

50 years of the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces in Aldershot – 1950 to 2000

The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces were stationed in Aldershot from 1950 till the year 2000. During this time the Dakota stood as a sentry at the entrance to Browning Barracks. When the Airborne were relocated to Colchester the Dakota went with them and now stand at the entrance to Merville Barracks. There is nothing left in Aldershot that reminds old soldiers or visitors that they were ever there.

Richard (Stace) Stacey, is the landlord of the Trafalgar Inn, which is the last airborne and military pub in Aldershot. Stace and Tommy Simpson, who both served in 3 Para, run a fund called “The Parachute Regiment & Airborne Forces Memorial Fund” to keep the memory of those who are no longer with us alive. They raised the funds and were given permission to put two new memorials into the Military Cemetery along with benches dedicated to the airborne units who served in Aldershot. When an airborne warrior passes on a plaque is added to the relevant bench.



Stace was talking to Tommy and came up with the idea of producing a memorial to all those who served in the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces over those 50 years. He said to Tommy that he would like to raise the funds and put a full size airborne soldier in full jump order in Aldershot. They had already put the memorials into the Military Cemetery so they looked for another location. The place had to be close to Aldershot Town centre and available to view by the public. One place that fitted this criteria is the Princes Gardens, which the airborne troops would have walked through to get to the many pubs.

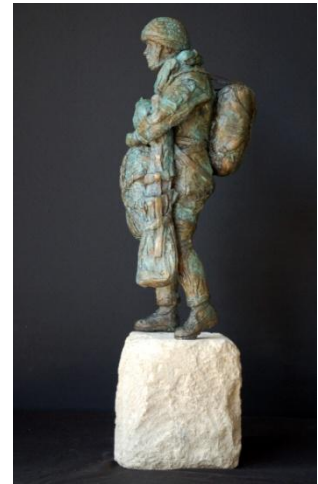
Both Stace and Tommy were adamant that the statue would be made in bronze and six foot in height. They contacted Amy Goodman who is a sculptor and operates from the Project Workshops near Andover in Hampshire. Amy produced the Pegasus and Bellerophon statue for the 16 Air Assault Brigade's HQ in Colchester. After discussing the project with Amy she told them that the cost would be £50,000.



Undeterred, Stace and Tommy started looking into obtaining permission. Stace contacted General Bashall, who was the Commander of Home Command in Aldershot and he was in full agreement. Rushmoor Council are also in full agreement. Once they had received both permissions the task of raising the funds began. Stace put an article on Facebook and explained what he and Tommy were proposing to do. It wasn't long before the money started to trickle in and the trickle soon became a flood. Money came in small and larger amounts, from individuals and PRA Branches. It wasn't long before they had raised the £50,000 needed to commission the statue.

Stace and Tommy started on the many visits to Amy. They arranged for Amy to join them at the Airborne Museum at Duxford. Waiting for them at Duxford was Jim Kilbride, Jim served in 2 Para and is the caretaker of the Dakota at Merville Barracks. Jim is 6 foot in height and had volunteered to be the model for the statue. Uniform and parachutes from 1982 were obtained and Amy proceeded to take many videos and pictures. Once back in her studio she started sketching and working on the small model that she will use to create the full size statue. By this time Forces News had started to get involved and they will be producing a series of short programmes about the creation of the statue that they will be broadcasting nearer the unveiling day. Along with the statue, five benches will be placed in the gardens. The benches will have plaques bearing the names of the five barracks that were in Montgomery Lines, Arnhem, Normandy, Bruneval and Rhine along with Browning Barracks. The statue will also have solar uplighters.

Stace then realised that they needed a plinth of rock to mount the statue on. The committee in the Falkland Islands were contacted and the request for a plinth of rock was sent. The committee passed the request onto Nigel Phillips CBE who is the Governor of the Falklands Islands and explained what was happening back in Aldershot. After a meeting of the Falkland Island Government, Nigel informed the committee that a block of white granite with quartz veins will be cut from Mount Longdon, put into a shipping container along with all the necessary paperwork and sent to the UK. At the same time the Government agreed to donate £5,000 towards the cost of the statue. The stone is now with Amy's stonemason.



The Aldershot Branch PRA was contacted a few months ago and was asked if they would organise the unveiling ceremony. We were highly honoured and extremely pleased to be asked. The organisation is now in full swing with constant meetings. We are keeping Stace and Tommy informed how the planning is going. The unveiling will be on Saturday 6 July 2019 and will start at 1130 with a march past the Princes Hall. The march will then proceed along Grosvenor Road and turn left down Victoria Road. They will then turn left into Station Road and again turn left up the High Street back to the Princes Gardens. This will be followed by a Drum Head service at the statue. The proposal is that the Regimental Mascot, Pegasus, will lead the parade followed by the band. The Colours of the Parachute Regiment and Airborne units will follow. The National PRA Standard will be in front of the Aldershot Branch Standard and the Pegasus Flag. This will be followed by the Standards of the Branches of the PRA. Following will be all of the people who served in the Airborne in Aldershot during their time in the army. The Cadets of the Military Preparation College along with the local Para Cadets will follow. Finally 60 Airborne Riders will complete the march past. All of the above is dependent on the availability of personnel. A Dakota has been booked and will complete a fly past and this will end the unveiling. People will then be able to socialise and meet old friends.



We are in contact with Regimental headquarters in Colchester and we have asked that the Colours of all of the airborne units who served in Aldershot during this time be on parade. The Parachute Regiment band and Pegasus the Mascot have also been requested. Along with this we would like as many PRA Standards and any other Airborne Standards as possible to be on parade. To help with the organisation we would be grateful if all Branches who are sending their Branch Standards notify the Aldershot Branch. This unveiling will be one of the biggest events staged in Aldershot for over 30 years. Early indications show that we are expecting in excess of 2,000 at the unveiling. We hope that you can join us, and celebrate the 50 years that the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces were stationed in the town.