

*At Brigade Council in Northampton the Brigade Secretary was presented with gifts from the Brigade to mark his forthcoming retirement. Since contributions towards the gifts came from across the Brigade we felt his response should be printed in the Gazette.*

I had hoped, by retiring in January, to avoid such an occasion at this at Brigade Council. However, the President had other ideas and in view of the kindness I have received I concede that he is right. I am grateful for the very kind words and the gift. I am taken aback that the generosity of the Brigade now allows me to have a modern computer and state of the art DVD player. I look forward to having time to thoroughly explore the complexities of the computer. I just hope that the unasked for messages most computers address to me are better than the one I most frequently receive now which is 'You have committed an illegal act!'

This will be a constant reminder of fourteen years as Brigade Secretary – the longest period I have stayed in any one post – as if a reminder will ever be needed.

These past years have been something of a roller coaster ride for the Brigade and for me. So much has changed over that time both inside the Brigade and outside. On the one hand there have been those excited by change and demanding even more, whilst others, almost in desperation, have pleaded with the words 'If it aint broke – don't fix it'.

No one was more surprised than I to be appointed to such a prestigious post – the one created and occupied by our Founder, Sir William Smith. In 1954, as a young Staff Sergeant, I sat a few rows behind the then Brigade Secretary in St Paul's Cathedral at the commemoration of the Founder's Centenary. The Brigade Secretary was Stanley Smith, son of the founder, who, alongside Lord McClay the President, were figures one looked on with awe. The following year I met the new Brigade Secretary, Major General Wilson Haffenden at Felden Lodge on the first KGVI Course and felt I had been introduced to royalty. I was speechless some time later when I was walking down Victoria Street in London to hear the greeting 'Hello Sydney' and turn to see the Brigade Secretary himself. I am still amazed that someone from my background can find himself in such a position.

And what an experience that has been. Some of the experiences I would rather have avoided but there have been

many memorable moments. There have been high profile occasions such as the Royal Review but most of the memorable moments have been on visits to Company Displays and events. On one occasion I was taken hostage by a group of seniors and held in the church vestry until money was paid. I was set for a long wait because I did not see who would want to pay for my



freedom. Quite quickly the Captain paid £30, which I thought was a surprising good deal for my captors. On another occasion during the usual inspection of the company at the beginning of a display when one sometimes struggles to think of something new to say to the boys as you pass along the line, I said to a bright looking Junior 'and what will be the best part of the evening? Without hesitation he looked me in the eye and said 'the end!' - And he was absolutely right!

What I have learned through the countless awards I have given is how important they are to the recipients. Even the senior who self consciously makes his way to the front, flicks an arm in a sort of salute and mumbles words such as 'cheers, fanks' enjoys the applause and is proud of his achievement. Never under-estimate the value of awards – there are still many boys for whom this is the only time they hear themselves applauded.

On the wider stage the Brigade has gone through many changes. I arrived at the beginning of the upheavals due to the sale of the Headquarters in Parsons Green. There was a sense of

disappointment and a real concern for the future. My arrival did not help those who were not convinced the Brigade was safe in my hands. However, over time confidence grew to some extent but not entirely because if the Brigade was to move forward we needed to look closely at what we had been doing for so many years and be prepared to make changes. To complicate matters we were embroiled in endless debates about admitting girls and changing the uniform.

The Executive was in a difficult position. It recognised the need for change but members had to face their constituents who did not always take such a broad view. However, the executive kept its nerve and I am pleased to say that I count many who have served on it over the years as my friends. Among those friendships one I treasure most was that with the then President Lord Thurso. He had a great sense of humour and we had a lot of fun. His retirement was a loss to us all but especially to me and I counted it a particular privilege to be asked to speak at his memorial service. I am pleased to say that the friendship with the family is maintained with Margaret his widow and John his son.

I have particularly valued the support of Brigade staff. They have displayed great loyalty and at times simple blind faith because I know they have not always shared my confidence in some of the paths we have taken. However, such programmes as Planning for Change, Firm Foundations, Amicus, and New Horizons etc would never have got off the ground without the support and commitment of the staff. I am especially indebted to long serving staff such as Malcolm Hayden at the Business Centre, Martyn Waters, Alex Hunter and Ian McLaughlan in the various countries as well as the former Field Officers such as Allan Percival, Eric Hudson and Tom Boyle who have readily adapted their roles to meet changing needs. Most of all I am indebted to my assistant, PA, secretary, minder and sometime conscience, Mary Care who has forgotten more about the Brigade than most of us will ever know. She started in Abbey House and when she retires she will leave a far bigger hole than any of us. The Brigade is, indeed, well served by its staff and I am proud to have worked with them.



