

= Lofty Large =

Donald " Lofty " Large (27 September 1930 ? 22 October 2006) was a British soldier and author .

Having joined the Army as a boy , Large fought in the Korean War and was wounded and taken prisoner at the Battle of Imjin . He spent two years in a prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp , where his injuries went untreated and he lost more than a third of his body weight . After his release and rehabilitation , he joined the Special Air Service (SAS) and went on to serve in various conflicts around the world , hunting communist guerrillas in Malaya , suppressing rebellions in Oman and Aden , and conducting deniable cross @-@ border reconnaissance and raids during the Indonesia ? Malaysia confrontation .

An imposing figure ? he was almost 6 feet 6 inches (1 @.@ 98 m) tall ? he was given the nickname " Lofty " after joining the Army .

After his retirement , Large wrote two books about his Army career , preceding such authors as Andy McNab and Chris Ryan . Andy McNab has said that Large and his books were " instrumental in setting the template for future members of the [SAS] Regiment " .

= = Early life = =

Large was born in Oxfordshire , the first child of Joseph Large and his wife Emily (née Pratley) . His sister , Janet , was nine years his junior . In 1939 , the family moved to a cottage 2 miles (3 km) outside the village of Guiting Power in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds . As a child his father taught him how to shoot game ; he later said of this experience , " little did I realise I would spend a lot of time , many years later [in the SAS] , being trained in exactly that type of instinctive shooting " .

Large would later dedicate his first book to " the best parents a man could ask for " .

Growing up during the Second World War , and having watched British and American soldiers on field exercises in the Cotswold Hills , Large said that he had always wanted to be a soldier . He also joined the Army Cadet Force .

= = Army career = =

Large joined the British Army as a " band boy " at the age of 15 . Unable to join his county regiment (the Gloucestershire Regiment) because of a lack of vacancies , he instead joined the Wiltshire Regiment , with whom he served for five years in England , Germany and Hong Kong . During this time he was given the nickname " Lofty " , having reached his adult height of 6 feet 5 3 ? 4 inches (1.975m) . In 1951 , by requesting a transfer to the Gloucestershire Regiment , Large volunteered to fight in the Korean War . After a combat training course in Japan , he was deployed to the front line .

= = = Korean War = = =

In March 1951 , along with half a dozen other newly badged Glosters , Large was sent to B Company 's position in the low hills above the Imjin River . The Glosters , as part of the 29th Brigade , were defending routes through the valley that could potentially be used by the Chinese in a southbound offensive towards Seoul . On 22 April 1951 , they engaged with Chinese troops in the Battle of Imjin . By the morning of 24 April , B Company had fought off seven assaults before they were able to rejoin the remainder of their battalion on what became known as Gloster Hill . By this time the battalion was vastly outnumbered , low on ammunition and cut off from United Nations lines . Large himself was shot in the left shoulder and , along with most of the remaining Glosters , was forced to surrender .

After a 10 @-@ day forced march north , and having received only basic medical attention , Large arrived at a prison camp outside Chongsung , about 50 miles north east of Sinuiju . He spent two years in the camp and celebrated his 21st birthday there . Throughout his incarceration he had two bullets and at least 18 pieces of shrapnel embedded in his body . To help Large cope with the

chronic pain of his untreated injuries , an American POW introduced him to marijuana , which grew wild in the area . Although he found it to be a highly effective ? and enjoyable ? painkiller , he was somewhat alarmed by its psychoactive effects and subsequently tried to limit his use of the drug . Like many of his fellow prisoners , Large also suffered from beri @-@ beri and dysentery .

In March 1953 , a Chinese doctor operated on Large and removed a tracer round from his ribs as a preliminary to his being released as part of an exchange of wounded prisoners . Having weighed 217 pounds (98 kg) in March 1951 , he had dropped to 136 pounds (62 kg) by the time of his release . He also still had very limited movement in his atrophied and wasted left arm and was later told that if he had been treated by a British doctor at the time of his injury his arm would probably have been amputated .

Large was one of a batch of 22 exchanged British POWs whose release and subsequent return to Britain became front @-@ page news : The Guardian newspaper reported that the group had been unaware of the death of King George VI (which had occurred over a year earlier) , but were now looking forward to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II . Interviewed after his release , Large described the war as " useless " and said that he believed the communist 's claims that the US had engaged in germ warfare .

For its defence of Gloster Hill in the Battle of Imjin , the 1st Battalion , Gloucestershire Regiment was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation . The citation is conferred on units of the armed forces of the United States and of allied nations , and was awarded to the Glosters for " exceptionally outstanding performance of duty and extraordinary heroism in action against the armed enemy ... Every yard of ground they surrendered was covered with enemy dead , until the last gallant soldier of the fighting battalion was over @-@ powered by the final surge of the enemy masses . "

After returning to the UK , Large was offered a discharge on medical grounds , which he declined . He went on to serve briefly in the quartermaster 's stores , as an instructor , and in the regimental police . Throughout this time he worked on regaining his fitness and rehabilitating his arm .

= = = Special Air Service = = =

In 1957 , wanting to escape the " stupidities of drill " and the " bullshit " of the regular Army , Large volunteered for the SAS ; however , while riding home from the Brecon Beacons within hours of successfully completing the notoriously tough selection course , he crashed his motorbike , and , having injured his ankle , he had to repeat selection ? this time with one boot two sizes larger than the other to accommodate the bandages and swelling . He went on to serve with 22 SAS in Malaya , Oman , Borneo and Aden .

Large 's first operation with the SAS was in Malaya , hunting the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) guerrillas engaged in the Malayan Emergency uprising . By the time of Large 's involvement there was little communist activity and , despite months of jungle patrols and encounters with leeches , scorpions , civet cats and tigers , he never had any contact with MRLA guerrillas .

