

# THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION



ROYAL PIONEER CORPS  
ASSOCIATION  
AND  
BENEVOLENT FUND

## NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2005



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# FUTURE & PAST EVENTS

## FIFTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PAST AND PRESENT OFFICERS' DINNER

23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, St David's Barracks, Craven Hill, Bicester Friday 14 October 2005

Serving and ex-serving officers are invited to attend the 59th Past and Present Officers' Dinner at 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC on Friday 14 October 2005, the principal guest will be the Director, The Royal Logistic Corps.

Dress: black tie, miniature medals and neck decorations.  
Timings: 7.00 for 8.00 to allow for a meeting.

Members are asked to send their cheques for £20 to 51 St George's Drive. Members of 23 Regiment should book through their PMC. This year we plan to accommodate retired members locally in Barracks.

## WOs & SNCO's PIONEER REUNION CLUB

Saturday 15 October 2005

The Warrant Officers' and Senior NCOs' Pioneer Reunion Club are to hold a Ladies Dinner on Saturday 15 October 2005. 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 10 November 2005

The Field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 10 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 12 November 2005.

## CENOTAPH PARADE AND SERVICE

Whitehall, Sunday 13 November 2005

Join us and 14,000 other veterans at Whitehall for the Cenotaph Parade and Service on Sunday 13 November 2005. Please write to HQ RPC Association with your details, including telephone number, if held, to arrive before 21 October 2005, so that we can apply for your tickets. A letter giving details will be written to all.

## PIONEER DAY

1 April 2005

It was decided to mark the withdrawal of the Pioneer Flash by holding a 'Pioneer Day' on 1 April 2005. The event was well attended with various 'celebrities' reading articles on the Corps history over the years. Each reading was followed by a toast, the cocktails used in the toasts were, of course, in Pioneer colours 'red and green'. It can be honestly stated that they tasted really awful!



Picture:  
Mixing cocktails  
for the toasts

## VE/VJ CELEBRATION LUNCH

Saturday 28 May 2005

The RPC Association held a lunch in the WO's & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Day. It was pleasing to see members and families, special mention must be made to the World War 2 Veterans who had travelled long distances. Mr P McMullen and his family had travelled from Belfast, although he served with 294 Company during the WW2 he has only recently heard about, and joined, the Association. He is the 20th new member this year.

During the lunch our historian, Lt Col John Starling RLC, gave a short speech about the work of the Corps during the War. However, instead of talking about the usual work of the Companies he mentioned some of the more unusual work of the Corps at the time, namely: Fire Fighting, Salvage, Smoke and Italian Companies and the PCLUs which at the end of the War had a civilian work force of some 1,743,000 workers. Also on display were a collection of weapons and radio equipment for members to view.

## 60th ANNIVERSARY OF VE/VJ DAYS

Veterans Lunch

Members of the Association represented the Corps on numerous events throughout the country to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Days. The Association standard was carried at the large parade on Horse Guards on Sunday 10 July 2005 by Mr Alan Fawcett from Northampton. Maj Bill Elliott, together with his carer (Mr Norman Brown) attended a Veterans Lunch at Buckingham Palace also on 10th July, they were amazed to find that Baroness Thatcher was seated at their table.



Bill joined the army in 1940 by lying about his age and served with the South Staffordshire's, including landing in Normandy on D Day, until compulsory transfer into the Gordon Highlanders. In 1954 he transferred to the Royal Pioneer Corps where he remained until 1977. He then became Regimental Secretary until his retirement. On retiring he wrote the Post War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps. Since 1991 he has been Treasurer of the RPC Association.

## REUNION WEEKEND

Bicester 8/9 July 2005

The Reunion Weekend was an outstanding success with a record numbers of attendees. It was pleasing to see many WW2 Veterans attending, two of these Mr G Pringle and Mr A Sullivan laid wreaths at the Corps War Memorial.



It was obvious that 23 Pioneer Regiment had put a great deal of hard work and effort in ensuring that the weekend was one to remember. The displays on the sports field during the Saturday afternoon ensured that there was something for everyone old and young and luckily the weather could not have been better.

# Editorial

It was thought appropriate as we are prepare to close 51 St George's Drive, which has housed the Association for nearly 60 years and move to Bicester, to include a photograph and short history of the building in this Newsletter. As can be seen, it is a beautiful building and will be missed by all who have been involved in its history with the Corps. It is hoped that by the time the next Newsletter is produced the Association will have completed the move to Bicester.

Functions this year, the 60th Anniversaries of VE & VJ Days, have been numerous with members attending functions throughout the country. The Corps was represented at the large parade at Horse Guards Parade on 10 July 2005 when the Northampton Branch Standard was carried by Mr Alan Fawcett. Maj Bill Elliott and his carer (Mr N Brown) attended the Veterans Lunch in Buckingham Palace.

Mr Alan Fawcett also carried the standard on 2 occasions in Northampton, one for VE Day and the other for VJ Day. Mr Derek Turner carried the Bromley/London Central Standard on the following occasions the Annual Parade and Service at Swanley Parish Church, at Orpington RBL 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Drumhead Service, the Belgian National Day Parade in London on 17 Jul, at Brookwood Military Cemetery on 18 Jul and also at the King Albert I Parade at Nieuwpoort, Belgium. We thank them both for 'keeping our standards flying'.

