

EULOGY

23 JAN 2024 – CAR Snelling

Cornelius Anthony Ryder Snelling was born on 1st April 1923 in Twickenham to his loving parents Winifred and Joseph Snelling. He arrived with his twin Brother, Alfred, who very sadly passed away in the days following their birth. Tony often said that he lived his life for both of them. His Parents named him Cornelius, after his Grandfather Cornelius Gray, later in life he became known to many as Tony. His Sister Joan, was 4 years old when Tony was born, she adored him. Tony often told us of the times they played together in their garden and also when he managed to push one of Joan's friends into the garden pond. Another time he set light to Joan's doll's house. Despite this, they had a close and loving relationship until Joan sadly passed away in 1977 at 57 years of age.

The Family moved from Twickenham to Kingston-Upon-Thames when Tony was 5 years old. Tony's Father, Joseph, very sadly passed away when Tony was only 14. His Mother later went on to re marry Ernest Mardell. Sue and Peter knew Ernest as their Pop. Every Saturday all the family went into Kingston for tea. This was followed by games of cards and lots of piano playing.

Tony's Family were very much a railway one with his Father being a Staff Clerk at Nine Elms, his Uncle a signalman and also his Grandfather one too. Tony told us that his Grandfather had to stop the Royal train which was virtually unheard of, but Tony said he had good reason to do so, however we have yet to research the reason why.

Tony went from Primary School to College which put him in good stead to follow in his Family's footsteps on the railway. Afterwards he too joined the Southern Railway Company. This was at the beginning of the Second World War. Tony always said that his educational opportunities were somewhat limited due to the War; He was exceedingly proud therefore, of all Family members who have had the opportunity to go onto Further education and University.

Tony did his initial railway training at Surbiton Station, which in those days had the highest season ticket issue on the whole of the Southern Railway. From there he moved into the Publicity Department at Waterloo Station. Due to the War, the Department was not fully

operational so Tony also joined the Land Defence Volunteers, the LDV in 1940. Tony was only 17 years old at the start of the War and he said that initially he did not realise the gravity of the situation.

As time progressed, Tony spent more and more time with the LDV at Waterloo Station. Their Headquarters was in fact at the old Lyons Tea Room, and Tony was involved in monitoring other units' duties across all of London's Railway Stations especially at night time. Initially, the LDV did not have uniforms or weapons, so they practised firearms' duties with broomsticks. The LDV later became the Home Guard, which the TV programme Dad's Army was based upon. Once the Home Guard was operational, they would perform drills on the Station away from the public view, and Tony also went for rifle training at a camp in Shere.

Tony experienced the blitz in London with air raids including incendiary bombs over Kingston and his home. Here their shelter was in the cupboard under the stairs. He also told us of one particular story when he was in an office at Waterloo, he could hear the whistle of bombs, quickly diving under a desk. One bomb penetrated the Waterloo and City line below and blew out a window frame. However, the light fitting survived and was operational. Someone swiftly shouted 'Turn that "blinking" light out'.

The bombing raids would disturb the rats, and they would also enjoy eating the carbon paper in the offices! Tony described all of this 'as a baptism of fire', before joining the Royal Navy in 1942 at just 18.

Once signed up, Tony was conscripted to shore base HMS Ganges for 6 weeks training before transferring to Chatham Naval base to await drafting. His draft took Tony on the sleeper train to Glasgow, where he made his way to Yarrow's shipyard in Scotstoun, on the banks of the Clyde. Tony joined a type of ship called a sloop, she was named HMS Wild Goose and operated under Captain Jonnie Walker. She was a convoy defence vessel, a hunter killer of U boats. The anti-submarine training took place in the Inner Hebrides under the tutelage of a Commodore nicknamed the "Terror of Tobermory", for many a good reason, this however prepared him for what lay ahead.

Active service began on Atlantic Convoy HX 236 in May 1943, escorting merchant vessels sailing from New York to the UK. Tony told us that he slept in a hammock and that the weather could be terrible at times. In September 1943 HMS Wild Goose escorted in landing craft at the Italian landings. Then in the November she provided cover across the Bay of

Biscay. The Nazis and U Boats had bases in Western France so they were tasked to stop them getting out into open water and to then attack the convoys.

In January 1944 the Wild Goose helped escort Convoy SL 147 across the Atlantic and became involved in the 'Six in One' mission that sunk six U-boats. On return to Liverpool, the crew welcomed King George the VI on-board. Tony's final deployment on HMS Wild Goose was Arctic Convoy JW 58. Arctic convoys sailed to the very Northern Soviet ports. He said that it was extremely cold and that you did not touch the boat without gloves for fear of freezing to it. There's good reason why Winston Churchill called these voyages "the worst journey in the world"

In the last few months of Tony's active service, attention turned towards the beaches of France and Normandy. He said that 'he judged' himself lucky to have survived as he saw many ships sink and shipmates lost. On D-Day, Tony was stationed on HMS Tyler. They sailed early on the 6th of June 1944 to Arromanches, codenamed Gold Beach, escorting landing craft. He said there was flack everywhere and that it was beyond description, but ultimately very grim. After the landings, Tony made many crossings from Southampton, ferrying supplies for the troops, and delivering parts of the Mulberry Harbour as well as protecting "PLUTO", Pipe Line Under The Ocean from U Boats and aircraft.

