

Gordon Robert de Carle (1916–1995)

The fine words of tribute spoken by Michael Nuttall, Bishop of Natal, at the funeral of Colonel Gordon Robert de Carle MC MM JCD on 8 August 1995 in the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity will ever be remembered by the wide throng of his friends who were present. His death, at the age of 79, marked the end of a chapter for the many companions of his Natal Carbineer days.

Bob de Carle was born on 9 May 1916, at Enfield on the outskirts of Greater London, the only son of Sidney de Carle, a clothing manufacturer of Huguenot stock. Bob was educated at Lindisfarne College, Westcliffe-on-Sea, and began his working life in London with Forestal International Limited, who, as owners of the Natal Tanning Extract Company, brought him to Natal in 1936, aged twenty.

On 1 July 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war, De Carle joined the ranks of the 1st Royal Natal Carbineers, to begin a military career which spanned 27 very rewarding years, ending with five years as commanding officer of the regiment, until his retirement on 31 July 1966. During the North African campaign he served as a corporal in the mortar platoon of 'Support Company' and was awarded the Military Medal for his brave leadership at the Battle of El Alamein. His citation reads:

De Carle was given control of the fire-plan of the four mortar detachments. Though under fire from mortars and field guns, he carried out observed shoots by day and harassing fire by night, kept all his mortars in action and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. There can be no doubt that the quite exceptional work of this junior non-commissioned officer very materially assisted in enabling the company to change its role to the offensive.

After Alamein, De Carle attended the Middle East Officers Training Course, was promoted to commissioned rank, seconded to the British Army and saw service with the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in Holland where he won his Military Cross — the citation recording:

Though wounded, De Carle personally led a dash over the bridge through a curtain of machine-gun fire. Taking his 12 surviving men, he crept to within grenade range of the enemy. They outflanked the strongly-held position, surprised the enemy with sharp fire and took 50 prisoners.

When the war ended Bob returned to Pietermaritzburg — picking up his work in Natal Tanning Extract with characteristic drive and at the same time qualifying as a member of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. Inevitably his qualities of leadership and financial know-how took him to the top of the company where he held office as its dynamic managing director for 21 years. His interests and his influence were widely spread and well directed. As a staunch member of the Anglican Church he was probably the youngest ever member of the Natal Synod and served for many years as a diocesan trustee where his business acumen was a crucial factor in the management of financial affairs and investments. His effort was constantly directed towards the improvement of the clergy's stipends.

He served Cordwales School as a governor and for a period as chairman of its board. And through all the years his strong Carbineer link was pursued unremittingly. After appointment as company commander, second-in-command and finally, commanding officer of the regiment — he continued on retirement to serve with unabated devotion as a trustee of the Natal Carbineer Trust, as member of the Carbineer Council and the Royal Natal Carbineers Association. It was he who initiated and for many years edited the regimental magazine *Carbineer*. And it was he who, in 1952, organised and led the first patrol up Langalibalele Pass to erect the new Carbineer Memorial Cross.

Bob de Carle married Jean Walker, daughter of Col. Henry Walker, retired regular officer of the Cheshire Regiment, British Army, in St Saviour's Cathedral on 31 January 1953. Jean, and the four children born to them — Olivia, Diana, Clare and Michael — have survived Bob. He is also survived by his sister, Mrs Mollie Roberts, who lives in England.

The death of Col. Gordon Robert de Carle on 3 August 1995, leaves his family, his Carbineer companions and his wide circle of friends with splendid memories of his fine and rewarding life.

PETER FRANCIS