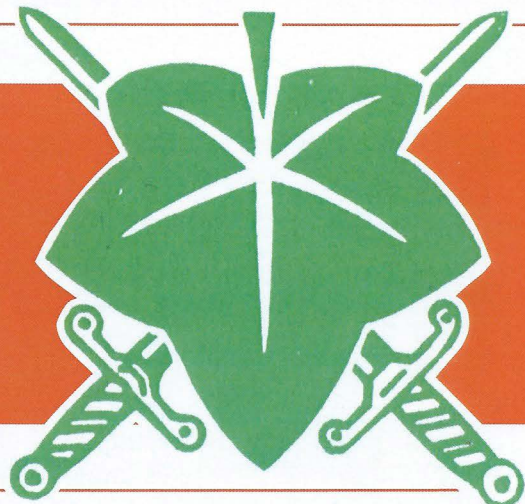


THE FORMATION SIGN

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One of 96 - A British SAARF Officer



The officer in the photograph - reproduced by kind permission of his grandson Michael - is Lieutenant Alfred Michael (Pat) Forrester details of whose military service are found at <https://www.paradata.org.uk/people/alfred-m-forrester>.

Having joined the Territorial 18th London Regiment – the London Irish Rifles - in April 1935, Pat transferred to the Royal Ulster Rifles a month later and was serving with its 1st Bn when it converted in wartime to the air landing role. In September 1942 Sgt Forrester attended a Parachute Training Course at RAF Ringway, transferring to the Essex Regiment in April 1943 as a 2nd Lieutenant. His entry on the database states he was transferred back to The Parachute Regiment in February 1944 “saw service in the Far East ...served with a Pathfinder Platoon” before being demobilised in 1948.



Although not mentioned on Paradata the photograph posted on the British Military Badge Forum shows Lieutenant Forrester wearing the much sought after airborne forces badge of the Special Allied Airborne Reconnaissance Force (SAARF), one of only 96 British soldiers to do so.



Concerned since 1943 about the possible fate of Allied POWs when Germany collapsed, in February 1945 Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was authorised to dispatch troops to secure the safety of such prisoners. A number of specialist teams brought together in March to form SAARF were to parachute into the vicinity of POW camps and investigate and report on conditions inside them. Based in the Wentworth Golf Club in Surrey, former HQ of 21st Army Group and SHAEF's Rear Elements, SAARF commanded by Brigadier John “Crasher” Nichols with the American Colonel JE Raymond as 2 I/C, included French, British, American, Belgian and Polish officers and several women who had served as SOE

agents. In its only airborne operation six teams were dropped near Stalag XIA, the British team soon captured and imprisoned in the camp. The remaining teams carried out various tasks connected with the Allied move into Germany until disbanded on 1st July 1945. SAARF insignia included the printed title - issued on 5th April 1945 and worn on the left arm under the SHAEF badge - and a badge for the right arm symbolising an aerial strike breaking the chains of captivity - which may only have been worn for the unit's July disbandment parade. More details at <http://www.insigne.org/SAARF-I.htm>.