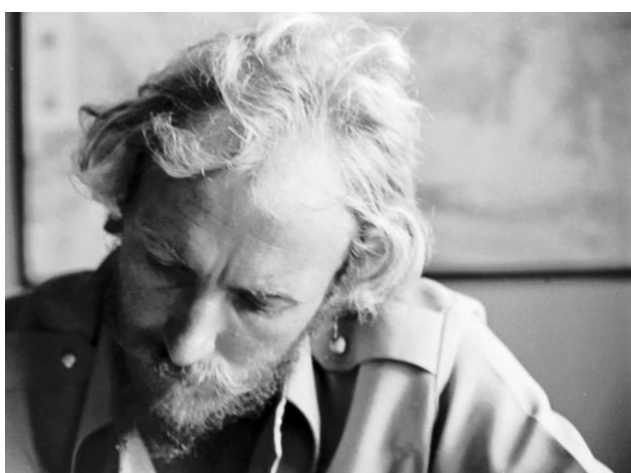





## Allan (Al) Townsing (RIP)

Worked with EO	from	May, 1975	to	July, 1979
Age on joining EO				
Nationality	Australian			
Role at EO	Leader/Driver			
Expeditions/Brief Encounters etc. led or taken	Allan led expeditions on all three continents Asia, Africa and South America. In 1978 Allan led an Eastbound Asia. He and David Hunter then set up the Kathmandu office and the budding rafting program. (David Hunter)			
Why did you want to work for EO?				
Occupation before joining EO				
Occupation after leaving EO	Allan left EO to run his own expedition with invited friends in South America. Allan died in 1980 while on this expedition when he dived into the Rio Napo to aid one of his group in distress. He did not re-emerge from the river and his body wasn't found.			
Now living in				

Photos	
 <p>(Photo by David Hunter)</p>	 <p>Allan (left), Sue and Rob Rumball (Photo by Derek Biddle) Camping in France en route to Le Mans 1975</p>
	 <p>Wren Park 1975 – Bryan Wallace (front left), Martin Crabb (rear left), Keith Miller (rear right), Al Townsing (front right), (photo by Derek Biddle)</p>

### Memories or anecdotes

Alison Muir Bennett penned this touching and honest tribute to Allan:

Allan Townsing was almost a golden boy, good looking, well-liked, excellent EO leader. I never knew him very well, but I did meet him properly when I was 'The San Francisco Office' and he was passing through. He spent the evening drinking my wine and holding me personally responsible for the stupidity of the English command in the Charge of the Light Brigade at Crimea, where many good Aussies were killed or many may say, murdered as a result. Even though many English died that day Allan being the proud Aussie that he was overlooked that small point in his wrath. We had a heated discussion. Presumably he got so cross with me about it because of my English diction, I must have represented all the things he disliked most about Pommies.

However I doubt he would have expressed himself in the same way to Tony Jones, who was after all an Officer and a Gentleman. So when I heard that he had met his end by plunging his 'body beautiful' into the Rio Napo off a canoe I was not overly distressed! Later I heard that this had been a noble sacrifice. He and his group were on a side trip experiencing a little local adventure when one of the group fell in the water, seeing they were in difficulty in the undertow he dived into rescue the person, and he was never seen again. I was shocked and sorry to hear this, I'm sure that with his sense of duty and his concept of right and wrong it would never have crossed his mind to question his own safety in the situation. That's why he was so cross about the Charge of the Light Brigade.

I will remember him as an Aussie Bastard, and as a man of strong convictions.

From Derek Biddle:

Al Townsing started with EO in 1975, the same week I did. We were the only two at Wren Park with Rob (Rumball) for about five weeks before others, both experienced leaders and new recruits arrived. We were on a four-week trial period and Rob was to let us know if we had passed the test. He never did, but after the four weeks invited us to travel with him and Sue to the Le Mans 24-hour race. So between us we took it that all was well with our performance!

From Lance Thomas:

I was an Expedition Member on a westbound Asia which departed Kathmandu at the end of April 1979. David Hunter took the trip from Kathmandu to New Delhi. Allan Townsing took the trip from there to London. We had a small incident in Afghanistan which I relate below. By way of background, anti-communist mujahedeens were fighting the communist government in Afghanistan. It was in late December 1979 the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan to support the ruling communist government.

When we left Kabul we were going to attempt to traverse Afghanistan by what was referred to as the Central Route. This was to follow the roads which head basically west from Kabul to Herat near the border with Iran. The giant Buddhas of Bamiyan and the turquoise lakes of Band-i-Amir could be visited along the way. The alternatives were to go north crossing the Hindu Kush through the Salang Tunnel to Masar-i-Sharif and thence to Herat or to go south to Kandahar and then north again to Herat. There was some doubt about the safety of the northern route and even of the central route because of the increasing activity of the mujahedeens. My diary entry read 'Leave tomorrow for the central route through Afghanistan. Hopefully we won't strike any problems.'

