

Many reasons have been given explaining why Royal Marines Cooks (now Chefs) wear a 'K' on their SQ Badge. One which used to go the rounds was that the Royal Marines couldn't spell. 'K' for Kitchenmaid has also been mooted. A more recent, and perhaps logical, explanation was that it stood for 'Killer'. In a piece written some years ago former member the late Major Ian Wray came up with the definitive answer (he says)

A Character with a Capital 'K'

by Major Ian Wray MBE

The late Colonel J M Fuller was a character with a capital 'K'. A Fleet Air Arm pilot between the wars, he commanded 28 Battalion RM in World War 2 and later became the AAG (Assistant Adjutant General) on the staff of the Commandant general from 1946 to 1950. I had met him first when he commanded 28RM. A real salt-water Marine, he would answer the telephone '28 Battalion' in the same manner that the Captain of an HM Ship, in answer to the challenge 'Boat Ahoy' would reply 'Royal Sovereign' or whichever.

My good fortune was to be appointed to his staff as Staff Captain 'A' in 1946 when he was AAG. As a somewhat 'wet-behind the ears' Acting Captain, I reported to the late, and not very much lamented, Queen Anne's Mansions, those august premises which housed the Commandant General's staff. Well, not so august really – eight floors up by early Roman hydraulic lifts and no central heating – coal fire in the office and one whole 60 watt bulb to strain the eyes.

I reported to the office good and early. Uniform was still the rig of the day. The door of the AAG's office opened and JMF emerged. He was clad in crumpled flannel trousers and an exceedingly passé khaki shirt, greeting me by saying 'Morning Sunshine – (an awful nickname of mine at the time) – Where the hell's my back stud?' And so began my service in 'A' Branch. I discovered later that the reason JMF slept now and again in his office was because he, being a warm-hearted chap, used on occasion to allow his friends to use his flat, which was close to Queen Anne's, for overnight accommodation and dalliance.

JMF was a bachelor – As apart from a celibate – and it was sometimes a problem to know which telephone number to ring in his absence without incurring the indignation of the lady he had not visited. He said on one occasion 'No Royal Marines officer is qualified to sit as President of a Court Martial on a buggery case. 90% have committed the offence and the other 10% don't know what it means'. Not a week later after this profound statement, no prize for guessing who was appointed as President in just such a case.

JMF had an amazing mind. When he drafted a letter, his mind would race ahead of his teeny-weeny handwriting, leaving whole phrases out. The result was that I had to take the draft to our Superintending Clerk (Percy Turner) and confer. Having decided what JMF probably meant, the letter would be typed. I would then take it to him to sign. He would read it and say 'I didn't write this, did I?' And I would say 'Well, no, sir, but I think that's what you meant.' He would then sign it, happily chuckling.

This second extract from Lloyds Weekly News later in the year is unrelated to the previous one although the name of Smith occurs in both

Crimean Veteran's Sad End

28th September 1916

The city coroner held an inquest yesterday concerning the death of William Richard Littlejohns, aged 82, a Crimean veteran, lately residing in Peterborough, whose body was found in the Thames near the Temple Bar on Monday. Thomas Stirling Hortor, a clerk of Woodman Terrace, Edinburgh, stated that Littlejohns, who was his uncle, was formerly in the Marines, and was present at the fall of Sebastopol. For that he held a medal and clasps, but he had no pension, except the old age pension of 5s a week.

Mrs Christiana Smith, of Bervette Street, Peterborough, widow of a farmer, with whom the deceased had lived for fourteen years, stated that as she had lost four sons in the war, and had an invalid daughter, she was no longer able to accommodate her uncle. Consequently he decided to go into the St Pancras Infirmary, and when he left Peterborough on September 18 he had 12s 6d after paying his fare. Witness afterwards heard that her uncle had been found in the Thames. He had never threatened suicide, and was most cheerful when he left her.

Other evidence showed that the veteran's body and bag were seen floating up the river, and that when the clothing was searched a postcard addressed to his niece was found - it read:

'God forgive me; no cash. Dear Chris, Good-bye. Remains of food on steps by the bank'

There was also found his marriage certificate showing that he married at St Bride's Church, Fleet Street, forty-nine years ago. No money was found on the body. The jury returned an open verdict of "found drowned".

These extracts were both submitted by Tony Perrett.

Cyprus and Confrontation

The planned Special Publication for 2003 will cover the experiences of Colour Sergeant Hart, 45 Commando, during his service in Cyprus. The Editor needs an overview of the Corps' important contribution in the four years 1955-59 to complement this individual story. Before memories fade, please contact the Honorary Secretary or Honorary Editor if you are willing to pen up to 5,000 words. Previously unpublished photographs would also be appreciated.

The Corps role in Confrontation in Sarawak and North Borneo is not well documented, except for 42 Commando's action at Limbang. This could be a future SP. Any volunteers interested in writing an overview or individual reminiscence should contact the Honorary Editor with a brief resume of what they might cover.

He had a phenomenal memory. He needed it for he carried all the details of the first post-war pay code in his head. We – the staff – never saw so much as a minute about it. This was the code which introduced ‘Specialist Qualifications’ instead of ‘Non-Substantive Rates’ – and also was silly enough to try to equate the duties and responsibilities of a Petty Officer, RM Sergeant, Army Sergeant and an RAF Sergeant.



