

# Memories of WWII

*In our e-Newsletter, The Colonade which was sent out in June this year we featured stories of OU heroes from WWII. Following this we received many more, some have been published in the OU Magazine, the rest we are pleased to be able to share with you here...*

## **Michael ‘Micky’ Rook DFC (LH 29)**

By **Michael Hawkes WB 73**

At 6-foot-6½, **Michael ‘Micky’ Rook DFC (LH 29)** was one of the tallest pilots in the RAF during the Second World War, he joined up in his early 20s and had a distinguished career throughout the war years flying in France, the Battle of Britain, Russia, North Africa and Sicily during which he achieved a total of six ‘kills’.

In 1943, his squadron re-equipped with Spitfires, which caused some concern as to whether he would actually be able to fit into the cockpit – something he only achieved by having his size 14½ boots fixed to the rudder bar!

After five years flying and a long period leading 43 Squadron, Micky was promoted and ‘rested’ with a posting to a staff job in Egypt. At the end of hostilities, he stayed in the RAF, but in March 1948, Micky and his navigator were killed when their Mosquito developed engine trouble shortly after take-off whilst on a training flight.



*Michael Rook*



*Micky easily identifiable from his towering height*

# Anthony Hough (L 31)

By **Gerald Hough (L 66)** on his father's war time service

**Anthony Hough (L 31)** was at Uppingham from 1931 to 1936, House Captain of The Lodge and Under Officer of the CCF. On leaving, and rather than take a university place, he joined the family paperboard business in London. In 1938 he joined the Artist Rifles Territorial Regiment and at the outbreak of war joined the 1st Battalion Tower Hamlet Rifles, which in May 1941 became the 9th Battalion, Rifle Brigade.

His part was a tiny cog in the vast machine of war. He was a British officer fighting to the last to protect his country and his people. His training in the Alps, with the objective of conducting snow warfare in Finland in early 1940, came to nothing. In late 1940 he was shipped to North Africa with the 1st. In late March 1941, the under-gunned 1st suffered a catastrophic baptism of fire against a determined attack by 15,000 Africa Corps troops and 500 tanks in Libya.



*Major Anthony Hough, 1946*

The now 9th Battalion fought backwards and forwards across the desert of Libya for a year and a half and experienced the brutality of constant conflict against a formidable enemy. This was followed by his joining 1 Special Air Service (SAS), and later conducting a raid deep behind enemy lines in December 1942, which proved to be a one-way ticket.

Incarcerated in a prisoner-of-war camp on the Adriatic coast of Italy, he suffered the deprivations of captivity. He escaped in September 1943 and hid in a small hillside village in the Majella mountains of Eastern Italy, eventually managing to cross the Allied line near Casoli in December 1943, having trekked across the snow-clad mountains in deepest winter.

He returned to England in February 1944, re-joining the Rifle Brigade in Nottinghamshire. He was sent on leave from July to September and it was during this period he met his future wife, on leave from working at Bletchley Park decoding top-secret Enigma transmissions.

In December 1944 he joined 21 Army Group in Europe, part of which was his old brigade. He was actively involved in the campaign to drive the Germans deeper and deeper into their own territory.

After the war ended In May 1945, he was posted as a Town Major in Germany, until his discharge from the army with the rank of Major in 1946.

He remained connected to the army in the territorial regiment 21 SAS (Artist Rifles) until 1952 and a lifelong member of their golfing society, as he was with the OUGS. He sent the author, his son Gerald Hough, to The Lodge in 1966.

The full story, *Desert Raids with the SAS: Memories of Action, Capture and Escape*, by Major Tony Hough with Gerald Hough, will be published in May 2021 by Pen & Sword.

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## **John Edwards (WD 42)**

by his brother **Anthony Edwards (WD 49)**

My late brother **John (WD 42)** and I had no home life during the war because our father was in the army and mother an invalid, so schooling was everything. John spent some of the school holidays staying with P.B. King, his West Deyne housemaster.

The photograph shows my father, with my brother and I, in 1945 after his return from active service in Italy. After Uppingham, John became an Oxford professor and I became a Cambridge professor, both Fellows of the Royal Society (FRS), mostly because of the fantastic scientific education we received at the School.