After the war in November 1945, Tony crewed HMS Tyler to the naval shipyard in Philadelphia, returning her to her American owners. Tony returned to the UK on board the Queen Mary, although it was not fitted out like a cruise ship then! He told us of how he met British Japanese prisoners of war onboard, who very sadly were emaciated. He never forgot those images.

Interestingly, later in life, Tony named his house after his last ship. Tony left the Royal Naval after the war years and returned to family life in Surrey. He re-joined the Southern Railway. It was truly remarkable that Tony survived these War years.

On his return to railway life, Tony rose through the ranks of British Railways and having spoken to his ex-colleagues, they speak with great respect and admiration of him. Highlighting how kind he always was. His colleague and great friend of 50 years, Chris, is here with us today. They worked in the investments and finance areas together looking at new schemes such as electrification and proposals for new stations.

Another great friend of Tony's, Roland, who worked for him initially and told us how patient and kind Tony was to him when he himself was learning the 'ropes. He said it provided a very good foundation for his own career going forward and that Tony was meticulous, excellent at consultation with other departments, a brilliant leader.

Turning to Family life Tony met Jose. She worked on the Railway too as a Private Secretary. They became close and were then married. Peter was born in 1958 and Sue in 1963. They lived in Sydenham in South East London before moving to Horsham in 1968. The house was brand new and bought off plan. Tony was still in this same house until he was 98 ½ years old. Living out his last two years at Westlake House Care Home in Horsham.

Peter and Sue's childhood years were very happy ones, as Tony was a kind, loving and supportive Dad to them both; they feel very lucky. Tony would commute daily to London whilst Jose looked after the home. They recall Jose standing at the door every morning with Tony's briefcase in hand having already cooked a full English breakfast for him. Everything ran like clock-work just as the railways did in those days!

They spent many a happy family holiday caravanning in France. On one such trip, Tony even drove all the way over the Pyrenees and down to near Barcelona in Spain towing their family caravan. Dad nurtured Sue's love of France and its language from a young age. Now both Ella and William have 'Le bug' ausi!

In his spare time, Tony loved rugby watching the international games and supporting the local club where Peter played. Tony also spent many happy hours in his garden – he designed it from scratch, then landscaping, cultivating and planting it out, There were flowers and vegetables which he grew from seedlings. He definitely had green fingers. He had a particular love of roses. Even in his last years there, he would grow enough tomatoes to feed most of the surrounding roads!

Peter and Sue recall that life in Horsham was fun, lots of parties and time with neighbours. Tony made life-long friends there, many of whom are here with us today.

Tony took early retirement from British Railways in 1984 and enjoyed 40 years of retirement. He loved spending time with all of his 5

Grandchildren. His legacy lives on in them all, and also in his 6 Great Grandchildren.

Tony's passion for railways never subsided. He loved visiting heritage railways and celebrating his 70th and 92nd Birthdays on the Bluebell Railway and Watercress Lines respectively. He also was an avid collector of 'N gauge' model trains and had a fully landscaped track which filled the whole of a double bedroom. He spent many happy hours playing with it and collecting engines and carriages.

He travelled further afield in retirement, both with Jose, and also his railway colleagues, visiting South Africa with a trip on the Indian Blue Train, with a stay on the Palace on Wheels. He also went to Hong Kong where he was entertained at the China Fleet Club by the Royal Navy.

When Jose passed away, Tony truly inspired the family with the way in which he continued to live and love life. He was devastated by her loss but was determined to keep going for everyone. He learnt how to cook and operate the washing machine. Bearing in mind that Jose's domain was the kitchen. Even when the care agency came into help, Tony would stand in the kitchen wearing a white laboratory coat, peeling and preparing all his vegetables before his lovely carers arrived.

Tony was actively involved in many Associations and Societies including the Sea Cadets, Royal Naval Association, Captain Walkers Old Boys, the Arctic Convoys, and the Retired Railway Officers Society. From the latter Society, a group of retired railway officers went onto form a friendship group called the Sheep, named after their founding member, Chris. They met regularly and travelled to various UK destinations for lunch, catch ups and of course Beer! One excursion even took them as far afield as Lille in France for lunch.

After losing Jose, Sue, Mark and Peter all had the honour and pleasure of accompanying Tony on various commemorative events to celebrate his service during the Battle of the Atlantic, D-Day and on the Arctic Convoys.

Tony went to Russia 3 times, once to Moscow and twice to St Petersburg. The Russian People treated all the veterans with utmost respect and great gratitude. It was particularly moving to see young children rush up and hand bars of chocolate to Tony whilst holding photos of their lost relatives of WWII.

