



The Future

COMEX AND THE COMMONWEALTH GREEN PENNANT AWARDS

*'Together let us go where the green pennant flies and friendship's banner raise
Together Unafraid'*

An Historic Beginning



The idea of Comex was inspired by the Commonwealth armies of the Second World War that set an example of comradeship the like of which had never been seen before, and in doing so raised the words equality, freedom and friendship to the pinnacle of man's achievement. When the possibility of reviving the same spirit was put to the first Prime Minister of India, the late Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1963 he at once proposed organising *'a new consciousness in the Commonwealth by bringing together selected groups of young men and women to meet in cultural and intellectual activities as well as in common adventure'* and authorised the setting up of a committee under the Chairmanship of R.K. Kapur of the Ministry of Education, with representatives of all Commonwealth missions in the capital, to explore the proposition. But the problems that emerged seemed insurmountable, hence the Commonwealth Expedition, Comex, under the patronage of Prince Philip with five contingents of 42 each from Oxford, Cambridge, London, Cardiff and Edinburgh, launched in 1965, with Commonwealth students on board and doctors from Australia and Britain, to preserve India's inspired initiative.

An Historic Beginning



There have been fourteen expeditions, (the largest, Comex 3 of 525 from 21 universities, including India on the return journey) identified wherever they went by a Green Pennant ('the little green flag or nannhey harey dhvaj') with HRH's Cypher and the Asoka Wheel embroidered in gold. The 4th expedition extended operations to Malaysia and Singapore in the LSLs Sir Lancelot and Sir Galahad (later lost in the Falklands), and Sri Lanka. Singapore responded with its own Comex retracing the Comex 4 route; Comex 8 for the Queen's Silver Jubilee linked the Royal Marines Depot in Kent to the Nilgiris (Blue Mountains) of South India in ten silver vehicles which came to be known as the Silver Train; Comex 9 followed with a 16,000 mile Commonwealth Expedition Express across India, completing the final leg from London to Derby courtesy of Indian and British Railways; and Comex 12 provided a trial run from Ocean to Ocean in Canada. After ten expeditions *'the little green flags'* was destined to become **The Green Pennant Awards**.

Relevant references:

CRYING DRUMS: Foreword by Prince Philip (George Allen & Unwin 1972)

TOGETHER UNAFRAID: Foreword by the late Professor Arnold Smith CH OC, first Secretary General of the Commonwealth and patron of Comex in Canada (Hale 1979)

JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME: From the Blue Mountains to Devon, Ten Tors and Comex (Northcote House 1997)

www.comex40.org.uk (40th anniversary website: The Story in Prose, Speeches, Pictures and Song)



The Chase High School, Malvern

Progress

His Royal Highness's prescient words at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards in 1980 can be heard in the original recording (detailed at the end of this proposal and copy of CD attached). Fifteen years on, the first Comex took place on African soil. This was Comex 14 and was preceded by an African-British-Indian reconnaissance (Comex 13). At President Kaunda's personal invitation, participating contingents came from Botswana, Britain (Devon), Canada, Cyprus, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and the host country Zambia (the majority sponsored by their governments). The Presidential train was made available for the exclusive use of Comex 14 from Kitwe through the Copperbelt to Victoria Falls, with suitable transport at every stopping place to entertain local people and enthusiastic audiences of children.

The Green Pennant Awards took place during the final entertainment at State House, Lusaka, hosted by the President and attended by the diplomatic corps. The Awards were then brought to the attention of the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in New Zealand for endorsement. In the words of the Zambian High Commissioner, Love Mtesa, after the event: *"I am so happy to tell you that the Green Pennant Awards received unanimous support in Auckland. Everything went very well indeed and, remarkably, the next awards are likely to take place in Edinburgh at the conclusion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. So I have sent the models back to Zambia to have more made"*.



