

# Major General Peter Alan Charles Baldwin

## 1927 - 2015

Major General Peter Alan Charles Baldwin had the distinction of being the first Army Apprentice to reach two star officer rank. He was born on 19 February 1927 into a theatrical family, which left him with an abiding enthusiasm for music and all forms of entertainment. After attending the King Edward VII Grammar School in Chelmsford, Essex he attested at the age of 14 to attend the Army Training School (ATS) at Arborfield to start training as a REME radio technician.



On joining man service, and after basic training, he was sent to 10 Command Workshops at Mill Hill, where he made the most of the opportunity to attend classical concerts in London, as well as London Symphony Orchestra rehearsal sessions and a two week course run by its director.

In December 1945 he prepared for his first overseas posting, to the Sudan, where with an ATS contemporary, he was one of only two radio technicians in theatre. At his mother's insistence, he attended a War Office Selection Board, and subsequently returned to UK in the rank of Corporal to start officer training at the Officer Cadet Training Unit, Mons, Aldershot. He graduated after six months with the Cane of Honour, and having elected to be commissioned into Royal Signals, the second part of the commissioning process was held at Catterick, where he again did well, this time being runner-up for the Cane of Honour.

His first commissioned posting was to 2 Lines of Communication Signal Regiment in Herford, Germany, and after a short time was sent to Berlin to command the detached 16 High Speed Wireless Troop. Here again he made the most of the opportunities presented to attend symphony concerts and other musical events. His time in Berlin encompassed the Berlin Airlift, which he witnessed at first hand.

His next posting was to 21 Fire Command Signal Troop and 27 Heavy Battery Anti-Aircraft Signal Troop in Scarborough, with the eventual destination of Hong Kong, at that time in some turmoil. At this time also he bought his first civilian suit – up until then uniform was worn everywhere – the impetus being the realisation that he

would have to travel to Hong Kong by BOAC flying boat, staying at luxurious civilian hotels en route. The journey took a very pleasant five days, and on arrival he had only been in Murray Barracks a short time before his batman arrived in the company of the tailor, to say "You need new suit"! The batman was an old hand, and knew the form!

In June 1950 the North Koreans crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and triggered the Korean War. He was dispatched with 38 Brigade Signal Troop on an aircraft carrier, eventually landing at Pusan, where they were to come under command of the US 24 Division. There he came under enemy fire (and blue on blue, courtesy of the US Air Force) for the first time, and after several encounters the unit was resubordinated to what became the Commonwealth Brigade. He moved with them to spearhead the advance up the western side of Korea, through Pyongyang to the Chinese border, only to have to withdraw again south of Seoul when Communist China entered the war and pushed south.

Following the ceasefire, he was sent to 1 Wireless Regiment in Munster, Germany. There he was an enthusiastic organiser and participant in regimental sports, and was present at the installation of 101 Wireless Troop at its new site at Langeleben. He was subsequently appointed Adjutant, and following the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Lonnon, was closely involved in the planning for the new Regimental Headquarters at Birgelen, on the Dutch border some distance to the west. His next posting was as SO3 Signals at HW Eastern Command at Hounslow, where he prepared to take the Staff College entrance examination. While in the exam, at Kensington Town Hall, the invigilator summoned him to talk to his superior at HQ. He did so reluctantly, and was surprised to learn that following a positive medical scan, a vehicle was its way to transport him to Woolwich Hospital, and that he should leave the exam immediately. On arrival at the hospital, the nurses assured him that the situation was not that dramatic, and he arranged to take the remaining four exam papers in a screened off corner of the ward, invigilated by officers from HQ Eastern Command. On being transferred to the King Edward VII hospital, he was advised that he would be off duties for some time, as he would need three months chemotherapy, followed surgery on his right lung and three months convalescence. There his morale was maintained by the cheerful and irreverent company of several other military officers similarly confined, and he eventually emerged fit, but with only one lung working properly.

