

SPECIAL FORCES CLUB. 40th ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS

SPECIAL FORCES CLUB

When our president ^{first} ~~by~~ telephoned to Greece, ^{and} ~~first~~ suggested that I should have the great honour of saying a few words on this ^{important} ~~marvellous~~ anniversary, I was rather alarmed; and, ^{for several nights afterwards,} ~~between sleeping and waking~~ ^(entangled) ~~visions~~ ^(curiously) ~~with the adjuncts and impedimenta of SOE.~~ I saw myself, sneaking into a Special Forces Club whose appearance and atmosphere had subtly but completely changed from the familiar, snug and welcoming ^{haven} ~~place~~ we all know; ~~and, indeed, it was somewhere~~ ^{it was} ~~entirely different~~ ^{too, Royal and Ducal} from the splendid precincts where we are feasting tonight. ^{The place} ~~It had turned into something very different and very~~ ^{The place} ~~forbidding.~~ ^{primordial} ~~It had become a daunting and shadowy Valhalla, a club~~ ^{and it was} ~~only~~ fit for heroes to drink in; ~~certainly, but~~ guarded by ogreish janitors. I sneaked in with trepidation, almost forgetting the password as I did so, ^{leaving} ~~I left~~ ^{coat} my ~~me~~ in a grim cloak-and-dagger room; and, at last, with misgiving found my place at a very unusual ^{dining-} ~~table~~ with a commando-knife on one side of my plate ~~and~~ ^{and a stick of plastic instead of a roll.} a gelignite plunger on the other. The menu was written on a one-time pad in disappearing ink, and just as well perhaps; because, between dagger and plunger lay an unappetising ~~Tellerminex~~ with limpets and clams to follow... The cock-tails were all Molotoff; the wine glasses were ^{abrim with} ~~full of~~ hair-dye and knock-out drops; and instead of polished wood or peerless napery, the dolefully groaning board was partly laid with old and tattered parachute material ^{The} ~~the sort of~~ blown-up maps of enemy-occupied territory that used to be sewn into ~~the linings of the~~ pre-infiltration outfits of agents about to be dropped in the dark ... But ~~there was~~ ^{worse} to come. An intimidating assembly of ^{nightmare} ~~veterans~~ ^{gathered;} ~~were assembled;~~ and, as they subsided into their chairs round the eerie banquet, all the cutlery, ~~which was~~ sinister enough already,

SPECIAL FORCES CLUB continued

started to shift and gravitate in a hair-raising, concerted and ^{movement; all heading for our laps} centrifugal manner. What on earth was going on? Suddenly, ^{there was a clinking and clattering,} a flash of revelation ^{descended:} everything metallic on the table had come simultaneously under siege by the scores of escape-compasses transformed into magnetic trouser-buttons as the guests sat down ... And it is only now, gazing round at fellow-members and seeing that they are not ^{nightmare} intimidating veterans at all, but friendly contemporaries, a few of them a bit older ^{than I,} and a great many very much younger ^{than I,} that these early misgivings are ^{were are} exorcized, and I see at last that ~~There~~ There was nothing to be alarmed about at all.

Nevertheless, a fortieth anniversary is a venerable milestone in the ~~life of a club~~ ^{how pleased Sir Colin Gubbins would be if he could float down into our midst!} ~~the extraordinary thing about this particular lapse~~ of time is that it has passed ^{so quickly.} ~~in a flash,~~ and ~~I, asked~~ ^{we were asked} without warning, when, as demobilized bachelors, we had actually joined, many of us might thoughtlessly say 'Oh, ten years ^{ago} fifteen perhaps' - and ^{only} then ~~we would remember that~~ ^{that} the club dates from the end of the War, and ~~that~~ ^{that} the time-lapse is ~~actually~~ only a decade short of half a century. Naturally, some of the older foundation members are great-grandparents by now; but, as the membership, most wisely and joyfully, has long since been expanded to include sister-services, it is perfectly possible for, say, an SAS member ~~who was~~ not even born when the club began to be the father of a thriving family ~~already.~~ ^{oldest} Even a grand-father, if he has got a move on. So, counting from ~~our~~ founding-fathers to ~~our~~ youngest recruits, we can ~~already~~ lay claim to half a dozen generations, and, ~~if heredity of callings still prevails and being what it is,~~ ^{it often does} the future of the club is full of promise.

