



Ralph Tanner 1921-2017

Ralph Tanner who died on 1 August 2017, was a non-conforming, larger than life character who did not fit comfortably into the twentieth century. Like all his generation, his was a life moulded by the outbreak of war in 1939. Educated at Rugby, he maintained this had been no preparation for an Army commission. Trained as a commando, he was selected by Evelyn Waugh to be his batman when, as part of Layforce, they were sent to Crete an experience later immortalised in Waugh's *Officer and a Gentleman*. During the last days of the retreat in 1941 Ralph acted as a runner for the force commander Colonel Robert Laycock, an action for which he was Mentioned in Dispatches.

Seconded to The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, he was shipped to Rangoon and selected to train for guerrilla operations in Maymyo, against the Japanese within China, in what was known as Operation 204 under the command of Mike Calvert. There followed a 400 mile retreat from Burma into India where at one stage he and his batman were tied together with string dozing as they walked. Despite his horrific experiences in Burma he had a love for the country and the people and returned to help see the country through to independence in 1948.

A sabbatical in 1959 allowed study for a degree at Trinity College, Oxford, which led to working within Makerere, University of East Africa, where he established the extra mural department in Mombasa, (Kenya). He used the local prison as a source for the eventual thesis for which he was awarded a PhD from Uppsalla University, Sweden, in 1970. Ralph's skill sets were based around two core features: Africa and

Catholicism. On returning to Britain in 1965, he lectured on comparative religions at Heythrop, the Jesuit College of London University.

He never ceased to write and publish and was proud to list 135 publications. The legacy which fitted his character so well are the important gifts, together with associated records and papers, donated to our national museums: African carvings were given to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; a collection of hand axes and obsidian arrow heads (found in potholes on a Tanganyika road) and one of Chinese blue and white porcelain (collected from a beach and providing evidence of early trading routes) were given to the British Museum and Tanzania National Museum in Dar-es-Salaam. Some of the china is travelling the world as part of the exhibition 'History of the World in 100 objects'. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, is still working on the many thousands of native African plants that Ralph pressed and sent them; so far six, hitherto unknown, have been named after him and his wife Penelope. His books, diaries, documents and lecture notes from his time in Uganda and Kenya in the 1950s and 1960s are a foundation stone of the recently formed Jesuit Historical Institute in Africa.

He was buried in dedicated woodland near the ancient drover's route, The Ridgeway, on the site of a Neolithic burial ground.

Ralph Tanner: born 24th August 1921, died 1st August 2017. Married Penelope Dell in 1944, who pre-deceased him in 1985. He leaves a son David from his first marriage and his wife Amoret Scott whom he married in 1985.

Amoret Tanner