

# Patrick John Cunningham

## Admiralty Sergeant

Peter Sherred

The Confederation of the Cinque Ports has a long and fascinating history. In its early days the Cinque Port towns of Dover, Hastings, Romney, Hythe and Sandwich were required to provide for fifteen days a year fifty-seven ships each manned by twenty men and a boy and such provision was to be free of charge and for the service of the monarch. If their services were needed for longer than the required days, the monarch was obliged to pay for the additional services. This 'ship service' as it was known was designed to ensure the coast could be defended from enemy attack on the one hand while at the same time a service was provided to take the monarch and the court on journeys abroad. Such ship service predates the Norman Conquest and the ships concerned (cogs) were very small, as the crew numbers indicate, but, as time passed, by the fifteenth century fewer ships and more crew members were required because of the increase in the size of ships and their crews. To encourage the Cinque Ports to undertake these duties they received in return various rights and privileges, chief among them being full self-government to each town and a closely defined surrounding area, called a liberty. Among the many other rights, they were able to claim wreckage that came to their shores which had either been floating in the sea or which had been deliberately jettisoned from ships. These rights were known as flotsam and jetsam respectively.

In each port and its limb the Lord Warden, as Admiral, appointed a droit gatherer to

notify his staff in Dover immediately a wreck occurred or flotsam or jetsam was recovered. Droit gatherers kept records of the goods recovered and expenses incurred by the salvors; so that the respective claims of the Lord Warden and the Ports could be determined. The principal droit gatherer was known as the Sergeant of the Admiralty and the person who held this post had responsibility for these functions within Dover, as well as for enforcing orders of the Admiralty Court. With the passage of the centuries circumstances changed and today the Sergeant at Admiralty (or Admiralty Sergeant, as the title currently is) has a purely honorary position within the Confederation whose main role is to bear the Admiralty Oar before the Lord Warden on ceremonial occasions and to lead the processions at the annual Speaker's Day event. The position of Admiralty Sergeant has been held since 2004 by Patrick John Cunningham of Dover.

Pat, as he is more informally known, was born in Folkestone in 1948 the eldest of three children. His brother Stephen and sister Ann together with three half siblings are all living. Pat's father was a Captain in the Merchant Navy while his mother was a trained accountant. When Pat was four the family moved from Cheriton, where they had then been living, to settle in Selsted where Pat initially attended Selsted School before moving to St Ninian's private school in Canterbury, completing his education in a Secondary Modern School in Folkestone. Sadly, his parents separated. His mother

moved to Cranbrook along with Ann and Stephen while Pat remained in Selsted with his father who subsequently remarried. Pat remained in Selsted so he could complete his schooling. He was not academic so when he left school eventually it was without any academic qualifications. Following school Pat moved to Cranbrook to be with his mother and siblings and it was here that he helped, for a short period, a family friend David, an electrician, to learn some of his trade. Pat's mother was formerly a member of the WRAF who had been based at Hawkinge and she suggested he consider the armed forces where he could learn a trade and have a worthwhile career.

So it was that Pat, aged 15, joined the army through a recruiting office at Chatham enlisting, due to his age, as a Junior Leader in the Royal Artillery and was posted to Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote near Nuneaton, for two years. The Barracks were home to the Junior Leaders' Regiment Royal Artillery between the 1960s and the 1990s. After this initiation period he was posted to his allotted regiment in Germany (17 Corunna Battery of 26 Field Regiment Royal Artillery) stationed at Bergen-Hohne. This garrison was a major British base following World War 2 and was located close by the former Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. The huge barracks site had formerly been a German SS camp. Like all the gunners Pat served time on the guns before carrying on his trade in communications (signals). He acted as a signaller in the Observation Post and later the Battery Commander's party.

In the mid-1960s the battery was deployed on exercise in Libya coinciding with the time of the coup against King Idris I. The 1969 Libyan coup d'état, also known as the al-Fateh Revolution or the 1 September Revolution, was carried out by the Free

Officers' Movement, a group of military officers led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. This event left Pat's battery stranded for months in desert conditions which involved extreme night-time cold. Cold weather clothing was flown in by members of the RAF to El Alamein. Prior to the overthrow of King Idris as leader of Libya the British had enjoyed having a vast desert training area in the country where real life manoeuvres could be held. A similar very large British Army training area exists in Canada known as The British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) and is located at the training area of Canadian Forces Base Suffield, Alberta, Canada.