On anniversaries like this, ~~our~~ ^{the} thoughts ^{of members stricken in years} automatically wing back to the ~~the times and places in our soldiering days~~ that were most important ~~them during the War.~~ ^{to us} We each have our own; mine happens to be Crete; and not Crete

SPECIAL FORCES CLUB continued

only, but three different men on that island, two of them English and one Greek, ~~None~~ of them are members here; for two of them, the Club wasn't founded early enough; and the third never came to England; ~~but they were all three~~ ^{are} ~~so~~ ^{but} representative of the spirit of the club, ~~and all that it stands for, that I feel they are all sort~~ ^{are all three} ~~of~~ posthumous honorary members. ^{They must be surely be}

The first is John Pendlebury. He had been a brilliant classical scholar at Winchester and Cambridge and, for the last few years, ~~he had been~~ Sir Arthur Evans' right-hand archaeologist in Crete. He knew the whole island backwards ~~x~~ and loved the islanders as they loved him. He spoke ~~every~~ ^{their} dialects, knew all their songs, could walk the fleetest of them off their feet over those merciless ranges, ~~then~~ ^{and} drank them all under the table ^{afterwards}. It was largely owing to ~~the~~ ^{his} arming and training of ~~his~~ ^{in the crucial months} guerillas ~~friends~~ before the battle, that ~~the rest~~ ^{those} of us who returned to the island ~~in the following years of occupation~~ ^{after it was lost} were spared the political tangles that ~~were~~ ^{became} the scourge of the rest of occupied Europe. How well I remember him, Outside Herakleion, on the second day of the German parachute invasion! His ~~florid~~ ^{florid} handsome face with its single sparkling eye, ~~his~~ ^{— he had lost the other in a youthful mishap —} slung guerilla-rifle and bandolier, and his famous sword-stick ~~x~~ brought a stimulating flash of romance and fun ~~into~~ the khaki gloom of our headquarters, ~~and into the battle raging outside.~~ ^{Setting off alone to join his guerrilla friends in the hills} ~~He was badly wounded fighting~~ ^{who had dropped outside} the parachutists ~~outside~~ the western walls of the city. ~~He was~~ ^{chivalrously} ~~chivalrously treated by~~ a German doctor ~~who~~ dressed his wounds, but ~~he was~~ ^{him} shot without mercy. ~~by~~ a new wave of parachutists. His fame was such that the Cretans said Hitler was not able to sleep at night until ~~John's~~ ^{his} glass eye, as proof of his death, was actually placed on his table.

Admiral ~~retired Admiral~~

The second figure is Mike Cumberlege. His ~~father~~, retired Admiral Cumberlege, affectionately nicknamed "Mayor of St Tropez" by the inhabitants, ^{spent for his retirement} ~~lived~~ ^{used to} on the yacht he ~~anchored~~ there, and Mike's amphibian growing-up turned him into a brilliant seaman. After finishing at Pangbourne, he got a job sailing ~~enormous craft and~~ world-famous ocean-racing yachts ~~across~~ across the Atlantic. He joined the Royal Naval Reserve at the approach of war, and soon, with Pendlebury and his guerrillas ^{in H.M.S. Dolphin,} he was conducting raids on the Dodecanese. Later on he slipped agents into Crete from ^{Bardia or} Mersa Matruh in small piratical crafts like the Hedgehog, the Porcupine and the Escampador. He was finally captured in plain clothes ^{off} near Poros on the way to blow up the Corinth Canal, and he and his crew, after years in Mauthausen, were, tragically, shot in Sachsenhausen two days before the end of the War. No one who knew him ~~xxx~~ can forget his youth and fine looks and humour and panache. He was a great favourite in Crete. ^{One day} Talking about marksmanship after a meal ^{with them} on the shore, he said there was nothing to it; and, pulling out his revolver, ^{he} light-heartedly fired it in the air without looking up, ^{was} a lucky shot in a million! ^{sea-} ~~was~~ people do on festive occasions in Crete, and a second later ~~a sea-~~ ^{gull thumped} ~~fell~~ dead on the rock beside him, ~~a lucky shot in a million~~. He quickly ~~was~~ masked his astonishment with a negligent gesture and for miles around the wonder grew.