It is with great sadness that we have to publish details of members who have passed away, in this issue we have included details of 3 wives who, whilst their husbands were serving, did a great deal not only for the welfare of the units but the Corps as a whole. They are Mrs Joyce Helen Ryall, Mrs Eileen Bennett and Mrs Julie Thompson.

The Derby Draw proved once again proved to be a great success with over £3,500 profit being made, the results are shown on page 6. This is one of the few remaining sources of income remaining to the Association so your help in selling Christmas Draw tickets would be appreciated. If you can sell more tickets please phone and let me know.

I must apologise for an omission in the last Newsletter. On the front cover was a list of places throughout the world where the Corps had served during the Second World War. It was pointed out by Capt (Retd) IW Haxwell that India had been omitted, he had served there. We are glad to publish an addendum, we are also in this issue publishing an article by Capt Haxwell describing his service.

The use of e-mails to inform members of events is proving very successful, if you have not registered your e-mail address with us please do so by simply sending an e-mail to [pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk)

## ■ Norman Brown



### Front Cover

51 St George's. Situated in Belgravia and built in approx 1830 by master builder Thomas Cubitt who constructed Eccleston and Warwick Squares and the 2 great avenues of St George's Drive and Belgrave Road. Between 1840 and 1914 this was the exclusive domain of the rich and powerful. The RPC Benevolent Fund purchased the building in 1946.

### Rear Cover

Mr Wally Buckler who died on 21 May 2005 aged 92. He was a Normandy Veteran and a keen member of the 39/93 Club, always proud to have been not only a soldier but a Pioneer.

# THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2005

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# Hospitality

by Alex Dickson

An extract from the Wartime Memories of Alex Dickson 1941-1946.

Alex was commissioned into the Pioneer Corps in 1945, he was selected for commissioning in the Royal Signals but damaged his knee whilst training for special operation in Burma. He now lives in the Somme Nursing Home in Belfast.

Following Pioneer OCTU 2Lt Dickson was posted to various units in the Catterick area, mainly prison camps looking after prisoners of war, he was then warned for posting overseas and ordered to a transit camp at Prestatyn in Wales, the old holiday camp, to await shipment to Egypt with two other 2Lts from the Pioneer Corps. They were there for some time until one afternoon the Colonel in charge sent for him and told him that he would be sailing on a troop ship from Liverpool the following day together with the other two 2Lts. However, the Colonel also had another job for him. He explained that he had 600 young Royal Engineer Recruits who had just completed their basic training and were to be posted to their depot in Egypt. There were no NCOs or officers with them so a special train had been arranged from Prestatyn to Liverpool tomorrow morning and he was appointed OIC Party until he handed them over on the troop ship, it should only take 2 to 3 hours and the other two officers could assist him.

So the next morning, 24 September 1945, saw the three officers at the station supervising the 600 men being boarded onto the train, it then set off. After an hour the train pulled into a siding and sat there for quite a long time until someone ran along the side of the train shouting, "Who's in charge. Who's in charge?" Lt Dickson explained that he was and the Captain RTO explained that he had some bad news, a dock strike had started at Liverpool and the troopship has been unable to dock and that he was now to wait for further instructions.

Some hour later they were informed that they were to be redirected to Tilbury and by the time they arrived the troopship would be there. On arrival they were informed that the dock strike had now spread to Tilbury and that they were to be accommodated in a transit camp. A guide was provided to escort them to Purfleet a few miles out of Tilbury. A Captain opened the gates of the empty camp, handed over the keys to Lt Dickson and informed him that he was now in charge of the camp and responsible for providing guards, cleaning the camp and so forth. It was explained that

he had no NCOs to which to assist, the Captain replied that all he could provide was canteen staff and 3 meals a day.

The following morning he learned that the dock strike might last for quite a while so after finding the telephone number of the original camp at Prestatyn he telephoned the Colonel and requested permission to bring the 600 men back to him. He was then informed that his original orders were that he was in charge of these men until he handed them over on the troopship and that order was to remain. In October the men were entitled to a further 3 days embarkation leave so the three officers now had to act as clerks preparing the leave documents. On their return from leave they were informed that they were to be boarded onto a special train to Peacehaven. It was now 2 November and they spent a further night in another transit camp. The following morning a smallish boat took them from Peacehaven to Dieppe where they were to board a special train.

This was an old battered French train with wooden slotted seats which had certainly been through the wars (possibly the first and second!). This was to take them to Toulon where they stopped at various stations during the journey to be given packs of sandwiches and tea, this journey took 3 days. On arrival at Toulon they eventually boarded a ship, not a troopship, but a small steam ship, the Acombar. They sailed on 7 November and arrived in Alexandria on 11 November. On arrival in Alexandria they spent another night in a tented transit camp, 599 men and 3 officers (one man went missing from Purfleet).

Enquiries revealed that the Engineers' Depot was a long day's journey by train and no-one from the Depot had arrived to meet them. Feeling responsible for the men the three officers decided to escort them to their Depot. On arrival at the nearest railway station they found that again no-one was there to meet them and the Depot was a few miles along the

road. On arrival they were asked who they were and gave the following reply, "These are 599 of your men who have just passed basic training we have been escorting them for nearly 3 months." The men were then marched off and a Captain asked the 3 Pioneer Officers how they had come to be in charge of the men. It was explained that a 2 to 3 hour job escorting the men to a troopship had turned into a 3 month job because of the dock strike. The Captain then asked if they could do anything for the 3 officers. It was explained that they had been travelling all day and had not eaten since breakfast. They were then informed that they were too late for dinner and were staying the night. They replied that it was already night and that the last train for Alexandria had already left so they would have to stay the night. They were escorted to a wooden hut where there were empty bunk beds and an hour later a soldier arrived with a plate of sandwiches and a pot of tea. No officer from the camp came to speak to them or invite them to their mess for a drink. In the morning a breakfast was brought to them closely followed by a Captain in full uniform complete with Sam Browne. He informed them that he was President of the Mess Committee and he understood that they were to leave that morning.