The Gov. Gen of Canada and Arnold Smith,
First Sec. Gen of the Commonwealth

Progress



Two years later, courtesy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Lord Provost's Office, the most recent Awards took place during a reception for Heads of Government at the Edinburgh CHOGM of 1997 hosted by The Lord Provost, Eric Milligan. Included among the recipients were: President Nelson Mandela for bringing South Africa back into the Commonwealth, and six African ministries of Youth and Sports for fielding national contingents to take part in Comex 14 Zambia, the first Comex in Africa (see full list at the end). Invited to address those present Colonel Gregory said:

"On behalf of the thousands of men and women of the Commonwealth Expedition, Comex, I would like to thank the Lord Provost's Office, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for including The Green Pennant Awards in this historic reception for Commonwealth leaders; that is to say, the leaders of over 1,500,000,000 people all over the world. To me, the Commonwealth represents friendship on a global scale, and I was fortunate enough to discover that friendship early in life among the endless columns of brave men from many nations marching off the battlefields of the world triumphant in what was called 'their finest hour.' The debt we owe them can never be repaid - not even by a conference such as CHOGM. These little green flags - and there will be hundreds, even thousands in the years to come - are a guard of honour to their memory and will remain on parade here for your inspection. Their purpose is to identify the spirit of adventure with crossing the barriers that divide. Their future rests in your hands".



The 2/2 KEO Goorkhas

The Proposal



It is now proposed (with the support of the Governments of India, and by association the Governments of Canada, Singapore and Zambia) that Commonwealth countries take it in turn to organise Comex as an ongoing Commonwealth Expedition, CHOGM to CHOGM, in an adventurous relay across the barriers that divide people that could last 100 years, and host The Green Pennant Awards in the presence of the Head of the Commonwealth to coincide with the biennial CHOGM. This proposal is based on the experiences of over 3,000 men and women, and modelled on Comex 14 Zambia. Their achievements are documented in the references given earlier. For the origins, the speeches, the Story in Song and in Pictures, please visit the website.



His Justice K.S. Garewal, India

The Proposal



An adventurous relay lasting 100 years may sound alarming at first glance but can be accomplished in modest doses of once every two years (the intervening gap dedicated to selection, preparation and training), each country picking up the *baton* from the one before. The current proposal owes much to the patron of Comex in Canada, Professor Arnold Smith of Carleton, the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth, and the large numbers from the provinces of Canada, crossing the Atlantic to participate in Comex - not least the Queen's Silver Jubilee Comex 8 - in the company of friends from India, Singapore and the United Kingdom travelling in ten silver vehicles, from the Royal Marines base in Kent to the Blue Mountains (Nilgiris) in South India (*almost within sight and sound of Sri Lanka, the little jewel, waiting to pick up the baton if this proposal is endorsed at the 2009 CHOGM*), including Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan in its itinerary and returning on time 15,000 miles later to complete the job in Wells Cathedral in Somerset, and an impromptu concert at Glastonbury, at the invitation of Bishop John Bickersteth of Bath and Wells.



Love Mtesa, Zambian High
Commissioner

The Proposal



This proposal draws on the experience of participating contingents getting to know each other and each other's countries, with the added incentive of The Green Pennant Awards taking place in the presence of the Head of the Commonwealth. Acknowledging the generous welcome and hospitality extended to Comex over years by non-Commonwealth countries, many of whom are caught up in conflict today, it is further proposed that those countries might be invited to send guest contingents. All contingents would receive The Green Pennant Award. To mark the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth and the 44th anniversary of Comex, this proposal is brought to the attention of Heads of Government at the 2009 CHOGM for endorsement, as the logical follow-on to the Awards themselves endorsed at the New Zealand CHOGM in 1995 - following a similar request from the Government of Zambia.



