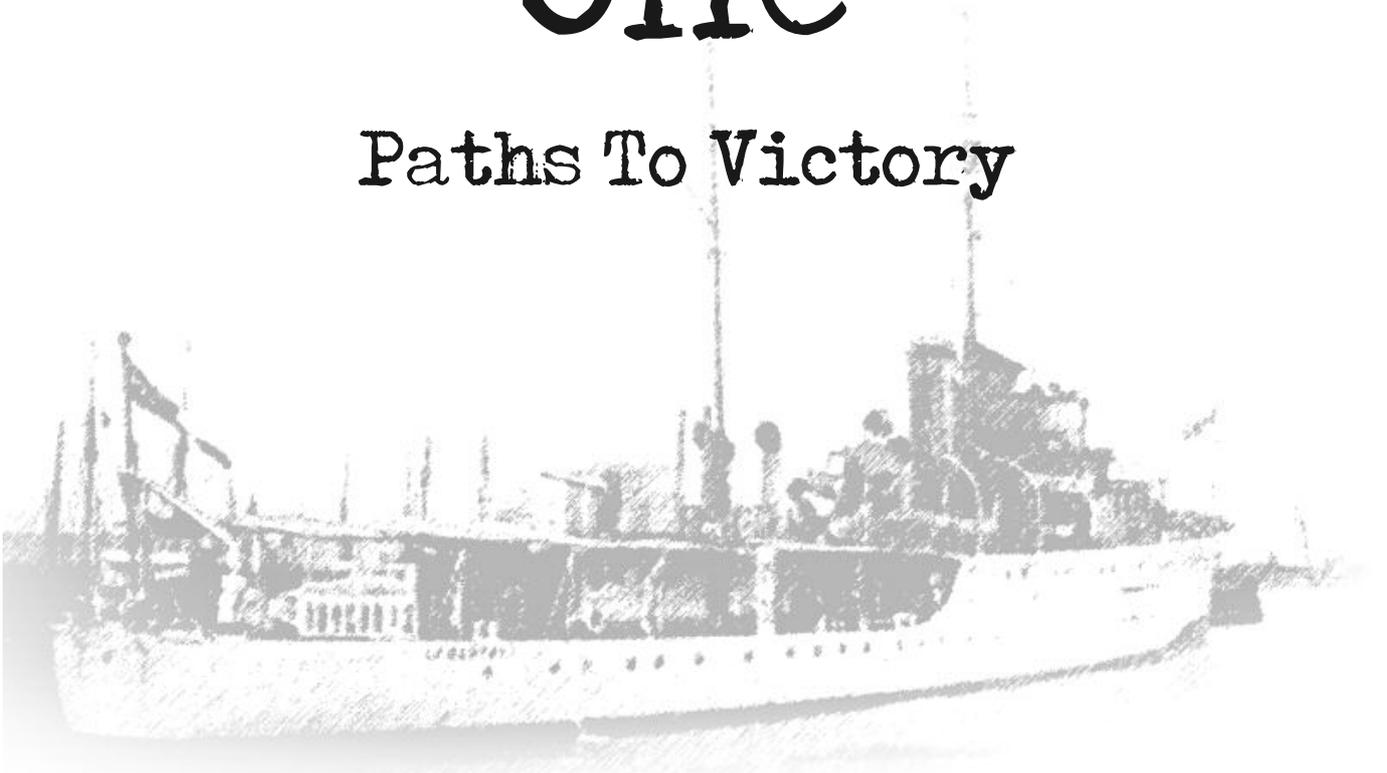


One

Paths To Victory



The island of Tresco was bathed in bright early August sunlight under a cloudless blue sky. The turquoise and azure coastal waters shimmered and sparkled, as the white-capped Atlantic waves slowly rolled in and broke upon the shore.

The assembled ship's company stood at ease, in three ranks, lined up on the hard standing that served as HMS Godolphin's small parade ground – typical of a Royal Navy 'stone frigate'. Facing them – and stood on a small dais – was Admiral Hembury DSO, Director of RN Coastal Forces. Either side of him were, respectively, a commodore, RN and a Royal Marine major general. Captain MacPherson, Godolphin's commanding officer,

stood behind the Admiral, ready to take over as master of ceremonies when called upon to do so.