He was informed that they were to leave immediately after breakfast. You cannot leave until you pay your mess bill they were informed. Lt Dickson replied, "Pay our mess bill, is this the thanks we're getting for looking after 599 of your men for 3 months when we are not even part of your Regiment, the only messing we have had were some sandwiches and a cup of tea last night and a very small breakfast. Make the mess bill out in my name, I'll pay for the three of us, but please put your full rank and army number on it, because when we get back to our depot I will insist in getting in touch with the Head Engineer in the Middle East to explain how we were treated when we delivered your men to you." ■



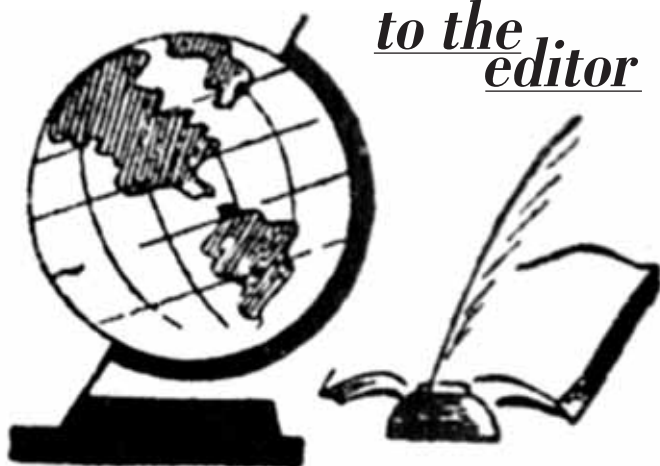
Picture: Officers of P.O.W. Stadium Camp, Catterick, 1945

2/Lt A Dickson, 2/Lt A A Rowe, 2/Lt A J Hall, Lieut E R C Wheeldon, 2/Lt E D C Edwards, Lieut O S Stevens, 2/Lt F J Marchant, Capt W Pratt, Major G Coleby MC MM, Major R C Holmes, Capt T Fothergill



# Letters

*to the  
editor*



**Alicante  
Spain**

**March 2005**

Dear Norman,

LETTER FROM THE SUN

We are often asked what it is like to retire to Spain, a brief description is: 300 days of no rain, no frost and no political correctness. We can mention things like a white Christmas, Christian names and we can fly the union flag in our garden. We pay our taxes and get a good service; for instance our council tax is 145 euros a year, yes 145 per year, for this we get our bins emptied every night, garden rubbish and any old furniture taken away.

We have a local police station where the police do not turn a blind eye, a good post system, we pay nothing to travel on the bus because we are residents (editor's note: I thought it was because Tom was over 60) they are clean, on time and with no graffiti. We do not have hose pipe bans and rarely see a drunk or witness anti-social behaviour, people talk to you and have time to have a chat. In our street we have French, Swiss, Dutch, German and Italians and do not have to watch what we say, every-one is tolerant of each other and we do talk about the war. If some of this is familiar you must be old enough to remember the good times in England.

With all ups there are downs, and missing old friends is one of them. However, I would like to thank Norman for all his hard work over many years for the Association. I have just finished reading the last newsletter which I consider to be professional, visually excellent and very informative I did notice who the designer was (keep it in the family!). You are both to be congratulated.

You know you are getting older when you read the obituary column, it came as such a shock to hear Ian Milne had passed away, not only was he a first class officer but I consider it a privilege to have had him as my OC and a friend, he will be sadly missed. It was the sad death of Del Goodman, which brought me down to earth and realised this life is not a rehearsal, you only have one life so live it well.

If we get any more Pioneers in Spain I may think about opening a branch, there are at least 5 who now own properties not far from myself.

Yours,

**Tom and Gloria Appleyard**

**Northenden, Manchester**

Dear Sir,

I hope you will be able to find if I am the oldest survivor of 120 Company, there can not be many left now. I was born on 21 December 1907 (aged 97).

I must say my service was rough especially on the Shetlands but we were well looked after. I remember the liver and onions for breakfast and a tot every night. I recall one of the incidents, building secret posts on top of a huge hill, all materials had to be carried on shoulders single file, bricks, stone and cement. No wheels would have been able to get up this hill, there were certainly some sore shoulders.

On D Day I Landed on Sword Beach, I think on wave 2. We boarded the ship at Tilbury on 4 June 1944 and while on board ship we heard the address by General Eisenhower before going down the ropes into the landing craft. Together with my OC Major Tschapline, I was one of the 16 men who captured 86 German Marines.

On 3 September 1944 our Company liberated the village of Quenst after 4 and a half years of German rule, what joy for the people. During the 50th Anniversary I was invited to the celebrations, the only British soldier together with an American Bomber Pilot who had been brought down and hidden by the villagers. I was given a plaque and made a Citizen of the Town now called Rebec.

It has been a pleasure to write to you.

