

A FINAL SALUTE

War heroes' last stand



■ **EMOTIONAL:** Old soldiers remember their comrades

A BAND of war heroes made their last stand at a final gathering of surviving Royal Naval Commandos in Birmingham.

Veterans who fought shoulder to shoulder under enemy fire in World War Two met for the last time at the city's Nautical Club.

The association, which has met at the club since it formed in 1982, closed because many members have died or are elderly.

St Augustine's Church, in Hagley Road, became the final resting place of the association's standard following the last annual parade yesterday.

The commandos' job

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in the war was to storm the beaches in seaborne assaults.

They took part in raids all over the world, but their most crucial role was the part they played in the D-Day landings.

Old soldier Richard Donger said that during the D-Day campaign he was shot by a sniper but battled on, helping to secure Sword Beach for advancing troops.

The 79-year-old said it must have been sheer shock which stopped him feeling the pain of his shattered arm and dislocated shoulder.

He was awarded the Croix de Guerre by France.

Yesterday Richard travelled to Birmingham from his home in Leicestershire to join up to 100 of his former comrades.

The remaining 360 commandos shared memories including the brave story of Birmingham-born Ken Hatton.

Ken, aged 79, was one of only seven who returned alive from a party of 23 who set out to capture an artillery boat in Elba, a key island off Italy, in 1944.

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■ **TRIBUTE:** Ken Oakley lays a wreath and a Sutton sea cadet (left) plays the Last Post. Pictures: Loretta Brennan

