



THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION

“We will”
remember them

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2004

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PAST EVENTS

39/93 CLUB REUNION

The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham 5-7th March 2004

This Reunion was held at The Red Lion Fareham over the weekend of 5-7 March 2004. For the last 5 years members of the RN and RM Association Worcester and Kidderminster Branches have been cordially invited to these events which are always enjoyed.

As normal a formal dinner took place on the Saturday night and on this occasion being the 10th Anniversary a large Iced Fruit Cake complete with the Royal Pioneer Crest had been presented. Sooner than cut the cake it was suggested by some that the old Pioneer tradition of presenting the cake to a deserving charitable organisation be followed. Mrs Rita Barnett the wife of the Secretary of the RMA Worcester Branch was nominated to this task. The cake was duly presented to the Crofters Close Home Droitwich Spa being an establishment that cares for Seriously Handicapped Children and allows them to remain in familiar surroundings indefinitely. (See photograph on centre page).

Care Staff led by the Manageress, Mrs Val Goode and residents gathered to see the cake presented. It was explained who had donated it and why. Mrs Goode thanked all concerned for the most generous gift, remarking that it was the first time ever that anything of this kind had been donated to the home. Reports told us that the cake was delicious and could thanks be sent to all concerned.

ERSKINE HOME

July 2004

The following appeared in the South Edinburgh Echo, Issue 71, July 2004.

The Edinburgh Erskine Home commemorated the 60th anniversary of the D-Day landings with performances by local children, a visit from Edinburgh's Lord Provost and the acceptance of a generous gift.

Residents gathered as students from Gilmerton Primary kicked off the morning with a trio of old time songs. After rousing renditions of Private Jones, The Quartermaster's Store and Boogie Woogie Bugle of Company B, three students from Merchison Castle School provided piano and bagpipe solos as well as a dramatic recitation of "Scots Wha Hae" by Robert Burns.

Throughout the entertainment, feet tapped, hands clapped and lips moved in sync with the words and tunes of yesteryear. Once the performances drew to a close, Lesley Hinds, Edinburgh's Lord Provost, accepted a painting on behalf of the Erskine Home.

"Pioneers", which depicts the landings on Sword Beach in Normandy, was donated by Catherine Blacklaw, whose father John Ponton had landed on Sword Beach with the Pioneer Corps. (CSM of 178 Company).

After he passed away in October of 2003, Ms Blacklaw, who had given the painting to her parents on their Diamond Wedding five years ago, decided that she wanted it to end up "in a beautiful place. I couldn't think of a place where it would mean as much as it would here."

"I think it's so important to remember D-Day and the sacrifices that were made for our democracy. I am delighted, as I look around, that both generations can come together like this and appreciate each other" the Lord Provost commented.



39/93 CLUB WEEKEND

The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham 15-16th October 2004

The 39/93 Club has arranged accommodation and breakfast for members at the Red Lion Hotel, Fareham, Hampshire at £21 per person, per night, from 15 to 16 October 2004. A dinner is to be held on Saturday 16 October at a cost of £15 per person, day visitors will be welcome to attend the dinner. If you wish to attend, please contact the Secretary, Les Rowley, telephone 0162 889 0913. The hotel will not accept telephone bookings.

FIFTY-EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PAST AND PRESENT OFFICERS' DINNER, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester Friday 15 October 2004

Serving and ex-serving officers are invited to attend the 58th Past and Present Officers' Dinner at 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC on Friday 15 October 2004, the principal guest will be our Patron. Dress: black tie, miniature medals and neck decorations. Timings: 6.30 for 8, to allow time for a meeting. Members are asked to send their cheques for £20 to 51 St George's Drive before Friday 1 October 2004. Members of 23 Regiment should book through their PMC. This year we plan to accommodate retired members locally in Barracks.

WARRANT OFFICERS AND SENIOR NCOs PIONEER REUNION CLUB Saturday 16 October 2004

The Warrant Officers' and Senior NCOs' Pioneer Reunion Club are to hold a Ladies Dinner on Saturday 16 October 2004. A Club Newsletter has already been forwarded to Club members, if you have not received yours please contact the Club Secretary Mr N Brown, telephone 01604 403338.

FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE

Westminster Abbey, Thursday 11 November 2004

The Field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 11 November at 1100 hours, when a short service will be given. Members attending the planting of crosses at the Corps Plot (no 134) are asked to arrive by 1030 hours. It would be prudent to bring a means of identification. The field will be open from 9 to 5.30 hours until Saturday 13 November 2004.

CENOTAPH PARADE AND SERVICE

Whitehall, Sunday 14 November 2004

Join us and 14,000 other veterans at Whitehall for the Cenotaph Parade and Service on Sunday 14 November 2004. Please write to HQ RPC Association with your details, including telephone number, if held, to arrive before 21 September 2004, so that we can apply for your ticket(s).

A letter giving details will be written to all.



Editorial

It is with great sadness and regret that I have to announce the death of Lt Col Ian Milne at the age of 55 years. He died on 4 July 2004 following a severe heart attack whilst playing a sport he loved, cricket. He was a Trustee of the Association for the last 15 years and took a great interest in the work of the Association especially in Benevolence. He will be a great loss to the Association.

A report on the Reunion Weekend is on page 3 of this Newsletter, it is pleasing to note that the numbers attending were the largest since amalgamation into the RLC. Many who attended have already contacted me to say how much they enjoyed it and are looking forward to next year. It is also pleasing to report that we have recruited 64 new members to the Association so far this year, many who served during World War 2. We welcome them to the Association and hope that they enjoy membership.

With only publishing a Newsletter bi-annually it is often necessary to contact members with details of events and unfortunately deaths of members to enable members to pay their respects. A quick, and cheap, way to do this is by e-mail. Most people now have home computers linked to the internet, if they do not they have children or even grand-children who are. Please let us have your contact address, simply send an e-mail to pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk giving us your details.

The Derby Draw proved once again to be a great success with over £3,600 profit being made, the results are shown on page 9. This is one of the few sources of income remaining to the Association so your help in selling Christmas Draw tickets, which are attached, would be appreciated. You may be thinking it is a little early for Christmas Draw tickets but the reason for sending them so early is two fold, one we will be first and secondly it gives you time to sell them and request more! If you are unable to sell tickets please let us know and we will then not send any more to you.

You will see from the minutes of the Annual General Meeting that benevolence will be passed to the RLC Trust from 1 October 2004. It is appropriate therefore in this Newsletter to thank the Army Benevolent Fund and the workers of SSAFA Forces Help and The Royal British Legion (and of course The Earl Haig Fund in Scotland) for all their help and assistance in the last 60 years. Without them we would not have been able to do the work we have done. We have during this time handled over 52,500 cases!

Norman Brown



*“We will
remember them”*

Front Cover

Our Treasurer, Major Bill Elliott with his grandson Sam at the grave of a former friend. Bill landed on Sword Beach on D-Day whilst serving with the South Staffordshire Regiment as part of No 4 Beach Group. He visited Saint-Manvieu Cemetery where many former friends and comrades are buried.

THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2004

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OLD PIONEERS MEET NEW PIONEERS

Gibraltar, May 2004

In May two 'old' Pioneers, Mr Norman Brown and Mr Dusty Bryant (and their wives), returned to Gibraltar courtesy of the Gibraltar Government's Tercentenary celebrations. Whilst there they met a Troop of Pioneers from 522 Sqn 23 Pnr Regt RLC who had deployed in April under the command of 2Lt Jenny Black and SSgt Dinger Bell.

The Troop undertook a wide variety of taskings including demolition of two OBUA houses, fencing and border wiring tasks as well as numerous small tasking namely using "Mark 1 paint brush".

This was the first time Gib had seen Pioneers since 1985 when a Pioneer died whilst working in the tunnels. As a mark of respect to the fallen Pioneer, Private Peacock, OC 522 Squadron Major Hing, SSgt Flanagan, SSgt Bell and 2Lt Black laid a wreath at the accident site, Pte Matairatu said a prayer and Pte Ewart gave a reading/speech.

Whilst the two old vets were on a tunnel visit, the guide, WO2 Pete Jackson Gibraltar Regiment, noticed the Pioneer badges and commented on how hard this troop had worked during their visit and hoped they would return soon. This impressed the other veterans who were mainly from the Dorset Regiment and The Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

On their last night in Gibraltar 2Lt Black and SSgt Bell visited The Retreat where all the veterans were staying, this was the Sergeants Mess at Lathbury Barracks and had recently been modernised. Here there was a re-enactment of the Ceremony of the Keys followed by a Barbeque.

NORMANDY VISITS 60th Anniversary



Many Association members visited Normandy during the 60th Anniversary of this historic day. A report on Henry Marzell's return is on page 14. On behalf of the Corps Captain Mat East laid a wreath.

