

HARRINGTON-SMYTHE, Maj. Gen. Sir Wilberforce Randolph Alexander Iain Trewellen, Kt. DSC OAM. Australian Army Officer; b. 1Apr1932 Little Piddlington, Hants; s. of Sir Philip Wilfred Harrington-Smythe and the Hon. Etha Turnbull Harrington-Smythe (née Klaxon-Horne) m. Felicity Primm 1952; div. 1953; no issue; m. Minerva Bannister 1956; div. 1957 no issue; ed. Lady Cruella De Ville's Preparatory school 1937-1939. Fam. mig. to Australia 1939; ed. Prof. Loewlyfe school Springvale 1939-1945; Melbourne Grammar 1945-1946; Duntroon Mil.Col. 1946-1950. 2nd Lt. R.A.R Korean War 1950-1952; prom. Capt. 1954; saw service Malaysia, Borneo, Singapore, 1954-1959; Adjutant Inf. Trng. Sch. Enoggera 1960-1964; prom. Major 1964; Vietnam 1964 and 1966 Army Intel. Svc; *Aide de Campe* CGS Victoria Barr.1966- 1969; Dir. Army Public Relations 1970-1973; resigned commission 1973; Board mem. Supascoop swimwear; CEO Harbour Bottom Fin. Co.; recommissioned 1982 as Lt.Col. Falkland Is. as mil. Adviser UK Indep.Unit; Mil. Observer Desert Storm Aug.1990-Apr 1991; with reserve force, rank Brevet Major General 1991 to present. Hons. List 1992; *Leisure interests* golf, bush walking, photography; horticulture, breeding Pelargoniums, Pres. Pelargonium Society 1984-1989; Current Patron of Society. Family Motto *Intemperantia nunquam satis est* *..

From "International Who's Who 1999-2000."

* (Excess is never enough)

I was born to Philip and Etha Harrington-Smythe in a small village near Chandlers Ford, Hants, during, I am told, a particularly stormy and cold April night. My early days there were pretty uneventful. My father was a senior Civil Servant with the Dept of Ag. and Fish and Mother was a charity worker. She was the second daughter of the 4th Earl of East Cheam and felt she had a duty to tend to the poor and oppressed as long as they didn't want to come into our home. After a short time at a gruesome Olde English type of public school for the brats of the upper middle class (or actually the lower upper middle class - pater balanced out mater's rating and took us down into the "lower-upper" bracket.) where I was subjected to all sorts of indignities for two miserable years. My father saw the writing on the wall and in August 1939 we migrated to Australia, settling in Springvale Victoria where I attended for the duration of the war the private school of professor Algenon Loewlyfe where I learnt a great deal about the vagaries and perversions of the human beast. I have recently visited the site of my old home, and I swear I saw more Vietnamese there than I did in Saigon in the 60s. But that's the way of things now. During the war my father took up a position in the Ministry of Supply under the Minister, Mr. Dedman. Dedman was intent of reducing wastage and one of his brainstorms was to have men's shirts made with no shirt-tails, claiming that the extra bit of material was wasteful, and the shirt's bottom hem would go round on the same level. The press had a headline that said, "DEDMAN SAYS 'NO TAILS'"

From "*Jumping the bags.¹ A soldier's story*" by Sir Wilberforce Harrington-Smythe. ©1995. Chap1.

My time at Duntroon was exciting in many ways, apart from the military training. I was known to my classmates as "Spooks" because of my initials. I was not over-tall, 5ft.10 or so, but solidly built, strong and agile. I did well at rugby as fly-half, cricket as useful bat and tricky leg-spinner, golf I could get somewhere near par and rowed with the coxless fours. The term "coxless" caused me to smile to myself because I was endowed by nature with a rather imposing set of "marriage tackle" as we called it, and after assignations with some of the local girls, the word spread through the typists and secretaries working in Government offices in Canberra and I found myself in great demand for parties and the like. There arose among the other cadets in reference to these girls the sobriquet "Spooks' Mona Lisas" because of the enigmatic smiles on their faces the morning after an evening spent with me.

I graduated from Duntroon 17th in a class of 31, so if I wasn't brilliant, I wasn't disgraced. They gave me one pip and sent me with the RAR to Korea. Not my idea of paradise, that cold

¹ During the Great War "Jumping the bags" was the Digger's equivalent of "Going over the top", the bags being the sand bags consolidating the trench parapet. I have a feeling that Willy put a different spin on the term.

bleak place. While there I received my “war wound” as I like to call it. Back in Kure, Japan, 2 on R&R a group of us dined not wisely but well and a Scot among us demonstrated the Scottish Sword Dance with a military sword and scabbard. Of course, we all had to try it, and muggins managed to tread on the hilt of the sword which flipped up and the blade drove into the inside of my left thigh, narrowly missing the femoral artery, and more important, the family jewels. ¹ I was embarrassed by the mortifying knowledge that it was my own stupid fault. However, on the plus side, it left an impressive scar and I found later it was a good talking point when chatting up the girls. Of course they all wanted to see my war wound, which I reluctantly showed them - making sure they caught a glimpse of what else was offering in the immediate area. Seldom failed!

Ibid Ch.2.

