

OBITUARY

COLONEL ALEXANDER KIRK JOHNSON, MBE, TD, M Inst RE, DL

Born 13th November 1918 - died 4th January 2018.



Born in Barlow Village, Co. Durham, the son of a miner and the middle child of three boys, his was a poor but happy upbringing. He attended the local primary school moving on to Blaydon Secondary School, a mere 5 mile walk each way which certainly toughened him up for his future life.

Following school, he began training as a biochemist and in 1939 was called up for 6 months of military training at Hadrian's Camp at Carlisle.

When war broke out he was sent to Winterbourne for Chemical Warfare Training and was posted to 1st Chemical Warfare Battalion. He was then sent to France and was captured by the German Forces. He escaped, and after many more adventures made it to Dunkirk and was evacuated back to England.

He joined 6th Commando and was involved in the raids on the Lofoten Islands and Vaagso in Norway. Smaller raids on the Pas de Calais, trying to convince Hitler where the expected Second Front would land followed, after which he was offered a commission which meant leaving the Commandos.

Once commissioned, he was posted to 7th Engineer Regiment at Bournemouth and trained as a Beach Group Engineer. As a result he was very early into France on D-Day to clear beaches of obstacles and minefields to facilitate our transport and men. After that success he, with his troop, became involved in the 'Falaise Gap', meeting up with Canadian soldiers and giving the Germans a very torrid time.

During the latter part of the War he moved up to the Rhine where he built rafts to ferry 15th Scottish Division over the river, subsequently levelling the banks to allow amphibious vehicles to enter and exit much more easily.

His troops were among the first into Belsen and the smells and sights remained with him always.

It was whilst stationed at Winterbourne he met his future wife Ruth at a village dance and they married in 1942. Two years later, their daughter Susan was born

Alex was demobilised in 1946 and when the Territorial Army was formed a year later he joined immediately. Starting as a Captain with 105 Construction Engineer Regiment RE TA. After a couple of minor name changes this became 105 Corps Engineer

Regiment RE (Tyne Electrical Engineers) TA and Alex commanded that Regiment from 1959 to 1962 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

On 10th June 1954 Alex was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

The Army Cadet Force was very keen that he should join them and he promised he would give it 3 years. His first appointment was as Area Commandant (North) in County Durham. The records show Colonel AK Johnson MBE TD as Commandant of Durham ACF from 1971 to 1974. He then became Commandant of Tyne and Wear County ACF, when this new County was formed. He did that for a further 7 years until 1981. He thus had 20 years of involvement with an excellent youth movement which was very close to his heart. He would have influenced a large number of cadets, many of whom would go on to serve both the Regular and Territorial Army.

Alex finally served in uniform as Honorary Colonel, 72 (Tyne Electrical Engineers) Engineer Regiment TA (a successor to the Unit he had been CO of) from 1976 to 1984. He gave his unstinting advice and support to 3 Regular and 1 TA Commanding Officers.

He remained a member of the North of England TA Association and then the Reserve Forces and Cadet Association until his death.

In 1985 he was made a Deputy Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear.

On 9th November 2015 Alex was awarded the Legion d'Honneur by the Honorary French Consul, the highest French order of merit for military and civilian service.

Following demobilisation he trained as a teacher and spent many years at Whickham School before leaving to run his own independent school – Linden School – in Forest Hall, near Newcastle. The school flourished under his guidance and he successfully influenced the lives of hundreds of children until he finally retired in 1997 aged 79.

He led an active life in his local community of Rowlands Gill serving on several committees. He was a keen bowler both indoors and out until weeks before his death.

During his later years he wrote several books on the local area and travelled around giving talks in schools and community groups.

Alex joined the newly formed Northumbria Branch of the Royal Society of St George in 2008, becoming its President in January 2015.

His passing means he will be sorely missed by so many in the North East.