The Corps confirmed that he was still needed, and he was sent to 5 Signal Regiment (later to become 30 Signal Regiment), with the medical grading of Home Only. After a year at Colchester, he was sent as GSO3 to Signals 5 in the War Office, where he learned that he would attend Staff College in 1960, a year later than planned. There his theatrical talent bloomed, and he produced a very successful pantomime, succeeding in persuading no less a personality than Brian Johnston to take part. On graduation, he was posted to 7 Signal Regiment as Adjutant to Lieutenant Colonel Peter Pentreath, subsequently Signal Officer-in-Chief (Army). On promotion, he assumed command of 3 Squadron, composed principally of line-men, whom he came to respect and value highly. On Exercise Spearpoint 1962, the squadron laid 700 drums of cable and recovered 699!

His next posting was to Signals 1 in the War Office, where he had responsibility for manpower planning and allocation, and was followed by selection to attend the Joint Services Staff College. He assumed command of 5 Infantry Brigade and Headquarters Signal Squadron in 1964, and survived the dismissal of his Brigadier and a deployment to Borneo at the end of the confrontation (where he earned a Mention in Despatches) to learn that he had been selected for promotion and posting as a member of the Directing Staff to the Army Staff College.

There he came under the influence of the formidable Major General Hugh Beach, renowned for possessing one of the sharpest brains in the Army. He taught all aspects of the military syllabus, and considers it one of his most challenging postings. Following this he assumed command of 13 Signal Regiment, the new incarnation of 1 Wireless Regiment, and by now well ensconced in their custom built barracks at Birgelen. His legacy as Commanding Officer was the construction of a swimming pool, opened by the actor Derek Nimmo. This was to prove one of his most enjoyable postings, as he combined coping with a continual stream of visitors of up to four star rank with a demanding operational role, all the while fulfilling the many social obligations his position entailed. He particularly relished the chance to revisit his old haunts in Berlin, in the course of his visits to his detached squadron.

His next appointment on promotion was a prized one, as Secretary to the NATO Defence College in Rome. There he had to cope with a myriad of very senior visitors from SACEUR downwards, and coordinate a series of course visits to various European locations, as well as an audience with the Pope. In July 1974 he was promoted to Brigadier and appointed to command 2 Signal Group in Aldershot. This involved control of units spread all over UK, both regular and TA, and extensive travel. His only real confrontation came

when he had cause to upbraid certain TA officers for wearing brown shoes and side hats while on exercise, an intervention which earned him the displeasure of their Regimental Colonel!

His next posting was to HQ AFCENT as DCOS Exercises, where he relished the contact with the many senior NATO officers with whom he had dealings. He was particularly pleased when SACEUR personally congratulated him on the turnout and bearing of a multi-national, tri-Service guard of honour, the culmination of several weeks of concentrated rehearsal. One of his more enjoyable duties was to take the salute for the British contingents at the annual Nijmegen Marches event in Holland each year. His final posting saw him promoted to Major General, and appointed as Chief Signal Officer BAOR in JHQ Rheindahlen. There he considers himself fortunate in having an excellent staff serving him, which allowed him to concentrate on strategic matters and ensure that targets and objectives were met with minimal delay and frustration. Among his more pleasant duties were hosting the Princess Royal, acting as telephone responder for BFBS on Christmas Day and visiting units under his command. A notable event was the Queen's Review at Sennelager, of which he commissioned a painting as a record of the occasion.

On his subsequent retirement, he secured the post of Deputy Director of Radio for the Independent Broadcasting Authority in Knightsbridge, London, with whom he started on the Monday after demitting office on the Friday at Rheindahlen! One of the roles he particularly enjoyed was the annual visit to Venice for the working party of the Prix Italia, where he was able to stay next to the Opera House. During his time in this post he was to meet many prominent figures in the entertainment business, including several musical performers, to his great delight.

He eventually retired for the second time in 1995, but remained active in providing consultancy to the Thompson Foundation and involvement with charitable works, including Crimestoppers, the Eyeless Trust and church affairs. He was an Associate member of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Trust, and a holder of the CBE. In his final retirement, he and Gail much enjoyed travelling, visiting friends worldwide, and attending musical events such as the quarterly end of term concert by the Junior Division of the Royal College of Music.

Peter Baldwin, President of the Langeleben Reunion Association 1993 — 2015, died on 15 September 2015. He is survived by his wife Gail, and two stepsons, Simon and Timothy. To them go our very sincere sympathies, and the commiserations and condolences of his many friends and colleagues in the Corps.