

Exercise 1984

Marine Reserves invade Scottish Hills to capture Mad Professor

By Anthony Sharrock (Merseyside journalist), as reported by Rev Canon Bob Evans, Chaplain to Mersey Division RNR, in "HMS EAGLET, Story of the Royal Naval Reserves on Merseyside", 2003.

In Spring 1954, **Exercise 1984**, the largest combined air, sea and land exercise ever staged by reserve forces in this country, reached a climax in the early hours of Sunday morning when fifty Royal Marine Commandos from Merseyside and Clyde Centres waded ashore on the Mull of Galloway to capture a "mad nuclear physics Professor".

The orders for the attacking force had been to capture the "Professor", who was convalescing from a nervous breakdown but with a newly-invented cobalt bomb among his possessions, "regardless of the cost in men and ships" - a challenging scenario !

Exactly what losses were maintained has not been finally counted but the expenditure in fireworks, noise and enthusiasm as the Marines stormed ashore was impressive and it was agreed that the exercise had been a resounding success.

HM Ships Mersey and Dee, tenders to HMS Eaglet, RNR Merseyside's Headquarters, participated in the exercise, ferrying the attacking force to and from the scene of the assault and providing Naval Gunfire Support (with fireworks) close in to the beaches.

Captain S. Beattie RN, one of the Observers, who had been awarded the VC for his part on the raid on St Nazaire in WW II, commented "Everything went nearly according to plan and was very good training ."

The exercise started on Friday night with MERSEY and DEE leaving Liverpool to rendez-vous with other units from Belfast and Greenock. Half an hour before midnight on Saturday they were anchored near Port Logan in preparation for landing the Commandos.

Camouflaged and with their faces blackened, some of the commandos secured a beachhead, while others made their way inland to the Professor's hideout. Seven men formed the Snatch Squad to dash through the defending troops of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers and bring the Professor back to the beach.

The four mile journey inland took them two and a half hours, with defenders harrying them along the way. with blank ammunition and thunderflashes The withdrawal took half that time.

“The enemy was completely demoralised by our aggression” said Captain Tom Sherman, leader of the Snatch Squad, “The journey inland was a bit troublesome, trying to move undetected through gorse and undergrowth, but we succeeded exactly, according to plan”.

By 3.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, the Professor, Commander Jim Tebay RNR from Preston, was safely aboard MERSEY.

The finale came on Sunday afternoon when MERSEY and DEE berthed once more in Liverpool. Complete with whiskers and deerstalker hat, the Professor was escorted ashore, clutching his home made cobalt bomb: one man around whom the weekend exercise involving over five hundred Reservists and four small warships had revolved.