**Above: The specialist qualification
Badge of a Cook (now Chef) 3rd class
Left: A SNCO with a First Class
qualification badge.**

There were problems with this well-meaning but ham-fisted code. One, for the Royal Marines, was the letter to be used for ‘Cook’. No problem for the Navy – they used ‘C’ for Cook and ‘W’ for Writer. But, of course, the Corps, being soldierly in origin, used ‘C’ for Clerk. What do you do? JMF solved the problem in an instant: ‘K’ for cook – and so it is to this day!

Being a traditionalist, he invariably spelled ‘Sergeant’ as Serjeant’ in the old-fashioned way. He was once rebuked in a docket from ‘G’ Branch signed by the late Lt Col ‘Tank’ Ransome who wrote ‘G Branch always spells Sergeant with a ‘G’’, to which JMF replied ‘A Branch always spells cock with a ‘K’”.

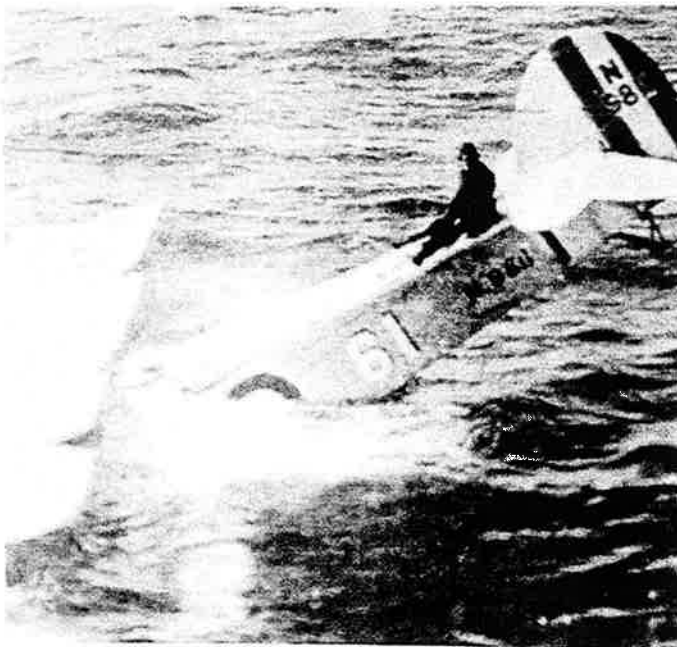
As a sea-going traditionalist, he took exception to the then somewhat over-played hand of those who served in Commando Units. His exception took two forms. One was a reversible beret (yes, he had it made and I saw it!) with Khaki on one side for active service and blue on the other for everyday. But his best effort was a poem which fortunately for him, had very little circulation. *Editor’s Note: and doesn’t seem to have survived)* He wrote quite a bit of jolly doggerel verse, but this was a masterpiece. Somewhat on the lines of Kipling’s ‘Soldier ‘an Sailor Too’ it recounted the many exploits of the Corps since its inception, but each stanza ended with ‘But they weren’t Commando trained’.

His acute ability to de-pomp was wonderful to behold. On one occasion we had to give a lecture to young officers on Corps administration. He started the lecture by handing round bottles of Guinness, saying that he knew this was a pretty dry subject and the Guinness might help.

This was the age of massive arrays of ‘In’ trays on staff officer’ desks. JMF had progressed much further than the usual ‘In’, ‘Out’ and ‘On Guard’. His read ‘In’, ‘Further In’, ‘Sinking’, ‘Sunk’ and ‘What makes the grass grow green in Texas?’ (For those who have not been to Texas the answer is, of course, bullshit.)

A serious and wordy report from Colonel ‘Freddie’ Dewhurst commanding the then not inconsiderable sized Unit in Ceylon included the statement ‘The Marines have now occupied the WRNS Quarters.’ JMF replied that he did not think that this was in the best interests of the Service (knowing quite well that the Wrens had long since vacated the accommodation).

Col J M Fuller was always up to pranks. In 1928, he survived a ducking when he ditched in the sea whilst serving in HMS Courageous, hence his nickname 'Crash' Fuller. For a £5 bet he and another officer jumped off the flight deck in bathing costumes, using umbrellas that inevitably collapsed. Later, as a Colonel in 1948, it was his plan which led to the complete reorganisation of the Corps following the Lamplough report.



Bill Fuller was a man to trust completely – a man whose loyalty to the Corps shone so brightly. A greatly under-rated man who did much for the Corps he loved so deeply. I am proud to have known him and served under his skilful, wise and impish leadership.

And his only memorial seems to be the 'K' on the sleeves of the Royal Marines cooks.

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Afternote: It reminds me of the occasion very soon after the change in nomenclature from Cooks to Chefs in 1991 was announced. Two Royal Marines chefs were unusually on a formal parade, one in the front rank and the other behind him in the centre rank. The inspecting General stopped at the first and asked him "What do you do?" "I'm a cook", the marine replied. The irate General, furious that the man did not seem to know about the change, roared at him "No you're not, you're a 'chef'" and moved on down the rank. When he reached the man in the centre rank again he asked "And what do you do?", the man immediately replied in a flash, "I'm a chef, sir!". "Ah, and how long have you been a chef?" the General asked, to which the marine replied "About 5 minutes, sir!".

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