



Memorial, Colonel Sir David Stirling

"Who Dares Wins"

Lt. Colonel Sir David Stirling For many years, the Commando War Memorial at Spean Bridge in Lochaber, north of Fort William, has been a popular stopping-off place for the many tourists and others who pass by. The Forth Valley in Stirlingshire may not be as desolate as the Spean Valley but it now has a memorial which is just as dramatic. And judging by the number of cars stopping in the car park, it has become just as popular.

The memorial is to Lt. Colonel Sir David Stirling OBE DSO - also known as the "Phantom Major" - who founded the Special Air Service at the height of WWII. Field Marshall Montgomery, who commanded the Allied forces in North Africa at the time, said, "The boy Stirling is quite mad, quite, quite mad. However, in a war there is often a place for mad people."

David Stirling was born November 15th 1915 son of Brigadier Archibald Stirling of Keir and the Hon Margaret Fraser, 4th daughter of the 13th Baron Lovat. So he had a long pedigree in serving his country at times of need. At the outbreak of war he joined the Scots Guards but volunteered for the elite No 8 Commando unit and served in the Mediterranean. In North Africa in 1941, while recuperating from a parachute accident, he built on the idea of a small highly-trained special operations group attacking the Rommel's long supply lines. When he failed to

gain access to his commanding officer General Auchinleck to argue his case, he just slipped past the guard and walked in (on crutches) - "who dares wins," indeed.

Using the innocent-sounding name of L-Detachment Special Air Service and working alongside the Long Range Desert Group, small detachments drove behind enemy lines and attacked enemy airfields, communications and supply dumps. The highly-trained and well-motivated created chaos and the Italians and Germans had to use up more and more forces to guard their bases. The destruction of large numbers of enemy aircraft even allowed a naval convoy to reach Malta to relieve the beleaguered island. Field Marshall Montgomery - another unconventional soldier, gave Stirling his backing and Winston Churchill became so impressed by the unit's performance that it was made into a full Brigade.

SAS Crest In 1943, Stirling was captured by the Germans, then escaped, but was captured by the Italians and became a prisoner-of-war. Hitler had ordered that all members of the SAS and other special forces should be executed but to his credit Field Marshall Rommel was the only German commander to ignore the order. During his time as a POW, he escaped four times and was eventually sent to the famous Colditz Castle where he remained for the rest of the war. In the meantime, his brother had taken over as commander of an SAS Brigade. The SAS expanded and became involved in escapades in many parts of Europe. The principles established led to the creation of the crack SAS Regiment which today forms the UK's premier special forces unit. David Stirling was awarded the OBE and DSO for his actions in war and was knighted in 1990 but died a few months later.

The memorial to Sir David Stirling is on a hill looking north towards the hills and mountains of Perthshire (see illustration above). Even without the memorial statue, it would be worth a visit - though the field of yellow oil-seed rape is not always there to enhance the picture! Close by is the picturesque village of Doune with Doune Castle which has featured in a number of movies, including "Monty Python and the Holy Grail". Also in the area is Kilbryde Castle which deserves to be better known. While the castle itself is not open to the public, there are extensive gardens which are particularly attractive in the spring when the rhododendrons and azaleas are in bloom. Dunblane with its Cathedral and its Pictish associations is not far away either.