Today I would like to pause and pay our respects to:

38289 Lt Col Cecil Edward **Barnes DSO MC**

Originally named Cecil by his parents he was born 30 January 1907.

Prior to the war Tom spent time in Australia as a civil engineer, following an eventful year in New Guinea as a surveyor where he first started the habit of daily diary-keeping that he continued for the rest of his life. He joined up first with the 2nd Australian Imperial Force but obtained leave for the duration to join the New Zealand Engineers.

When war broke out, he came back to NZ and enlisted in the New Zealand Engineers as a Lt with Headquarters, 21st (N.Z.) Mechanical Equipment Company, 2nd NZEF. This unit was raised on the 15th Nov 1940 in Trentham. It departed from New Zealand on board the Nieuw Amsterdam, with the 3rd section of the 4th Reinforcements on the 1st Feb 1941, with 8th Field Company and 18th Army Troops Company. It stopped at Bombay and left Deolali Camp, Bombay, where it had been for two weeks, and sailed for the Middle East on 11 March 1941. It arrived at Port Tewfik on 23 March and moved to Maadi Camp on 24 March. HQ and Repairs Section left Maadi on 3 July and moved to El Hamma. At the end of 1941, Company HQ was at Haifa and No. 3 Section, where Tom was, at Aqaba on port reconstruction/construction tasks in connection with the transportation of munitions to Russia

It was during this time Tom became bored, trying to get posted to the Division. He was appointed adjutant at the engineers training depot in Egypt, after he had returned to Cairo. He sought far more exhilarating and adventurous activities!!

In September 1942, he was chosen as one of a party of four men who were to undertake special operations in Greece with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE).

Operation Harling was a sabotage mission by the SOE, in cooperation with the Greek Resistance groups EDES and ELAS, which destroyed the heavily guarded Gorgopotamos viaduct in Central Greece on 25 November 1942. This was one of the first major sabotage acts in Axis-occupied Europe, and the beginning of a permanent British involvement with the Greek Resistance.

The SOE team numbered thirteen men and was divided into three groups, each including a leader, an interpreter, a sapper and a radio operator. The first group was composed of Lt. Colonel Eddie Myers, CO of the mission and group leader, Captain Denys Hamson as interpreter, Captain Tom Barnes as the sapper and Sergeants Len Willmott and Frank Hernen as wireless operators. The second group consisted of Maj. Chris Woodhouse, 2nd Lieutenant Themis Marinos (a Greek), Lieutenant Inder Gill and Sergeant Doug Phillips. The third group consisted of Major John Cooke, Captain Nat Barker, Captain Arthur Edmonds (another New Zealander) and Sergeant Mike Chittis.

The team was split into groups with each group to jump from a separate B-24 Liberator aircraft. After just one training jump the first attempt to drop them over Greece was aborted as the pre-arranged signal fires had not been lit. During the next flight on 30 September the *Harling* team was dropped after the fires were located. Major Cooke's group was unable to locate any fires and jumped near the heavily garrisoned town of Karpenissi. One group member even landed inside the town itself, and had to be hidden by local Greeks. Evading the Italian troops searching for them, they made for the hills, where they came upon the guerrillas of Aris Velouchiotis.

In the meantime, the main group was being hidden by the local Greeks and constantly moved around the area to prevent their capture by Italian searching parties.

Myers and Hamson, from group one, undertook a reconnaissance, with a local Greek guide, of the three prospective targets, and chose Gorgopotamos, which offered the best chance of success: it was guarded by a small garrison of 80 Italians and it had good access, cover and a line of retreat for the attacking force.

The force available for the operation numbered 150 men: the twelve-strong British team, which would form the demolition party, 86 ELAS men and 52 EDES men, who would provide cover and neutralize the garrison. Two teams of eight guerrillas were to cut the railway and telephone lines in both directions, as well as cover the approaches to the bridge itself, while the main force of 100 guerrillas was to neutralize the garrison. The demolition party, divided into three teams, would wait upriver until the garrison had been subdued, and then lay the charges.

An Italian garrison held both ends of the Gorgopotamos viaduct, the bridge finally selected as the only feasible target for the operation.