Seated on two rows of wooden benches to the right of the dais were a number of VIP guests and visitors. A Royal Marines band added to the relaxed, summery occasion, playing traditional British airs and marches.

In front and to the left of the dais, three officers, one rating and one Royal Marine from HMS Godolphin – immaculately turned out in their best uniforms – stood waiting for the awards investiture to begin. Standing with them was a smartly dressed young woman.

One of the three officers present was Lieutenant Commander Richard Tremayne, RNVR, commander of the Tresco flotilla. Flanking the group were two naval flag lieutenants wearing gold ceremonial aiguillettes on their shoulders.

Immediately to Tremayne's right stood Lieutenant David Willoughby-Brown, his first lieutenant and close friend. To his left stood Commander John Enever, HMS Godolphin's donnish and highly talented Senior Naval Intelligence Officer. Next to them, in order of seniority, stood Royal Marines Sergeant Geoff Kane and then Leading Seaman 'Pablo' Watkins.

Alongside the five, her hands clasped in front of her, proudly stood Sarah McDonald, the widow of Tremayne's engineer – Petty Officer Alistair McDonald – who was so brutally executed when he and Tremayne were taken prisoner in Brittany some eight months previously. Though pale and drawn, she projected an air of great dignity and quiet composure. On the

lapel of her new navy blue suit she wore a silver brooch in the shape of a naval Tudor crown.

Today was *their* day and the formal recognition of their courage and professionalism. It was to be a celebration with enough fitting pomp and ceremony to create a memorable sense of occasion for them and those of their loved ones who were present. Acknowledging their own was something that the Royal Navy did well – and today was to be no exception.

Already, Tremayne had found the day to be an intensely moving one, where outstanding service – and sacrifice – were being publicly acknowledged with justifiable pride.

As the strains of the old air *Where Ere You Walk* died away, the substantial figure of Captain MacPherson stepped forward to the front of the dais and, taking command, called the parade to attention. As one, sailors and Marines smartly brought heels together and snapped arms to their sides, as their rifles, with bayonets fixed, were swung into position.

The Royal Marines band, resplendent in white pith helmets and blue parade uniforms, struck up *Rule Britannia*. From the stirring opening bars, Tremayne was delighted that it was the original version they were playing. Mercifully, he thought, it was devoid of any pretentious conductor's tedious, so-called 'arrangements', which too often dilute Arne's inspiring composition.

'Hmmm, patriotism might be the last refuge of the scoundrel,' he mused as his spine tingled, 'but right now, some unashamedly raw jingoism feels pretty good to me!'

Accompanied by his two flag lieutenants, Admiral Hembury moved towards the group of six to begin the investiture and present medals. Starting with the most senior present, he began with Commander John Enever who had earned an OBE for his tireless and crucial contribution to Naval Intelligence. Second was Tremayne, awarded the DSO for his outstanding leadership and gallantry in action on Sword Beach, immediately following the D-Day Normandy landings.

Lieutenant Willoughby-Brown, RNVR, was next in line, also to receive the DSO for his coolness and the example he set, under fire, in rescuing Tremayne off the Brittany coast, following the latter's escape from a German PoW camp.

After Willoughby-Brown, it was Sarah McDonald's turn to receive the posthumous DCM for her husband's courage and devotion to duty in captivity and his persistent refusal to divulge information to his interrogators. To spare Mrs McDonald further distress, no mention was made in the citation of the appalling, brutal treatment that her husband – and Tremayne – had suffered at the hands of the Gestapo before his indefensible execution.

Admiral Hembury spoke to each recipient in turn. A sincere and kindly man, his comments went way beyond trite platitudes and clichéd conversation. It was obvious that he had given considerable thought to what was particularly important and relevant to say to each of those being awarded medals. He spent a little longer with Sarah McDonald than with the others and Tremayne was grateful for that.

Sergeant Kane followed, to receive a Bar to his Military Cross for his bravery, under heavy German fire, with the Combined Operations Pilotage Party shore reconnaissance team at the start of the Normandy landing. Then it was Leading Seaman 'Pablo' Watkins' turn. Watkins, a popular member of Tremayne's own MTB boat crew, was awarded the DCM for outstanding bravery in the face of the enemy when fighting ashore on D-Day as naval infantry.