*Anthony and John Edwards with their father*

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## **Tom Geake (L 52)**

At the time of VE Day, my mother and I were refugees in South Africa and she had to explain to me that, despite victory in Europe, the war against Japan still continued and my father would remain in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. His life was eventually saved by the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He crawled out of the camp on hands and knees with advanced beriberi, a disease caused by a vitamin B-1 deficiency.

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# Ross Littlejohn (LH 35)

Citation Military Cross

Ross R Littlejohn was awarded the MC for his fortitude when severely wounded on patrol having been shot in the thigh in Normandy in June 1944. The award was published in the Times of September 1st 1944. The full description of what occurred that day reads as follows:

“LT Littlejohn, 4th Commando, and a Sergeant of 3 troop Number 10 (1A) Commando, went out to La Grande Ferme du Buisson at about 14.30 hours 19th June 1944. They crawled up and down in front of the enemy lines observing their positions along the Gonneville – Longuemare Road and looking for the best position to try and pass through. As soon as it was sufficiently dark an attempt was made to cross the road, but the enemy line was almost continuous and no penetration was possible.

They lay up in a ditch all day 20th June, observing the enemy from a distance of less than 50 yards and towards evening decided to make another attempt to work their way between two enemy posts. They crawled forward to the road, but on raising his head to observe Lt. Littlejohn found himself looking straight down the muzzle of an enemy rifle. The enemy was apparently even more surprised than Littlejohn, who threw a hand grenade and dashed back towards the ditch. On the way, however, he was shot and badly wounded in the leg though he managed to regain cover of the ditch. There he lay observing and, though wounded, intending to make yet another attempt to carry out his task, but soon realised he was too badly injured to move. About an hour later a search party came out from the enemy lines. One fired a shot at Littlejohn from two yards range and missed him.

Littlejohn, unable to move, shammed dead. The search party took his pistol and ammunition, and checked that he was dead by turning him over with a kick and prodded him in the face with a bayonet. But in spite of great pain, he still made no move and eventually the Germans moved off leaving him for dead.

Littlejohn still had not the strength to move, and a little later a second looting party came out, dragged him out of the ditch and removed his boots, compass, watch and field glasses. Still he did not move, again the Germans left him.

By darkness Littlejohn mustered sufficient strength to move and in spite of his wounded leg crawled back over 2000 yards to our lines where he was picked up exhausted in the early hours of 21st June 1944.”



*1940 Uppingham Praepostors (Prefects). Ross Littlejohn seated centre as Captain of School. In this group photo, Ross was the only one who did not survive WWII.*



# Christopher Thompson (L 1924)

by his son, **Michael Thompson (WB 49)**

My father, **Christopher Thompson (L 1924)** died as a POW on the Burma Siam Railway, often called the Death Railway, on 16th June 1943. He was just 33 when he died. Such a waste. I was eight years old at the time and, although I hadn't seen him since we had to part two years previously, the news brought floods of tears. As a result, and entirely due to the generosity of others, I secured a place at Uppingham, joining West Bank in September 1949.

I have long felt that I owe everything to Uppingham, the grounding I received there enabled me to get to Cambridge after National Service and make my way in life from there. My son **Christopher (L 81)** and daughter **Mary (Fd 86)** also followed in my Uppingham footsteps, with Mary marrying **Antony Woods (WB 83)** whom she met at the School.

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It's thought that more than 2,000 Old Uppinghamians saw service during World War II and there were instances when OUs crossed paths. One such occasion was the OU dinner held in Thailand's Chungkai POW camp on 18th April 1944, as recorded in the photograph of the hand-drawn menu card kindly sent in for the School's archives some years ago by **Lt. James Frere Twitchin (F 25)**, who was in attendance with fellow OUs, **Lt. Col. John Stitt (LH 12)**, **Maj. John McLaren (F 18)**, **Lt. Peter Leckie (L 26)**, **Lt. Marcus Bradford (R 18)**, **Lt. Ernest Charles (SH 33)** and **Maj. Thomas Christopher (M 26)**. An incredible record from the time.

