

Good morning, everyone! It's a great honour to be here today and thank you so much Mr. Bennett and Mr. Haigh, in his absence, for the kind invitation to speak today.

SLIDE 1

I'm passionate about Remembrance, as I believe there is no greater love than that of those, who have made the ultimate sacrifice. They gave their todays for our tomorrows and we owe our way of life to them. So, in return, our Duty is to always remember them. It's a simple contract.

SLIDE 2

So, I'm going to tell you a story that involves my Grandpa and my dear friend, Colonel John Waddy, who died last year.

John was a remarkable man. He led an action-packed life, was shot three times, received several shrapnel wounds and had many lucky escapes. It was incredible that he made it to 50 let alone 100!

At the outbreak of WW2, he found himself in a fort defending the North West Frontier of India

- it was stifflingly hot and a long way from the war, like something out of a Kipling novel.

So, in 1941, when the call came for volunteers to join the Airborne Forces, John jumped at the opportunity and joined the newly formed 151 Parachute Battalion in Delhi.

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Officers led the way and early training took great courage.

There were no helmets and only rudimentary harnesses - this strange thing is an original WW2 parachute! Not sure I'd want to strap it on and jump out of a plane!

Parachutists learned their dangerous craft by jumping through holes cut in the floor of old Bi-Planes. There were many casualties.

In November 1942, the Battalion arrived in Egypt to become the senior battalion in Brigadier Shan Hackett's new 4th Parachute Brigade. It was also renamed 156 - now remember that number.

SLIDE 4

Hackett was a brilliant soldier. Having been wounded at the Battle of El Alamein, he then became the Director of Special Raiding Forces, and was instrumental in the formation of the Long-Range Desert Group, the SAS and Popski's Private Army - AKA No.1 Demolition Squadron.

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Grandpa was a good friend of Hackett's and an experienced soldier. He was a Grenadier Guard, an early Commando, a pilot and a founding member of the Airborne Forces. Having just returned from parachuting into Tunisia on Operation TORCH, he was asked to take over as the Commanding Officer of 156.

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Grandpa's job was to raise standards and bring the Battalion up to scratch. So, 156 was shipped off to the biblical lands of Palestine where training began in earnest.

SLIDE 7

They were like Crusaders in their pursuit of excellence. From the romance of storming desert forts and parachuting below sea level into the

Dead Sea, the Battalion soon became disciplined, polished, strong and tight-knit. They became a Brotherhood and an elite fighting unit. Morale was good.

SLIDE 8

During the allied invasion of Southern Italy, 156 spearheaded the amphibious landings at Taranto, before returning to England to prepare for the invasion of Northern Europe.

Slide 9

D-Day was on 6th June 1944. In the following weeks, the Allies made swift advances across France.... 4th Parachute Brigade was held in reserve for emergencies. There were many cancelled operations and frustration set in.

Slide 10

As the Germans retreated through Belgium into Holland, Russian Forces made rapid advances towards Berlin on the Eastern Front. Whoever got there first would decide the fate of Europe for the next fifty years ... a great deal was at stake....

Slide 11

So, in September 1944, Field Marshal Montgomery devised a plan that was intended to end the war by Christmas. It was called Operation MARKET GARDEN and involved 35,000 British, American and Polish Airborne soldiers.

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The objective was to punch a hole through the enemy frontline to create an invasion route into Germany. The mission was to capture the bridges across the River Rhine in Holland. The tactical plan was to parachute three airborne divisions in to take them.

The Americans were to take the bridges at Eindhoven and Nijmegen. The British 1st Airborne, which included the Poles, was to take the furthest bridge, at Arnhem, 65 miles behind enemy lines.

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Over three days, 10,000 airborne soldiers were to land at Arnhem, seize the bridge and hold out until relief arrived....

The British land-based army, XXX Corps, was then ordered to make a rapid advance across the captured bridges to reach Arnhem and relieve the stranded Paratroopers.

It was the largest Airborne operation ever attempted.

So, What Happened?

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It was a disaster. They knew from the intelligence reports before they left that it was going to be rough but the British 1st Airborne had no luck. Everything went wrong:

- The weather was against them
- The Drop Zone was too far away
- German Panzers were resting nearby
- XXX Corps got stuck on what became known as Hell's Highway and didn't make it....

The first wave of Paras had the element of surprise. They made it to Arnhem and captured the north side of the Bridge, holding onto it for four days, twice as long as expected.

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By the second wave, which included 156, the element of surprise had been lost. The Germans were waiting and mercilessly shot into the air as they parachuted in. They were sitting ducks. Then, as they fought their way to the Bridge, German fighter planes swooped in to strafe the lightly armed paratroopers and they ran into a vicious blocking line of German Panzers. 156 was cut to pieces.

John was shot in the groin by a sniper and later, badly wounded by several mortar blasts. His war was over.

SLIDE 16

156 withdrew into the woods and continued the fight with incredible courage. They were up against machine guns, grenades, mortars, tanks, flame-throwers and self-propelled guns but they would not give in. The onslaught was horrendous. The noise must have been deafening.

Grandpa was killed by heavy machine-gun fire from a self-propelled gun. One of his Sergeants found him leaning against a tree, mortally

wounded, and asked if he could help. His last words were:

"No, the enemy is in front of you. They need you there...."

He died shortly afterwards. He was only 32.

By now, the fighting was hand to hand. With bayonets drawn, the remnants of the Brigade made a final "Death or Glory" charge at the Germans....

They fought their way through to Divisional HQ, where they formed a perimeter and held out.

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After 7 more days of gruelling fighting, during which Hackett was also badly wounded, the survivors were evacuated back across the Rhine. The wounded were left behind.

Some weeks later, the Dutch Resistance spirited Hackett out of hospital and nursed him back to health. The following spring, he escaped back across the river.

Eventually, John recovered and was sent to a Prison camp in Bavaria, to sit out the rest of the war, mainly in solitary confinement.

The British 1st Airborne suffered devastating losses: Only 2,500 men escaped across the Rhine, 1,500 were killed and 6,000 were missing, wounded or taken prisoner. However, of the nine battalions that fought at Arnhem, 156 suffered the worst of it: only 27 of the 603 men from the Battalion were evacuated. Less than 5%.

The brave Dutch suffered dreadfully that winter. There was starvation and many German reprisals before Arnhem was liberated on 15th April 1945.

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After the war, Hackett was promoted to General and went onto high office.

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John had an incredible career and served all over the world. He became Colonel of the SAS and the first Director of Special Forces. In retirement, he was the military adviser to the film "A BRIDGE TOO FAR".

Both returned to Arnhem on numerous occasions to remember their fallen comrades.

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Grandpa is buried in the Airborne Cemetery at Oosterbeek just outside Arnhem.

It is very peaceful and surrounded by lovely trees. There are 1,500 graves. Each one tells the story of a brave young man, who was killed in that terrible battle.

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Some graves are marked "A Soldier of the War - Known only unto God" because their bodies were so badly damaged, they could not be identified.

SLIDE 22

The significance of what happened at Arnhem has become the stuff of legends and a deep bond of friendship has been established between the veterans, their families, the Dutch and the Parachute Regiment.

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British school children have now started to join the Dutch children, who lay flowers each year at the graves during the Commemorations.

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Our duty is to remember not only the brave men of Arnhem but **ALL** those who have died in conflict, the service of our wonderful country and the fight for freedom.

We will remember them. Thank you.