Following the investiture, MacPherson resumed his role of master of ceremonies. Calling the ship's company to attention, he ordered 'Parade, left turn!' then 'By the left, quick march!' as the band struck up *Heart of Oak*, another telling reminder of the Royal Navy's past deeds – and their most recent successes.

The medal recipients, their families and several VIPs attending the ceremony as guests were then transported in RN three-ton lorries – fitted with temporary seats – to afternoon tea on the large lawn, close to Tresco Abbey and its beautiful gardens.

The band, which had now rejoined the party, began playing light music, maintaining a relaxed garden party atmosphere as a fitting sequel to the earlier, more formal, yet intensely moving celebrations.

Tremayne quickly sought out Mrs McDonald, who was already being well looked after by the attentive, white-clad stewards. He was only too aware of the emptiness of words to the bereaved, yet he wanted to talk with her and, small comfort though it might be, to let her know that he was with

her husband when he died.

‘Thank you for introducing yourself to me. Alistair often spoke of you with admiration and was so happy that you were his commanding officer.’

‘For my part, I was grateful and glad that he was a member of my crew – and such an important one at that. In times of crisis, he was our ‘Rock of Gibraltar’. We all relied on Mac – as he was known to us – and on his unfailing dependability. On our last operation together, I was able to get to know him well and was so impressed by his courage and commitment. It was indeed a privilege to have served with your husband, Mrs McDonald.’

Emma Tremayne, herself a former Wren officer from Commander Enever’s Intelligence Section, unobtrusively joined her husband and Mrs McDonald. With her gentle sincerity and sensitivity, she added so much empathy and natural warmth to Tremayne’s words of comfort. Within seconds, she and Sarah McDonald were fully engaged in conversation, like two old friends who had known each other for many years. Tremayne sensed that it was his cue to move on.

He next found Leading Seaman Watkins who, together with Tremayne, had wiped out a German machine-gun post, firing on troops coming ashore on Sword Beach during the D-Day landings. Watkins – known universally as ‘Pablo’ because of a sombrero he had insisted on wearing during several runs ashore on his ship’s pre-war visit to Panama – smiled self-consciously as Tremayne shook his hand to congratulate him.

Touching the brand new medal with obvious pride, he said wistfully, 'Old Brummie would 'ave laughed like a drain if 'e'd been 'ere today, sir, and seen me get this from the Admiral.'

Brummie Nicholls who, like Watkins, came from Birmingham, had been killed as Tremayne's party came ashore, following the sinking of their MTB early on D-Day.

The two had been inseparable, having known one another long before they joined the Navy together. Almost two months had passed since Nicholls' death, but the pain of the loss of his closest mate was still etched on Watkins' amiable, lived-in face.

They had been chatting for some time when Enever emerged from the guests' refreshments marquee, which had been set up on the lawn, and came over to tell Tremayne that Admiral Hembury wanted to speak with him.

Before he left, he was glad to see that Emma and Sarah McDonald – along with Willoughby-Brown and his fiancée, Lucy Caswell, who, like her friend Emma, was a member of Enever's Intelligence Section – were moving round to converge on Watkins. The Royal Marines major general was engaged in an animated discussion with the recently promoted Sergeant Kane, which was regularly punctuated with bursts of laughter from each of them.

As Tremayne, followed closely by Enever, entered the marquee, Admiral Hembury detached himself from a group of distinguished looking civilians and senior officers from all three Services and came over, his hand outstretched in welcome.

‘Tremayne, my dear fellow, do come and join us.’ Motioning to one of the hovering stewards, he called for glasses of champagne for both officers.

Hembury quickly introduced Tremayne to those in the VIP party with the words: ‘All of you, I believe, will most certainly have heard of Lieutenant Commander Tremayne by reputation and some of you have met him or served with him already.’ He looked around the group, noting the number of assenting nods and affirmative responses.

‘You will know then, gentlemen, exactly what I mean when I say that he is indisputably a fully paid-up member of the ‘by-my-deeds-ye-shall-know-me’ school of leadership. You are aware, too, that I am running a major conference on Combined Operations Strategy at the Royal Naval Barracks, Plymouth – the core theme of which is ‘The Path to Victory’. The main thrusts of that theme are the urgent need for greater collaboration and shared openness of military intelligence between the three Services and the level of professional leadership essential to create and sustain such cooperative openness.’