Yours sincerely,

**W Ganson**

**Bootle, Merseyside**

Dear Norman,

We, that is Hughie Ramsey, Arthur Sullivan and I wish to thank you for the enjoyable week-end reunion and Memorial Service at St David's Barracks. Will you also pass our grateful thanks to all concerned as I know it requires a lot of effort on everyone's part to make it a success. We were able to talk to a lot of the Regulars and were surprised when their wives were thanking us for what we did in WW2. Apparently the gist of the thank you's was "we wouldn't be here today if it hadn't been for you" Yes, we enjoyed very minute and hope to come next year.

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them", which one are you, Norman, or are you all 3.

Bye for now.

**G Pringle**

**Hinckley, Leics**

Dear Mr Brown

On behalf of my wife I would like to thank you for the cheque (Editors note 4th prize in Derby Draw).

I was wounded with 2nd Gloucesters and transferred to the Pioneers and commissioned in 1942. I landed on Juno Beach but my second landing was worse. Attached to a Marine Commando unit for the assault on Walcheren. After an adventure at sea I was the only officer of 144 Company to get ashore. The CO of the Commando Brigade said CSM Herman and I were admirable leaders. This was the only time in war anyone said anything good about me. WO2 Herman got an MBE I got the Noble Order of Nowt! Sometimes I wonder how I managed to get to the age of 93. I was twice wounded in war, kicked, banged and punched in rugby games. I now keep busy painting, carving and modelling.

All the best,

**Ted Hayball**

**Why not drop us a line...**

51 St. Georges Drive, London SW1V 4DE or email us at [pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk)



## LEGACY TV CAMPAIGN

sends a powerful message to the public



If you have been watching Channel 4 over the past months you are likely to have seen Michael Buerk on TV encouraging more charitable gifts in wills. The target audience is people who are making or updating their wills, many of whom are yet to discover that a legacy is a great way to give to their favourite cause, and a great way to beat the Inland Revenue as charitable donations are exempt.

For many married couples, straightforward Will planning can enable a double exemption to be claimed - so that only estates having a combined value in excess of £550,000 need a more sophisticated solution. However, with the overall increase in house prices, more and more ordinary people are falling within the inheritance tax net, which makes use of the available reliefs increasingly important.

**Table 1 - inheritance tax rates and exemptions**

On death	2004/05	2005/06
Nil	£0 - £263,000	£0 - £275,000
40%	over £263,000	over £275,000
Main exemptions:		
Annual gift	£3,000	
Small gifts	£250 per donee	
Gifts on marriage	£5,000 per parent £2,500 per grandparent	
To spouse:	Unlimited (unless spouse has foreign domicile)	
To charity:	Unlimited	

**Table 2 - single estate**

Alan Brown is single/divorcee/a widower. He dies on 1 March 05 and his estate is valued at £300,000. This inheritance liability is:  
 $(£300,000 - £263,000) \times 40\% = £14,800$

**Table 3 - married couples**

Charlie Davies is married to Margaret. They have two children and their joint estate is valued at £400,000. Charlie dies on 1 March 2005 and under his will his estate passes to Margaret. There is no inheritance tax liability because of the spouse exemption. On Margaret's death on 1 September 2005 the inheritance tax liability is:  
 $(£400,000 - £275,000) \times 40\% = £46,000$

## FREE PASSPORT SCHEME EXTENDED

for veterans, spouses, widows, widowers, partners or carers



The UK Passport Service (UKPS), working in partnership with the MOD, has supplied free one year passports to veterans, spouses, widows, widowers, partners of veterans or carers attending overseas 60th WW2 commemorative events during 2004 and 2005.

Details of how to obtain a free passport under the scheme can be found at [www.veteransagency.mod.uk](http://www.veteransagency.mod.uk) or by calling the veterans Helpline 0800 169 2277.

An enhancement to the scheme has seen free ten year passports being made available to all those who were aged 16 or over on 2 September 1945. The scheme is available to all eligible for a British passport, including those currently living abroad. To find out more, call the UK Passport Service Helpline number on 0870 521 0410.



## COALITION TO FIGHT FOR PENSION REFORM

"There is a change in the air"

Four organisations, including Help the Aged and Age Concern, have formed a coalition to prevent the burden of future pension's contributions forcing staff to work into old age.

It aims to lobby the key stakeholders involved in the forthcoming pension reform before the publication of the Government's Draft Pensions Bill early next year.

"There is change in the air", said Mervyn Kohler head of public affairs at Help the Aged. "The debate has so far focused around pensions professionals, such as insurance companies that look at how the economics work out. We felt that the voices of users and contributors should be heard too."

The coalition wants to convince the Pensions Commission to scrap the principle of voluntary contributions and get employers to make more comprehensive provision for workers to enable saving. "We are trying to work with them to get a consensus," said Kohler. But this might seem too radical for the commission, which sees the way forward as a mix of voluntary contributions, state system reform and compulsion.

The coalition plans to lobby behind closed doors instead of running a public awareness campaign. "Polls show that people already understand that change is needed," said Kohler. "We are targeting the 80 people we met at the commission's seminar. We will send them regular e-mails".

However, coalition members differ over what extent contributions should be made compulsory. "Many in the coalition believe that employers and employees should contribute to a scheme that would provide an additional pension on top of that provided by the state," said an Age Concern spokesman. "We believe that if increased compulsion is necessary, the fairest way to achieve it would be through the state system."

Kohler added, "We have different nuances of opinion. The important thing is that we all want the future reform to be fair to workers". The coalition is also calling for a new state pension system that is fairer to women. It argues that the current law does not recognise that women spend less time in the workplace because they might take long career breaks to bring up children or have to care for someone because most carers are women.