Other members took part in parades throughout the country. In Northampton the Branch Standard was carried by Allan Fawcett where amongst the 2,000 on Parade there were 8 Pioneers.

REUNION WEEKEND Bicester, 9/10 July 2004

The Reunion Weekend was, once again, held in conjunction with 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC Open Day and proved to be a complete success. The first event of the weekend was a gathering in the Corporals' Mess closely followed by a reception in the Sergeants' Mess thanks to the RSM, WO1 Billy Dilkes. With more old comrades attending this year than in previous years (some 120 over the weekend) both messes were nearly full and the Sergeants Mess had to use the overflow facilities (the lawn!). It is always nice to see the regular attenders from the Old Comrades but it is pleasing to note that there were some attending their first reunion since leaving the Army over 20 years ago. They have since reported how much they enjoyed the weekend and how they are looking forward to the next one.

Thankfully the weather stayed fair on the Saturday morning for the Drumhead Service. The Old Comrades as they were marched on parade were headed by the Northampton Branch standard carried by Mr Dusty Bryant, we will either have to issue him with high-heeled shoes or reduce the height of the standard!

The 56th Annual General Meeting of the Association was held in the Sergeants Mess and 77 members attended. This was followed by the Pioneer Open Day on the sports field. The side shows and the Arena Display were greatly enjoyed. Even the weather could not dampen spirits although shelter in the various tents, especially the beer tent, had to be sought on 2 occasions.

The evening function once again was a sell out although the outside function had to be curtailed early because of the weather. The outside activities proved to be popular especially the dodgems where a 'simulated road-rage' incident was held with Ex WO2 Dougie Durrant leading the way.

Our thanks to the CO of 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Lt Col PA Jones, for hosting and providing such a memorable weekend. Also special thanks to WO2 Stu Day and SSgt Dinger Bell for all their hard work and who managed to keep the Old 'Uns under control.



DID YOU SERVE IN GIBRALTAR ? In the past 300 years !?

Have you ever served in Gibraltar? If so you could be eligible for a visit, funded by the Gibraltar Government during the Tercentenary celebrations this year. Visits are being arranged in September, October and November. To be eligible you must have served in Gibraltar at any time in the past 300 years (!?), and can be of any age.

If you have need of a carer the organisation will also fund that person. Contact Mr N Brown, HQ RPC Association (0207 834 0415) if you wish to go.





VETERANS REUNITED Lottery Fund Scheme Setup

To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the end of WW2 a scheme called Veterans Reunited has been set up as part of the National Lottery Fund, this falls into 3 categories:

Their Past - Your Future is an educational project, including a website (www.d-dayandbeyond.org) and a series of exhibitions and publications. This is to encourage schools and museums to mount projects on the war period. Enabling veterans and young people to mark the courage and sacrifice of Britains' wartime generation.

Home Front Recall will provide small grants to support UK based activities relating to veterans and those who contributed to the war effort at home.

Heroes Return is a scheme to help UK veterans visit locations overseas to commemorate the battles they fought and the comrades they lost 60 years ago. The programme runs until 31 December 2005 but applications have to be made by 31 March 2005 (This scheme is also open to widows of veterans of WW2, whether they receive a war widow's pension or not). The veteran's spouse/partner can also travel together with a carer if required (one person). The geographical location will determine the value of the grant. Claims can be applied for retrospectively, i.e. 1 January 2004 (the start date of the scheme). To apply just ring 0800 169 2277 and ask for a "Heroes Return" pack.

PENSIONERS TAX CREDIT You may be able to claim

If you are aged 65 or over you may be able to claim Pensioners Savings Credit. Add together your basic weekly pension and any other regular weekly income plus weekly interest of savings over £6,000.

If your weekly income as a single person is more than £103 but less than £140 you may receive savings credit. Contact your local council to see if they hold a Pensioners Tax Credit Surgery where you can get advice, if you are housebound an advisor will visit you at home. Or telephone the Pension Credit Helpline 0800 028111.



PROBE INTO GULF WAR RELATED ILLNESSES Inquiry to be held at last

It is pleasing that an inquiry into Gulf War-related illnesses is to be held at last. More than 5,000 British troops have reportedly suffered ill health since service in the first Gulf War.

The inquiry will be headed by Lord Lloyd of Berwick, a former Lord Justice of Appeal, Lord Morris of Manchester, parliamentary advisor to the British Legion announced the inquiry and said the British Legion had repeatedly called for an inquiry into the illnesses. A spokesman for the Legion said, "It is a matter of great disappointment that an inquiry could not have happened sooner, so that any issues identified could be used to improve the procedures for the preparation of troops for current operations."

Gulf veterans who wish to submit evidence can visit www.lloyd-gwii.com or call 0207 400 5117 for more information.



UNCLAIMED BENEFITS FOR PENSIONERS 2.5 billion lying unclaimed !

It has been reported that there is up to £2.5 billion lying unclaimed as pensioners are not claiming what they are entitled to. The benefits concerned are: Pension Credit, for those who received MIG (Minimum Income Guarantee), they should have automatically been transferred to the Pension Credit. To make a claim or to make an enquiry, the Pension Credit helpline can be contacted on 0800 99 1234.



Council Tax Benefit/Housing Benefit, for those who receive Pension Credit, pay rent and council tax, they will normally be entitled to both Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. If they do not receive Pension Credit and do not have more than £16,000 in savings, they may still receive some Housing and/or Council Tax Benefit. Contact the Pension Credit helpline or the local authority for more advice.

Attendance Allowance - A non-taxable benefit paid to people 65 or over, living at home, who need help looking after themselves. This is paid at two different rates and is not affected by savings or income. To claim contact the local Social Security office and ask for leaflet DS702 and claim pack AA1.

Disability Living Allowance, this is not related to income or savings and is for people who become disabled and claim before the age of 65. DLA has two parts, Mobility Allowance and Care Allowance. The former is for those who cannot walk or have difficulty in walking. The latter is for those needing help with personal care. To claim contact the local Social Security office and ask for leaflet DS704 and claim form DLA1.



STAY WARM FROM POWERGEN Unique service for the over 60's

A unique electricity and gas service is being offered to the over-60's, which gives peace of mind by making the worry about fuel bills a thing of the past. There are no bills and you can use all the electricity and gas you need. If there is one member of the household aged 60 or over you could be eligible for Staywarm.

The price of Staywarm is guaranteed for 12 months, from the time of sign up; you make fixed payments based on the number of bedrooms (maximum 3) and people living in your home (no more than 4); payments are made weekly, fortnightly or monthly by direct debit or by cash or cheque and at the end of the 12 month period an annual review is carried out and you will be notified of any price changes.

Anyone who would like a presentation for their group can use the services of the Referral Advisors, just call 0800 1694 694 for more information or to request a presentation.



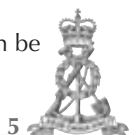
THE R.L.C. MUSEUM Future events at the Museum

Operation Market Garden - 30 September 2004, a lecture by Brigadier Frank Steer MBE covering many aspects of Op Market Garden, September 1944. Tickets £6 each.

Review of the Crimean War 1854-56 - 1 December 2004, a lecture by David Williams to commemorate the 150th Anniversary. Tickets £6 each.

Title to be Confirmed - 3 March 2005, an evening lecture by Richard Holmes. Tickets £6 each.

Tickets to be booked in advance and bookings can be made by phoning 01252 833371 or emailing rlcmuseum@btconnect.com



COMMEMORATION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II
 2 - 10 July 2005 (tickets available are for WW2 Veterans only)

A MOD-sponsored event will be held on Sunday 10 July 2005 to commemorate the end of World War 2. There will be a religious commemorative Service in Westminster Abbey and a Parade on Horse Guards. Attendance to all events will be by invitation only, this Association has been allocated the following tickets:

Service in Westminster Abbey	2
Horse Guards Parade Event	6

These tickets are for World War 2 Veterans only. Individuals may only be nominated for one of these events.

Each ticket permits entry, free of charge, to the nominee and one guest, who may be a spouse or other individual, including a relation or a fellow veteran who has not been allocated a ticket.

However, if the nominated veteran requires a carer, then the guest must be able to act as such.

If you wish to apply for one of the vacancies please contact HQ RPC Association by no later than 21 Oct 04, if more than the allocated numbers apply a draw will then be held.

Other events/displays are also to be held and it is intended to list full details in the Feb 05 Newsletter when they are known, the following is a list of those events already notified:

• **WW2 Museum Exhibition**

It is the MODs' intention to have a number of interesting WW2 Museum exhibitions available to the Veterans and the general public in St Jame's Park, London during the week preceding the 10th July.

