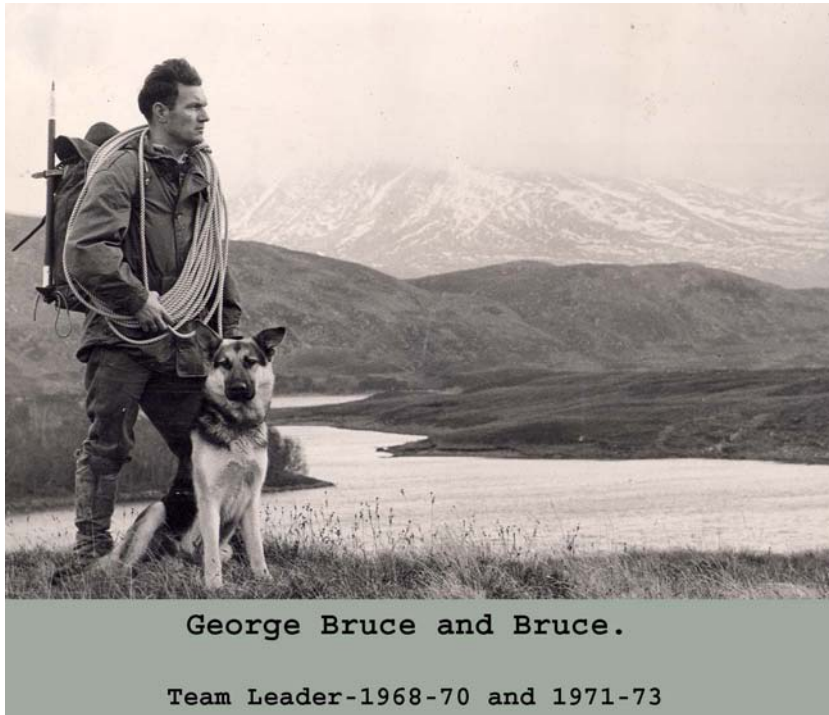


## George Bruce BEM



George Bruce was a friend I met in the Royal Air Force many moons ago. I first met George in 1968 when he returned from a tour as the Mountain Rescue Team Leader in Cyprus.

George had outstanding people skills, not learned from any management course, but from life. A Physical Training Instructor by trade, George was also a parachute-jumping instructor, with over 1000 jumps to his credit. Few people know this because he rarely mentioned it. He had a unique personality and charisma, which made him one of the best man managers I have ever met. Unusually, for somebody in the RAF George was never intimidated by rank. He was also teetotal, but seemed to get high on a few cans of coke.

Such were his powers of persuasion that a 10 minute discussion with George could change your opinion of any subject. He could convince you black was white. I have never known him to lose an argument.

George was not a crack climber compared with modern day standards but he had an aura and tremendous area knowledge. He was the thinker and could walk into a call out anywhere in Scotland, and hold his own on any incident. Due to his unique “people skills” he could talk to survivors of an accident and get the full story of what happened, and deploy the troops

with maximum efficiency. George was forthright in what he saw as the correct course of action and many owe their lives to his good decisions.

The Kinloss team was heavily involved in the Cairngorm Disaster in November 1971, when 6 Edinburgh schoolchildren and 2 instructors went missing on the Cairngorm Plateau in atrocious weather. Kinloss and a Glenmore party found two survivors barely alive, who needed immediate recovery to survive. George jumped on to a Royal Navy Sea King Helicopter and after a short brief the pilot agreed to fly the recovery mission provided George was with him. George guided the chopper from Glenmore, up Strathnethy and over Loch Avon in desperate weather, and on moving onto the plateau the pilot lost his ground reference and landed in a white out. George got out and waded the last mile through the snow to the casualties with the chopper hopping along behind him. The casualties were evacuated and made a full recovery. Throughout this tragic operation his leadership was inspirational and George was awarded "The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct".

When we remember George we must not dwell on the many difficult and sad mountain rescues that he led. But must remember him for his zest for life and the many amusing stories that he told.

Shortly after the Cairngorm tragedy George participated in an expedition to Elephant Island in the Antarctic. On his return he showed me some photos of 8 guys pulling a loaded sledge and George standing in front. He said as the only NCO he had to be the leader as they were all officers and could not be expected to make sensible decisions, so they pulled the sledge. Once again throughout this difficult expedition he showed outstanding leadership. At this time George was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to RAF Mountain Rescue.

On another occasion we were called out to search for a missing army officer between the Cairngorm car park and Jeans hut. What made it so important was that the officer was the son of the General Officer Commanding Scotland. As usual in February the weather was desperate with a blizzard and white out conditions as we arrived at car park. Out of the blizzard appeared this very bedraggled officer along with a tired Collie dog. After confirming he was the missing person George invited him to recover at the Norwegian huts where we were staying. "Just come with us and my troops will cook you breakfast, Sir". The officer was ushered into the hut, which had a magnificent pot bellied stove glowing red hot. The officer and dog were asleep in seconds. Now George had a real mean Alsatian, also called Bruce. It came into the hut, sniffed the

air, growled at this little intruder and proceeded to attack the Collie. George came racing in gave Bruce a kick and said “get away Bruce. I have taught you never to attack an officers dog”.

In 1973 George was posted to the RAF Outdoor Activities Centre at Grantown on Spey as Chief Instructor. Many and varied are the courses run at this unit. One of the courses is for very senior officers, really a bit of a jolly. George spent the morning instructing these officers on kit and how to pack their hill sacks and how important all this equipment was. They were instructed to be on the bus with their kit at 1300hrs for a walk round the Northern Corries of Cairngorm. They were duly boarding the bus when George noticed that the most senior officer had no hill bag. “Where is your hill bag, Sir?” says George. “Do I really need one, Flight Sergeant?” said the officer. The retort from George was “God has no respect for rank” and with that the officer scuttled away for his bag.

George once put a Pike in a rabbit snare about 2000 feet up the hill and 3 miles from the loch, on an aircrew survival course. The guy he sent to check the snares was really confused.

George left the RAF and became the first head ranger of the Pentlands Park, a new career and he loved the job and its people. He called it “his Estate”. He came regularly to the RAF Kinloss team reunions. He was a natural speaker and could give the most entertaining speeches at the drop of a hat. Here he was in his element as a speaker, without doubt one of the finest, he never used notes and spoke from the heart. He could make any subject interesting and his sense of humour infectious.

After leaving the Royal Air Force George became a stalwart member of the Royal British Legion and was treasurer for 14 years and more recently President for six years.

George was an ardent Glasgow Rangers fan, a season ticket holder following them through thick and thin. When George was told he had cancer he asked the specialist how long he had left to live. “Will I have time to see Rangers win the European Cup?”. “Unfortunately, you will not”, the specialist replied. George replied “I would have worried if you had said yes”; Rangers were appalling at this time! What a sense of humour.

George touched so many of us taught us so much about life, people, the wild land, the animals and its mountains. It was a privilege to be a part of

your team and the world will be a sadder place without you, but your memories, stories and jokes will live on.

On behalf of the RAF Mountain Rescue Service and Association, sincere condolences to Joan and her family. George was a legend in mountain rescue in his era. When will we see his like again?

Written by Ray (Sunshine) Sefton and Dave (Heavy) Whalley.