Set up in December 2002, following the Governments pensions Green Paper, the Pensions Commission is expected to publish its final report, which will contain policy recommendations in November.

## DERBY DRAW 2005

The results are...



The Derby Draw made a net profit of £3,500, the results are:

- 1st** Mr RM Teague  
Enniskillen  
£500 (38616)
- 2nd** Mr A Powell  
Wednesbury  
£250 (41564)
- 3rd** Mr J Barker  
Manchester  
£125 (11846)
- 4th** Mrs C Hayball  
Burbage  
£75 (27732)
- 5th** Mrs J Chapman  
Crowle  
£50 (25065)

Thank you for your support.

## PENSION ENTITLEMENT

To qualify you must pay contributions detailed below



To qualify for a full pension you must have to pay contributions as follows:

**Male** - for 44 years out of a working life of 49 years. When the number of years is less than 44 an appropriate pension is paid (i.e. if you contributed for only 22 years you would receive 50%). The minimum pension payable is when only 11 years have been paid i.e. 25%. If less than 11 years no pension is payable.

**Female** - To qualify for a full pension a woman has to pay contributions for 39 years out of a working life of 44 years. The minimum number of years is 10.

However from 6 April 2020, State Pension age for both men and women will be 65. The Government will introduce the change gradually from age 60 to 65 for women over a 10-year period from 2010 to 2020.

### When will you get your State Pension?

If you are a woman born before 6 Apr 1950, you can claim your State Pension at 60. If you are a woman born on or after 6 Apr 1955, you can claim your State Pension at 65.

If you are a woman born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955, your State Pension age will be between 60 and 65, depending on your date of birth. The following are some examples of the revised pension dates:

Date of Birth	Pension Age Date
6.4.50 - 5.5.50	6.5.2010
6.4.51 - 5.5.51	6.5.2012
6.4.52 - 5.5.52	6.5.2014
6.4.53 - 5.5.53	6.5.2016
6.4.54 - 5.5.54	6.5.2018
6.4.55	6.4.2020 (aged 65)

It is recommended that all persons when approaching retirement complete Form BR 19 (Available from all Post Offices) to receive a pension forecast.

## DISCOVERY CHANNELS

Are you a single parent ?



If you are a single parent then the Discovery Weeks project could be of help to you to find out about what work and benefits options you have open to you.

The scheme, run by Working Links, aims to help single parents explore the options available, such as help applying for jobs, training opportunities or affordable childcare options. Freephone 0800 9179262 for more information.

## LAUGH AND BE HAPPY

Something to fill up the page...

I had occasion to drive into Bicester one evening with the self-styled "Don Juan" of the Regiment. All the way he spoke of nothing but his forthcoming rendezvous with one of the choicest local blondes.

You can imagine my surprise when about two hours later I met him by himself in 'Ye Olde Pioneer'. Before I could ask about his date, he wailed, "I can't make it out! I just can't make it out! I waited over an hour for her, and she never arrived." Then, realising that his reputation was at stake, he added quickly, "So I stood her up!"

Automation has gone so far that they've got a new book out for computers - on how to understand people.

## LONDON'S CHILDREN AT WAR

Portrayed in a new film

Former London evacuees and conscripted wartime coal miners are being invited to share their experiences in an ambitious film project to mark the 60th anniversary of the events leading up to the end of the Second World War.

Heritage Films - a London-based group of disabled, older and young people - is hoping to produce a lasting memoir of video interviews and written testimonies called Children at War.

With the help of a £20,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund, the group is trying to track down Londoners who were evacuated out of the capital to avoid the horrors of the Blitz, and young men who were conscripted by the government to work in the mines rather than fight with the armed forces. "We've interviewed some lovely people so far," says Heritage Films participant Carol Phillips. "They are so keen to talk. They are all in their 70s and 80s and very keen to keep their experiences alive to pass on to future generations. We've seen evacuees who had a terrible time and others who had a wonderful experience in the countryside."

Many conscripted miners - known as Bevin Boys - ended the war deflated and aggrieved that their contribution to the 'war effort' was not recognised, with many people wrongly assuming they had been conscientious objectors. But with a shortage of coal from 1943 - and a shortage of able-bodied miners - 40,000 young men were conscripted into the mining industry. "Even though there is an active association of former Bevin Boys, no-one knows how many are still alive, but we would love to hear from any living in London, and also anyone who was evacuated out of London," said Ms Phillips.

Heritage Films hopes to produce a lengthy archive of people's reminiscences and plans to hold public presentations before the end of the year as well as producing DVDs and CD-Roms for use by schools, libraries and community groups.

### The group can be contacted via:

[heritage@go53.freemove.co.uk](mailto:heritage@go53.freemove.co.uk)

For full details, log on to [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

## DIGGING A HOLE

"Bless' em All"

Early in the war a paper-backed book called "Bless 'em All" had a success de scandale. It was a very critical study of supposedly out-dated Army methods. Questions were asked about it in Parliament.

The other day someone turned up a grubby and well annotated copy. The book once again acted as a flint for a fiery discussion. There was a passage about how the Army digs a hole. How absurd \*(says the author, in effect) to go about it by causing six men to parade at two o'clock, calling them to attention, marching them left, right, left to the tool store to draw spades, then marching them to the scene of operations, ordering them to dig, then falling them in again, marching them back to the tool store to hand in their spades, then marching them somewhere else to be dismissed. Surely a hole could be dug in a more efficient way?