• **Veterans Awareness Week**

The MOD hope to raise the public awareness of the service to the Nation of Veterans of all three Armed Services. The first week, or what is hoped will be an ongoing event, will be held from 4th to 9th July 2005 prior to the WW2 commemorations on 10th July. It is planned to encourage a number of events nation-wide during this period.

• **VE Day Concert**

To be held at Guildford on 6th May 05 and organised by ABF, SSAFA and TRBL.

• **Beating Retreat and ABF Reception**

To be held at Horseguards and Wellington Barracks, London on 1st and 2nd Jun 05.

• **International Festival of the Sea**

To be held in Portsmouth from 24th to 27th Jun 05.

• **International Fleet Review in the Solent**

To be held on 29th Jun 05 involving a multinational gathering of warships and some 20 major merchant vessels e.g. new Queen Mary 2, P&O liner, some 80 Tall ships and thousands of minor vessels will take part.

• **Aldershot Tattoo**

There is an intention to hold a Tattoo at Aldershot on August Bank Holiday weekend 2005. There will be a number of popular items including the Field Gun Race.



THE ARMED FORCES MEMORIAL PROJECT

Remembering those who have given their lives since WW2

The Armed Forces Memorial is a new national memorial to the men and women of the UK Armed Forces, who have been killed on duty or as a result of terrorist action since the end of the Second World War, it will be located at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire.



The Memorial will not be a tradition 'war memorial' that only remembers those who have been killed on operations but also those who died during training and on exercise and will include those who are killed in the years to come. Importantly, the Memorial will also help to raise the awareness of the invaluable contribution made by the UK Armed Forces throughout the world.

The Arboretum was chosen because of its central location within the UK and its close association with the Services. There is a Chapel and a Visitor Centre and plenty of scope to develop education and research facilities.

HRH The Prince of Wales is the Patron of the Fundraising appeal and is taking an active interest in the design of the memorial through The Prince's Foundation. There are two other elements of the Armed Forces Memorial Project that will be sited in London. A memorial plaque will be placed in Westminster Abbey and Rolls of Honour, similar to those for the Royal Air Force held in the Church of St Clement Danes, will be kept in the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields for the Royal Navy and in the Chapel of the Royal Hospital Chelsea for the Army. These will list the names of all those who have died in Service since the end of the Second World War regardless of the cause of death.

VACANCY

Appointment of Regimental Editor - RHQ RLC

The appointment of Regimental Editor at RHQ RLC, Deepcut, is a C2(MSF) post responsible for publishing the 6 annual Journals of The RLC, the annual RLC Review, plus other publications. The Editor and his staff report on Corps events and activities and are also responsible for managing The RLC Logistic Employment Network and its small Military staff.

Terms are those for a C2, however in some circumstances candidates may be offered a higher starting salary. Appointments with RHQ RLC are eligible for RRA (£2,000 per annum).

For details of the appointment contact RLC Regimental Secretary on 01252 833593. Applications should be made online at www.mod.uk or call Leighsa on 0141 224 2584.

NEWS FROM 170 PIONEER SQUADRON

(Deans Troop)



"We have had a great year out here, in particular a trip to Italy (and chuffed to bits we beat Taff Teague to J Tancred's grave). I managed to get all my Troop on the Tour and we visited Monte Cassino where we tried to find where he fell on Monastery Hill but as you know nobody is quite sure of the exact location.

We brought back some crayon rubbings of his gravestone and we have passed one onto 23 Regiment. We laid a brass plate from the Troop and a few moving words were spoken, even the youngest of the Troop were inspired by the visit."

STORIES FROM THE MESS

Help needed for a new book

Etiquette expert Heather Pickering is appealing for help with a new book. Currently in the early stages of researching material on the protocol of the Officers' Mess in historic and modern times, the Northampton businesswoman is looking for contributions.

"Following an advertisement in the Daily Telegraph I had had a few calls with rather nice little anecdotes, but am looking for more. The book is intended to be a light-hearted read, story-telling rather than profound social observations, with a wealth of anecdotes."

Heather is keen to see any written material which might have been handed out to officers on joining a regiment, such as lists of rules and regulations or handbooks of acceptable behaviour and talk to officers, both serving and retired, to record their memories, stories and observations.

"Officers who remember their Regimental Mess during the war are few and far between," she said. "I want to make contact with as many as possible as a chapter on wartime conduct is absolutely essential."

Anyone who can help can call Northampton (01604) 729297 or 07774 7923383 or email hdp@protocol-plus.co.uk



COMPETITION TIME

Old Pioneer Cap Badge



WO2 Cliff Jenkins (SSM 518 Sqn) thinks he is the last soldier to be issued with the old type cap badge before we changed on 13 February 1985.

He was issued his in September 1984, do you know differently?

VETERAN'S BADGE

Announcement

Mr Ivor Caplin, Minister for Veterans, announced on 10 May 2004 that a Veteran's Badge was to be awarded to Veterans. The badge was developed in consultation with veterans' organisations and is intended to reinforce the veterans' identity and to help the wider public recognise veterans.

The badge is to be a lapel badge to wear on civilian attire. Lord Healey of Riddlesden, who saw distinguished service as a Beach Master during the Anzio landings in Italy in 1944 was the first recipient of the badge which is designed to promote a veteran's identity amongst the ex-service community and to raise the public's awareness of veteran's issues.

In the first instance the badge is to be awarded to all veterans of the first and second world wars. If there is sufficient demand, consideration may be given to extending eligibility to veterans of more recent campaigns.

Applications can be made on 0800 1692277.





MINUTES OF THE 56TH A.G.M. OF THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION

held in the WOs and Sgts Mess, Bicester on Saturday 10th July 2004

Chairman : Brig C B Telfer CBE
Treasurer : Maj ER Elliott
Secretary : Mr N Brown
Members Present : 77

After welcoming members present and receiving apologies from Brig HJ Hickman, Lt Col A Barnes, Capt M East and Mr C Mullaney the Chairman opened the meeting at 1200 hours.

ITEM 1 - MINUTES OF 55TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Proposed By : Mr L Rowley
 Seconded By : Mr GW Goode

1. That the minutes of the 55th Annual General Meeting be agreed. CARRIED
2. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2 - REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

3. Lt Col PA Jones OBE, CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, gave the following report:
4. The last year has been a relatively stable period for the Regiment, during which we have successfully recuperated from last year's Regimental deployment and are once again ready for the challenges that lie ahead. The success of the Op TELIC deployment were selected in the Operational Honours and Awards list, which saw individuals in the Regiment awarded an OBE and 2 x QCVS. Our commitment to Op TELIC extended through the end of 2003 and into 2004, with single troops deploying on 2 occasions since we were redeployed in May 2003. The return of the troop in March of this year was a milestone in this Regiment's history, being the first time that the Regiment did not have any formed part deployed on operations. That said, we have continued to supply individual reinforcements including those from 168 Pnr Regt RLC, 170 Pnr Sqn RLC and RASU to many operational theatres and this commitment is ongoing.
5. Whereas the year has been somewhat quiet from an operational point of view, the Regiment has had no shortage of foreign travel, having deployed troop level attachments on exercises in Canada and Gibraltar and in support of the recent D-Day Anniversary in Normandy. In the near future we are deploying a troop in support of the Jungle Warfare Training Centre in Belize for a 2-month period.
6. The conversion to the BOWMAN communications system has been the focus for the last 3 months and a steady stream of Pioneers has completed technical training at the BOWMAN Training Centre at St George's Barracks. This training will culminate in a 4-week BOWTAT package in September and on completion the issue of equipment. 23 Pnr Regt will be at the forefront of perhaps the most important and far-reaching procurement project for several years.
7. Just as Project BOWMAN will have an enormous effect on the way that we operate whilst deployed, Project SLAM promises to vastly improve the living conditions of the soldiers in barracks. As you will have noticed on arrival, the layout of St David's Bks has changed significantly. The demolition of the blocks to be replaced under Project SLAM began in February and work has continued apace. We fully expect to bring the first of 7 blocks online in March 2005, with the last of the 390 single, en suite rooms being ready for occupation in September 2005. I am also pleased to report that building of the new LAD and MT facilities at St David's Barracks is running ahead of schedule and is expected to be in use by October of this year. Whereas the use of purpose built facilities such as these will undoubtedly be advantageous to our operational effectiveness, I feel that this is overshadowed by the positive effect that drawing the Regiment into one location will have on unit cohesion. The plan to accommodate the entire Regiment's equipment and manpower within St David's Bks is in place and will be complete by October 2005.