John Mwesa, The Heritage Singers,
Zambia

The Proposal

THE FOLLOWING FACTORS ARE INTENDED FOR CLARIFICATION

- In view of the contribution made by Comex and its supporters over 44 years, part of the cost, to host and participating countries, might be included in CHOGM budgets. (See Appendix to ***Together Unafraid***).
- In addition to formal invitations – as in the case of Zambia organising the first expedition in Africa - the host country would be responsible for (a) drawing up the overall plan; (b) providing the base camp for briefing, preparation and training; (c) arranging transport and essential camping facilities; (d) making suitable provision for security and medical cover; (e) commissioning The Green Pennant Awards from Zambia and India; and finally (f) hosting The Green Pennant Awards.
- Every contingent (including guest contingents) would receive The Green Pennant Award on behalf of its country.
- It would be the responsibility of the expedition to use these arrangements with care and consideration. Participating contingents of 10 to 25 each - selected and sponsored by their governments - would be expected to make their own travel arrangements to the base camp in the host country, and share the cost of catering.
- While at the base camp an entertainment would be put together, modelled on The Story of Comex in Song with appropriate national extras. The theme song would be 'Little Green Flags' (The Green Pennant), and the closing chorus 'Together Unafraid'. These songs were originally recorded on the road, not to entertain but to make the telling of the story as entertaining as possible
- A special feature could be the formal adoption of TOGETHER UNAFRAID and LITTLE GREEN FLAGS as A Commonwealth March and A Commonwealth Raga respectively (in tribute to the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and, and the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Professor Arnold Smith of Carleton University) having already been played as such: *Together Unafraid* by the Band of the Coldstream Guards at the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace before Comex 10, and by the Band of the late 2nd KEO Goorkhas at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards by Prince Philip. The idea of a Raga for the Commonwealth began with Little Green Flags (the name taken from His Royal Highness's speech at the inauguration of the Awards) played on bagpipes by the late Pipe Major Angus MacDonald MBE, from Edinburgh Castle, and performed as a raga (Nannhey Harey Dhwaj) on Tabla and Sarod by Kamal Kant Sharma and Promod Shanker at the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine in Chandigarh, Punjab, and later at the Awards in Zambia accompanied by the Heritage Singers.

Points of General Interest

Comex 1 was sponsored by Massey Ferguson.

The inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards at the Commonwealth Institute in London was hosted by Times Newspapers.

The Master model of the Awards (by Garrard of London) was commissioned (in silver) by Devon County Council, and later redesigned in copper by Hamilton and Inches of Edinburgh in recognition of the huge success of Comex 14 in Zambia and the participation of African countries.

In proposing a Commonwealth Youth Festival in 1963/4, the Government of Jawaharlal Nehru voted £100,000 for the purpose, in addition to providing base camp facilities and travel concessions.

The Indian contingent of Comex 14 Zambia was sponsored by the Government and organised by the ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations); the African contingents by the Ministries of Youth and Sports.

The British contingent for Comex 14 Zambia was organised and administered by Devon County Council with a financial contribution from the government. **The Singapore Comex to Britain** was initiated by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in response to Comex 4 (overland to India, and transported from Calcutta to Malaysia and Singapore in the Landing Ships Sir Lancelot and Sir Galahad, courtesy of the MOD) and organised by the People's Association.

The Prime Minister of Singapore received a Green Pennant at the Awards ceremony in Delhi.

The first Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Professor Arnold Smith of Carleton University, Ottawa, received a Green Pennant at the Awards ceremony in Lusaka.



The Green Pennant Awards, Edinburgh 1997

Conclusions

The proposal being brought to the attention of Heads of Government for endorsement at the 2009 CHOGM has distinct advantages:

1. It would be hugely popular, and a fitting tribute to the first Prime Minister of India, the late Jawaharlal Nehru, and the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth and patron of Comex in Canada, the late Professor Arnold Smith CH OC,
2. It would begin the process of Commonwealth countries taking it in turn to organise Comex and host The Green Pennant Awards in the presence of the Head of the Commonwealth – coinciding with the biennial CHOGM,
3. It would mean inviting guest contingents from non-Commonwealth countries who welcomed Comex so beautifully over the years – all of whom would receive The Green Pennant Award,
4. As it was an Indian initiative in 1963 that inspired Comex and The Green Pennant Awards, it is especially appropriate that India should be the first country to call for the endorsement of the next phase of this remarkable achievement by young men and women (the same age group called upon in war) as part of the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth and the 44th of Comex.
5. It would provide the occasion to present each guest contingent with a recording of The Story of Comex in Song (incorporating the songs now being rehearsed in India) in which they all played a part.

In the end it all comes down to everyone playing a part – within their own spheres of influence – however great or small.