The intelligent brown eyes sought Tremayne’s. ‘I want the lieutenant commander to speak at the conference on what I term ‘close-quarter’ leadership. That is, the critical importance of a leader to be able to read situations correctly and to make happen, *what* should happen, *when* it should happen. As I believe our American friends say ‘If you are in the room, BE in the room.’ It is as much that rare skill of *sensing* what is required of the leader, as it is of using logic to intervene and take command.

I have in mind an input of one hour, based upon your experiences and unique practice – with plenty of specific examples.’

Once again, Hembury looked directly at Tremayne to gauge his reaction to being put on the spot and committed so unexpectedly – and so publicly.

With his stomach churning – yet outwardly seeming completely unfazed – and only too conscious of the Admiral’s Biblical reference to his leadership style, Tremayne’s response was immediate: ‘I’m honoured, sir. Thank you. Does a suggested synopsis by next Monday meet your deadline, sir?’

‘It does. Indeed it does!’ Hembury paused for a moment’s reflection. ‘A tip, Tremayne. Draw upon what is meant by the ‘Nelson touch’ – without making the connection glaringly obvious – and then, above all, be yourself and talk from the heart as well as from the head. Concentrate on the ‘must-do’s – not the ‘nice-to’s – as I’m sure you will.’

Hembury paused, smiling, clearly delighted with Tremayne’s swift and positive reaction.

‘Now, keep contact through Lieutenant Armstrong here – he’s putting the conference programme together for me and knows exactly what I need from you.’

He indicated the tall, smiling figure of the youthful flag lieutenant, wearing the gold aiguillettes.

Returning to Tremayne, the Admiral concluded with, ‘Thank you, Richard – I look forward immensely to your very important contribution to our landmark conference.’

Then to the assembled VIP group: ‘Ladies and gentlemen,

the sun is shining, it's a glorious day. Let's go outside and enjoy it!'

Armstrong immediately came across and shook Tremayne's hand.

'Richard, I'm John and here's my phone number. Call me on the blower whenever you need to. As soon as I return to HMS Drake, I will send you synopses of the other speakers' contributions to give you a conference background and context, within which you can pitch your lecture.'

As they left, Enever lightly touched Tremayne's arm. 'Well done dear boy, you've made a big hit. Thank you for such an immediate and positive response. I'm afraid you have me to blame for this!'

'I rather suspected that. I certainly couldn't imagine Captain MacPherson putting my name forward!' grinned Tremayne.

MacPherson, a hostage to procedure, routine and detail, had made it clear from the outset of their relationship that he did not approve of Tremayne's unorthodoxy and preference for the unexpected in the role of flotilla commander. Admiralty Fleet Orders (AFOs) were MacPherson's 'Bible' and, on several occasions, he had sought to block what he saw as Tremayne's maverick operational tactics.

An executive officer of limited imagination – and possessed of a deep-rooted fear of any departure from conventional, copper-bottomed practices – he had often attempted, unsuccessfully, to 'bring Tremayne into line'.

Too often it seemed, his principal motivation for applying

the stifling grip of seniority was to enforce and maintain control – whatever the cost to the outcome of an operation.

Commander Enever, a man of high intelligence and social acuity, frequently acted as a buffer for Tremayne. On more than one occasion, he had simply enlisted the driving support of Admiral Hembury in order to move urgent and critical operations forward. If MacPherson had, in any way, been an impediment to necessary swift and decisive action.

This command was MacPherson's first experience of Special Forces. Their natural, confident resourcefulness and irreverent self-reliance did not sit comfortably with him. Characteristically, he sought to control by fear, stifling authoritarianism – and the rule book – or, at least, *his* literal interpretation of it.

Enever, a highly creative and resourceful thinker, regularly engaged in battles with MacPherson, whose inept and irrelevant orders too often over-complicated and delayed the achievement of operational objectives. On one notable occasion, when utterly frustrated by such mindless interference, he broke protocol, describing MacPherson as someone with an infinite capacity for turning the term 'Naval Intelligence' into a most unfortunate oxymoron.

Teatime refreshments found Tremayne back once more with Emma and Catriona, their two-month-old baby daughter. The glorious August sun continued to shine and the band played more light music, adding to the sense of peace and well-being. So different, reflected Tremayne, from the world he had

temporarily left behind, in post-invasion France, just a matter of forty-eight hours ago.