8. Pioneer manning across the Army remains in a healthy state. There are currently 845 Regular Pioneer Soldiers in the British Army, some 30 in excess of the 815 Pioneer posts in the Royal Logistic Corps. Those 30 extra personnel are taken up either at E2 or are Y-Listed. As reported last year, Pioneers are sought after in the training world, we currently have soldiers in both 25 and 5 Training Regiments, ATRs Pirbright and Bassingborne, in the Military Training Wing (Germany) and we are about to man a further post at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate. Whereas the Army's recruiting as a whole has been reduced.
9. The Future Army Structures Study has caused some concern in parts of the Army, I, however, am confident that the Pioneer Regiment in its' current form is secure for the foreseeable future. We will continue to both broaden the skills base of the Pioneer Soldier, whilst striving for an increased depth in the individuals' trade knowledge, to ensure that the Pioneer remains, in the words of the Director Royal Logistic Corps, "the Logistician of choice".

ITEM 3 - COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

10. The Chairman thanked the CO 23 Pnr Regt for his update and also again for hosting the AGM/Reunion Weekend and all the work that this entailed. He believed that Pioneer discipline was in good hands.
11. He then described the future of the Association. Although benevolence was being transferred to the RLC to administer from 1 Oct 04, this was exactly as it was 11 years ago when the Association and Benevolence were single bodied. The planning/managing the long term future of the Association is being prepared in discussions with the RLC prior to convergence. In advance of convergence members of the Association are already represented in the RLC structure being members of RLC Trustees Committee, members of the Benevolent Fund Committee and members of the Heritage Committee.
12. In short the future of the Association will exist as of now but new ideas/suggestions are always welcome. It is envisaged that convergence will take place in the next 2 years.
13. It is expected that our home, 51 St George's Drive, will be entered for sale within the next month, although all options on the building are still open. Administration of the Association will then move to St David's Barracks.
14. The Chairman then placed on record thanks to Mr N Brown for his work during the past year. 64 new members had joined, the sale of draw tickets had increased and a Newsletter commemorating the 60th Anniversary of D Day had been produced.
15. The Chairman also thanked the work of the 39/93 Club and Northampton Branch in organising events during the year.
16. The Chairman closed by commenting that future events, i.e. the Reunion Weekend, Cenotaph Parade, London Lunch, 39/93 Club and Northampton Branch would continue as long as people are interested.

ITEM 4 - HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

17. The Treasurer gave the following report:
 - a. Benevolence. In 2003, 318 applications for assistance were received and 251 grants made at a cost of £81,735 of which the Association contributed £52,698 and the remaining £29,037 was received from the ABF.
 - b. This shows a reduction of approx 10% from 2002 when 375 applications were received and 294 grants made at a cost of £91,230 of which the Association contributed £48,212 and ABF £43,018.
 - c. Financial Results:

Income		Expenditure	
2003	2002	2003	2002
£126,249	£92,725	£119,945	£148,230

- d. Investments. The Association has a portfolio of investments with a market value of £1,598,699 (2002: £1,612,169). This is with the freehold property, 51 St George's Drive, having a value of £1,250,000.
- e. Prize Draws. An overall profit of £6,722 was made on the Derby Draw and Christmas Raffle in 2003. (2002: £2,823).
18. It was unanimously agreed to accept this report.

ITEM 5 - GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

19. The work of Benevolence continues and as had been forecast a decrease of approximately 10% in the number of applications was recorded. Benevolence would transfer to the RLC Trust from 1 October 2004.

20. The Derby Draw 2004 had made a net profit of £3,600, the results are:

				Ticket No
1st	Mr JJ Ciceri	St Albans	£500	59952
2nd	Mr R O'Byrne	Leicester	£250	41047
3rd	Mr B Chamberlaine	Newark	£125	17052
4th	Mr J Beavin	N Zealand	£75	40468
5th	Mr A E Foster	Bicester	£50	24736

21. The response to the new style Newsletter had been good and it was hoped to continue in a similar format in the future. Articles are always welcome from members.

22. It is hoped to establish a register of e-mail addresses as this is a cheap way to inform members of latest news. Most people now have an e-mail address or for the older members their children or even grand-children's address would suffice.

23. A number of members attended the 60th Anniversary of D Day in Normandy, it is hoped that details will appear in the next Newsletter. It is pleasing to announce that Pioneers lowered the Royal Standards during this event. However, on a sad note one member, Mr F Duckworth from Barnsley, died whilst in Normandy, details are shown on page 19.

24. I would also like to thank Maj Elliott for his help and guidance during the past year, he has always been on the end of the telephone when required.

ITEM 6 - ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

25. In accordance with the Constitution one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year. The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected:
Brig CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald, Lt Col JGO Lowe, Maj PJ Fleming and Maj G Crook

26. The meeting also elected Lt Col A Barnes who had been nominated by the Council for the one vacancy.

ITEM 7 - APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Proposed By: Mr F Berry Seconded By: Mr P Ennis

27. That the firm Saunders and Wood be appointed as auditors for the forthcoming year. Carried

ITEM 8 - ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

28. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting has been confirmed as 8/9 July 2005.

ITEM 9 - BRIEFING OF DAY'S ACTIVITIES

29. The RSM, WO1 W Dilkes, then gave a resume of the days activities.

ITEM 10 - ANY OTHER BUSINESS

30. The losing of the Pioneer Flash from April 2005 and the possible replacement of a Brigade Flash showing the Pioneer colours was discussed.

31. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1300 hours.

N BROWN
Secretary

THE R.P.C. ASSOCIATION SHOP

(prices include postage and packing)



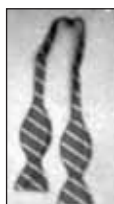
Wall Shields
85-93 badge £20



Bow Tie
adjustable £5.50



Wall Shields
Hand Painted £20



Bow Tie
silk £14



Ties
polyester £6



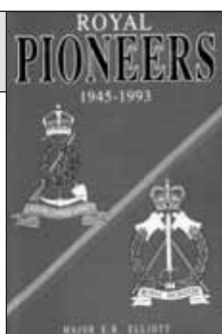
Blazer Badge
silk & wire £7



Blazer Buttons
gilt on brass, engraved,
6 small and 6 large £22



Seasons Greetings Cards
x10 £2.50



SPECIAL OFFER

"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"
by Major Bill Elliott

The Post-War History of the Corps was written by our honorary treasurer, Major Bill Elliott, who generously donated his work and rights entirely for the Association's benefit. It was published by Images, Malvern in May 1993 and is on sale in the book shops at £24. Callers to 51 St George's Drive or the Northampton Branch may now buy this book at the reduced price of £10.

To order the book from here, please send a cheque for £14 which includes postage.



"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"

by Major E H Rhodes Wood

This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of £10 (plus £1 p&p) from HQ RPC Association.



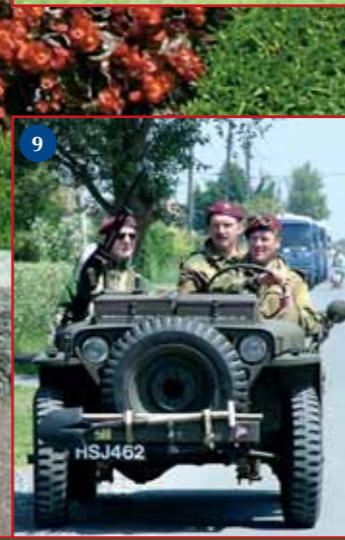
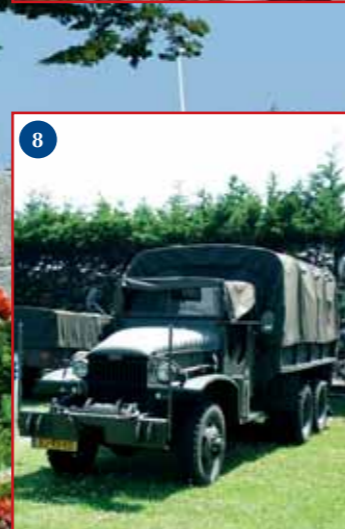


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My father was a Russian émigré and my mother French - the daughter of a French army officer. When the war broke out I was living in Paris with my mother and working in the Paris office of a London firm of Chartered Accountants. As the Germans advanced on Paris and the Channel ports I managed to get out on one of the last boats leaving Le Havre. Later I learnt that within a few days of the Germans occupying Paris the Gestapo had gone to my mother's flat looking for me. In 1941 I joined the Pioneer Corps and after training at the big Pioneer Corps depot at Lees, near Oldham, was eventually posted to 243 Company. After taking part in the invasion of Sicily and service in Italy as part of the 78th (or 48th?) Infantry Division 243 Company was recalled to England to train for amphibious operations in preparation for D-day.

My unit - 243 Company RPC was part of 50th Infantry Division which landed on Gold Beach on 6th June 1944. Our job was to man "Rhinos", motorised rafts, which ferried tanks and guns from the LSTs (Landing Ship Tanks) on to the beaches.

