

Captain Humphrey Drummond of Megginch

Captain Humphrey Drummond of Megginch, who died on April 2 aged 86, was a figure seemingly drawn from the pages of Sir Walter Scott: debonair, boisterous and handsome, he was variously a writer, falconer, wit and soldier.

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In March 1945 Drummond, who was serving with the 1st Mountain Regiment RA (1 MR), was attached to 45 Royal Marine Commando as the forward observation officer during the forced crossing of the Rhine. After the commandos captured a factory in Wesel, they were repeatedly counter-attacked by determined groups of the enemy, sometimes in company strength.



On March 24, Drummond established an observation post with one of the forward troops. The house he was in came under accurate fire from small arms and self-propelled guns, and he was often in full view of the enemy; but he put down several concentrations of artillery fire, and this played a vital part in breaking up every counter-attack.

The citation for his immediate MC stated that he moved about in exposed positions oblivious to the enemy fire, and that whatever the odds or the danger he risked everything to protect and assist the commandos. "Seldom," it concluded, "has such determination or personal courage been equalled."

The son of an Army officer, he was born Humphrey ap Evans on September 18 1922 at Old Buckenham, Norfolk. In 1966, when he and his wife, Cherry Drummond, later Lady Strange, moved into her family's seat at Megginch Castle, Perthshire, he would take her surname.

After Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, he joined 1 MR in 1942 and commanded a troop in 451 Battery during arduous mountain and snow warfare training in the Highlands. The regiment was equipped with screwguns which weighed about 1,800lb and had to be broken down into eight mule-loads.

With better air transport, the regiment exchanged their mules for Jeeps and re-equipped as an air-portable, mechanised 3.7 inch Howitzer regiment, storming the island of Walcheren in the Scheldt estuary, one of the most heavily-defended sections of the Atlantic Wall, in November 1944.

After the forced crossings of the Rhine and then the Elbe, the town of Lauenburg was captured. The

light flak guns left by the enemy were put into action against the Luftwaffe, and Drummond scored a direct hit on a Focke-Wulf 190.

On May 1 a carrier in which he was travelling ran over a booby-trapped bomb and was blown about 30 yards. Both the driver and signaller were killed. The rest of the group were wounded, and although Drummond remained in action until the end of the campaign, his own injuries troubled him for the remainder of his life.

After the war ended, he served with the Indian Political Service for a spell and was then the Welsh representative of the National Trust from 1949 to 1954. In 1953 he was Gold Staff Officer at the Coronation.

Proud of his Welsh ancestry, Drummond had meanwhile helped to found the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales and was its general secretary from 1947 to 1951.

Following his marriage in 1952, however, he moved to Scotland, where he became interested in falconry. He used to attend Founder's Day at Eton with a goshawk on his shoulder.

He was once asked to look after an eagle for a friend. It arrived with six guinea pigs, all pregnant. The animals bred so fast, he was told, that there would always be enough of them to keep the eagle happy. Drummond was appalled. He would shoot birds and trap mice, he decided, rather than subject the guinea pigs to such a cruel fate.

The Kilspindie Basset Hounds, a pack that he raised and with which he hunted, may have staked a prior claim to his attention however, for the guinea pigs grew fatter and sleeker by the day while the eagle became thinner, more miserable and bad-tempered.

Like all dedicated practical jokers, he was sometimes prepared to strain the forbearance of his companions if the jest was good enough.

One evening, at the Imperial Hotel, Vienna, while a friend who was late for the opera was frantically finishing dressing, Drummond, who had great physical strength, piled up eight immense sofas in the door of the bedroom to delay his departure.

A neighbour, who shared Drummond's fondness for pranks, once received a visit from a BBC producer. When the man announced that he was looking for a suitable background for a "low-intellect" comedy, the neighbour, who felt that his own establishment did not fit the bill, suggested that he take a look at Megginch instead, and telephoned Drummond to say that the chap was on his way.

Drummond, convinced that this was another leg-pull, attired himself in dark glasses, a Goldilocks wig and a cape that Count Dracula himself might have envied. The visit was of short duration, and

Drummond later heard that the poor fellow had dosed himself on tranquillisers for a week in an attempt to get over the shock.

In 1986 his wife succeeded in proving her claim as the 16th Lady Strange, a title which had been in the family since 1627 but had come down to her only after a series of abeyances. She duly took her place in the House of Lords, where she made her mark by providing it each week with flowers from her garden.

The Drummonds travelled widely, often on parliamentary business, and when he reserved a room in his name and that of Lady Strange he would get some rather old-fashioned looks from hotel receptionists. This delighted him.

He had a great rapport with children. When some young cousins came to stay, he bought up all the pistol caps available in the toyshops of Perth. The afternoon was spent scraping the powder off the paper backing until there was enough for a satisfyingly large bang.

From 1975 until 1981 he was chairman of the Society of Authors (Scotland). His own books included *Our Man in Scotland; Sir Ralph Sadleir 1507-1587* (1969); *The Queen's Man: James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell and Duke of Orkney 1536-1578* (1975); *The King's Enemy: The Life of Francis Stewart 5th Earl of Bothwell; Falconry for You* (1960); and *Nazi Gold* (1994).

Cherry Strange died in 2005, and he is survived by their three sons, of whom the eldest has succeeded to the barony, and their three daughters.

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