One half thought that this was merited criticism. Spokesman for the opposite camp (a cynical fellow) said that if you asked six men, in a gentlemanly way, to dig a hole, explaining what the hole was for, this is what would happen:

Two men would arrive at the scene of operations at two o'clock without spades, saying they didn't know they had to draw them, another man would arrive late with a spade for himself and nobody else; a fourth man would arrive, spadeless, ten minutes late, saying that he had to go to the lavatory; a fifth man would eventually be found in the NAAFI; and the sixth when found would say that he thought you meant tomorrow, not today.

The argument was still going on at a late hour. It has been going on for that matter since the Army began.



**MR ALAN FAWCETT**  
Standard Bearer for Northampton Branch

Mr Alan Fawcett a lifelong Leeds United fan will be appearing on the big screen later this year in a film about his beloved football club. "The Penalty King", which is to be released later this year and stars Nick Bartlett, Samantha Beckinsale, Claire Grogan and Steve Sweeney.



Alan, aged 55, of Wildern Lane, Northampton volunteered as an extra in the comedy which is about a blind Leeds United fan who becomes a dead ball specialist. He appears in two scenes, the first which was shot in Brighton where he plays a defender alongside the star of the film, Nick Bartlett of "Gangs of New York" fame. In the other he is part of the crown at Elland Road, the Leeds United ground.

He said, "It's the first film I have been in, I really enjoyed the experience. I lover acting, I used to do it at school (editor's note: and at Simpson Barracks instead of working) and really enjoyed it.

**'COMPO'**  
was a chunk!

Are you aware that the late actor Bill Owen who played Compo in Last of the Summer Wine was commissioned into the Pioneer Corps during World War 2.

**Picture:**

OCU Bradford in July 1941.  
*Rear Row Standing* - Richmond, Thomson, Worker, Kerr  
*Centre Rank Standing* - Willisrofdt, Rutherford, Wright, Wood, Styles, Kingston, Trill, Sanders, Small, Kerr  
*Front rank sitting* - Raikes, Jentle MM, Wells, Williams, CQMS Denny, Lt Finlay, Maj Rogers, Sgt Robertson, Rowbottom\*, Jones, Summers, McBay.

\* Later Bill Owen the actor (COMPO)



# The Fighting Pioneers

Just listen to my song of joy - come on boys make a crowd  
I want to tell you a story which makes us Veterans' proud.  
It didn't take us centuries - it was in fact just a few years  
To earn our unofficial name of the "Royal Fighting Pioneers".

You have heard of the "Fighting Fifth",  
the "Diehards" and the "Boys"  
The "Lincolns" the "Bedfords" or the "Fusiliers" and "Greys"  
The "Scotties" in their kilts or the noble "Grenadiers"  
Now you're going to hear a bit about the "Fighting Pioneers".

Of course we're not real fighting men  
as Lord Haw-Haw blew the gaff  
He called us "wrecks and ruins" and termed us "the riff and raff".  
But I think old Hitler told him off as we held "Jerry" band  
And fought them back at Arras and Boulogne  
and faced them hand to hand.

We fought beside the "Durhams" with picks and hammer shanks  
We then pinches "Jerries" Tommy guns  
and blew up his blinkin' tanks.  
We held the Germans back while our  
infantry reached Dunkirk by the score  
We've earned our share of honours and hope to win some more.

We fought with the 1st Army in North Africa  
- then across the "Meddy" sea  
To invade Sicily, Salerno and Anzio then Rome in Italy.  
We were support troops at Monte Cassino  
in the mud and snow - but soon  
Churchill wanted us veteran soldiers for  
D Day on the vital sixth of June.

I've only told you a little bit, but in time you'll hear the rest  
Sometime in the future when the war is over  
and we're having a well earned rest.  
But we've had enough of jibes and jokes  
and the Infantry's blinkin' sneers  
Because we've shown our place is amongst the best  
- 'cause we're the Fighting Pioneers.



# FREE *Corps* Magazines



The following is a list of spare copies of Corps Magazines currently held at HQ RPC Association. If you would like a copy/ copies please send stamps to cover cost of postage (35p per copy), a donation to the Association would, of course, be appreciated.

These magazines make fascinating reading and are a great source of historical information. If you wish to receive an edition where only 1 or 2 copies are available please telephone and reserve these copies.