We left Kabul early to visit the camel and sheep market in the north of the town. We then headed south towards Kandahar. Along the way there were tank and gun emplacements beside the road. At the turnoff we needed to take to head west, there was a military checkpoint so we went past it and tried a track further on, but it went nowhere. We then tried another side-track further on and all seemed to be going well. After an hour or so some villagers hitched a ride. (They knew the road ahead was blocked by a landslip and we would have to come back anyway.) By luck, we came across a bus driver who spoke English and he gave us directions to get back to the road we needed to be on to get to Bamiyan. When found the road but discovered we were within a couple of hundred metres of the military checkpoint on the Kandahar road. If they saw us, they did not come after us and stop us.

At about 4.30pm in the afternoon we passed a convoy of troop carriers and tanks. We made camp in a village and the tanks and troop carriers kept rolling past us from the direction we were headed until about 10pm. We expected to be visited at some time during the night by either the army or the mujahedeens but in the end the night passed without event. When we continued the next day, we found the road to Bamiyan. The roads were dusty but the weather was cool. Just around midday we found the road was blocked by a large rock and while some of us dug it out, others prepared lunch. There was nobody around when we stopped but after a while some villagers appeared at the top of a hill. We waved to them and slowly they came down to meet us. Gradually, we were able to get across to them that we wanted to go to Bamiyan but the villagers were adamant that it would be dangerous for us. We turned around and headed for the village of Behsud intending to head west from there. Again, the road was blocked by a rock slide but this time it had obviously been deliberately caused.

So again we turned back and found yet another road. When we camped for the night once again villagers appeared and we were able to deduce we were now on the right track to Behsud. We noticed that during the previous two days the villagers would always run off when they saw the truck approaching. We surmised they thought we were an army vehicle and they just wanted to get away from us. By this afternoon however we noticed that they didn't seem to mind so much so we figured we were probably now in an area when there was less trouble.

At Behsud however we were stopped by the army once again. They were not going to let us continue our journey west. Instead of having to retrace our steps, Allan managed to negotiate with them to let us go Ghazni, on the Kabul-Kandahar road, which was basically due south from our current position. We were given a guide and two soldiers to go with us to a point further on where we would meet another army position and from where we could go direct to Ghazni. A few miles from

the fort at Behsud, however, they signalled us to stop. They got out of the truck and looked very nervous. They showed us the track to follow and then headed back to the fort on foot.

So we carried on. Not much further down the road a local signalled vigorously for us to go back but we carried on and suddenly there were two cracks – gunshots. Two people had been sitting on the roof of the cab with their feet dangling through the turret hole. They dived into the cab while Allan made a quick u-turn. Those of us in the back of the truck dived off our seats to get lower to the floor of the truck. I was a bit slower than the rest and could only manage to get my head down with my bum still in on the seat. Donald, the Scotsman, was squatting on the floor but his head was still up. He held a copy of *War and Peace* to the side of his head hoping that if a bullet came through the metal sides of the truck this might give him some more protection. Three more shots were fired – all from close range but as far as we knew none hit the truck so we presumed they were not actually meant to hit us.

We came to a group of houses and took a side road pointed out to Allan. A little way up that road another person ran across a field at full pace signalling us to go back. We turned around again and this time headed back towards the army post at Behsud. Just as the truck entered a dip in the road two more shots rang out. This time they sounded like they were from larger calibre rifles. Allan stopped the truck in the dip and got out and ran up the other side waving his hat vigorously. There were no more shots though one of the gunmen had the people in the cab directly in his sights. The men came over to the truck and when they saw we were just ‘tourists’ they motioned us to leave, quickly. We all stayed on the floor until we were within sight of the army fort at Behsud again. Of course, this all happened while I was in the back of the truck with head down and bum up, hoping like hell there would not be any more shooting, and relate it here from the description given by Allan later. While all this was happening, there were still people calmly ploughing their fields.

Once we were in sight of Behsud, we stopped to get ourselves better organised. When we got out of the truck we saw that one of the tyres on the trailer was completely shredded. Whether it had been shot or not we never did work out. We changed the tyre as quickly as we could and before heading off again organised ourselves so we could all sit on the floor if need be rather than the jumbled mess it had been before. We also put one of the tables across the open back of the truck as well to give us a little extra protection. We came back to the Kabul-Kandahar road just south of the checkpoint we had passed two days before. Afterward I think I was more relieved than scared that finally the half-expected had actually happened to us and we could now carry on with the trip, hopefully without further incident.