He wore a single gold earring, like Sir Francis Drake. Just before the War, he ^{had} thrown a party on a large sailing yacht ^{he had} ~~he had~~ just piloted from Europe. Noticing that a beautiful guest was wearing precious screw-in earrings he said they would be safer with pierced ears; ^{I'll show you} but she said it would hurt too much. He said "Nonsense!", picked up a sail-needle and drove it clean through the lobe of his own ear, letting out a surprised cry of pain and a scarlet gush. She was so touched, she gave him ^a the gold earring ^{to put in it} and he wore it ever after.

The third of these island figures is Manoli Paterakis, one of six astonishing brothers from the tiny mountain village of Koustoyérako perched high in the wildest sierras of the White Mountains of Western Crete. When invasion came, they seized their guns and fell on the parachutists, and, after the battle, took to the hills again. Like many Cretans, they saved

5. SPECIAL FORCES CLUB Continued.

~~countless~~ ^{countless} lives, rescued ~~escaped~~ British prisoners. Their mothers and sisters and daughters clad and fed them, and all Crete helped them escape to the Middle East. A shepherd and goat^{herd} like all his brothers, Manoli knew every peak and canyon in the island and ~~it so happened that~~ for two years we were inseparable in all sorts of improbable ~~and dangerous~~ moments.

His fast pace, his knowledge of the Cretan cordilleras, his skill in finding the most inaccessible tracks, his aquiline glance, his fearlessness and vigour and humour made him one of the most loved ^{people} ~~men~~ in the island.

~~A few~~ ^{Six} months ago he was challenged by the young men of his village: could ~~he~~ still hunt ibex as he used to ~~to~~ in his youth? He took down his gun without a word, ^{set soon} and outstripped all his challengers ^{up} in ~~scaling~~ the jagged mountains to the haunts of his forbidden quarry. They heard the ^{bang} ~~bang~~ of his rifle high above and returned crestfallen. But ^{when} ~~he~~ failed to come ^{a search party was sent.} ~~hew~~
A clean-shot ibex, of record size and length of horn, was found on the edge of a precipice, but no Manoli. Hoisting it on his shoulder, he had made the first false step in his life, and the last: ^{he} ~~and~~ had fallen three hundred feet to instant death on a ledge inaccessible to anything but a helicopter... It was somehow a fitting death: he vanished like the mountain eagle he so much resembled

Four years ago, he and I were were invited for a gala fournight to the United States by the Cretans of America. Neither of us had been ^{there,} ~~and~~ they showed us everything. On our last evening they took us to the Empire State Building, with a forest of lesser ^{towering} ~~skyscrapers~~ all round us and a million cars roaring below. I saw he was smiling and asked why. "I was just thinking ^{that} ~~he~~ said ^{my} ~~back~~ in the village it would be nearly time to go up and milk the ewes..."

All of us over a certain age can think of a score of similar figures. We can think, too of many who worked ~~for years in~~ in selfless, ~~unremitting~~ and unspectacular but unremitting danger for years on end, ^{and} it is right that we should remember them ^{all} ~~tonight~~; for it is they, and people like them, the brave men and women of ~~a~~ world at war with a cruel tyranny, who were ~~the~~ the inspiration of our club, its very spirit and the reason for its existence