NO	DATE	AVAIL	NO	DATE	AVAIL	NO	DATE	AVAIL
8	JUL 46	1	79	JUN 64	1	135	JUN 78	1
12	OCT 47	1	80	SEP 64	2	136	SEP 78	1
13	DEC 47	1	81	DEC 64	1	137	DEC 78	1
14	MAR 48	1	82	MAR 65	2	138	MAR 79	1
15	JUN 48	2	83	JUN 65	2	139	JUN 79	1
16	OCT 48	1	84	SEP 65	1	140	SEP 79	2
17	DEC 48	3	85	DEC 65	1	141	DEC 79	1
18	MAR 49	2	93	DEC 67	2	142	MAR 80	2
20	SEP 49	4	95	JUN 68	1	143	JUN 80	2
22	MAR 50	2	96	SEP 68	1	144	SEP 80	1
24	SEP 50	1	98	MAR 69	1	145	DEC 80	2
25	DEC 50	2	99	JUN 69	1	146	MAR 81	1
26	MAR 51	7	100	SEP 69	1	148	SEP 81	1
27	JUN 51	8	101	DEC 69	20	149	DEC 81	2
28	SEP 51	11	102	MAR 70	3	153	APR 83	8
29	DEC 51	5	104	SEP 70	6	154	SEP 83	14
30	MAR 52	7	105	DEC 70	8	155	DEC 83	1
31	JUN 52	4	106	MAR 71	10	157	AUG 87	6
32	SEP 52	7	107	JUN 71	23	159	APR 85	42
33	DEC 52	1	108	SEP 71	6	160	AUG 65	1
34	MAR 53	1	109	DEC 71	24	161	DEC 85	1
35	JUL 53	1	110	MAR 72	11	162	APR 86	16
36	SEP 53	1	111	JUN 72	23	164	DEC 86	1
37	DEC 53	1	112	SEP 72	12	165	APR 87	2
41	DEC 54	1	113	DEC 72	3	166	AUG 87	50
42	MAR 55	1	114	MAR 73	16	167	DEC 87	6
43	JUN 55	1	115	JUN 73	14	169	AUG 88	2
44	SEP 55	1	116	SEP 73	23	171	APR 89	2
47	JUN 56	1	117	DEC 73	21	172	MAR 90	1
52	SEP 57	3	118	MAR 74	22	176	AUT 91	19
58	MAR 59	3	119	JUN 74	4	177	SPR 92	10
59	JUN 59	3	120	SEP 74	3	178	AUT 92	11
62	MAR 60	2	121	DEC 74	2			
63	JUN 60	1	122	MAR 75	3			
64	SEP 60	1	123	JUN 75	1			
65	DEC 60	2	124	SEP 75	1			
66	MAR 61	2	126	MAR 76	2			
67	JUN 61	2	130	MAR 77	1			
68	SEP 61	2	131	JUN 77	1			
69	DEC 61	1	132	SEP 77	1			
70	MAR 62	2	133	DEC 77	1			
71	JUN 62	2	134	MAR 78	1			
72	SEP 62	2						
73	DEC 62	4						
74	MAR 63	2						
75	JUN 63	2						
76	SEP 63	2						
77	DEC 63	4						
78	MAR 64	1						





Stevie Nichols posing during the Reunion Weekend

# PHOTO INDEX

- 1 Maj Bill Elliott at Buckingham Palace on 10 Jul 05
- 2 Mrs Doreen Forrester (widow the the late Maj F Forrester) with her grandson Jeremy at the Not Forgotten Association Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.
- 3 Maj Bill Elliott and Mr Norman Brown (his carer!) at Buckingham Palace on 10 Jul 05
- 4 Clean plates mean a good meal - taken during the VE/VJ Dinner on 28 May 05
- 5 Pioneer Day on 1 Apr 05 (it appears that WO2 Taff Jenkins has had too many cocktails - he cannot stand straight)
- 6 The mess staff join in the celebrations on Pioneer Day
- 7 One of the citations being read during Pioneer Day
- 8 VE/VJ Dinner on 28 May 05
- 9 Mr G Pringle, laying a wreath on behalf of the old comrades at the Reunion Weekend
- 10 Mr Alan Fawcett proudly carries the Association Standard at Horse Guards on 10 Jul 05
- 11 Mr Pat Morley at the Reunion Weekend (reluctantly he leaves the TA this year after 30 years service)
- 12 Sam (Grandson of Maj Bill Elliott) winning first prize for the dog who looks like his owner - note new/old ties.



## MINUTES OF THE 57TH A.G.M. OF THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION

held in the dining room, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester on Saturday 9th July 2005

**Chairman :** Brig C B Telfer CBE  
**Secretary :** Mr N Brown  
**Members Present :** 55

After welcoming members present and receiving apologies from: Brig HJ Hickman, Col RF McDonald, Lt Col A Barnes, Lt Col Cave, Lt Col P Jones, Maj ER Elliott, Maj G Crook, Capt M East, Capt A Mycroft and Mr D Luker the Chairman opened the meeting at 1200 hours and requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year.

### ITEM 1 - MINUTES OF 56TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 56th Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed.
2. There were no points arising.

### ITEM 2 - REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

3. Lt Col M Bennett, CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, gave the following report:
4. 23 Pnr Regt has gone from strength to strength in the last year. The Regiment is one of the four constituent regiments of 104 Logistic Support Brigade commanded by Brig Jonathan Downes. The operational role of the Brigade is to enable British Army operations world-wide. The operational role of the Brigade is to enable British Army operations world-wide. At extremely short notice, the Regiment deployed a small RHQ and both 206 and 522 Sqns as the Cyprus Reinforcement Unit to backfill 1 RHF who deployed to Iraq as the Emergency High Readiness Reserve. Based in Akrotiri, the Regiment was responsible for the security of the Mount Olympus, Troodos and PLUTO National Communications Sites.
5. 187 (Tancred) Sqn at the same time sent a Troop to Canada with the Royal Engineers on Ex WARPAINT where the soldiers used their extensive artisan and assault Pioneer skills to refurbish several training areas and construct a sophisticated trench system than can be attacked by exercising troops. Additionally, 187 (Tancred) Sqn have trained an enlarged Troop of 1 + 35 as the Force Protection Troop with 3 Composite Logistic Regiment in Basra on Op TELIC. The Troop deployed to Iraq in May 05 and will return in November this year.
6. The Regiment deployed on Ex ROVING PIONEER in April to test the Regiment's new BOWMAN digital communications. The regiment remains the most advanced and fully converted RLC unit to this new and revolutionary communications system. 144 Sqn deployed its echelon in full to resupply the other Sqns. In addition, 144 Sqn were the lead unit during the HQ Theatre Study Period, Ex INTREPID GRIFFIN based at the Defence NBC School at Wintertborne Gunner.
7. The new Director of the RLC Brigadier Jeff Little OBE visited the Regiment on 1st June. The regiment was the first RLC unit the Director was to visit and we displayed the full range of our equipments and skills. DRLC has agreed to undertake some research on the provision of more C+E driving course for RLC Pioneers before they leave Deepcut after Phase 2 training. As an immediate regain, the Regiment has secured the funding for 50 Pioneers to be given civilian driving courses to gain at least a Category B licence. The Director also agreed to engage with EOinC to ensure that RLC Pioneers are given the necessary number of places on courses to train in bricklaying, carpentry, concreting and joinery.
8. 518 Sqn based themselves in Garelochhead, Scotland for the month of June as the foothold through which the regiment rotated 250 soldiers in adventurous training. Skills such as canoeing, dingy and offshore yacht sailing, rock climbing, mountain biking and hill walking were practised. The Regiment has