The smaller LCTs

(Landing Craft Tank) could get right up to the beaches but could only carry one tank at a time. The bigger LSTs could carry many more tanks, guns, and other vehicles but could not get close to the beaches due to shallow water and had to anchor well out to sea and transfer their tanks onto our Rhinos.

These were rafts made from naval pontoon equipment, steel caissons, bolted to angle irons, they were 180 feet long by 60 feet wide, powered by two 250 h.p. engines. They had no protective armour from either enemy fire or the sea and, when loaded were only an inch or so above the water. Each LST towed one or more Rhinos which were pulled up to the sides of the LST as they stood to. We clambered down the rope nettings on the sides of the LSTs on to the Rhinos and manoeuvred them to the front of the LSTs. These opened their bows and the tanks rolled on. We then steered the Rhinos on to the beach and let down the ramps at the front so that the tanks etc could roll off on to the beach. Each Rhino had a crew of 8 Pioneers or Royal Engineers. Many Rhinos were disabled by shell fire and mortar fire. The Rhinos were difficult to handle in the rough seas and several drifted on to sectors of the coast still held by the Germans. Despite this 243 Coy managed to land about twenty Rhinos on King and Jig sectors of Gold Beach at the cost of about half a

dozen killed or wounded (Very light casualties compared to some of the other Pioneer Companies).

The Rhino I was on got impaled on the German beach defences. These were pointed metal stakes embedded in the beach with mines attached and connected by barbed wire. I was at the front with another Pioneer ready to lower the ramps when we struck the defences. My mate Bert (I think his other name was Gascoigne but am not sure) was wounded, thrown off the Rhino and got entangled in the barbed wire. Luckily the water was shallow and I managed to disentangle him from the barbed wire and half dragged, half carried him up the beach to a field dressing station that had been set up in a hollow in the dunes to have his wound dressed. I returned to the water's edge to find that my Rhino had been freed from the beach defences and floated back to its LST. Everything was chaotic. Each sector of the beach an officer, called a beach master was responsible for directing the incoming units to their assigned positions, the evacuation of the wounded and coordinating activity. As I was now separated from my unit I reported to the beachmaster on our sector - a Royal Marines officer - and was ordered to assist the sappers in dismantling the beach defences to facilitate the landing of more craft onto the beach, helping to

man handle bogged down vehicles and guns on to dry land, etc.

After all these years my memory is hazy but I do remember that at some time during the day the shelling of the beach stopped. I believe the German battery which was shelling our beach was captured by units of the regiment I subsequently joined - the Green Howards. I also remember that during the day we were machine-gunned by two Messerschmidts. (Years later I saw the film *The Longest Day* which had that incident so I know at least that part of the film is true). During the day I found my section corporal, Harry Forrest, who had also got separated. We spent the first night sleeping on the beach, nearly getting run over by one of our tanks. The next morning we found and rejoined our company who had dug in at Ver-sur-Mer.

Our company remained at Ver-sur-Mer until the break out from the beach head working on Mulberry Harbour, unloading supplies, repairing roads, filling in bomb craters and shell holes on forward air-strips, salvaging repairable equipment from burnt out tanks. (A horrible job as the burnt bodies or part of bodies, of the tank crews were often still inside).

Our company also provided patrols to flush out isolated small German units that had been cut off behind our lines and were hiding in woods. Often, their presence was reported by local French civilians. As I could speak French fluently I was often included on these patrols to interpret as the French locals tried to guide us to the suspected enemy location. These enemy units were composed mainly of Ukrainians and Baltic Russians who had been captured on the Russian front and press-ganged into the German army. Most of them were only too glad to surrender.

When our company occupied Ver-sur-Mer we found that the German unit occupying it had pulled out in such haste that they had left a carcass of a cow just ready for butchering and cooking. One of our company - a lad called Sam Plaskwa - had been a butcher in civvy street so we got him to finish the butchering and cook the meat. The steaks were a very welcome alternative to our emergency rations and provided the company with several meals. The only problem was that Sam was Jewish. I don't remember whether he was orthodox and observed Jewish dietary laws or not, and whether he was bothered that the cow had not been slaughtered in a kosher way. But if he was he did not say so and enjoyed the steaks too!

An unusual task - tracking down and capturing a suspected spy:

Being half-French and speaking the language fluently landed me in an unusual job. One day my company commander, Major H. Ball, told me to report to, what I assume was, the Divisional Intelligence HQ. There I was told they had had reports that a suspected German agent had been left behind and was being sheltered by a French woman. I was put in command of a 3-man patrol and a vehicle with orders to track down and capture the suspected spy and bring him in for questioning. I thought they must be very short-handed if they had to rope in someone from an operational unit, even though a French speaking one, to help them out. I eventually located the house in which the man was suspected to be hidden. I told the driver to stay in the truck at the front of the house and keep the engine running, sent the other man to cover the back; and loading a magazine into my sten gun walked up to the front door and knocked. A woman opened the door and with my gun cocked I entered the front room and confronted a man standing there. It is amazing the strange way one's mind works in moments of stress or danger. My first thought was that if the man was armed and resisted I would have to get a shot in first. My next thought was that it was such a neat, >

"My mate Bert was wounded... and got entangled in the barbed wire... I disentangled him... and carried him up the beach..."

Recollections of Harry Ratner

D★on DAY

by Harry Ratner



tidy and well kept home that it would be a pity for bullet holes and blood all over the walls and floor to disfigure it! Fortunately the man put his hands up. So with my gun pointing at his back I escorted him out to the vehicle - trying very hard not to scratch the highly polished wooden floor with my steel studded army boots! I never found out what happened to him. Was he found innocent and released? Was he shot? There must be some record somewhere in military files.

Into Paris with a Resistance Group

As I have explained I was living in Paris when the Germans invaded and I escaped to England. My mother and grandmother remained in Paris throughout the occupation, and I was anxious about their fate.

Since it became obvious that the British 2nd Army was not making for Paris but the Americans were I requested permission to attach myself to an American unit in the hope I would enter Paris with them and find my family. My company commander, Major Ball, said he could not officially give me leave but he would shut his eyes to my temporary absence from his company provided I undertook to rejoin it as soon as practicable. I therefore made my way to the Americans on our right flank. But on the way I came into contact with a French resistance group that was being incorporated into the Free French army. They were making directly for Paris

where the Resistance had started an uprising without waiting for the regular armies. Our Free French group advanced rapidly through gaps in the now disintegrating and retreating German army and entered Paris across the Pont de Neuilly while the fighting between the Resistance and the German forces was still going on. I believe I must have been the first regular soldier in British uniform to have entered Paris. I was among those who paraded down the Champs Elysee behind General de Gaulle. My mother and grandmother were, naturally, very surprised when they opened their front door to see me standing there in British uniform since they had had no news of me since 1940, except for Red Cross cards and did not know I was in the British army. I learnt that my uncle, my mother's brother, had been involved in a resistance group, led by the well known French racing driver, Robert Benoist and had been arrested by the Germans or the collaborationist French police and spent several months in prison.

After Normandy

After the break out from the Normandy beach head 243 Company advanced with the British 2nd Army into Belgium and spent some time in Antwerp on the docks. At the time Antwerp was under constant bombardment by the German V1s. In early 1945 I was transferred to the infantry and was posted to the Green Howards and spent the rest of the war with them, being demobbed in 1946.

■ Harry Ratner

Harry Marzell's 2nd Longest Day

The Longest Day, as day 1 of the D-Day landings is famously known was in our minds when the three Marzell brothers, Paul, Laurence and Simon took their father, Harry, back to the Normandy beaches for the 60th anniversary.

Harry, despite his 90 years of age, had no problem setting off from Finchley in North London at 0500 hrs for a dash down to Kent to catch the first Eurotunnel train of the day. Harry, true to form, wasn't impressed by this particular mode of transport that took him back to Normandy for the first time since he'd landed 60 years ago.

Landing in the first wave on June 6th with 173 company Pioneer Corps of Juno/Sword beach, Harry initially didn't have too much enthusiasm to go back a second time. As such, our plans to take him back were a last minute affair, spurred on by the recent departure of his wife Marion. They'd been together for [??] years. Consequently, as D-Day no.2 drew near, Harry got more into the spirit of things and, by the time we were winging our way to catch the Eurotunnel, Harry was in top form, cracking inappropriate jokes along with his sons.

Originally, we wanted to take the ferry to emulate Harry's previous journey. We had visions of dropping him a couple of hundred yards offshore and letting him wade in. We'd heard for so long that his landing the first time round was no big deal. We wanted to see if this was still >

the case.

But Eurotunnel proved a good alternative allowing us to leave on the day. Norman Brown at the RPCA had provided us with 173 Coys war diary and we knew that they had been Headquartered at Asnelles-sur-Mer. Harry was certain he landed on Juno Beach. The diary said Sword. Although we know now that elements of 173 did also land on Juno.

