

## Funeral Eulogy for John Lamond

How does one do the eulogy of one's own father? Please excuse me if I refer to my father as just 'John'...

I wanted to start with the scripture which Rev. Barbara read. In it, Jesus' disciples are about to enter a time of loss ... they feel disorientated and numb ... life will not be the same.

For all of us here, we may be feeling much the same thing.

Our father John has been taken from us. Of course, we all have a finite amount of time in this strange thing we call life, in which there are the ups and downs - and there were many ups in my father's 93 years.

John was born in Rangoon, Burma (16<sup>th</sup> April 1930) into an older world - the world of Kipling which forged him. His early experience on returning to England was being evacuated to Wales at the beginning of the war.

He was always a character. There was something engagingly lunatic about him!

His friend, Alan Rees, always described him as a "have a go kid", whether zooming down a colliery slag heap on a makeshift sledge or climbing a rock face.

To us, his family, he was a strange mixture - obsequious establishment on the one hand, but also a stubborn rebelliousness - somewhat like Don Quixote!

His youth was obviously marred by the death of his father when he and his brother Joe were rather young, but they both joined the army and elected to go for officer training. As a young subaltern, he met and became engaged to my mother, Sylvia Hartridge, in Portsmouth before being posted off to Malaysia to fight the insurgents there.

I think my father was proud to have served his country in combat (hence his insistence that I wear these gongs, which I wouldn't normally do at a family funeral). He once said to me, as we swapped war stories through the bottom of a whisky glass, that I had experienced as much war as he had, but this was not true - I was spared the awfulness of the duty of killing the enemy, unlike him.

His army career spanned over 35 years in the Brigade of Gurkhas, about which he came to know a great deal. His career certainly had its ups and downs - he would often regale us with stories of his escapades which either ended in great success or spectacular disaster ... and to him it didn't seem to matter which!

He could be a blusterer, but he did have the endearing quality of being able to laugh at himself. He could also be very selfless and even heroic. For instance, in Borneo he once rescued two civilians from a burning car wreck at great personal risk since the car was about to go up, and we found some very moving accounts of this among his papers.

He was always keen to read my confidential reports from the RAF - which was fine, but I couldn't understand why until he admitted that it was because he had had some really colourful reports from the Brigade when he was a junior officer ... and he even showed me one which was as amusing as it was tragicomic! He once had to lead a demonstration exercise - a simulated attack in Malaysia. It started badly because the simulated artillery barrage at the beginning did not go off. Well, the show must go on - he led his men forward advancing and firing by sections, then all the barrage went off in one great blast - a huge mushroom cloud that liberally smattered the watching senior officers with mud and dust.

Worse was to come when John advanced at the head of his men and fell down a well (dug by the locals). He described looking up, wedged in the well, at the chink of sunlight metres above with the Gurkha soldiers leaning in and asking "Sahib, what do we do now?" "Go on, go on", he ordered them... but the attack petered out. That probably delayed a promotion by a year or two!

My sisters remembered him in Brunei at the gymkhana - a sort of carnival celebration gathering in which horse or pony riding skills were displayed. (Actually, he was in high spirits due to all the Gurkha barley wine that was liberally dished out.) There he was, volunteering for the fun-run horse race and he couldn't even ride a horse! Anyway, the lists opened and everyone was off at a steady canter - but not him - he was stuck until, to our joy and delight, he gave the horse such a kick that it bolted off at lightning speed taking him into the lead. The problem occurred at the first turn which was beyond his skill set - Johnny remembers him crashing in ruin on the first corner, but that was ok for such a jack-the-lad!

He could do some silly things for fun. Once, when on holiday with another couple, he happened to be sailing with his friend's wife and for fun started to rock the boat. Unfortunately, he rocked it too far and the dinghy sank. His friend's husband described how, from the beach, he saw the boat disappear and couldn't see his wife. The only thing he could see was my dad's head under a Chinese sun-hat he had been wearing with a pair of dark glasses.

Years later, a captain in the Gurkhas said, "Oh yes, your father was the one who broke the regimental table". We knew this was a splendid teak table almost 20 yards long, like something from Downton Abbey. I asked him how he did that? The captain casually remarked, "Oh, he was doing a Russian dance on it!"

John's career took him all over the world - mostly the Far East, but Europe as well - facing off against the Soviet Bear. Although he packed us children off to public school to protect our education, we all knew that he loved us and wanted the best for us.

After 35 years he retired, was pleased to get the MBE and went on to manage the Gurkha museum in Winchester for some years. Like all ex-service people, he sometimes found civilian life strange and difficult to understand ... or even approve of. He had deeply loved the Gurkhas and loved visiting many of his old friends in Nepal. One nickname of his was "Soda pani", meaning soda water, because of his volatile spirit. He once visited me at an RAF station. When I arrived at the camp gate, he was singing with a Gurkha soldier - one of the guards whom he knew. (Small world!)

Of course, the sad times came as well. His marriage to our mother sometimes struggled - he being a larger-than-life character roaring around 'frightening the tenants' while Mum was the shock absorber for the family, but John was heart-broken by her loss 18 years ago, and that of his brother 3 years later.

But life went on with John making big plans. He was widely read, but radically overestimated his practical skills. He never stopped, even making big plans when he was quite ill these last couple of years - he was no quitter!

So, if I can summarise, he was not always a perfect man and he knew it, but we all knew he loved us and meant the very best for us. His loss will leave a huge gap in all our lives and, like so many sinners, he made his peace with the Almighty, trusting in Christ's mercies before he died.