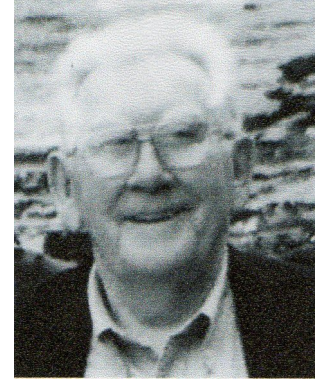




### Ron Tasker 1930-2008

Born in Cleethorpes on 22 July 1930, Ron first went to work on the docks in Grimsby, as a barrow lad, aged 14. After that he worked as a steam engine fireman on the railway. On 25 Sep 1947 Ron enlisted into Royal Signals at Lincoln. After basic training he volunteered for Airborne Forces and completed his selection and parachute training at Ringway in Jul 1948.



Ron met his future wife Rene at a church youth club bonfire party the same year. He was posted/attached 33<sup>rd</sup> Para Light Regt RA, the Gunner unit of 16 Indep Para Bde Gp, which was then serving on static occupation duties in Germany. Ron joined 16 Para Bde Sig Sqn in Nov 1949 and with the rest of the Bde Gp moved back to its new home at Lille Barracks, North Camp in Aldershot.

In 1951, 16 Indep Para Bde deployed to Cyprus and Egypt (Suez Canal Zone), and eventually returned to UK in 1954. In 1953, Ron asked Rene to marry him, but she didn't want to be an army wife, (famous last words), so he left the army and in June that year they were married in Cleethorpes. Their first child, Carol, was born in 1954. Although his Civvy job was lorry-driver for the Hope & Anchor Brewery, even with its perks Ron was so unhappy out of the army, that Rene suggested he sign-up again. So he did, and in 1955 returned to 16 Para Bde Sig Sqn, a happy man. He and Rene moved house to Aldershot, where their first married quarter was in the infamous Scott Moncrieff Square. They were later upgraded to the delights (sic) of Rutland Terrace. 16 Indep Para Bde deployed to Cyprus in Aug 1956 in preparation for Operation Musketeer, which eventually began in Oct with the airborne assault by 3 PARA on El Gamil airfield, and the subsequent sea landings at Port Said. In 1957, son Chris was born.

In 1958, 16 Para Bde deployed to Cyprus, then to Amman in Jordan, following the revolution in Iraq and much unrest throughout the Middle East. The deployment lasted until Nov of that year. Ron was promoted Sgt the following year, and by all accounts was very effective in the MT Troop.

In 1961 many Sqn SNCO's, including Ron, were posted out of the squadron "to broaden their outlook and gain promotion." R Sigs MRO said they had been in the Para Sig Sqn too long. Ron went to 4 Div at Iserlohn, Germany, and hated every moment of this enforced "hat" posting. Secretly, he plotted his return. In 1962 their second daughter, Mandy, was born. Tragically, she later died of a brain haemorrhage, aged 43.

In 1963, the Tasker family were planning to go back to UK for Christmas, and to allow Ron to attend a Para refresher course. Ron had secretly been in touch with Robbie Laing and John Griffin in Aldershot, because he desperately wanted to get back to Para Sigs. It was agreed that if he could somehow get back to the UK, he would be allowed to rejoin the Sqn. His OC in 4 DIV at the time was ex-Para, and he authorised the Para Refresher course, knowing full well that Ron wouldn't come back to BAOR. The family loaded everything that they could into the car, along with the three children, and then off they went, doing a moonlight flit, back to Ron's beloved Para Sigs. On the day that JFK was shot in Nov 1963, the Tasker family returned to UK.

In Aldershot Ron continued his service with 216 Para Sig Sqn, being promoted SSgt, the year after his triumphant return. He was always careful never to have his hair cut by the barber in Arnhem Barracks, known to many as "Charlie the Chop". On one occasion though Ron had an inspection due and left it too late to get his hair cut elsewhere. So he had to go to Charlie. He felt the result was so awful - he didn't take his beret off for two weeks.

Ron was promoted WO2 (RQMS) in 1970. He remained with 216 Para Sig Sqn until he retired in Jun 1972. In a full career of 25 years, he served 20 years with the Paras. Ron was a recipient of the GSM (1918-62) with clasps for Canal Zone, Near East, and Cyprus, and the LS&GC medal.

On leaving the Army, Ron joined the RSPCA, whereupon he was asked to write an article about the Society for the Army Resettlement Board. This resulted in a few servicemen following his example - notably two of his comrades from 216, Jim Shearer and Ivor Wells. Ron was firstly the local RSPCA Inspector for Basingstoke later promoted to Chief Inspector. He was invited to be a founder member of the newly instigated Special Operations Unit, and afterwards spent a lot of time working undercover, abroad. Unfortunately Ron suffered a heart attack in 1986, which required quadruple, bypass surgery. He was told it would last for 10 years. Due to his stubborn refusal to submit to old age, his love of life and Rene's loving care (and nagging); he was able to make it last 22 years. During his RSPCA service Ron was awarded the

European Group Medal for "Outstanding Services to Animal Welfare in Europe", the Special Service in Europe medal, the Special Service Medal for "Animal Rescue in Dartmoor", and the RSPCA Long Service medal. He was eventually promoted to RSPCA Group Chief for Surrey, and retired in 1992.

Retiring to live in W Sussex, Ron led an active and happy life with Rene and their children. He delighted in being a much-loved Granddad to Gemma, Lucie, John, Kate and Joshua, and a Great Granddad to Lauren and Jasmine. In 2008, Ron became increasingly very ill when his heart began to fail. His stubborn determination was in evidence when, on being moved into intensive care, he asked for his Jack Higgins book and reading glasses, because he'd need something to do while he was in there. IC patients don't usually sit around reading books, but he was insistent, and of course the book went with him. Sadly, Ron died of heart failure on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2008. His last words to the family were, "Remember to put the bin out, and please bring chocolates in for the nurses."

Carol e-mailed the Para Sigs OCA website, where condolences and farewells were later posted by many of her father's ex-comrades. They may be read on the guestbook at [www.216parasigs.org.uk](http://www.216parasigs.org.uk). On 16<sup>th</sup> Sep, the chapel at the Surrey & Sussex Crematorium in Crawley was packed with family and friends. Members of Para Sigs OCA were also present, accompanied by Dave Fox MBE, bearing the standard of Weston-on-the-Green RBL Branch. Ron's great nephew, a serving member of the RAF, read the Homily. In committal, Ron's ashes were scattered at his daughter Mandy's memorial in the Snell Hatch Cemetery in Crawley.

Ron's first love was Rene and they were happily married for 55 years. His other great love was the Paras - he was a Para through and through. His years with them formed the character that was to serve him so well into a second successful career with the RSPCA, and for the rest of his life.

R.I.P., Ron Tasker, small (but perfectly formed) Airborne Warrior.

(Written by Richard Hamilton in 2009, with much help from Rene Tasker, Carol Moon, Jack Turner, and Dave Fox)

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