With the anniversary celebrations on Juno predominantly Canadian, and without a single lumberjack in our family, we decided to head for Asnelles where we at least knew there was a connection to 173 Coy. That said, we made good time and found that we did indeed have time to take Harry to Juno Beach before the first events were scheduled in Asnelles.

We arrived at Juno in good time for a visit to the beach and a French café for lunch. Despite being very crowded, we had little difficulty driving right into the centre and parking close to the beach. Having Harry on board helped of course. Whenever we bumped into an officious Gendarme we just pointed to him, jangled his medals and shrugged our shoulders in a French accent.

Harry of course couldn't remember exactly where it was he'd landed. Despite always being able to remember whenever we owed him money. He did however recall that running behind and parallel to the beach was a road and fields. Given we were now in the centre

of a town, this was unlikely to be the spot. But, we were on the beach and sand is sand and this was as close as we were going to get him without the unlikely intervention of either a landing craft or a helicopter.

After a few photo calls with Harry at various plaques and on the beach, we had an enjoyable lunch at a pleasant café surrounded by half the Canadian Army. Then set off for Asnelles.

Several events were planned for Asnelles in the afternoon and parking was a little more difficult here. However, after a tour around, which, with the number of vintage and WWII vehicles on display and driving around, was a sight to see, we eventually stopped in a road, running parallel to Sword beach, surrounded by fields. Could Harry have landed on the exact dividing line between Sword and Juno we asked ourselves?

Sword Beach was extremely crowded. The Royal Marines had taken it over for the day and a number of landing craft, landing ships and tracked beach assault vehicles were on display. The predominantly French crowds were very welcoming. The many Veterans who had turned up for both the RM display and the ceremonies outside the Town Hall a little later in the day were in good form.

After a quick scout around, it proved difficult for us to get close to the beach through any of the roads. Walking any distance was out of the question as Harry's knees weren't up to it. So,

without much hesitation, we hoisted him out of the window, shrugged our shoulders in French and drove through some closed roads into a field close to the beach that looked as if it was reserved for vintage WWII vehicles.

Here we found a little track leading up to the dunes and onto the beach. Harry did well getting across the field and dunes despite his knees and, the constant banter from his sons that he'd landed on D-Day and this was not Dunkirk and he was going the wrong way.

We also tried to get him to jump onto and lie flat across a rusty old barbed wire fence that blocked the track so that we could use him as a bridge. But he wasn't having any of that and we eventually made it to the beach and to our surprise, directly opposite from where the RM landing craft were.

It was here, on the beach, surrounded by literally thousands of happy French in bright sunshine and with our impressive Royal Marines in front of us that really seemed to make the trip for Harry come to life. He was very soon being congratulated and welcomed by many of the French less than half his age as if he'd only just landed and they'd just been liberated. Whilst being somewhat bewildered, as Harry always maintains that he was just doing his job. He seemed truly pleased by all the attention.

On the beach he was interviewed and photographed by the Daily Telegraph with some other Veterans. >

"We spent the first night sleeping on the beach, nearly getting run over by one of our tanks..."



And continued to be welcomed and thanked by the French for most of the day. Shortly before the ceremony and parade at the Town Hall, the tide had retreated a little and the landing craft had started to become accessible to the few hardy souls who didn't mind getting wet.

Not wanting to be the only Marzell in the family who could say he'd landed on D-Day, I waded out, up to my chest, fully clothed and boarded the nearest craft. Once aboard, with a little help from a RM, I was able to look out at a view that my Father, and those countless thousands of other brave young men had seen 60 years ago. And for a brief moment, I was able to reflect on what had happened then, to allow me to see this same view 60 years on in peace and safety. I felt very humbled.

It was now time to move onto Asnelles Town hall and join the small parade and ceremony presided by HRH The Duke of Kent. This was a simple affair, organised by the Devonshire's. The crowd outnumbered the 70 Veterans present formed up for the service near the memorial. Harry joined the dozen

or so Veterans from other units.

HRH Duke of Kent arrived and the Devonshire's Padre led the service. As with the rest of the day, we seemed to be in the right place at the right time. Just to our left and well within sight, a number of aircraft approached. This was the fly-past over the main official ceremonies taking place at Arromanche, the next town along. It was an impressive sight as the 2 dozen or so aircraft flew past and distracted the crowd a little from the Padre's oratory.

But unfortunately for the Padre, he then lost the assembled congregations attention completely. Directly overhead flew the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. The emotional engines tones and sight of a Lancaster Bomber, a Spitfire, a Hurricane and a Typhoon probably did more to bring a tear to people's eyes than anything else that day. It certainly did mine.

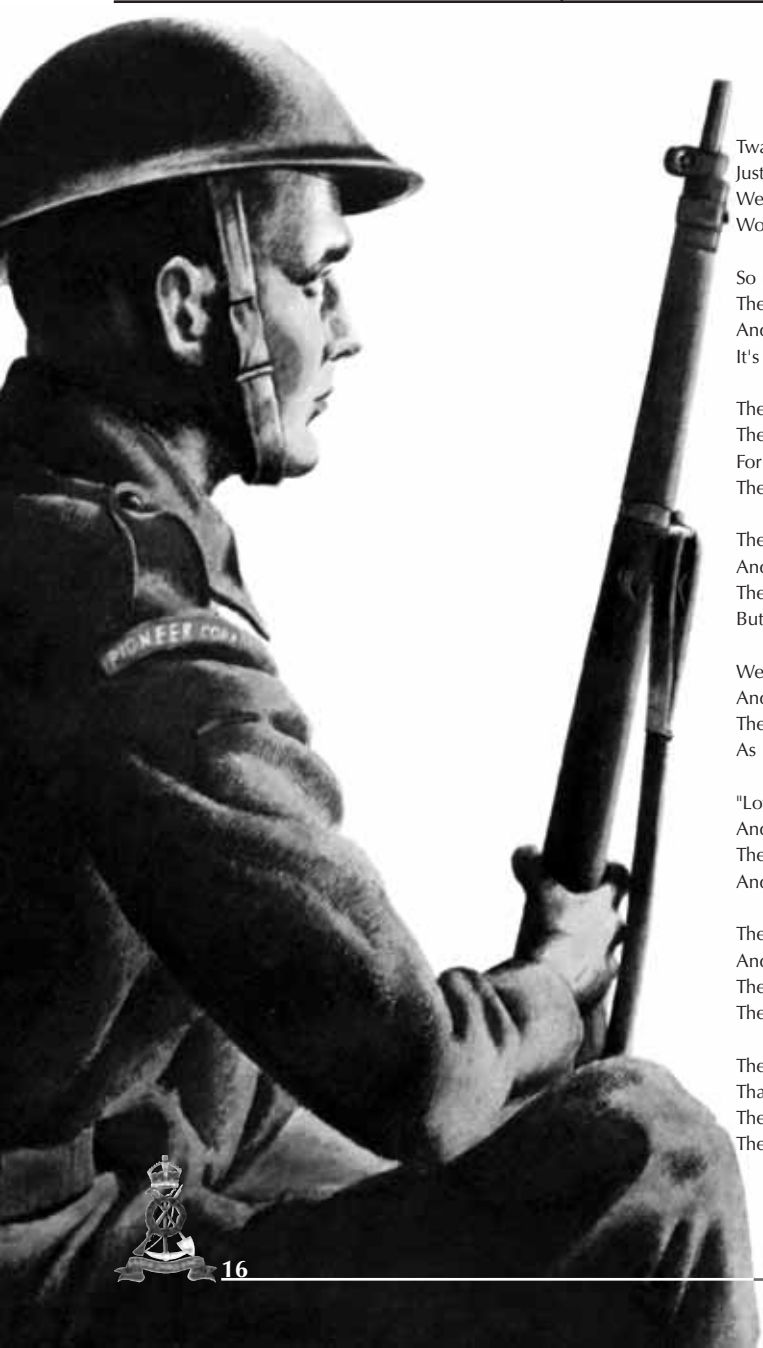
With the wreaths laid, the service over and a short but emotional march past by the Veterans, the day was nearing its end. A drink in the local café, banter with some of the other Veterans who by

now were seriously denting the supplies of local beer and it was time for us to set off on our long journey home.

But not before we made one last trip to a quite cul-de-sac round the corner from the town hall; to Rue De Pioneer, one of the many roads and avenues named by the town of Asnelles to commemorate the Allied landings. Here, we stood Harry, a Pioneer Veteran next to the road named in thanks to him and the many thousands of other Pioneers who both gave and risked their lives to liberate Asnelles and the rest of Europe 60 years ago.

We finally reached London at 2200hrs, tired but very pleased we'd made the effort and seen and experienced a little of what Harry had 60 years ago. We're not sure whether our day had really been as long as Harry's. But the memory of it will stay with us forever; we certainly couldn't even start to do justice to what he and his fellow Veterans had done for us so many years ago. But we're glad we took him back and would gladly do it again.