Postscript



The world is bedevilled by violence of many kinds, old friendships, upon which peace so largely depends, are among the early casualties. Afghanistan and Iraq (both on the Comex route more than once) are not happy places; and yet Comex made many friends in those countries. There are lesser examples elsewhere, all pointing in the same direction: towards the barriers that divide people as the greatest single challenge of the day; but just talking about them is not enough. Despite innumerable difficulties, Comex tried to do something about them at every point of contact, and in all circumstances, in a medium universally understood, along ancient land routes picked out by camels and donkeys centuries ago. Every member of this remarkable experiment in human relations deserves an Award, but resources were limited. The future beckons.

Recipients of the Green Pennant Awards



1. His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka, India
2. His Excellency the President of Kenya
3. St Edward's School, Simla, India
4. Anne Murray, Comex 1-10, Edinburgh, UK
5. Christopher & Mary Nichols, Comex 3 & 5, Surrey, UK
6. Judith Parkinson, Comex 5, 6, 7 & 13, London, UK
7. Peter Wheatcroft, Comex 4, Yorkshire, UK
8. Alan Severn, Comex 5, New South Wales, Australia
9. Kevin & Shirley Lacy, Comex 5 & 6, Hertfordshire, UK
10. Graham & Jane Collins, Comex 7 & 9, Suffolk, UK
11. Desmond & Lina Waite, Comex 4 & 8, Buckinghamshire, UK
12. Colonel Peter Davis, Comex 7, Nottinghamshire, UK
13. The Royal Marines, Comex 8, Deal, Kent, UK
14. The Chase High School, Comex 10, Hereford & Worcester, UK
15. His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada
16. His Excellency the President of Zambia
17. 2nd King Edward VII's Own Goorkha Rifles, Hong Kong
18. The Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
19. Mahendra Kaul, BBC Asian Service, Birmingham, UK
20. Kamaljit Singh Garewal, Comex 10, Punjab, India
21. Bunty Bidie, Comex 5 & 12, Ontario, Canada
22. Mary Abendroth, Comex 3, 7 & 8, Minneapolis, USA
23. The Bolton School, Girls' Division, Lancashire, UK
24. His Excellency the Prime Minister of Singapore
25. British Rail, Comex 9, London, UK
26. Prithi Singh, Himachal, India
27. Pritam Singh Sandhu, Delhi, India
28. Ramaswamy Iyer, Delhi, India
29. Air India, Comex 1, Delhi, India
30. Kamal Kant Sharma, Comex 7, 8, 10 & 13, Delhi, India
31. Rowena Dique, Tamil Nadu, India
32. Bansi Mehta, Maharashtra, India
33. Colonel Vasant Deshpande, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India
34. Post Graduate Institute of Medicine, Chandigarh, Punjab, India
35. Sarjit Singh & Davinder Garewal, Himachal, India
36. The Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India
37. Dr Pramjit Singh Grewal, Amritsar, Punjab, India
38. The Town of Simla, Himachal, India
39. The Greater Manchester Police, UK
40. Norman Leigh, Comex 2, 3 & 11, Lancashire, UK
41. Dr Charles Holme, Comex 4, Somerset, UK
42. Sydney Williams, Comex 5, 11, 12 & 13, Devon, UK
43. Ron Hall, Comex 6 & 11, London, UK
44. George Brew, Comex 7 & 11, Cheshire, UK
45. Habinder Kaur, Comex 10, Punjab, India
46. Chander Prakash, Tamil Nadu, India
47. LSL Sir Galahad, Comex 4, RNFA, UK
48. Fr Joshua Sterk, Karachi, Pakistan
49. Mohammed Saleem, Comex 7 & 8, Lahore, Pakistan
50. Jane Boston, Comex 7 & 13, Sussex, UK
51. Marjory Lyon, Comex 9 & 13, London, UK
52. John Mwesa, Comex 10 & 13, Lusaka, Zambia
53. The Heritage Singers, Comex 10 & 13, Lusaka, Zambia
54. Zambia Broadcasting Services, Comex 13, Lusaka, Zambia
55. Tom Booth, Greater Manchester, UK
56. David Burchfield, Devon, UK
57. Dr Edward Nickerson, London, UK
58. Promod Shanker, Comex 11 & 13, Delhi, India
59. Professor Arnold Smith, first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Canada
60. His Excellency, the President of The Republic of South Africa
61. The Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Comex 1 – Edinburgh, UK
62. Elisabeth Rowell, Comex 6 – Northumberland, UK6
63. Gillian Corson, Comex 3 & 4 – Durham, UK
64. Tim Sage, Comex 3 – Southsea, UK
65. Michael Wilson Comex 3 & 5 – Powys, UK
66. Michael King, Comex 4 – London, UK
67. Brenda Stevens, Comex 5 & 6 – London, UK
68. Michael Parish, Comex 5 & 6 - North Wales, UK
69. Alan Waters, Comex 9 & 13 – Essex, UK
70. Zambia, Comex 13/14 *
71. Botswana, Comex 13/14 *
72. Cyprus, Comex 13/14 *
73. Kenya, Comex 13/14 *
74. Malaysia, Comex 13/14 *
75. Nigeria, Comex 13/14 *
76. Tanzania, Comex 13/14 *
77. Zimbabwe, Comex 13/14 *
78. Nedjelko Ivancevic, Lawyer, Croatia **
79. Nikola Vrbos, Postman, Croatia **
80. Robert & Cally Gregory Comex 3, 4, 5 & 6, Derbyshire, UK
81. A Replica for the Office of The Lord Provost of Edinburgh host to Heads of Government at the 1997 Awards **

