

known as, respectively, "Tenente [Lieutenant] *Plastico*" and "Tenente 808".

For three months the *missione inglese* and the partisans enjoyed considerable success in sabotage operations. But in November 1944 the British General Alexander ordered the partisans to cease large-scale operations against the enemy over the winter and to build up stocks of weapons and ammunition in anticipation of final efforts the following spring. In December COOLANT was ordered to accompany the Italian partisans in joining up with Yugoslav partisan forces and on 12 January 1945 the team started four weeks of arduous cross-country trekking in snow-covered mountainous countryside before reaching Crnomolj in Yugoslavia and being flown out by the RAF on 12 February 1945. After his return, Ron served from March 1945 on special operations air despatch duties at an American airfield in north-western Italy until, after the Axis surrender in Europe in May, his engineering expertise was put to good use in public works when he was posted in June 1945 to work with the Allied Military Government in Trieste. He was awarded a Mention in Despatches in March 1945 and the Italian Partisan Medal in July of the same year. Ron was released from the Army in 1946, at which point he rejoined A E Watson as technical manager.

Post-war, Ron continued a successful career in engineering. In 1948 he joined Costain John Brown Ltd and the same year saw him return to Brighton where he spent a short period as a lecturer at his old college and some time living back at his parents' home, then at 5 Mount Pleasant. He married (Ruby) Betty Harding in July 1949 and the following year saw the start of their family with the arrival of twin boys, Rod and John. Ron commuted to work in London from Hove until, in 1958, the family moved to Cheam in Surrey. His career as a development engineer included spells with Tubewrights Ltd and then with Stewarts & Lloyds, later part of British Steel Tubes Division. He played a leading role in developing and establishing structural engineering with tubes and hollow sections, notably the first Boeing 747 hangar for BOAC at Heathrow Airport, before leaving British Steel at the age of 59 and setting up his own practice as a consulting engineer. He continued to work into his 80s.

Ron was a member of the Council of the Institution of Structural Engineers, a Visiting Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at Surrey University and a Master of the Worshipful Company of Constructors (1985/86). He returned to Italy on a number of occasions for post-war partisan reunions and events, being made an honorary Major in the Alpini Regiment. He appeared in a 1984 BBC television programme about SOE and participated in a 1987 conference of former SOE agents and partisans in Bologna, but otherwise spoke little of his wartime experiences. Having settled in later life in Buckinghamshire, in 2002 he moved to Dorchester, but only a few weeks later, died there on 10 December, aged 86.



THE UNVEILING OF A PLAQUE COMMEMORATING CAPTAIN RONALD TAYLOR

ROYAL ENGINEERS
and
No 1 SPECIAL FORCE, SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE (SOE)

Saturday, 6th July 2019 – 12 noon

Welcome and thanks – Louisa Russell, Chair of The SWW2LN

Introduction – Paul McCue, Trustee of The SWW2LN

Ron Taylor, Past Master – Mike Parrett
Master, The Worshipful Company of Constructors

Captain Ron Taylor, My Father – Diane Grainger

Unveiling of the Plaque – Diane Grainger and John Taylor

A toast – Captain Ron Taylor, RE and No 1 Special Force, SOE
con vini d'Italia - Paul McCue



The Secret WW2 Learning Network (SWW2LN) is an educational charity registered in the UK, no. 1156796

<https://www.secret-ww2.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/secretww2net/>

The Worshipful Company of Constructors – www.constructorscompany.org.uk

CAPTAIN RONALD TAYLOR



Ronald Gordon Taylor, known as Ron, was born on 2 October 1916, the youngest of the ten children (only eight survived infancy) of Thomas Samuel Taylor and Jane Taylor (née Luckhurst). While his father had been born in Lancashire of Cheshire stock, his mother was born in Brighton and the family was living at 29 Carlton Street, Brighton, when Ron was born. Ron attended his local elementary school, St John's, in Carlton Hill, Brighton until 1928; Varndean Secondary School in the town until 1935; and then undertook an external University of London BSc (Eng) degree at Brighton Municipal Technical College, graduating in 1937. He first joined the firm A E Watson in Brighton, before moving to London in connection with his work and it was there that, only weeks after the outbreak of war, he joined the Royal Engineers of the British Army on 18 October 1939.