■ Laurence Marzell



D-DAY POEM

'Twas the evening of the 5th of June
Just as we'd finished tea.
We felt the boat rocking
Wondered what could it be.

So up on deck we make a dash
The boat is on its way.
And then we hear the water splash
It's the beginning of D Day.

The lads they didn't get much sleep
They know it was no peach
For soon across the Channel deep
They'd land on the Normandy beach.

The boys they were all chewing gum
And thinking of the day ahead.
The Officer was dishing out the rum
But there was very little said.

We got the order to stand to
And to our craft we mustered
The time was drawing near we knew
As in our boats we clustered.

"Lower craft" came the order at last
And as she hit the sea
The lads were thinking of the past
And not of things to be.

The waves leapt over six feet high
And most of us were sick
The little craft seemed to hit the sky
Then fall down like a brick.

The ships around were such a sight
That no one's ever seen
Their guns were firing left and right
The Hun must have felt green.

S Trueman, Pontefract
E Taylor, Pollington

Now as our craft got near the shore
The order came get dressed.
The crew began to lower the door
And out we ran to do our best.

Now all around we could see the Hun
His spandaus were spitting lead
We knew the second front had begun
And the Hun he would soon be dead.

The prisoners now were coming in strong
Bus his 88s were still crunching
And the boys they knew it was all wrong
For them to start abunching.

At last our objective we did reach
And were feeling hungry
Although we weren't far from the beach
Now the Hun was getting angry.

The time had come for us to dig
And we did it with good heart
For we knew that things to come were big
Each man would have to play his part.

The end of D Day was drawing near
The job was well in hand
We lost a lot of friends so dear
In trying to gain this land.

Now folks at home remember this
These lads they died for you
And we all know someone will miss
The ones they loved so true.

And now with victory on our side
The Hun we soon will fleece
Lets not forget those lads who've died
To gain the world its peace.

G Ellison, Whitby Bridge
J Evans, Malton



REMEMBERING CASSINO

A TRAIN OF PORTERS



The following article appeared in the May 2004 edition of *The Wartime News*. This is a quarterly publication and is available from *The Wartime Company*, PO Box 1939, Bournemouth, BH1 3XA. If you would like to receive a sample copy telephone 01202 503902. They also have *A Wartime Bookshop* and stock a wide selection of books and videos many of which feature personal experiences of the Normandy Landings. Details are available on the above telephone number or visit their website www.wartimenews.co.uk

In "Life in Cassino 1944" (Feb 2004), Bill Fitness mentioned that he saw "a train of porters entering into a town". I would like to explain what "portering" meant to all ranks of the 175 Company Pioneer Corps.

First of all it meant a change from being used as infantry at the Salerno beach landing when everyone had to fight for five days to prevent the landing becoming another "Dunkirk". It was also a change from probing for mines as we erected the bridge in darkness over the River Garigliano on 17 January 1944. This action enabled the troops of 46 Division to cross and eventually capture Minturno. It was a change to build sangers for the Guards Brigade on 12 February to enable them to advance in darkness and not to have the laborious task of building their cover when they reached the RV position. It was a change from building roads to by-pass dangerous crossroads which were usually under enemy fire. In between all these tasks, portering was just another job to the Pioneers as their motto is "Labour omnia vincit", but our unofficial motto is "We do the difficult tasks immediately. The impossible tasks take a little longer".

Picture then several mountain peaks with long rugged ledges that often led to nowhere except a steep drop into the valley far below. Snow covered mountains and, below, the infantry of opposing forces fighting to hold on to any gained high ground that will give an advantage. Sited mortar and machine guns lines covering every known track that we must climb, and the endless torrential rain making visibility poor and our existence wretched. But we knew there were small groups of men isolated and exposed to the elements who were depending on their support troops, the Pioneers, for food, water, ammunition and other necessities.

To help the Pioneers, the RASC brought supplies to the nearest road in the foothills. Mules led by a specially trained Pioneer force took over climbing the narrow, winding trails until the tracks ceased to exist. Then our Company took over carrying the 50lbs loads on our backs, securely fastened to avoid us overbalancing into the valley below. We had also given up our rifles so that our hands would be free for climbing. We moved steadily and almost breathlessly, lest we made our presence known to an enemy patrol. Each time a loose rock was dislodged and fell noisily to the valley below, we froze in our tracks as the Germans or our own forces fired an inquisitive flare into the sky illuminating the mountainside. We clung there until word was passed back that we could proceed and made our way to the RV point which our leading Corporal, Arthur Sullivan, had correctly located. We handed over to the infantry the required and very welcome logistics. With no time to rest on our descent, we acted as stretcher bearers bringing down from the mountain ledges the soldiers who were too badly wounded to make

their own way. Usually four men would handle a stretcher case, but it was often only two, due to the narrowness of the track, slipping and stumbling over the rocks while the wounded soldier would be groaning. On a few occasions it would be only one man in the wind, rain and darkness who would have to carry his burden across his shoulders because a stretcher could not be used. In this way we carried on until all our wounded men were safe in the hands of the RAMC.

Capt H Tristram, a forward observation officer in the 46th Division, recorded in his records, "The Pioneers provided bearers for positions well forward in the Cassino Monastery Hill area. During the fiercest battles, they worked for 72 hours without sleep or rest until towards the end they appeared to walk and work like robots as their limbs seemed to be moving from an unbreakable spirit of duty and discipline and the maxim of not wanting to let the other men down. This was camaraderie at the highest point".

It was also recorded that Private J Tancred (187 Company) carried a wounded officer for 16 hours through the bitterly cold, continuous rain along treacherous tracks. This he did through the darkness of one night and part of next day until he stumbled into an ADS, then collapsed and died. The cause of his death was given as "died of natural causes - exhaustion". So we just did our tasks as support troops whenever called upon to carry out a mission.

No, we were not just "a train of porters entering a town" but members of an elite and trained force for any emergency - the Pioneer Corps.

■ George D Pringle, Bootle



SCOTTISH WARTIME SECRET

Huge ports built by the army at Gare Loch and Loch Ryan
(The Scotsman 1945)



A closely kept war secret which is fully revealed today was the building between 1940 and 1942 of two important ports on the West Coast of Scotland for military traffic. They are of very great engineering interest, as many varying ways of construction most difficult in those time were employed, and they were built with entirely military labour.

It became essential after the fall of France and the Low Countries in June 1940, and the subsequent virtual closing of the ports on the East and South Coasts of England to large ocean going ships, that additional deep water berths should be built for military traffic. There was also a great probability that certain of the remaining ports might be damaged by enemy action.

The facilities in the ports on the West Coast could not possibly have coped with that part of the Transatlantic Traffic which had to be diverted from the South and East Coasts. Deep-water berths with all facilities to meet military requirements were urgently needed.

By selecting sites in the Scottish Lochs, it was believed that berths could be formed with deep water and without extensive dredging in areas well away from habitation. Two sites were selected - one in Gare Loch off the Clyde, and the other at Cairnryan, Loch Ryan, Wigtownshire. Work commenced towards the end of 1940.

NO 'LONG LIFE' CONSIDERATIONS

Construction proceeded rapidly, in view of the fact that the ports were being built for war service only, features normally adopted for long life were excluded.

Responsibility for the work was held by the Directorate of Transportation at the War Office, and the actual work was under the direction of Brigadier Sir Bruce G White, KBE, Director of Ports and Inland Transport, who had an expert staff responsible for the design of the works. In certain aspects of the work, assistance was given and design prepared by a panel of three civilian consulting engineers.

The military labour involved was provided by the Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Corps, sometimes these men, amounting to roughly 5,000, worked under the most adverse weather conditions for very long periods, Camps were built, and all the necessary amenities had to be provided very quickly where none had previously existed. Large quantities of material had to be obtained, and some of these were quarried locally.

In both cases railways between three and six miles long were constructed, and in all 50 miles of railway track were laid in connections and sidings and along the berths.

Deep water berths, six of 500 feet length at No 1 Military Port, Gare Loch, and five of 500 feet at No 2 Military Port, Cairnryan, provided berths with 33 feet of water at low tide. The berths are now fully equipped with cranes. Twenty of these now at No 1 Military Port were transferred by military personnel from the quays at Southampton to Gare Loch. Each Port covers more than 1½ mile of water front.

SEVERAL BATTLESHIPS BERTHED

The first ship berthed at No Port in July 1942. From time to time the Royal Navy have made use of the ports. Several battleships have been berthed, and HMS Malaya was fitted out with new guns at No 1 Port, necessitating a lift of 90 tons by a giant floating crane.



