of the plateau.' Today to leave a camp without adequate safety gear is unacceptable, but at that time we still had a lot to learn. Butson's diary explained what happened:

Three of us left Kevin in camp at about 10 AM in perfect weather to reconnoitre the glacier, driving the dogs and enjoying the skiing along behind them. After about 3 miles, as the downhill slope increased, we tethered the dogs and I took the lead. Horizon after horizon appeared deceptively near, and it was not until about 12:30 that we had a good view of the upper part of the glacier down which we were looking for a route. When we turned round, we realised that we had been travelling down wind and the snow was covering our tracks. After an hour, we picked up the sledge, with the dogs invisible under a blanket of snow. From that moment we were, frankly, panic-stricken, realising that we had been led insidiously on the outward trip by the deceptive horizon and a following wind. After 3 miles with the sledge, the wind and drift were intense, coming full in our faces. From the back of the sledge, I could barely see the dogs and only rarely the man leading ahead. Twice we nearly lost each other; our faces were masked with 1 inch thick ice, and our eyes masked by a layer of ice between our eyelashes which we had to melt out with our bare hands....As well as drift we were now completely enveloped in mist. John and I admitted that we prayed to God harder than we ever had before during that nightmare. As was our wont we had run out our distance on the sledge wheel, we decided that we were to the right of our course and turned through a right angle and proceeded on a steady bearing for about 200 yards when John saw a piece of lavatory paper and veered towards it; 20 yards downwind we saw the tents. It was thanks to a combination of Dougie's superb dead reckoning and John's ability to hold a compass course that we owe our lives. We might have been able to survive one night but certainly not two.

At the end of the first year, the base commander, Ted Bingham, was to leave and a new base leader had to be appointed. To all of us, there was really no choice as to who it should be; it was assumed that it would be Tonkin. I suppose any of us, if interviewed at home, might have been considered as a potential base leader, but in the harsh, close conditions of life in a polar hut, different qualities were required. John had them.

A year before he died, I was discussing this with Bingham, and he admitted that he had asked Tonkin to take

over, but that Tonkin had, with great wisdom, declined, stating that he thought he would be of more value as second-in-command, as a sort of buffer for the problems that he could see ahead. I personally think that it is a measure of his leadership qualities that he was right. Tonkin was the catalyst that made our second year at Stonington a very happy one.

Towards the end of our time in the south, there were many discussions about what the return to civilisation would be like. John was always very firm on one thing; whether it was based on experience with the girls of Norway or not we will never know. 'When you get home,' he would say, 'if ever you let a girl get her claws into you, watch out. You will never have a chance. Don't think that you will. The only thing to do is to turn and run.'

In 1948, when the time came to leave and we were homeward bound from Port Stanley, one of our party had to remain to cover the second visit of the relief ship to the Antarctic to land a replacement aircraft. Tonkin remained, and when we reached home we heard by radio that he and the secretary of the Governor of the Falkland Islands, Heather Sedgwick, had been married. It was another of Tonkin's off-the-cuff decisions that was proved utterly right. For the next 50 years, their life together was as adventurous and, in some measure, as unpredictable as his first 28. They had four children, and, after he retired, they lived near the sea as a very united family at Mornington near Melbourne. After he died, his family sat down and wrote out what they knew of his life. It was an astonishing story, and the last half as good as the first!

In my life I have been privileged to have crossed paths with some remarkable natural leaders in all walks of life, from full admirals to tramps. There is no doubt that Tonkin heads the lot. He was a remarkable leader and a remarkable man.

Kevin Walton

Dr Laurence McKinley Gould, widely known as Larry Gould, died on 20 June 1995, aged 98 years. He was an outstanding geologist and leader of polar research in the United States from the 1920s to 1970, when he retired as President of the international Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. As a Trustee of the Ford Foundation, he obtained funds for the extension that trebled the size of the Scott Polar Research Institute. This he opened formally on 27 July 1968.

Born on the family farm in Michigan, Gould left home when he was 17 to teach in a one-room school in Florida for two years. He then moved to the University of Michigan to study law. After finding lodgings with Professor W.H. Hobbs, a noted polar geologist, he switched to geology, especially of polar regions. Service in Italy and France during World War I with the US Army Ambulance Service interrupted his studies. Until 1932 he remained in the department in Michigan, receiving his ScD in 1923.