The attack on the garrison outposts on the two ends of the bridge began as scheduled. Myers took it upon himself to send the demolition teams in while the fight was still under way. The setting of the charges was delayed also, since the girders to be destroyed turned out to be differently shaped than had been anticipated, forcing the SOE sappers to break down their plastic explosive charges and assemble new ones. After the charges were set and the fuses were lit, the first explosion heavily damaged the central pier and collapsed two spans. The demolition teams then set new explosives to the second pier and the remaining span, which also went off. In the meantime, the guerrilla outposts had engaged and halted a train with Italian reinforcements heading to the scene. By 04:30, the entire attacking force, which had suffered only four wounded, had successfully disengaged and retreated to its assembly area.

An entry in Tom Barnes diary gives an insight into the hardship encountered:

*Whole gang with mules—it was dark as pitch & the going bloody. —The plan is for my D [demolition] party to wait until the Bridge is clear & then go in. Zero hour is 2300—The trip down was done in absolute darkness & silence—we crossed the river and were on our own—off loaded the mules—and proceeded to our rendezvous—got there @ 23.10—firing 23.15—bullets hit around us but OK... MMGs [medium machine guns] LMGs [light machine guns] rifles. T guns [Tommy guns]and Grenades—No Verey signals so went in @ 0015... proceeded to Br. [bridge]—had to cut through wire twice. –Piers not as expected—U shape—Arthur, Inder and I [Arthur and Inder are the other engineers]laid charges & on the X [cross]members—this took nearly an hour—6 main charges & 16 small—Arthur & I finished simultaneously [.] Shooting, MGs, TGs, Grenades, going off all around—3 whistles—cover—terrific bang—2 spans down—one twisted—pier still stood—twisted and leaning. & 10-12’ shorter. —went back—most of helpers cleared off—laid charges on front of D. [demolished] pier & on T members of back dropped span and P on p [pier] next to abutment...Br w[as] held f 3 hrs. ...successful—Proceeded uphill to rendezvous—all hands just about all in...Helluva climb up to rendezvous. Wonderful weather for operation—raining & heavy fog all the time...Halted @ rendezvous—damned tired—everyone too tired to be elated over success of job...we had been 24 ½ hrs on our feet [spelling and punctuation as original].*

As the diary notes, Tom and his party got a terrible shock when they arrived under the bridge to lay their charges. The bridge had seven piers constructed of masonry and three of metal. These metal piers were their target. They had received intelligence that the cross-section of the girders was L-shaped but in fact it was U-shaped. The intention had been for Tom to take his party in when the garrisons at both ends of the bridge had been subdued, but the Italians seemed to have had forewarning of the attack, which took much longer than expected. Tom had to take his party in under fire, and it was under those conditions that he had to recalculate all the charges in his head, get his party of engineers and assistants to take all the pre-formed charges to pieces, before setting them in place to match the actual cross-section. A second set of charges were laid after the first explosion, to ensure that the bridge would not be quickly or easily repaired.

After the attack the party had a 2,000 feet climb up the slopes of Mount Oiti to their rear rendezvous. Fortunately for them, low fog covered their escape route from Italian pursuers.

The sabotage mission was a major success for SOE, being the biggest such operation carried out until then. In its aftermath, the Harling mission was not withdrawn, as originally envisaged, but instructed to remain in the country and form the British Military Mission to Greece.

In April, 1944, Tom was called back to Egypt to meet King George of Greece and the Greek Government.

Major Bowie was manager of several N.Z.E.F. clubs in Cairo and Bari, and got to know Lt Col Barnes quite well, meeting up with Tom again on his return to Cairo and the two men discussed the mission.