While in Libya Pat was quartered in a desert tented camp known as "Chatham". The ranks lived in six-man tents with large marquees for the various messes and cook house, with corrugated iron structures for shower blocks. Pat remembers there was enough water for showers but for other needs water purifiers were necessary and when out on patrol in vehicles water was stored and cooled in canvas bags (known as 'chuggles') which enabled evaporation to cool the water. Pat recalls, as a major feature of life at this time, the sand flies which transformed the external bleach brown colour of the tents and marquees to black. In order to protect themselves from the flies everybody had to carry whisks to swish away the fly nuisance. There was no British involvement in the coup itself and no conflict with Colonel Gaddafi but Pat remembers seeing many decommissioned broken down former British vehicles, which had been used by the Idris regime, awaiting spares - which would now never arrive! At the end of the extended deployment large numbers of vehicles and equipment were rendered unusable by being immobilised or destroyed. A memory of Pat's was the sight of much equipment and vehicles, some of which

was new, being dumped into Tobruk harbour.

Another prominent event in Pat's memory is the 1969 Berlin Tattoo in which the battery's guns were required to be fired for the 1812 Overture. The guns were positioned within the Olympic Stadium and when they were fired for the first rehearsal the noise was so loud it cracked some of the structure of the stadium! Eventually, to enable participation in the event, the powder charge was required to be reduced to a quarter charge. Pat remembers this tattoo was a spectacular show because the event involved the massed bands of the British Army, engaging hundreds of personnel, who put on an impressive display. Pat was responsible for the firing of one of the guns stationed round the stadium each of which had a signal light attached, controlled by the Band Master, which, when illuminated identified the time to fire. The Tattoo was a huge show with many different elements involved in it including drill displays and vehicle manoeuvres and Pat believes that about six regiments in total were involved. Each day the guns were ferried from camp to stadium at speed with police outriders and going through all the lights on the roads without stopping! A particular memory he retains occurred at the end of the event party in the NAAFI block, when a 'few glasses' were being raised. It is of a vision of the conductor of the massed bands, who was a short Guards Colonel, standing on a table amidst the throng of army personnel conducting some musicians while dressed in polka dot boxer shorts, a scarlet tunic top and wearing a busby!

While in Germany Pat took the opportunity to visit East Berlin which made a lasting impression. He described the experience as going from a bright

sunny day to a grey dismal foggy one where much war damage was still evident and there were very few shops. Everything was grey and dour. What he found particularly sad were the presence of towers from where people could wave to family members across the street in West Berlin, since the wall separated the two communities on either side of the road.

Returning from Germany in 1972 to act as the support regiment for the Royal School of Artillery Larkhill (Roberts Barracks) involved Pat for two years in the training of young officers to control a battery or to move a battery together with associated military skills. Following this the regiment returned to Germany and was stationed in Dortmund. A tour of Northern Ireland involved being stationed at Long Kesh, a former RAF base upon which was sited the Maze Prison used to house paramilitary prisoners, where Pat ran a search team which involved searching inside and outside the camp and also patrolling estates and buildings looking for weapons. This was an emergency tour of some four and a half months and for which he received the General Service Medal (GSM) for service in Northern Ireland.

Throughout his service career Pat was an avid skier. After learning the art with the Junior Leaders in Geilo, Norway, he continued skiing as a member of the regimental team taking part in the UK championship in Aviemore Cairngorm in Scotland and annually in the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) championships becoming very proficient at the sport reaching a good professional level in the army. He became one of the highest qualified ski instructors and each season he used to ski race and following the championships he returned along, with other instructors, to run a ski lodge giving tuition to up and coming skiers. It was

through skiing Pat met his wife-to-be Clair who was representing the Women's Royal Army Corps and a competent skier herself. While at Alpbach, Bavaria, the two met after each day's skiing and hit it off socially. He recalls an incident involving the two of them at the top of a slope when he skied down behind Clair intending to pick her up and carry on skiing but she froze as he approached and her skis dug in the snow and in the resulting collision he split his chin against a guard post and missed his race start time. As a result he was disqualified from the race which was a bit of blow because he was third in the Division at that time. Clair returned to the UK to continue working in the Ministry of Defence. Slightly later Pat was posted to Woolwich as a training instructor at the depot for recruits. Clair and Pat were married within a couple of months on 13th March 1976 in High Wycombe where Clair's home was located and where her parents lived.