It was from Gare Loch that the Prime Minister commenced his voyage on the Queen Mary to attend one of his historical conferences, and the King and Queen sailed from the port in Loch Ryan to visit Northern Ireland.

Considerable tonnages of U.S. military stores, including aeroplane and glider parts, technical equipment and vehicles were received, and the rate of handling and assembling vehicles for onward dispatch to the Continent constituted a world record.

Apart from the great value which these ports have been, and the great part which they can play in clearing up the aftermath of military operations and the return of Allied troops, the building of them proved to be of the greatest value in connection with the raising and training of the large force of port construction and repair, port operating

and inland transport troops which was required for operations overseas.

During the construction and operation all classes of work - including difficult underwater work - were experienced. Without such opportunity for training this very large and specialised force, it is doubtful whether the extremely successful work performed by the Royal Engineer ports units in clearing and repairing damage overseas could have been carried out.

Certain parts of the force were also employed in connection with the building of 'Mulberry harbours' which made our invasion of the Continent possible.

BRITISH SOLDIERS LIFE IN SOVIET ZONE

The Association recently found the following newspaper cutting which was published in December 1949

Experiences Since 1947, Berlin, Dec 2
Private Noel Moncaster, of the Royal Pioneer Corps, who arrived in Berlin on Tuesday after having been missing from his unit since May 1947, to-day described his experiences in the Soviet zone of Germany.

Private Moncaster, a National Service soldier, said that he went by train from Lunenburg, near Hanover, in the British zone, where his unit was stationed to Brandenburg, in the Soviet zone. He was with a German woman, and had fallen asleep on the journey and did not know the destination. He attended a party at Brandenburg, and on his third day there was arrested by Soviet military policemen and taken to a military prison at Magdeburg.

At first, said Private Moncaster, he was told that he would be handed back soon to the British military authorities, but about six months later, having in the interval been kept on "starvation diet", he was informed that he had been sentenced to from "one to three years' imprisonment." He had no trial, but the Russians mentioned, "different things", alleging that he was a spy.

Private Moncaster stated that after about 18 months' solitary confinement he was transferred to another military prison in Halle, where he applied to the Russians for permission to work in the Soviet zone. This, he said, was granted on October 1 of this year, and he was given a German identity card with a German name on it, and was taken to the former I.G. Farben works at Leuna, where he worked for about a month as a joiner for 55 marks a week. He then got work on a water-boring plant at Merseburg, near by. During all this time he lived privately, and was free to move about as he wished, although he had to report to the Russian commandant once in three weeks.



OBITUARIES

It is with sadness and regret that we have to report the following deaths

Mr AC Teague	11 Aug 03	Paignton (Ex SSgt CQMS)	Mr JTE Skidmore (Aged 89)	10 Oct 03	Wakefield
Mr P Hanton (Aged 85)	3 Jan 04	Shepton Mallet (Ex Sgt 3 Coy - Normandy Veteran)	Mr MJ Murray (aged 43)	2 Jun 04	Kidderminster (Ex Cpl)
Mr WGH Bevan	25 Nov 03	Trelloch, Monmouthshire	Mr S Duckworth (Aged 84)	6 Jun 04	Normandy (Ex 320 Coy - Normandy Veteran)
Capt (Retd) RCH Pearce	20 Sep 03		Mr I Williamson	Jan 04	Erskine Hospital
Mr WR Maitland	10 Dec 03	Ramsgate	Mr WE Martin (Aged 97)	2 Apr 04	Blantyre
Mr AE Scollins (Aged 76)	22 Mar 04	Doncaster	Lt (Retd) GJ Clark	30 Nov 03	Bromley (Ex 60 Coy - Normandy Veteran)
Mr WH Sumner	11 Dec 03		Mr WH Spreckling	15 Feb 04	New Milton, Hants (Aged 79)
Mr A Simonds	3 Apr 04	Telford (Ex WO1 (RSM) 23 Group RPC)	Mr SH Lauchlin (Aged 70)	19 Jan 04	Barnsley
Mr EC Bates	5 Apr 04	Romford (Ex SSgt Chief Clerk)	Mr LWJ Ackland	14 Mar 03	Late SSgt (CQMS)
Mr J Aldridge	23 Mar 04	Bridgend	Lt Col (Retd) IA Milne	4 Jul 04	Collingbourne Ducis (Aged 55)
Maj (Retd) RJ Kedda (Aged 72)	20 Apr 04	Blisworth (Ex AO CVHQ RPC)	Mr JE Parsons (Aged 73)	26 May 04	Wallasey
Mr W Morris (Aged 75)	3 Dec 03	Runcorn	Mr N R Raper (Aged 71)	22 Jul 04	Hartlepool
Mr D Levy (Aged 68)	3 Mar 04	Bridge of Weir			
Mr HC Blandford (Aged 90)	10 May 04	Slough			
Mr VC Noon (Aged 78)	14 Mar 04	Bridgend			
Mr R F Sandars (Aged 83)	13 May 04	Hedon in Hull			

OBITUARY - Mr Sammy Duckworth (Aged 84)

Normandy veteran Sammy Duckworth was determined to return to the D-Day beaches one last time - even though he fell critically-ill on the journey to France. Sammy started feeling unwell on the cross-channel ferry but declined an offer from the Captain to return to England so he could get medical treatment.

Instead he defiantly told his comrades, "I'm going to France". But less than an hour after making an emotional return to Normandy for the first time in 60 years, he collapsed and died in his hotel room in the city of Rouen.

Rev Albert Jackson, chaplain of the Churchfield branch of the Royal British Legion, travelled with Sammy and other veterans. He said, "There was no way he was going to let the Captain turn that ferry around - he was determined to get to France. This revealed Sammy's character and it was an act which

OBITUARY - Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Ian Alexander Milne (4 July 2004)

Lt Col Ian Milne died whilst playing cricket on Sunday 4 July 2004. He joined the RPC in 1972 after completing a 5 years Short Service Commission in the Royal Marines, during which time he completed 2 tours in Northern Ireland and represented the Marines in Rugby, Squash and Badminton.

His first posting was to 522 Coy RPC at Kineton, here he trained the unit boxing team who achieved the runner-up position in the Army UK Boxing Finals. He then moved to 206 Coy RPC at Stratford Upon Avon and came first in the 200m in the Group Athletics Meeting. He then moved to 518 Coy RPC at Bicester where he took the Company on pre PGFMaggiligan Training. Here he represented the Company and COD Bicester at cricket being the most successful batsman and bowler for 2 successive years.

A move to Hildesheim for his first appointment in the Civil Labour world followed and here he represented 5 Hy Regt RA at Rugby. On promotion to Major he was posted to Bielefeld where he was appointed Captain of the 1 (BR) Corps Rugby Team and also represented BAOR.

An academic life at Strathclyde University followed before returning to HQ BAOR where he passed his BFT in under 9 minutes before even sitting at his desk. A posting to 8 Regt RCT

totally embodied the Normandy spirit. I was stunned by what happened as he had been in tremendous spirit when we left Barnsley."

Sammy was a member of 320 Company RPC which was involved in the second wave of landings on Gold beach on 6 June 1944.

At his funeral service held on 28 June 2004 a poignant last poem found amongst his belongings was read out by a fellow D-Day Veteran, Harry Chappel, of the Royal Army Service Corps. The prophetic last lines read:

**"There's still an old veteran, but numbers are smaller
As slowly but surely they answer the caller.
Their position secured by God the Installer
When the last one is fallen and peacefully laid
No wearing of chevrons, no sashes or braid
Just marching as one on the final parade."**

as OC 144 Coy followed before a return to Bicester as 2IC 23 Group RPC. Participation in the 1st Gulf War as SO2 (P&L) HQ BFME Riyadh followed. In 1992 he was promoted Lt Col and CO HQ 23 Group RPC and was fundamental in arranging the amalgamation of the Group into the RLC as 23 Pioneer Regiment. This involved lengthy and details submissions to the Establishment Committee, Army Vehicle Liability Committee and the Army Communications Committee.

On leaving the Army he was instrumental in the setting up of the revised Courts Martial procedures before moving to Drummond Barracks, Ludgershall as IT Manager MSA. He had been a trustee of the RPC Association since 1989 and always took a keen interest in the work of the Association especially the Benevolent aspect.

At his funeral service tributes were made by Miss Charley Hampshire on behalf of her mother, Ian's wife, Lynne, Lt Col John Starling on behalf of the RPC Association, Judge Advocate Michael Hunter and a representative of Urchfont Cricket Club.

He was a man of many qualities and a great all round sportsman on and off the field. He was a very modest man of impeccable character; he had a very ready wit and had a fund of humorous stories. His death is a great loss to all who knew him both in the Army and in the world of sport. We extend our deepest sympathy to his widow Lynne and to his first wife Sukie and to Gregor and Holly.





ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION REUNION

10th JULY 2004