*"It was 20 months later, in April, 1944, that Colonel Barnes walked in on me in Cairo wearing a begrimed battledress and camouflaged behind a full-grown beard and moustache," said Major Bowie. "He had returned from secret operations in Greece and had been called back to Egypt to meet King George of Greece and the Greek Government. I believe that it was the express instruction of the authorities that he should retain his beard until that meeting was over. Although naturally reticent and reluctant to say much about his experiences, I gathered sufficient to appreciate something of the hazardous and dangerous work he had been engaged on. After selection for the mission which was to destroy and disrupt the German lines of communication in the western coast of Greece, then being used for shipping munitions and men across the Adriatic Sea to Italy and thence to North Africa, Colonel Barnes and his three comrades were given a brief training in parachute dropping. He had, I understand, one jump off a fast-moving lorry and two jumps from a warplane as his course of training before being dropped among the hills in North-west Greece. The party of four also included, I understand, another New Zealander, a Lieutenant-Colonel Edmonds. Only a sketchy outline of what these four men and the others dropped at other times and places had achieved was related by Colonel Barnes, but enough was told to indicate the tremendous havoc they wrought with the enemy's communications. They blew up bridges and viaducts including one of the largest and most carefully guarded viaducts on the main railway line from Yugoslavia to Corinth. An epic deed had been the lowering of an Englishman to the depths of a ravine to explode a charge that brought the long viaduct crumbling to ruins, while the German guards engaged the others in the party who created a diversion.* *The damage resulting from these activities caused the Germans to divert their transport to the eastern ports of Greece and to ship munitions through the Aegean Sea — this being the purpose of the Allied strategy as it forced the enemy to use the longer sea route on which the transports were subjected to many attacks by British submarines. Their primary job completed, the men then attached themselves to Greek patriot forces operating as guerrillas and conducting a sabotage and hit-and-run campaign. Colonel Barnes and another joined General Napoleon Zervas and his Patriots "where" they continued to harry the Germans and their sorties and raids grew in strength and effectiveness as communication was established with British bases and more Paratroops and supplies were dropped."*

*"The Germans made great efforts to get hold of Colonel Barnes," said Major Bowie. 'They knew he was one of the leaders of the raiders and put a price on his head."*

Lt Col Barnes remained in Greece after the attack, he rose to become one of two Area Commanders for the Allied Military Mission in Greece.

*Citation* ***Military Cross****.*

*Lt. Barnes was the leader of the demonlitiion party which successfully destroyed the important railway bridge over the Grogofotamos river in enemy occupied Greece.*

*The coolness, courage and capable leadship of this officer was an inspiration to the men under his command , who carried out this major actof sabotage, with the minimum delay and with conspicous success, in spite of being under fire throughout the operation, 25/26 Nov 1942.*

*Citation* ***Distinguished Service Order***

*Lt Col Barnes dropped with the first party ever to be infiltrated into Greece, on the 30 Sept 1942. From then until his return to the Middle East for leave on the 24 Apr 1944, Lt Col Barnes served as a BLO with the Allied Mission.*

*Since Aug 43, Lt Col Barnes has been the senior member of the mission with ZERVAS forces in Epirus and Anatolia provinces and through sheer hard work, tact, and unfailing optisim has got ZERVAS and his 6,000 guerrillas completey under control of GHQ MEF.*

*During the period of the civil war in Nov and Dec 1943, Lt Col Barnes was involed in the skirmishing , but more particulary in countering German drives. The latter were frequent and more than once Lt Col Barnes came under direct enemy fire. On no occasion, however, did he lose control of the situation and he never failed to extricate his mission intact.*

*During “ANIMALS” Operation, which was part of the cover plan for the Sicily landings, Lt Col Barnes organised extensive demolitions and attacked some German garrisons throughout his area. He himself led the attack on the Kaloyerou Road Bridge, west of Arta, which was the major target. The attack was completely successful, intense activity with little foof and no sleep.*

*Lt Col Barnes has worked indefatiguably to improve the efficiency of the EPIRUS geurrillas and has overcome difficulties which at one time threatened to anhililate effective resistance in the province. Apart from its military value, his work has made an important contributionto the future relations between Great Britain and Greece*

*He is RECOMMENDED FOR THE IMMEDIATE A WARD OF THE D.S.O.*

Tom Barnes passed away on the 22 June 1952 at Garfield Victoria, Australia, following a car accident where his liver was ruptured by the steering wheel impact. He was aged just 45.

*General Napoleon Zervas wrote on 8 August 1952 to Beth Barnes, Tom’s wife, when he heard of Tom’s death. In his words:*

*“He was an outstanding figure for all of us and we feel that Tom is not dead. He lives as a symbol of the ideal man and brave soldier.*

*Tom Barnes was for Greece a second Lord Byron and the whole Nation has admired his heroism and is grateful for his love for our country.*

*His name will be written among the names of the heroes of the [Second] World War.”*

He is not buried in a cemetery. His ashes have been scattered into Spirits Bay by his wife and youngest daughter, Rosalind Anne, whom Tom never met.

RIP Tom

Thank you for your service

E kore warewaretia

Will never forget

At his death, Tom left behind what is now a significant archive. In addition to over 1,000 photos there are maps of Greece printed on silk, compasses concealed in military buttons, his war diaries and decorations, his reports and letters to his fiancée, even some of his uniforms. Some of these artifacts would be of interest to the ECM based in Linton.





