

COMMANDER JOHN RUSSELL SIMPSON (K32 -36)

The following is taken from his obituary in the 2020 Framlinghamian :-

Commander John Simpson died peacefully in his sleep at Allonsfield House Care Home, Campsea Ashe, on 4th April 2020, just four days after his 101st birthday. He moved there in September 2019, when he left his home at 22 Mills Almshouses, Framlingham.



John sitting with Norman Porter, holding his SOF 100th birthday card

Just over a year before, on Sunday 31st March 2019, John celebrated his 100th birthday with many friends and family members from across four generations. His daughter, Helen Chapman, invited Norman Porter and Peter Howard-Dobson to join the festivities as representatives of the Society of Old Framlinghamians, which John had served so well and for so long. They presented John with a 100th birthday card from the President and members of the SOF. OF members of the family present included his son Jeremy Simpson (K56-64), his granddaughters Hetta O'Connor (P94-99) and Sophia Rogers (M94-02), his grandsons Robin Smallwood (S82-86) and Adrian Smallwood (S84-88), and his cousin Charles

Simpson (K65-72).

The other picture, here, was taken ten years previously at John's 90th birthday party. The other card John was given was from the College's Headmaster at the time, Paul Taylor, in which he congratulated John on his centenarian status and recalled the special role that the Simpson family had played over the years since Framlingham College's foundation in 1864.

John also received two more special birthday cards: one from Her Majesty the Queen, and one from the Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, then Pensions Secretary. In hindsight, it is wonderful that was possible to celebrate John's life and achievements, as well his contributions to Framlingham and the SOF, at a time before COVID-19 severely curtailed all such commemorations.

The Simpson family is perhaps the only one to have twenty-nine members educated at Framlingham College since it opened in 1865. John's grandfather, George Henry Simpson, was the first one in the family to walk through the College doors, and the line has remained unbroken to date.

John was on the Board of Governors and was President of the SOF in 1975/76.

John was born in Golborne, Lancashire on 31st March 1919. He had younger twin brothers: Michael Ratcliffe Simpson (K32-40) who was killed in a car crash in 1950, aged 27, and Peter Ratcliffe Simpson (K32-40) who died in Queensland in 2017, aged 95. At Framlingham, John was a Foundation Scholar and a subprefect to Head Boy, Norman Borrett. He won the Goldsmith Prize for French, was President of the Debating Society and a member of 1st XV rugby team. In his final year in the 1st XV the comment was, 'On the light side for a forward but is active and uses his feet well. Needs more vigour and determination, especially in defence'. The picture is of John, aged 15.



John, at the age of 15

John joined the Royal Navy in 1936 as a Cadet under training in the cruiser *HMS FROBISHER*. He passed out third on the list of Paymaster Cadets and joined *HMS SUSSEX* as Paymaster Midshipman in the Mediterranean

Fleet. During this time, in 1937 he saw action in charge of an armed Naval Patrol, manning a roadblock outside Haifa in Israel during the period of Palestinian/Jewish unrest that followed Partition in that year. He also acquired a tattoo of a tiger's head on his forearm (whether in sobriety or not, we shall never know) inked by an Egyptian tattooist in Alexandria, who clearly had never seen a tiger. John always remarked wryly that it looked more like a mouse than a tiger! From that day onwards, he was nicknamed 'Tiger' by shipmates and friends alike.

During the war he served ashore and at sea, in Scotland, in the Northern Approaches and at Lee-on-Solent, Portsmouth. After the war, in 1946, while serving as Supply Officer Lieutenant in *HMS AJAX*, the ship returned to Montevideo in Uruguay, the scene of her earlier involvement in the Battle of the River Plate in 1939. This voyage was undertaken to repatriate German Naval prisoners-of-war who had been incarcerated in neutral Uruguay throughout the War following the scuttling of the German battle cruiser, *Admiral Graf Spee*. John often recalled the extraordinarily warm Civic Welcome that the ship's company received from the Deputy President of Uruguay in a formal ceremony, just before *HMS AJAX*'s return voyage to Kiel in the Baltic.



John saluting the Admiral in Rosyth in 1957

Following a Staff Course in the UK, John was based in Malta from 1948-50, returning to a further shore training post in Wetherby before being appointed Secretary to Rear Admiral John Cuthbert, who was Deputy Controller of the Navy at the time, and under whose command John had served in *HMS AJAX*. John was paid a considerable compliment (in Service terms) by Rear Admiral Cuthbert, who requested that John should continue as his Secretary for the Admiral's next three appointments, the final one being Flag Officer, Scotland and Northern Ireland, from 1956-58, after which Vice Admiral Sir John Cuthbert retired. The picture is of John saluting the Admiral in Rosyth in 1957.

