

# Harry Pettinger

## “A true gentleman of his time”

I am sure many members of the long service association will remember Harry Pettinger, I was fortunate to have met him many times over the years. He was in Charlie Days office when my apprentice agreement was signed in January 1956. He interviewed me with Harry Jullier, in 1966. I was asked to present him with a gift, on behalf of London Construction, in honour of his retirement in 1982. Then usually I would see him once a year from about 1998 onwards at the Union Jack Club, at a small gathering of friends of Jack Garard, organised by Valerie Keefe, Harrys loyal secretary for some 20years, who also arranged the Long Service functions over many years

Mike Lyons, a good old friend, and I attended his service of Thanksgiving service 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Although I always held Harry in very high regard, and knew he had served in the forces and been decorated, I did not know any details that his Eulogy revealed.

Forgive me, because I felt it would be of interest our association members, and it being the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the War, I have taken the liberty of editing and plagiarising a combination of the Eulogy and a newspaper article for Long Service newsletter:-

Major Harold Arthur William Pettinger

12<sup>th</sup> November 1920-25<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Born in South London on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1920 he was an only child, named after his uncle Harold, who died as an army lieutenant near Ypres in 1917. As a child he developed a fascination for technology and electronics, building his own crystal set to pick-up short-wave transmissions from across the world.

He was educated at Alleyne's School which he enjoyed, and where he took a full and active part in the school Officer Training Corps, which stood him in good stead a few years later.

In 1937 he joined Waygood Otis at Falmouth Road as an apprentice, but his time was cut short by the outbreak of the Second World War. Harry duly enlisted in the Army in

1941, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Yorks & Lancaster regiment and was posted to Egypt.

On arrival in Cairo, he was sent in to Syria and fought against the Vichy French. After a while he was posted to the Tobruk garrison, which at that time was being besieged by the Germans and Italians. It was at Tobruk that the Allies broke out, after the longest continuous siege in modern warfare.

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Harrys Company was ordered to breakout of the siege perimeter, to capture and hold, a desert hill position for 24 hours, in the event it was held for 7 days, the remaining company having eventually to resort to using captured guns and ammunition.

At the appointed time they went “over the top” attacked across open ground under an artillery barrage, and were supported by tanks from the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank Regiment, they started to take heavy casualties Harry was thankful to be able to advance behind one of the tanks most of the way but, as he approached the objective, he saw an anti-tank gun emplacement.

Shouting to four men to follow him, he led a charge on it. They dealt with the two gunners and, after fighting their way into the surrounding trenches, took thirty prisoners. Harry was hit in the back by shrapnel, and later a hole was discovered in his respirator that had taken the impact of a bullet, Harry’s lucky day!

The company originally 120 in strength was reduced to 40 who were still able to fight. Harry believed he only survived because he had decided to carry a rifle instead of the revolver, which was standard equipment for officers then, and would have made him a particular target. He was awarded an immediate Military Cross.

The citation in that day’s war diary reads as follows:

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Pettinger rallied the men around him, then personally led them to the objective. On arrival he, accompanied by only 4 men assaulted part of the position occupied by about 30 of the enemy, destroyed and took them prisoner and thus obtained a footing in the enemy position. Though under continual heavy fire this officer showed a complete disregard for his personal safety and it was largely due to his personal example and leadership that this attack by his company was a success. For this act of bravery, he was awarded the Military Cross.

Later Harry was sent to the Far East bound for Singapore, just three days out from the destination, news was received that Singapore had fallen, and the ship was ordered back to India, so probably saving him from years of captivity.

Promoted to Lieutenant, he was involved for a while in Indian internal security, and had under his command a complete armoured train with steam up at all times, the better to patrol the North West frontier.

Then in 1943 Harry volunteered for the Chindit special operations that took place 1000miles behind Japanese lines in the Burmese jungle. During training he injured his knee, forcing him to miss the first operation, which probably again saved his life as very few Chindits in the first operation came out of the jungle alive.

Harry was then appointed Captain, and later Major, Special Forces HQ, in charge of supplying the second more successful Chindit operation in the jungle: which was the first major army operation supplied completely from the air, all food, drink, and ammunition's dropped by parachute over the jungle

Later that year, he was repatriated to the UK, and arrived back in London, still in tropical kit on VE night, after being away for four years. His parents thought he was still in Burma, imagine their surprise when he phoned from a few miles away.

Harry was then demobilised from the army in 1946, and then married his childhood sweetheart Monica, they had written to each other throughout the war, Harry found she was now a beautiful 19-year-old nurse not the young girl he remembered.

Harry now re-joined Waygood Otis as a branch manager in Newcastle on Tyne, where his first two children, Martin and Hilary were born. He also joined the Territorial Army and spent much time training and on manoeuvres. In 1955 he was awarded the Territorial Decoration.

Also in 1955 the family moved to Sutton Coldfield, where his second son Richard was born, Harry had been promoted to Birmingham branch manager, eventually becoming the district manager.

After spending some months in New York for special management training

Harry was appointed London Sales Manager and later Director of Otis Elevator Company, (as Waygood Otis had become) and the family moved to Stoke D'Aberon near Guilford where his youngest son was born.

In 1965 Harry went to Harvard Business School in the USA for an advanced management degree. Then in succession, he became Technical Chairman then President of the National Association of Lift Manufacturers, leader of the British Delegation of European Standards and then President of the European Lift Manufacturers Association. He even took part in many of the early Open University television Lectures explaining, and answering various technical questions surrounding lifts and escalators.

Having served over 40 years with Otis Elevator Company he retired in 1982

Sadly, his wife Monica had suffered a severe stroke in 1972 she fought back and recovered enough to drive, Harry and his family cared for her, until her death from another stroke in 1989.

After his retirement he had put his drive and enthusiasm in many other activities, one becoming a church warden, installing the majority of the wiring for a new church organ, joining a sailing club where he sailed his dingy eventually becoming an instructor for the RYA taught navigation, and sailing. Raising funds for the RNLI, which resulted in a bronze RNLI award, and so much more?

Harry was a remarkable and gracious man; who always had time for people. He was eminently suited to lead, as evidenced, by his distinguished service in the armed forces, his working life in our Company, and then with his local community.

Truly an Honourable Gentleman, who it was an honour to have known.