In the confused weeks that followed the first heady and triumphant days of liberation, Tremayne had already experienced the uncertainty and transient stability of the contentious interregnum following the Germans' departure. In those areas liberated by the Allies, the various, competing Resistance groups openly fought and jockeyed for political power and influence.

Attempts to weld the different Resistance groups into a cohesive fighting movement – the Forces Françaises de l'Interieur (FFI) – had created an irregular, as yet uncoordinated, army of impressive potential. The FFI had done much to facilitate the Allies' rapid advance and deployment across France after their beachhead breakout and they continued to pay a terrible price for their courage and initiative. Yet even with their track record of bravery and military success, they acquired the nickname of 'Fifis' amongst some disaffected sections of the population.

In occupied Vichy France especially, French paramilitary units such as the Milice and Groupes Mobiles de Réserve (GMR) regularly operated in conjunction with the German army and SS to wipe out local Maquis groups with savage ferocity. In Vercors alone, in the south of France, some 750 Maquisards were slaughtered by a combined Milice and GMR force, supporting German alpine troops. At Glières, another 150 members of the Maquis were killed and many hundreds were captured when over 1,200 Miliciens and GMR once again joined Gebirgsjäger

mountain troop units to crush Resistance groups.

The utter tragedy of Frenchmen killing Frenchmen – and women – had escalated dramatically since D-Day, as many Resistance units prematurely rushed to support the invading forces.

Now, different factions, including the powerful Communist elements and former Vichy unit turncoats, were at loggerheads with one another, fighting for ‘territorial’ supremacy in the anticipated new order of things. Both, in turn, were opposed to General De Gaulle’s rapidly growing influence, as supporters in Paris and the major towns flocked to join the FFI and identify with his very direct brand of French patriotism.

Already, in these early days of newly won freedom, many of those liberated were coming to regard their liberators as another, replacement, army of occupation and were beginning to react against what they termed ‘*Liberté, à la sauce américaine*’.

In Brittany, Tremayne’s area of most frequent operational activity, some Resistance groups were, similarly, at odds with US attempts to assume overall control in those regions where the American army had just ejected the Germans.

After four years of Nazi occupation, the French – understandably – wanted to run France the *French* way, with French customs and practices. Even that seemingly reasonable brand of chauvinism was riven, culturally and politically, by the irreconcilable division of conservatism versus radicalism. As Enever had said, ‘We’re dealing with a nation of fifty million people – and fifty million different political parties!’

‘The territorial imperative can be an all-consuming, all-powerful emotive drive,’ mused Tremayne, deep in reflection, as he walked back to rejoin Emma and Catriona.

Emma’s burst of happy laughter as she played with their daughter, suddenly broke Tremayne’s reverie and brought him back to the relaxed atmosphere of the garden party.

He felt both angry and guilty that his concern with his impending role in France was cutting into his precious and very limited time with Emma and Catriona. These were among tomorrow’s most important memories. He recognised, too, that because of Emma’s work in Intelligence – both in the Wrens and latterly as a civilian working with the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) – it was all too easy to take for granted that she would understand and accept his preoccupation. Her unfailing tacit support and lack of reproach only added to his uncomfortable sense of guilt.

To enjoy a more personal celebration of the investiture, Tremayne and Emma, together with Willoughby-Brown and Lucy Caswell, dined that evening at the New Inn. As they laughed and talked animatedly – as they invariably did, ranging over so many shared interests – Tremayne’s mood lifted. He was constantly aware of Emma’s unconditional love. Expressing it in so many understated ways – by a knowing smile, a concerned look, or by some hilarious but subtle put-down – Emma could quickly put his concerns into perspective.

Whatever her own worries about his role, she invariably managed to cover up her anxiety and not project it onto her

husband. That night, at the New Inn, they made love with intense, yet sensitive passion, giving themselves completely to one another in what they termed ‘their’ room.

The day after the investiture, Enever called a briefing meeting with Tremayne along with members of SOE and Capitaine de Vaisseau Philippe Duvalier, code-named ‘Lionel’ – formerly of the French Marine Nationale and the leader of the Resistance Confrérie Bonaparte in Brittany. His priority was to outline the immediate operations he was planning for the Tresco flotilla in France, following the Allies’ breakout from Normandy. The war-torn France to which Tremayne would be returning in little more than thirty-six hours’ time...