In the winter of the same year the Officer Commanding the junior musicians asked Pat's Commanding Officer if Pat could train a group of musicians in skiing in Aviemore. As Clair and he had not had time for a honeymoon he was able to obtain permission for Clair to accompany him on this exercise. Pat trained up the group and they subsequently performed well in the UK Championships. Clair and Pat came back to quarters in Woolwich and while stationed there, during the national firemen's strike of 1977, Pat as a senior NCO became a commander of a Green Goddess whose crew was made up of his recruits. When called out he and his crew had police outriders he recalls and during the strike he met Willie Whitelaw who was subsequently Margaret Thatcher's Deputy Prime Minister. He and his crew worked on various shifts and Pat remembers that on Christmas Day he unexpectedly found

he could return to quarters but Clair was unprepared for this eventuality and had nothing in so their meal comprised tinned salmon and chips! One fire to which his crew was called out was at a school where in one of the buildings were several school pets. At first, he was denied entry to the building by a school official but having indicated, if necessary, he would use his axe to gain access he was allowed entry and he and his crew managed to rescue all the animals inside. This warranted a write up in *The Times*. While at Woolwich another unusual experience for Pat was appearing on television with Pan's People with other drill instructors. Pan's People was a British all-female dance troupe most associated with the BBC TV music chart show 'Top of the Pops' from the late-1960s to the mid-1970s. For this particular occasion, the dancers were clothed in outfits made from military material and Pat's star turn involved drill moves to music while Pan's People danced and this, Pat said, was his claim to fame!

From 1978 to 1983, stationed in Dortmund, Germany, Pat carried out regimental duties and continued to enjoy his skiing. He was then posted to Bordon Garrison, Hampshire, a large army camp where he and Clair were quartered, as a member of 8th Cadet Training Team which served several large schools and their Combined Cadet Forces. A team of four instructors, with an Officer Commanding, trained CCF members in all army skills of fieldcraft including map reading, first aid, trade craft skills and the use of arms. This exercise also involved organising summer camps and training on ranges, all to equip students as cadets. Pat did this for some three years in Sussex and Surrey and some of the Sussex schools he visited included Christ's Hospital School, Horsham, Ardingly College, Lancing College and Hurstpierpoint College, Hassocks (where

the current Lord Warden went to school). He also was involved with the Army Cadet Forces in the local towns. He recalls this period as being very busy and midway through the cadet training period he was promoted to Staff Sergeant.

For his final two years of service Pat moved on to recruitment having his own office in both Crawley and Horsham. Recruiting was for the army generally and targeted boys, girls, adults and juniors. During this period, he stayed at Preston Barracks Brighton before moving to Aldershot (long seen as the home of the British Army). The Aldershot garrison was established in 1854 when the War Department bought a large area of land near to the village of Aldershot, with the objective of establishing a permanent training camp for the British Army. Pat finally ended up in residence at Caterham Barracks from where he retired from army life. At Caterham he was given the title "The Lodger" because he was only seen at breakfast and then later in the day. By this time, in addition to the GSM for service in Ireland, he had received the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal awarded at Woolwich for the most deserving junior NCO in 1977 and he also received the Long Service Medal.

A few years before retirement Pat and Clair set out to look for a house and settled on their present address in Dover. Its advantages were that it was on the level, had a river to its rear and was sufficiently central to the town. Clair came to live in the house and Pat moved into the mess and would join her at weekends. This arrangement lasted for nearly five years. Pat left the army in June 1988 as a Staff Sergeant and settled in Dover at the age of 40 but he obtained work immediately with English Heritage at Dover Castle where he was to work for some twenty-two and a half years. Clair had obtained the application form for the post which was

filled in during one of Pat's weekend visits just prior to retirement. Following interview, he was appointed and over the years acted as a Custodian. He did any job required of him and became Senior Custodian, then Deputy Head Custodian running the Castle site in the absence of the Head Custodian. Consequently, he managed all areas of Castle life including the tunnels, the Keep, financing and retail. He developed time tickets for the tunnels to avoid queues and was often involved in advising on film locations. He retired as Head Custodian at the end of 2010. Meanwhile Clair had been employed in the Civil Service at the Job Centre being in post for some 10 years until restructuring was undertaken after which she found employment at Pencester Surgery as a receptionist, a post she held for many years and where she was well regarded by doctors and public alike. Both Pat and Clair have been keen walkers over the years with Pat leading his NHS health walks and Clair walking with the White Cliffs Ramblers often goes some 10-12 miles in a session.

When Head Custodian at Dover Castle Pat was asked by the then Deputy Constable, Brigadier David Santa-Ollalla, if he would consider becoming the Admiralty Sergeant of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports. He says he was honoured to take up the role, succeeding Angie Russell in 2004. Being ex forces he had preconditions! These were that he would take the role seriously, would undertake the functions associated with it properly and that he had an appropriate uniform. His predecessor had simply worn a gown with a tricorne hat. He designed a uniform himself basing it on the long military frock coat of late C19 early C20. Pat's distinctive uniform has navy vertical pairs of gold buttons to the front, with a box pleat and ornate cuffs and epaulettes carrying the Cinque Ports