While suppressing a rebellion in Oman in 1958 , Large infamously lost his temper with a recalcitrant donkey . Recalling the incident in a 2003 interview , he said :

All the donkey handler did was laugh . Just as I turned round , the donkey 's face was right by me and it shook its head and I stuck a punch in among it somewhere , and the donkey went down like it was shot ... much to my amazement . But not to as much amazement as the donkey handler 's ? I 've never seen a bloke sober up so quick . It was a hole in one : the donkey struggled to its feet and looked really willing to go up the hill and the donkey handler lost his laugh .

Several weeks later , in January 1959 , Large was part of the " A " and " D " Squadron assault on the Jebel Akhdar . This entailed a 2 @,@ 500 @-@ metre (8 @,@ 200 ft) overnight ascent of the south side of the jebel , with each soldier carrying up to 120 pounds (54 kg) of kit . Having completed the ascent the SAS were able to surprise and defeat the rebels , who had previously held the plateau as a virtually impregnable stronghold .

During the Indonesia ? Malaysia confrontation in Borneo , Large took part in Operation Claret . As the leader of a four @-@ man SAS patrol , he spent up to two weeks at a time hidden in the jungle on deniable incursions into Indonesia , performing reconnaissance or ambushing Indonesian forces

. While hidden on the banks of the Sungei Koemba River during one of these incursions , Large and his patrol had the opportunity to assassinate Colonel Leonardus Moerdani , the commander of the Indonesian special forces in the area (and later Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces and subsequently Indonesia 's Minister of Defence and Security) , who was passing by on a river boat . However , at the last moment Large spotted a woman on the boat . He later described the incident :

There could have been other women and there could have been children on the boat . And we don 't do that sort of target , so ... it went . And it was in fact the very man we 'd been looking for for three months : Colonel Moerdani of the Indonesian paracommando unit , and he was on the end of my rifle and I let him go ? but ... you can 't blat women and kids .

For his service in Borneo , he was mentioned in despatches .

Parachuting was an important part of SAS training and operations , but it was not an experience that Large enjoyed : He suffered from a fear of heights and his considerable bulk meant that he descended far too quickly to have any chance of a comfortable landing . Despite this , he eventually qualified as a parachute instructor , although the footnote on his course report read , " not suited to parachuting ? either in size or inclination . "

In his memoirs Large recalls that the last shots he fired on active duty were warning shots . Fired at long range at the ground a few feet in front of a local woman (it is unclear where the incident took place) , they were intended to dissuade her from heading into " certain danger " . Despite firing increasingly close to the woman 's feet , she continued forward , moving out of sight , only to reappear moments later leading the previously unseen bull which she had been intent on retrieving ? " What a player ! God help any poor son @-@ in @-@ law she might have . "

Large spent the final years of his 27 @-@ year Army career as an instructor with 23 SAS Regiment (one of the SAS 's two reserve regiments) , eventually leaving the Army in 1973 as a Squadron Sergeant Major and Warrant Officer Class 2 .

= = Legacy = =

In his book SAS Heroes : Remarkable Soldiers , Extraordinary Men , former SAS soldier Pete Scholey describes Large as " simply the finest soldier [I] had ever met ... an inspiration to those around him ... with an admirable sense of fair play " .

Andy McNab , who joined the SAS 11 years after Large 's departure , has written about Large 's enduring impact on the Regiment :

Being like Lofty was something I aspired to without realising it . When I joined the Regiment I was told that the best way to survive those first years in the Sabre squadron was to pick out someone who you thought you would like to be . Shut up , watch and listen . For me there were a number of the ' old and bold ' who fitted that requirement . It wasn 't until later in my service that I learned that most of them , as newly ' badged ' members to a squadron , had picked Lofty .

A memorial bench was donated to the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum by a group of Large 's former SAS colleagues . The inscription reads :

= = Personal life = =

Before leaving for Hong Kong with the Wiltshire Regiment in 1951 , Large had met Ann , a nanny at the Regiment 's depot in Devizes . She wrote to him five times a week during his captivity in Chongsung , although only about 90 of these letters were actually delivered to Large . They eventually married in 1955 and afterwards lived in an Army rental property on the top floor of a farmhouse in Longford , on the outskirts of Gloucester .

When Large volunteered for the SAS in 1957 it was not a unit that was well known outside of military circles ? a fact that Large took advantage of by initially telling his wife that the Regiment 's job was to air drop supplies to troops in the jungle .

In 1960 the couple moved with the Regiment to Hereford , where they later had two children , Andy and Donna .

= = Later years = =

After leaving the Army Large worked in the UK and the Middle East . Having earned a heavy goods vehicle driving licence and a qualified testing officer 's certificate during his time in the Army , he spent the last 14 years of his working life as a driving instructor .

He wrote two books about his time in the Army : One Man 's SAS and One Man 's War in Korea , and was one of the first non @-@ commissioned officers (NCOs) to write about the SAS , preceding such soldiers @-@ turned @-@ authors as Andy McNab and Chris Ryan . A third book , Soldier Against the Odds : From Korean War to SAS , consisted of revised versions of his first two books together with some additional material . Andy McNab has said that " [Large 's first two books] were recommended reading for Regiment candidates . He was instrumental in setting the template for future members of the Regiment . "

In his seventies , Large , along with Pete Scholey , returned to the Borneo jungle as part of a 2003 Channel 4 documentary about the history of the SAS , taking the camera crew to the exact spot on the bank of the Sungei Koemba River where his patrol had successfully ambushed an Indonesian Army river boat in 1965 .

Having been ill with leukaemia for three years , Large died aged 76 at St Michael 's Hospice , Hereford . His funeral was held on 1 November 2006 at St Martin 's Church (which has a long association with the SAS) .