In that same year, the family moved back to Suffolk and John returned to sea as Supply Officer in the light cruiser *HMS BERMUDA*, once again in the Mediterranean, before taking up his final Service appointment in 1960 as a Staff Training Officer at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. After retiring from the Royal Navy in 1962, John was employed by the Grocers' Institute in Holborn as Training Development Officer. Drawing on his extensive experience as a Supply Officer, his role coincided with the emergence of supermarkets in Britain and he travelled extensively throughout the country, lecturing and training.

Moving to Cheltenham in 1977, he set up John Simpson Associates, a consultancy dealing with recruitment and selection, management and manpower forecasting and planning. When he finally retired, he and his beloved wife Barrie moved to Wiltshire, and from there to Comberton, near Cambridge, in 1985.

Following Barrie's death in 1994, John returned to Framlingham to live with his younger daughter, Helen, in Pembroke Road. In 2002, he went back to Cambridge to live with his elder daughter, Lydia Smallwood, but returned to Framlingham in 2006, following Lydia's untimely death. He set up home in one of the Mills Almshouses and remained there contentedly until he moved to Allonsfield House in September 2019.

John's was a long and active life. Despite his increasing deafness and memory loss, he remained a welcoming host who was full of stories, memories, and limericks which he was always ready to share. He was a particularly distinguished member of a distinguished Suffolk family, and willingly gave of his talents to the school that had nurtured him.

The following paragraph is not part of John's Obituary, but its points of reference give some idea of his deep knowledge of, and commitment to, the College. It also shows how embedded he was in College history. The piece (now abridged and edited) was originally written as an introduction to the Prizes section, in the Distinguished Section on our OF website. The loss of John makes it all the more poignant.

Framlingham Prizes Speech-day at Framlingham has, for me, always released a flood of memories of people I have known and liked and admired. The Austin- Sparkes prize is usually the trigger. I remember him well. R H P Browne was another near contemporary: we played in the same scrum and both went into the Navy. I last met him not long before he was lost at sea in HMS HOOD. Martin Bulstrode was a friend for many years. I once bought a bantam cock from Percy Clarke. Before it was incorporated in the Speech-day list, the Ellis Arthur prize was presented at the OF Suffolk supper and it fell to me to present the first award. My father was one of Inskip's pupils and talked of him a lot. I knew General Inskip and Alfred Pretty. W E Winstanley was my housemaster and a lasting influence in my life. The memory of his last insult still rings in the ears: it was at my daughter's wedding and he was admiring a portrait painted by my sister-in-law; "It is remarkable", he said, "that a portrait can be so distinguished and still look like you". For me, therefore, these prizes commemorate people: for most prize-winners, they commemorate only the names of people. Although the aim was to produce biographies of individuals, the result is almost a potted history of the College itself. The names of all, I believe, should be recorded before there is nobody left who remembers.

On Friday 19 November 2021 a number of John's items were sold at auction. Here is the description that accompanied.

Royal Navy Officers tin transit trunk marked to the lid 'J.R. Simpson R.N.', containing, R.N. Officers Mess Dress uniform jacket, trousers and boots, sleeve insignia to Commander, gilt Kings crown buttons, greatcoat, gilt kings crown buttons sleeve rank to sub lieutenant (removed), greatcoat, gilt Kings crown buttons, Service dress uniform jacket and trousers, Queens crown buttons, sleeve rank to Commander, ribbons for Naval General Service Medal, 1939-45 Star, Defence Medal, and 1939-1945 British War Medal to left breast, Mess Dress jacket, sleeve rank to Commander, gilt Queens crown buttons, Royal Navy Staff Officers gold and blue Aiguillettes with gilt Kings crown button, white stiff shirt with detachable collars, Womens Royal Navy Service officers jacket, sleeve rank to 3rd Officer (removed), gilt Kings crown buttons, spare Royal Navy and WRNS officers sleeve, shoulder and cap insignia, removed from uniform,

The WRNS uniform is believed to have belonged to Commander Simpsons wife Alisa who served in the Royal Navy as a Wren officer.

**COMMANDER JOHN RUSSELL
SIMPSON, ROYAL NAVY
(31.03.1919 - 04.04.2020)**