* The Ministries of Youth, Culture & Sport

** Special Awards

Addendum



From: Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore

'There is room and enough to spare within the Commonwealth for all the energies and idealism of young men and women who wish to make a contribution towards better understanding between nations; between rich and poor; developed and developing; young and old. Comex expeditions have proved to be one of the most realistic and worthwhile programmes devised to foster such goodwill. It is with pleasure that I accept the Green Pennant Award which you have chosen to extend to me and my country. The Singapore High Commission in New Delhi will accept the Award on my behalf. My I take this opportunity to wish Comex 11 every success in its endeavours. It is my hope that the excellent traditions of Comex will be maintained in the years to come.'

From: Fr Joshua Sterk, Franciscan Priest and Headmaster of St Francis School in Quetta, Pakistan (written from St Anthony's Church in Karachi)

'I have been in hospital with a massive infection in my leg and have to be very careful, and do a lot of resting. Things were very low but, in this gloom, whence did a little ray of sunshine come? From the good old Commonwealth Expedition. How well I recall the first expedition (Comex 1) nosing into the Grammar School. We enjoyed having you stay in the school. Do I get the honour of a Green Pennant for having you as my guests? For an honour it is, and I am proud of it, and show it off to anyone stepping into my room. It is a pity you are not known in Karachi. I wish I could invite you here to show them. But you are not coming to Pakistan any more, and I am only a poor parish priest with not enough showers. But if Pakistan rejoins the Commonwealth, you must come. I thank you for the honour you do me with this Green Pennant. The boys in the School always remembered, and now they have grown up they will still remember. When they come and see me I will show them the sign of your appreciation, which is for them too. Thank you once more, I am not a very good "thanker"; but what can a man say more?'

From: Vasant Deshpande, Parashuram Niwas, Kolhapur.

'I feel as proud as the proverbial cat with two tails in receiving the Green Pennant Award which singular honour you have awarded to a thoroughly unworthy person. My association with Comex has been since its inception (1962); and before that I was an admirer of the Ten Tors expeditions which struck me even then as a wonderful effort to keep up the Englishman's (in which genre include Scots - they were the Empire Builders) spirit of adventure and discovery. My nostalgia for the British Raj revolves around the Britishers who climbed Everest because it was there, crossed the Empty Quarter simply to find out what is fear. If Comex has fired some of our youth with the same spirit, it has served its purpose. I am sure the occasional Indian who goes to the Antarctic, or sails in a dinghy, does draw inspiration from it. I think this is absolutely magnificent that the pennant reached me via Bangalore. I am sorry that I could not in person meet the gentleman who brought it, along with a case of wine with the compliments of Shaw Wallace; but I have invited General Thorat and a few other friends here for a get together on Sunday, 3rd December when we will drink to you and our other friends of Comex.'