In 1926 Gould was a member of the University of Michigan's first expedition to Greenland under Hobbs. The following year he joined G.P. Putnam in exploring and mapping the west coast of Baffin Island. He was then selected by Commander Richard E. Byrd, USN, as geolo-



Fig. 1. Larry Gould on a visit to Cambridge around 1933. From left: Gould, his wife Peg, and Antarctic veterans Raymond Priestley and his brother-in-law Charles Wright.

gist on his first Antarctic expedition of 1928–1930. He so impressed Byrd that he was appointed second-in-command before they landed in the Bay of Whales in January 1929.

Gould took charge of the construction of the expedition base, Little America, until early March, when he led a three-man party to survey and investigate the geology of the Rockefeller Mountains. They planned to keep their aircraft at their base camp, but severe gales damaged the camp and wrecked the aircraft. Loss of radio contact with Little America alarmed Byrd, who led a successful search and relief of the party by air.

When Byrd made the first flight over the South Pole the following summer, a dog sledging party under Gould at 85°S near the Liv Glacier provided a search and rescue party should any mishap occur to the aircraft. When the flight was over, Gould and his team continued on to make the first successful geological survey in the Queen Maud Mountains. The party experienced difficult crevasse conditions during its 1500-mile journey by dog sledge. On return to the United States, Gould received a Congressional Medal and wrote a classic account of his experiences: *Cold*.

In 1932 Gould left Michigan to start a department of geology as professor in the small liberal arts Carleton College, Minnesota. He remained in this post until 1945, when he reluctantly gave up teaching to become President of the College. By his retirement in 1962, Carleton College was one of the leading liberal arts and science colleges in the USA.

In addition to his college duties, Gould's services were in demand in many other spheres. During World War II, he acted as Chief of the Arctic Section of the US Air Force's Arctic, Desert, and Tropic Information Centre. He was a trustee both of the Ford Foundation and of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; he also became president of the American Association for

the Advancement of Science and a member of many other bodies, including the National Science Board, which advises the National Science Foundation. His Honorary University Degrees run well into double figures.

At the first planning meeting for the Antarctic programme of the International Geophysical Year in 1955, Gould led the US delegation and was Vice Chairman under Georges Laclavère (obituary in *Polar Record* 31 (176): 86–87). Held at the height of the Cold War, the meeting was outstandingly successful in planning international scientific cooperation in the Antarctic. This work provided a sound basis for the Antarctic Treaty of 1961. Gould continued as a leader in this field and followed Laclavère as President of SCAR from 1963–1970.

On retiring from Carleton College, Gould moved as a professor to the University of Arizona, in Tucson, to enjoy teaching Pleistocene geology again. He spent the remainder of his life there. One geologist inspired by Larry Gould, James Zumberge (obituary in *Polar Record* 28 (167): 337), later president of the University of Southern California and president of SCAR 1982–1986, wrote in a foreword to a reprint of *Cold* in 1984, 'there are still many who look to Larry Gould for his sage advice, wise counsel, and personal encouragement, whether the question deals with academic administration, international science, or polar affairs.' Such advice was based on Larry's firm belief that if academic life or polar research accepted the mores of the market place, much damage would ensue.

The extension to the Scott Polar Research Institute due to his support has advanced polar research considerably during the past three decades and will help for many more. In Cambridge, as in many places around the world, Larry is remembered affectionately by his many colleagues for his friendship and leadership. His wife of more than 50 years, the former Margaret Rice, died in 1988. They had no children.

Gordon Robin.

In Brief

SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHS DECLASSIFIED. United States President Bill Clinton has authorized the declassification of satellite photographs obtained by the US intelligence community between 1960 and 1972. Prints, however, will not be available until mid-1996. The Executive Order refers to the first generation of photo-reconnaissance satellites of the Corona, Argon, and Lanyard systems. It covers more than 800,000 images of the

Earth's surface, including many from high latitudes. Ground resolution of the imaging systems ranges from 2 m. The collection includes 640 km of film in 39,000 cans. An information packet with samples of declassified photographs is available for \$25 from the US Geological Survey, EROS Data Center Customer Services, Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57198, USA. (Source: Charles Swithinbank)