In my various postings I usually managed to satisfy both the inner man and more carnal requirements. There was a very scary incident while I was stationed in Penang, Malaya, 1956, I had a batman assigned to me, an Indian Havaldah, Rogan Josh, who was always anxious to attend to my slightest whim. I casually mentioned to him that some of the local girls were damned attractive but didn't seem at all interested in a robust Army Officer. He replied, 'Do not be being perturbed, Captain Sahib, I will be attending to it most soonly.' Later that day he went out, but didn't return. To my horror, next morning I found his head on my doorstep. I later found he had gone “trawling” among some nubile girls he noticed walking along the waterfront. They were some daughters from the married quarters of the Gurkha Battalion stationed in Penang.

Ibid. Ch.4.

For a while misfortune seemed to dog me. In Singapore, 1957, there was an unpleasant incident when the Regimental Silver went missing. For a while suspicion fell squarely upon me as I had had an inheritance come to me which made me quite wealthy - and as usual getting the wrong end of the stick, the Colonel thought I had flogged the wretched tin. Turned out it was the adjutant, Major Denis Bloodnok, who had nicked the stuff. He was caught attempting to board a China-bound junk with the silver hidden in a case of port. He was cashiered and became an actor in the BBC, a fate one wouldn't wish on one's worst enemy. Then there was the incident with Adrian, the butler assigned to me in Port Swettenham, Borneo. He was caught by the MP's in bed with the under-gardener, a tough dyak who later was shown to be a head-hunter. The dyak was sent back to his tribe and Adrian got six months and deportation. Being caught was probably the best thing that could happen to Adrian. He was definitely better off doing blow-jobs in Soho rather than having his head as a decoration in a dyak longhouse. The dyaks are very adept in the use of the *kris*, that fiendishly sharp wavy-bladed knife they favour.

Ibid Ch 5

After two tours to Vietnam I spend the rest of my service more or less in the Melbourne area, being a basewallah at Victoria Barracks on Staff. Frankly I was terribly bored with Staff work and “swallowed the anchor” as my Naval friends used to say and went into private enterprise. Some unfortunate misunderstandings with the ATO caused me to go back into the army just in time to go to the Falklands as adviser to a Brit unit of cutthroat commandos. Nasty bastards but necessary. Back to Melbourne where I became very interested in breeding pelargoniums of all things. What attracted me most was the number of attractive early middle age widows and bored wives who were members. The glamour of the uniform, red tabs and “fruit salad”, worked wonders and I once again had a coterie of “Mona Lisas”. There was an obnoxious pest Col Michael Fitzherbert in the Pelargonium Society who had married a rather delicious Asian girl - we contended that she was “mail order” - to enable him to obtain a post with a Government department that required a married man. He had a reputation of playing for the other team with a chum Herbert Fitzmichael. There were scandalous rumours about me and

servant girls spread by Fitz and his hangers-on; he couldn't seem to get it into his head that I didn't need adolescents when I had a troupe of highly motivated and adept mature women

¹ A very similar thing happened on HMAS Melbourne when some pilots were “sword dancing” and one trod on the hand guard of a naval sword, spiking his leg.

paying me all the attention I could desire - or handle, for that matter. While talking to a group of my ladies, his name was mentioned and Gwendoline said she felt sorry for his wife because of his proclivities. I made the passing comment, 'Oh, I don't know; I laid his old lady too.' This caused much amusement and Nora who had a wicked sense of humour suggested that from then on activities in the Society - not just breeding pelargoniums - should become known as "yodelling" to the inner circle of the group. I had bred two pure white pelargoniums, *La Neige* and *Pride of Tyrol*, which fitted the yodelling theme, and covered the esoteric meaning. These varieties were known as "dancing" because of their movement in the wind, similar to the antics of anemones.

Ibid Ch.7.

I have always enjoyed taking the mick out of pests and numbskulls, - another day, another dullard - pretending to the Colonel Blimp character and taking delight in having these idiots swallow the most ridiculous stories because *they wanted to believe them..* I was blessed with a strong mellifluous voice that could charm the birds out of the trees, or so my ladies told me. I can also say, modestly, that I have an ability to manipulate the written word until the recipient is completely befuddled, never quite sure if the leg is being pulled, if so, why. The girls told me that I would get myself into serious trouble one day teasing people with no sense of humour. The trick is knowing when to duck for cover. Still, I will keep their admonitions in mind.

Ibid. 8. ¹

My last active contact with the army was as observer in the Gulf War 'Desert Storm'. Slaughter of the Innocents would be a better title. The Allies caused almost as many casualties to their own with "friendly fire" as the Iraqis ever did. As for what they did to the Iraqis - it doesn't bear thinking about. You cannot face such an overwhelmingly powerful and effective force when your only military training is running around firing your weapon into the air and yelling 'God is Great!' - even Muslims should know that God is on the side of the big battalions.² When I came back to Melbourne from Iraq I had just turned fifty-nine and I thought it was high time I hung up the spurs. I wangled retirement into the Reserves as a Major General, Brevet Rank, which suited me just fine. My only duties consisted of Anzac Day parades and annual reunions. And, of course, maintaining the pleasuring of "Spooks' Mona Lisas"!

Ibid Ch.10.

¹ Sir Wilberforce has written a book on this subject, *Dancing With Thieves*, under the name of J. Cosmo Newbery. Available by contact with the author on www.sweetchillisauce.com.

² *Dieu est toujours pour les gros bataillons.* - Marshal Turenne 1611-1675 (attr) and *On dit que Dieu est toujours pour les gros bataillons.* - Voltaire 1694-1778.