

# Major General Mark Strudwick obituary

**Quietly determined and well-liked infantry officer who became head of the army in Scotland and governor of Edinburgh Castle**



Of the three major tactical areas of responsibility during Operation Banner, which lasted from August 1969 to July 2007 and cost 722 soldiers' lives, Belfast, 39 Brigade's, was the most complex; Londonderry, 8 Brigade's, was the most intractable; and the counties of Down, parts of Tyrone, and Armagh, 3 Brigade's, was the most dangerous. A battalion in strongly republican South Armagh could expect to lose several men to the bomb and the bullet during a six-month tour of duty, often with little to show for it in return.

Mark Strudwick, a quietly determined and well-liked Scots infantry officer, commanded 3 Brigade in the early 1990s. No time in Armagh was easy, but the late 1980s and early 1990s were particularly tricky. Ten years earlier, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Northern Ireland, Sir Richard Lawson, in an attempt to "take the heat out of South Armagh" and restore police primacy, had disbanded the brigade and transferred its area of responsibility to the other two. Yet South Armagh continued to be "bandit country", the roads no-go for the RUC and army because of culvert bombs. Movement was either on foot across country or by helicopter. In July 1988, in large part at the instigation of the new GOC, Sir John Waters, 3 Brigade was reactivated. Much ground had now to be made up, particularly in intelligence and RUC cooperation.

Strudwick was a notable success in restoring the situation, his style and manner much appreciated by the RUC. His brigade, which included troops resident in the province, battalions from the mainland on emergency tours, and the Ulster Defence Regiment, on whom fell the routine of patrolling inland from the border, knew exactly what he wanted. The balance between proactivity and restraint was always difficult. The brigadier who succeeded him was sacked after five months.

His success was all the more notable for his not having been to the staff college. Few brigadiers got operational commands, especially in Northern Ireland, without the coveted letters “psc” (passed staff college) after their name.

Mark Jeremy Strudwick was born in 1945, the son of Ronald Strudwick, a wartime officer in the Royal Artillery who subsequently worked with Macmillan, the publisher, and Mary Beresford, who worked for the War Office. After St Edmund’s School, Canterbury, he went to Sandhurst, where he was “spotted” by the regimental representative of the Royal Scots, the army’s most senior infantry regiment, and was commissioned in 1966.

He married four years later, early by the standards of the time, particularly those of the Lowland Brigade, to whose training depot outside Edinburgh he had been posted as an instructor. He had met Janet, “Jan”, Vivers at a Betjemanesque tennis party at the barracks. Her father had been a wartime officer in the King’s Own Scottish Borderers and was working at the garrison headquarters in the city, where Jan was temping at the Forestry Commission.

By 1974 Strudwick was back with his battalion, now in Cyprus, as adjutant. The Cypriot National Guard, at the behest of the military junta in Greece, staged a coup to bring about enosis (union) with Greece. In response, Turkish forces invaded but a ceasefire was quickly declared. The junta collapsed and was replaced by a democratic government, but another Turkish invasion resulted in the occupation of a third of the island, the second ceasefire line becoming the UN buffer zone, which continues to this day. The Royal Scots, with the other British troops in the Sovereign Base Areas, were under pressure for many months with internal security and the humanitarian emergency resulting from the displacement of thousands of Greek Cypriot families.

Strudwick had a good brain, but entry to the staff college required much study. Being adjutant of an infantry battalion at such a time was not ideal, and he failed the exam. The army had a safety net. An officer could become progressively “sq” (staff qualified) in staff posts that did not require the qualification “psc”. Consequently, in 1982 after commanding a company and being mentioned in dispatches in Northern Ireland, Strudwick found himself in the HQ of 4th Armoured Division in the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) as the staff officer responsible for intelligence and security.

After two years Strudwick was promoted and given responsibility for administrative planning of Exercise Lionheart, the army’s largest exercise ever. Under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Martin Farndale, GOC 1st (British) Corps, Lionheart tested reinforcement plans for BAOR and more than doubled troops in Germany to 131,500. Strudwick’s organisational skills did not go unnoticed.



Command of 1st Royal Scots followed, after which John Waters, commandant of the Staff College at Camberley, took the unusual step of appointing Strudwick, as a non-psc officer, to the teaching staff.

When in 1988 Waters became GOC Northern Ireland, he acquired Strudwick as his principal administrative staff officer. Two years later, Strudwick moved 30 miles down the road from Lisburn to Armagh to command Waters's old brigade. At the end of his two years in command, he was awarded a second oak leaf (mention in dispatches) to add to the CBE gained in the staff post.

A year's respite of a kind followed in Delhi at the Indian National Defence College, where his wife gained approval by deciding to take up the *nautch*. The word derives from Prakrit and means simply "dance", but old India hands still connected "nautch girl" with additional favours, which led to amusement at times on return to England. After Delhi, Strudwick was appointed deputy military secretary. The plus side of the job was telling officers they were going to be promoted. The down side was telling them they were not. He did the latter with uncommon sensitivity.

Then followed a term as director of infantry, before in 1997 promotion to major general and appointment as GOC Scotland and simultaneously governor of Edinburgh Castle.

Strudwick retired from the army in 2000. He went on to become chief executive of the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust, director of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Colonel of the Royal Scots and an officer of The Royal Company of Archers (the Queen's ceremonial bodyguard for Scotland).

In 2013 Jan died. Two years later he married Susan Garrett-Cox, a widow and family friend, who survives him along with the children of his first marriage: Sara, a management accountant, and Piers, who was commissioned into his father's regiment and was until recently defence attaché in Ankara.

In his rise to general rank without the benefit of "psc", Strudwick was also notable for leaving no trail of bodies, save those of the Queen's enemies.

**Major General Mark Strudwick, CBE, KStJ, Royal Scots officer, was born on April 19, 1945.**

**He died of cancer on September 26, 2021, aged 76**