Ron initially served as a Sapper (Private) in the Depot Company of the 1st Training Battalion, Royal Engineers at Shorncliffe Camp in Kent where duties were enlivened by the garrison being responsible for defence of the Hythe to Folkestone coastal sector. In October 1940 he was posted to 141 Officer Cadet Training Unit of the Royal Engineers, also at Shorncliffe. He passed out from the course in March 1941, was commissioned at Aldershot as a Second Lieutenant with the new service number 179725 and was quickly promoted to full Lieutenant the following month. He then spent two years, from March 1941 to July 1943, as an officer at the British Army's Experimental Bridging Establishment at Christchurch, becoming an expert on military bridging and helping design the original Bailey Bridge.

Ron continued to develop his professional status as a Structural Engineer and Chartered Engineer, but though he was posted to 510 Royal Engineer Field Company from July 1943, he sought a more active role in the war by volunteering for SOE in October of the same year. SOE's plans for Ron involved using his technical expertise in support of sabotage operations by partisans in southern Europe and the Balkans. He would first need further specialised training, but unlike that provided in England for personnel destined for western or northern Europe, he was posted to SOE's MO4 branch, at GHQ Middle East Forces in Cairo. He reported in Cairo on 30 November for posting to Force 133, the unit responsible for SOE's operations and resistance forces in northern Italy and the Balkans. In order to join Force 133, Ron required parachute and paramilitary training. For the former, in

December 1943 he attended a course at the RAF airfield at Ramat David, 30 kilometres south-east of Haifa in what was then Palestine, now Israel. In May 1944 he completed a paramilitary course at Special Training School 102 (STS 102 – also known as Military Establishment/ME 102), housed in the abandoned Stella Maris monastery on the westernmost slope of Mount Carmel, above the town of Haifa. He was rated 'good' or 'very good' throughout this training, albeit with the sobering added comment '*requires further practice in Silent Killing*'.

Ron was then posted to SOE's forward headquarters in Italy, joining No. 1 Special Force at Monopoli. There, he was briefed as one of a three-man team to be sent to the already-operational COOLANT mission of Major Hedley Vincent. The original drop of Vincent had been codenamed SERMON and the operation to parachute Ron and his colleagues was therefore named SERMON II. Ron and his fellow-officer, Lieutenant David Godwin of the Royal Armoured Corps, were to add their specialist skills in sabotage and the use of explosives and they were accompanied, as interpreter, by Corporal Michael "Micky" Trent, recruited by SOE in Palestine. Trent's real name was Issack Michael Gyori, a Czech-born Hungarian Jew who could speak twelve different languages. The operation to drop the three-man team took place on the night of 12/13 August 1944 and was undertaken by an unarmed Dakota to a Drop Zone (DZ), codenamed BEAVERTON, just to the north of the village of Canebola, on the upper slopes of Monte Joanez. All three men jumped without incident and landed within a few metres of the signal fires, Ron being enthusiastically welcomed by an Italian partisan who kissed him vigorously on both cheeks.

The team's principal task was to train the partisans in the use of explosives for sabotage and to ensure that operations against the enemy were part of a planned and co-ordinated programme. Training courses, each lasting three to four days, were held either in the open, weather permitting, or in schools – in Canebola itself and at various villages throughout the area. Priority targets were the road and railway running from Venice up to Austria through the Pontebba pass, along which the enemy were carrying vital supplies to the front and, in the opposite direction, a considerable quantity of war booty. A secondary target was the road leading into Austria from the Yugoslavian side of the border. Resistance efforts were hampered, however by the tensions among the different partisan groups with which the COOLANT team had to work. The *Garibaldi Natisone* Brigade was a communist group, distinguished by the wearing of red scarves. But links were then established with a Republican partisan organisation, the *Osoppo* Brigade. Sporting green scarves, the *Osoppo* were firmly anti-communist and consequently viewed the *Garibaldini* with mistrust. In return, the *Garibaldini* were deeply suspicious of the *Osoppo* who had many former officers of the Italian Army among their ranks and who were therefore considered fascists. Ron, together with Godwin and Gyori, was attached to the *Osoppo* group where the Nobel 808 plastic explosive that they used, supplied by SOE, led the Italians to give Ron and Godwin a *nome di battaglia* and they consequently became