

## Colin MacNicol

Colin MacNicol, who has died aged 84, won an MC at the Battle of the Imjin River in Korea in 1951.

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In April 1951, MacNicol was a platoon commander serving with 1st Battalion the Royal Ulster Rifles (1 RUR), part of 29 Independent Infantry Brigade. After a rapid advance into North Korea followed by a no less rapid withdrawal, the brigade was holding a defensive line south of the Imjin river.

On April 14 the Chinese communist forces attacked an isolated company position of 1 RUR, their main assault being directed at the platoon position commanded by MacNicol. Throughout that night they came in wave after wave, in repeated and determined attempts to overrun his position. MacNicol's forward section was penetrated, and every grenade was used; but he rallied his men and retook all the ground that had been lost.

From the morning of April 23 until midnight on April 25 the battalion withstood a Chinese assault in strength across the Imjin. The ferocity of the battle caught the imagination of the world, as tank commanders sprayed their own units with machine-gun fire to clear them of swarms of enemy that were clambering over them, while infantry, dug into underground bunkers and in danger of being overrun, called down artillery fire on their own positions.

During the three-day battle MacNicol moved among his men, heedless of the incoming fire, encouraging them or redeploying them to different posts as the situation demanded. His courage, coolness and inspiring leadership were recognised by the award of an Immediate MC.

Colin MacNicol was born in London on October 31 1928. Both his father and grandfather were engaged in the Scotch whisky trade and ran their own company. Blessed with an excellent singing voice, Colin was a treble with the choir at Tonbridge School and made several recordings.

He also showed an early aptitude for ball games, and would infuriate his father, no mean player himself, on the tennis court by taking a smash volley and just softly stroking the ball back over

the net. His father would rush to the net and get in a return, only to see his son send a powerful drive to the far corner. Colin represented the school at several sports, notably cricket.

After being called up for National Service, in January 1948 he was commissioned into the Border Regiment, and on being released two years later he joined a family-owned timber importing company.

When the situation in Korea deteriorated, however, he was quickly recalled from the Reserve and posted to 1 RUR, a unit which was very under strength. After undergoing pre-embarkation training at Colchester, in November 1950 he landed with his battalion at Pusan, Korea. Early in 1951, in bitter weather, they suffered their first casualties during a night withdrawal.

Released once more from the Army, he rejoined the timber trade and, based at Kinshasa (then Léopoldville, Belgian Congo), worked for many years in the timber plantations and in London. After the business was taken over by a public company he managed the offices of a firm of solicitors in Sussex.

MacNicol continued playing cricket, but also took up golf, winning many prizes. In 1952 he beat the then Open champion Bobby Locke by six strokes, and in 1969 he won the Highwoods Open, a competition open to players from all over the country, playing off scratch.

He kept up his connection with the Korean veterans and worked for a number of charities until a stroke left him disabled.

Colin MacNicol married first (dissolved), in 1959, Ann Gillian Caswell. He married, secondly, in 1971, Hester Joan Knowd. She predeceased him, and he is survived by three sons and a daughter of his first marriage and a daughter of his second.

**Colin MacNicol, born October 31 1928, died August 13 2013**

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