buttons while the uniform collar carries the Cinque Ports badge. Army-style trousers make up the uniform, giving the Admiralty Sergeant a distinctive appearance when in full ceremonial dress complete with tricorne hat and carrying the Silver Oar. One of Pat's functions is to train the Lord Warden's cadets each year on the ceremonial requirements of events in the Confederation. The cadets come from the Sea Cadets' organisation where each unit commander is invited to recommend a cadet for the prestigious posts during the coming year. Two cadets are selected from those nominated (one from East Sussex and the other from Kent) by the Area Officer of the Sea Cadet Corps in Portsmouth and those recommendations are then submitted to the Lord Warden for approval. The newly appointed cadets attend a formal Induction Ceremony at Walmer Castle, around the end of May, where they are presented by the Lord Warden, with certificates and badges of office to be worn on their uniforms. Pat indicates parental support in the role is important. Pat then orchestrates and choreographs many of the ceremonial events of the Confederation through each year and this involves all the drills for the cadets and rehearsals for major events



*Speaker's Day Lunch Hastings 2018*

such as the annual Speaker's Day. He also assists the Registrar in advising on matters of protocol.

Pat's full life has also involved a ten-year battle with Cancer. He was first diagnosed while with English Heritage and this prompted him to submit his notice at the time. Throughout all the years of treatment subsequently, which has included major surgery several times, he continued fulfilling his obligations to the Lord Warden and the Confederation of the Cinque Ports where he is held in very high esteem by all involved. He is a fervent supporter of the bowel cancer screening programme following his experience of the process and its aftermath. He has retained a very positive approach to his challenge and his life, viewing the cancer as something to fight and he has put up a good battle for ten years ably supported by Clair (who Pat describes as his "rock") and others. His philosophy is, in his own words, "I will not go down without a fight". Notwithstanding all his challenges he was on parade for the induction of the 215th Deputy Constable of Dover Castle, Brigadier Peter Rowell MBE, on Wednesday 5th December 2019 in Constable's Tower, Dover Castle where he carried the Silver Oar as usual and organised the two cadets for the induction ceremony.

Pat considers his role as a "great honour" and his involvement with the Confederation as "fantastic". He is especially grateful to the current Lord Warden, Lord Boyce and his late wife Fleur, for all the support offered to him. "It has been an honour to serve him, I love what I do," says Pat. He feels the Confederation gave him the targets he needed each year to strive for and participate in over the last ten years. Additionally, for approximately thirty

years, Pat has been the Chairman of The Royal Artillery Association, Dover Branch which meets once a month in the Sea Angling Club in Priory Road. One of his functions occurs annually on Remembrance Sunday when he has been responsible for the firing of the 25-pounder field gun at Dover Castle at the beginning and end of the two minutes' silence. He briefs members of the public on the safety issues of the event and afterwards encourages members of the public to ask questions. This event takes place near the statue of Admiral Bertram Ramsay, admiral of the British Navy during the Second World War, who led the evacuation

of Dunkirk and, during the preparation of D-Day, led the navy. The gun faces out to sea so that it is "against the damn Frenchies", according to Pat!

Both the Registrar and Seneschal of the Cinque Ports Confederation, Ian Russell MVO MA MSocSc, and The Lord Warden of the Confederation, The Lord Boyce, have paid tribute to Pat in the following terms. The Registrar says "With his military background and attention to detail, Pat brought a new professionalism to the role of Admiralty Sergeant. Always smartly turned out in his distinctive uniform, he choreographed many large parades (which



*5th December 2019*

he sometimes likened to "herding cats") and his input to these events will be much missed by the Cinque Ports. He also played a major role in developing the new institution of Lord Warden's Cadets, helping the young people concerned to perform with confidence and precision which has reflected great credit upon their units and the whole Sea Cadet Corps. I am personally very grateful to him for his support over the last 15 years. He will be a very hard act to follow."

The Lord Boyce KG GCB OBE DL pays the following tribute, "It is my pleasure to have had Pat Cunningham as my Admiralty Sergeant from the time of my Installation as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 2005. He is a mine of information on my Admiralty, most especially on Dover Castle of which I am Constable, and I have learnt a huge amount from him. He is also an engaging and most pleasant person

with whom to be associated and his invariably smart bearing and positive outlook on life are greatly to be admired. In addition, his impeccable knowledge of how ceremonies should be conducted to the highest of standards has been a boon to me - and, indeed, to all the Cinque Ports. My Lord Warden Cadets, two appointed every year, have also benefitted from his wise and sensible advice and mentoring, as I am sure all thirty who have held the post would readily acknowledge. In all, I could not wish for a more accomplished and reliable Officer to fill his position. The Cinque Ports and I are most fortunate."

High praise indeed for a man of whom Dover should rightly be proud.

Since the above article was submitted for publication it has been announced that sadly Pat Cunningham passed away during the night of 30th January 2020.

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