

The Hon Sir Ralph Kilner Brown OBE(Mil) TD DL

1909- 2003



Sir Ralph Kilner Brown, the former High Court Judge has died aged 93. During the Second World War he served as a Brigadier on the Staff of Field Marshal Montgomery whilst planning the Normandy landings. He was later known as a kindly and fair judge of the Queen's Bench Division.

On the outbreak of war Ralph Brown had been called to the Bar only five years. He had become noticed already through his many impassioned speeches as a Young Liberal in opposition to appeasement. His sporting achievements seemed always overshadowed by his academic prowess. An outstanding athlete, he was the British 440 yards hurdles champion and had competed at several international meetings on the Continent. An injury prevented him from taking his place at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games whilst his brother and his sister won a Gold and two Silver medals.

In 1938 Brown enlisted in the South Staffordshire Regiment as a private and was commissioned the next year. In 1941 he applied for a transfer to the Royal Air Force but instead he was selected for training at Staff College. His time there was well spent and he was recommended for appointment as a Grade 2 Staff Officer.

In January 1942 Brown began work on the detailed planning of cross-Channel operations, with particular responsibility for questions of build-up, supply and maintenance. This was the planning team that would lay the foundation for the ultimate "Overlord" invasion of Europe in 1944.

Following that invasion and during the dash for the German frontier in September 1944, Brown was moved forward to take charge of a team which controlled the whole of the British and Canadian and some American transport, delivering ammunition, petrol and supplies for the rapidly advancing forces. Later he had responsibilities for shipping movements and was chairman of the committee which arranged the schedules and shipping movements of Antwerp.

He was retained by Montgomery after hostilities ceased to help set up the details of military government. It was in this period that he wrote the Army textbook "Administration in the Field of War". He was mentioned in dispatches and appointed OBE (military) in 1945.

Another book was published later "Top Brass and No Brass" (1991). In this he made his challenge of the popular view that a dynamic United States had gained the Victory for a failing Britain. He said "The United States never won the war any more than Russia or Britain and the Empire did." He went on to state clearly he was in a unique position to judge: "as the only one involved with the planning for the invasion of Europe even before the Americans arrived . . . who then worked with them and lived with the preparations for this colossal enterprise throughout, and finally served in its execution with the British Headquarters of 21 Army Group until after the war was over".

Ralph Brown was born in Calcutta on 28 August 1909. Early childhood was spent at Bankura which is about 100 north of Calcutta. His father was the Reverend A E Kilner Brown CIE.. He was principal of Bankura College, which was affiliated to the University of Calcutta. He was also mayor of the municipality. Though not medically qualified The Reverend Kilner Brown was the designer and medical superintendent of the local hospital.

In 1915 Ralph's mother took him and his three younger siblings back to England. After six months they all returned to Bengal apart from young Ralph, who was left with his maternal grandparents at Four Oaks, Warwickshire. He was educated at Kingswood School, Bath. He went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Here he was Squire Law Scholar, the runner-up for the Presidency of the Union and leader of the Young Liberals. He represented Cambridge three times at athletics narrowly missing his Blue at cricket.

Following his call to the Bar by Middle Temple as a Harmsworth Scholar in 1934, he went to Birmingham to begin his practice in chambers of Donald Finnemore, a nonconformist and teetotaler (his was known as "Cocoa Chambers"). Finnemore expected all his juniors to take on duties with the Boys' Brigade. Ralph Brown formed a company at Kingstanding. This was a new housing estate in the suburbs for families from the slums of Aston. The programme centred upon forming good Christian values, Sunday morning Bible classes, a drill parade every week, a bugle band and an annual camp under canvas.

Demobilisation in 1946 found Brown re-establishing his common law practice. He found time to take command of the Birmingham Battalion of the Boys brigade. There were 40 companies and these trained over 2000 boys over the next 10 years. He found service also on the committees of the Royal Institutes of the Blind and the Deaf, and contested four general elections for the Liberals, polling well but without success. He remained in the Territorial Army until 1952. Each year he attended for the 15 day period at the Army Command HQ thus keeping up to date as a senior staff officer.

At the Bar Brown was known as a measured, skilful advocate and a brilliant mitigator. He took Silk in 1958. As president of the Mental Health Review Tribunal for the Birmingham area (1962-65) he was consulted by Ministers of Health on several occasions.

His judicial career began with his appointment in 1954 as deputy chairman of Warwickshire Quarter Sessions; he became chairman 10 years later. Always fair and likeable, he was Recorder of Lincoln (1960-64) and Recorder of Birmingham (1964-65) before being appointed as an Additional Judge of the Old Bailey - and then as Recorder of Liverpool (1967-69).

Following his elevation to the High Court in 1970, Kilner Brown spent five years as presiding judge on the Northern Circuit. It was at this time he adopted into general use middle name to avoid confusion with other judges named Brown.

Ralph Kilner Brown was elected a Bencher of Middle Temple in 1964, knighted in 1970 and was Master Reader of Middle Temple in 1982, when he published *The Office of Reader in the Middle Temple*. He served for many years as a Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire. In 1970 he declined an invitation a Liberal peer preferring to remain in his present position.

Ralph Kilner Brown joined Cripplegate Ward Club in 1980 and was a popular and faithful member. He was a gentle, modest man of integrity. He was as popular with the members of his profession as he was with friends.

He married, in 1943, Rosemary Breffit; they had a son and two daughters.