

Brigadier David Baines

D-Day veteran who was involved in a perilous rescue of civilians from an overturned bus in Libya

The Telegraph

BRIGADIER DAVID BAINES, who has died aged 94, had a distinguished and adventurous career in both the Army and the Security Services.

In 1947, Baines was serving as adjutant with 74 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA in Libya. On the night of October 22, near Homs, a civilian bus loaded with Arabs ran off the road into a *wadi* or ravine which was flooded after a cloudburst.

Baines was one of a rescue party which arrived at 2000 hours on a tractor. By this time the bus was overturned in a torrent about 10 yards from the edge of the road. Eighteen Arabs were clinging to the bus. Four others had been swept downstream and two of these were 120 yards away and holding desperately to some rocks.

After the Arabs in the vehicle had been rescued by means of an improvised ropeway, Baines floated a lifeline to the two nearest Arabs. He rescued one. The other was washed away by the strength of the current.

When all attempts to float a line to the two remaining Arabs failed, Baines dived into the river. He was tied to the bus with one rope and carried another, but he was still 50 yards from the two men when he reached the end of his rope. He tried to float the other line to the men, but this failed and he made the perilous return journey for more rope. Several times he disappeared under the water but eventually he got the line to the men and they were slowly pulled against the current to safety. When the rescue operation ended at 0300 hours, Baines had been in the water for more than three hours.

He was recommended for a George Cross. When this was questioned, George VI intervened. The King considered that the courage Baines had shown merited the award of at least a George Medal but, in the event, he was appointed MBE (Military) for gallantry.



Baines in 1967, and, below, during Octu training; he was once arrested by the Soviets for not wearing a uniform at the opera



David Fitzroy Alan Talbot Baines, the son of a Gunner officer, was born at Sutton, London, on December 22 1923 and educated at Eton, where he was Captain of House. He enlisted in 1941 on his 18th birthday and was commissioned in April 1943.

Having joined 25/26 Battery, 7 Medium Regiment RA, as signals officer, he landed on Gold Beach on D-Day and took part in fierce fighting in Normandy, Belgium, Holland and the advance into Germany.

At the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944, he was attached to US 82nd Airborne Division and, in the forced crossing of the Rhine, his vehicle was blown up on a mine and his signaller killed.

In August 1945 he transferred to 6th Field Regiment RA and served as adjutant with this unit in Palestine and Tripoli where 6 FR became 74 HAA. After a posting to 5 Royal Horse Artillery followed by a move to Mons Officer Cadet School as an instructor, he was on the staff at 31 Lorried Infantry Brigade.

In 1957 he joined 3 RHA at Bulford, first as adjutant, then as battery captain. A spell at the MS Branch of the War Office was followed by command of the Chestnut Troop 1 RHA in BAOR as a brevet lieutenant-colonel.

After a tour as Chief of Staff at HQ 2 Division, BAOR, he assumed command of 1 RHA and led the Regiment to Aden on operational service in September 1965. The Regiment fired more than 23,000 rounds in support of seven British and six Arab battalions and received some 50 casualties, including seven killed.

In 1967 he was promoted brigadier and appointed Commander Royal Artillery 4 Division in Herford, BAOR. He subsequently became Director of Plans at HQ Strategic Command.

His final job took him to Berlin as Chief of the British Military Mission to Soviet Forces or Brixmis. The system licensed intelligence gathering by Soviet and Allied forces but differing interpretation of the rules led to some sharp clashes, some of which strained relations almost to breaking point. But there were also lighter moments.

On one occasion Baines and his wife, Honor, attended the opera in Leipzig, behind the Iron Curtain. Baines felt that the occasion demanded that he wear a dinner jacket. Uniform, however, was what the Soviets insisted upon and, at the end of the performance, they were arrested in full view of the audience and driven to Potsdam under escort.

Unfortunately, the young Russian officer leading the convoy got hopelessly lost, and Baines ordered his

official car to show him the way. This resulted in the unprecedented sight of the large black British Military Mission vehicle, flying the Union Jack, leading 10 Soviet army cars up the East German autobahn.

Baines might have reached higher rank had he been more calculating, but his nature was to tackle problems head on, to take swift and decisive action and to encourage others to do likewise. He was highly respected and held in great affection by the officers and men who served with him.

He retired from the Army in 1974, and for the next nine years worked for MI5 on measures to counter the terrorist threat, especially that posed by the IRA, to oil and gas installations around the British Isles. He then became a security consultant to BP International until he retired in 1988.

For the next five years, he was emergency planning officer for St John Ambulance in Wiltshire. He was, for 10 years, a member of the Wessex Region Committee of Ofwat, and for many years he was churchwarden of his parish church of Berwick St James.

Settled in a Jacobean house in Salisbury, he and his wife travelled to many parts of the world. He enjoyed skiing, sailing his yacht and, when well into his eighties, he was riding astride elephants in northern India.

As President of the Normandy Veterans Association, he attended the annual commemoration of the D-Day landings and rarely missed the reunions of 1 RHA Aden Veterans.

David Baines married, in 1948, Honor Coriat, whom he met when her father was Area Governor of Tripolitania, and who was the greatest support throughout their life together. She survives him with their two sons, both of whom became cavalry officers before having careers in the City.

David Baines, born December 22 1923, died March 1 2018

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