On his visit to Moscow, Tony sadly became very unwell whilst paying his respects at the grave of the unknown soldier, Red Square. The other veterans and families with him took off their coats, scarves and hats to keep Tony warm whilst medical aid was sort. Tony then spent a week in a private medical hospital being treated for pneumonia. He had daily visits from UK military attaches. His family will be forever thankful for the swift intervention of all those involved, some of whom are here today. At the time Tony was 90 years young! Other Arctic Convoy Association members who sadly passed over the bar before Tony have also had the white ensign we see here today at their funerals.

Remembering his fallen comrades was extremely important to Tony and he attended all the Remembrance occasions he could. Including marching at the Cenotaph and the first ever Armed Forces Day at Chatham, ironically his first base. Tony was also a standard bearer for the RNA travelling to numerous events including the Royal Tournament.

Tony travelled to France often for the D-Day celebrations, and again Tony was treated like a VIP by the French and visiting people. This will stay with Tony's Family forever. He met several members of the Royal Family including the late Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh. The now King Charles III, Princess Anne, Prince William, and Princess Katherine. When he was introduced to Queen Camilla at Bayeux Cemetery on the 75th Anniversary of D-Day she asked what Tony's secret was to looking so young. Tony jest fully replied 'Pussers Naval Rum!' with that twinkle in his eye that we all loved and will remember forever.

Tony and Sue travelled to Buckingham Palace for a Veterans Garden Party with Di, who is with us today, and also her late husband, Jimmy, a fellow Arctic Convoy Veteran. Tony was selected to meet the Queen, an incredibly proud moment for him and the whole Family. The Queen spoke with Tony for several minutes asking him about his recently received Russian Ushakov medal. This is Russia's highest military award, which she admired greatly, and thanking him for his service. Later Tony also received the Legion d'Honneur, France's highest military accolade.

France was not only an important destination to Tony for D-Day commemoration events, but also for treasured Family holidays with Sue, Mark, Ella and William.

They spent every Summer at a cottage in Normandy although, Tony would often remark how strange it was to walk on the same beaches in peacetime with his family that had seen so much devastation during war time.

Tony loved gardening at the cottage. He spent many happy times with friends, David and Tracey, Paul and Helen, who have all travelled here today. Definitely enjoying David's whiskey, Tracey's cooking and not forgetting's Pauls jokes and his love of life! Even when Tony partook of slightly too much whiskey, he was always the first one up the following morning!

When returning with a Brittany ferry on one family trip, Tony et-al were invited to the Bridge by the Captain so he could oversee the Ship coming into dock at Portsmouth. Another moment he absolutely loved.

When Tony was 95 years old, he began to have daily help from an agency, who provided carers, ensuring he could live at home for as long as possible, something which was extremely important to Tony. The carers became wonderful friends of Tony as they all grew to know and to love him. He would often be naughty though climbing the stairs when he shouldn't, and doing their duties, but it was his fierce independence that drove him continuously.

The agency team cared for Tony for 5 years. They all visited him at Westlake, and his face would light up when he saw them. There was a very special bond there. Tony also enjoyed visits from many of Sue and Mark's friends too who equally were Tony's friends. They have shared birthdays, barbeques and so many panto trips as well as many happy times with him.

During his time at Westlake House, Tony enjoyed many mornings with the Veterans Breakfast Club, who met there. In fact, they have played a major role today and we are eternally grateful. They took Tony under their wing and made him feel very much part of their get togethers.

Westlake actively supported Tony's lifelong interests and at 100 years of age he was still able to attend Armed Forces Days, Remembrance events. He had a wonderful trip to Portsmouth Dockyard, which the Veterans Club organised along with the Royal Naval Association. Here Tony was commemorated with a presentation by the then head of Portsmouth Naval Base, Captain Bill Oliphant.

On Dad's 100th Birthday, Westlake also provided a splendid celebration for his Family and all the Residents. This was organised by Hollie and Jenny, both veterans themselves. Hollie's husband, James, also a veteran, played an active role by marching in and presenting Tony with a commemorative plaque. They became very close to Tony.

Tony's care at Westlake was incredible. When the Family visited, Tony always looked smart and more importantly he was extremely happy. There are so many people we could mention individually at Westlake but let's just say that Angels move amongst them. Many are with us today. We will be forever thankful to Tony's nurse who he trusted and adored, along with his main carer, who was with Tony and the Family as he peacefully passed away.

Everyone here has their own unique memories of Tony. He was kind, loving, supportive, and loyal, He had a wonderful sense of humour and incredible joy for life.

To the Family, he is their very special Dad, Grandpop and Great Grandpop.

Tony leaves behind a huge legacy, we thank him for his bravery and his service to the Country.

We all feel so very proud and lucky to have had him in our lives for so long.

Tony it was a privilege, an honour

We love you, our Hero - forever.