I have been privileged to provide leadership to the Brigade through years when major changes have taken place outside our control. There is no time to explain in detail but I believe the movement is well placed to move forward as a leading Christian Youth organisation.

The strength of the Brigade is, as it has always been, in the individual company. My visits to companies throughout the Brigade have shown me again and again that our best resource is the ordinary company officer and I yield to no one my admiration for the largely unsung heroes who serve companies week in week out. I often comment on the fine young men the Brigade produces and am conscious that they are the product of ordinary companies and ordinary company officers.

Just a week or so ago I spent time with a group of young men and women on a KGVI Course. The level of their commitment and the quality of the faith of many of them shows me that the Brigade is still getting a lot of things right.

Numbers have fallen and it is increasingly difficult to find sufficient staff to maintain and strengthen companies. Even so the quality remains and we should be proud of that.

I hope I have been able to make some contribution to the development of the Brigade. I know that at times I have been unsubtle and provocative in my approach. If I have offended some in the process then I am sorry but if I have provoked some to consider what they are doing then I am glad. I have seen it as one of my roles to provoke new ideas and encourage innovation. I have challenged tradition where it has obstructed progress but above all I have tried to ensure that our Christian objective remains central to all we do. We are unashamedly Christian and I have not and will not apologise for that or diminish the emphasis. At the same time I believe that the needs of our boys and young men must remain above the needs of the organisation. We have still a long way to go at all levels of the Brigade before we can claim to have liberated the talents and hopes of our boys and young men in ways which give them greater responsibility for what the Brigade does. Empowerment of young people

may be a modern 'buzz' word but I believe passionately that we do not use our young people anything like as much as we should. Where we do, we see their confidence and their faith grow.

## To witness the strength of their faith has been awesome and, over the years, to see that faith develop has been a moving experience.

My happiest and most abiding memories of my time in the Brigade will not be the high profile events, meeting royalty, or being treated as a VIP (pleasant though that is). It will be the times I have spent with many of our young leaders on courses such as KGVI and projects such as New Horizons during which I have shared times of prayer with them. To witness the strength of their faith has been awesome and, over the years, to see that faith develop has been a moving experience.

For many young people the BB is what makes them what they are. I know young men who have literally been rescued by a BB Officer as my Captain rescued me during a very unhappy adolescence. They owe what they are to the BB, as do I – some might say my Captain who, God Bless him is still alive and still important to me, has a lot to answer for! Maybe, but he did what BB officers are still doing and which makes me so confident that I leave the Brigade in good heart and still a major player in Christian Youth work.

As I move from the centre and out of the way I hope not out of bounds. I will help where I can, when I can and if I am asked.

Meanwhile the Brigade still faces major challenges. There is the challenge of achieving financial equilibrium – we are on the way and the light is at the end of the tunnel but there is a long way to

go. I am conscious that sometimes what one thinks is a light at the end of the tunnel is, in fact, the headlight of an express bearing down on us to run us over but, no, in this case I believe it is the light of hope.

There is also the challenge of ensuring that we keep our focus clear on our object, The advancement of Christ's Kingdom. With the political spotlight on young people there are plenty of incentives to follow a government agenda rather than our own. Focussing on the excluded, joining in the connexions programme means access to cash but it would disastrous to trim our object just to attract funds. The philosophy behind the connexions programme is no more than what BB officers have always done which is to provide an adult to advise and guide young people through their formative years.

Through all the problems I have never doubted that God's hand has been there to guide. You only have to look at the fine Christian young men we are still producing to be assured that we still have an important role to play and that God still wants to use us.

I passionately believe in the Brigade's ability to change young lives and I regard it as a privilege to have been able to serve such an organisation and to succeed some great men. I thank you for your support, your respect, even your love. The task of identifying a successor is under way and needs your prayers.

Finally, we often sing on these occasions about our Anchor – grounded firm and deep. Indeed our anchor is our hope in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately some take the simile a little too literally and rejoice that their anchor is safely embedded in the rock so we cannot move. If we are to be a movement and not a monument then we must be prepared to take a risk, pull up the anchor and launch out into the deep. There are boys still to work with and souls to save. Thank you and God bless you.

**Sydney Jones**