conducted two overseas expeditions. The first expedition trekked through the Pyrenees in Spain and the second involved high level mountain climbing in Peru.

9. 206 Sqn deployed on Ex EAGLE's STRIKE to Dartmoor and Salisbury with 16 Air Assault Brigade as part of 4 Regiment AAC's validation with the new Apache helicopter. The exercise culminated in the Sqn being attacked in Imber Village by a combined force of Apache and 3 Para.
10. The Regiment has received the new British Army range of improved power tools provided by Makita. There will be an ongoing extensive programme for every Sqn to convert their personnel to the new equipment.
11. The Regiment's major annual FTX, Ex ROVING PIONEER will take place on Salisbury Plain next week. The exercise will include a 3 day test of military skills of each Troop in preparation for the RLC Gore Trophy Competition in September. GOC Theatre Troops, Major General Tim Cross CBE, will visit the Regiment at RAF Keevil during this exercise.
12. The Regiment continues to support Bicester Garrison and Bicester Town at every opportunity. 522 Sqn are refurbishing the Garrison Rugby pitches at Blackthorn putting their artisan skills to good effect. Every Sqn entered several teams in the Garrison Fun-on-Wheels Day to raise money to fund children's activities in the summer. The Regiment has paraded in Bicester twice this year, first at the Remembrance Service and on the second occasion at the inauguration of the new town mayor. We continue to support 5 local ACF and 3 CCF detachments in the Oxfordshire area and we have assisted several local schools with minor works.
13. Sporting success has continued to be an essential component of the maintenance of the Regiment's high morale. The Regiment can now proudly claim to be the most successful RLC unit at Rugby. This includes competing in the Army 7s Competition where the Regiment was defeated by Army Championships 1 Royal Scots in the final and in the 4 Division Rugby 10s competition the Regiment lost to 1 RGBW in the final. The Regiment won the RLC Williamson Trophy and the Sir Cecil Smith Cup at the best RLC at full side rugby. 23 Regiment has now graduated to the Premiership of Army rugby as one of the 10 best sides in the Army and the only RLC unit to make the grade. Rugby is not our only success. The Regiment has fielded a highly successful shooting team, winning through the Corps SAAM and 4 Division SAAM to compete at Bisley where we finished the highest placed RLC unit in several competitions. The Regimental cricket team continues to make excellent progress and has beaten all comers handsomely this season.
14. In addition, the Regiment continues to provide static and mobile displays to support the RLC recruitment at ATRs Bassingbourne and Pirbright and RMAS Sandhurst as well as hosting several visits to Bicester from the RLC Young Officers courses throughout the year.

### ITEM 3 - COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

15. 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 wished, on behalf of the Association, to congratulate the success of the Regiment.
16. The list of apologies has already been submitted but we wish Mr Derek Luker, who was due to attend but unfortunately requires hospital treatment, a speedy recovery. We have also heard that our only in-pensioner at Chelsea, Mr R Crump (aged 91), has been admitted to the infirmary again we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery.



17. It is pleasing to see so many here this year, we believe it is a record and certainly as many as the old 'Open Days' at Northampton, as we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Days it is nice to see World War 2 veterans here this weekend.
18. During the year members met on numerous occasions namely:
- The Past and Present Officers Dinner
  - The WOs & SNCOs Reunion Club Ladies Dinner Night
  - Field of Remembrance
  - Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall
  - Northampton Branch had a very successful Xmas Party
  - The 39/93 Club met once again at Fareham
  - A 60th Ann. VE/VJ Lunch was held at Bicester in May
- Also during the year members have taken part in various parades and celebrations throughout the country and Capt Mat East laid a wreath on behalf of the Association in Normandy in June.
19. 51 St George's Drive, our home since December 1946, is currently on the market and a sale is expected in the near future. Once this happens our Controller, Mr Norman Brown, will be working from an office within the camp here at Bicester and will continue in a similar vein to now.
20. We have also to report that the Standard Bearer of the Northampton Branch, Ex Cpl Alan Fawcett, is to appear in a film called "The Penalty King" also appearing in this film are Nick Bartlett of "Gangs of New York" fame and Samantha Beckinsale.
21. The Chairman then placed on record thanks to Mr N Brown for his continued hard work during the last year.

#### ITEM 4 - HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

22. The following report had been forwarded by the Treasurer:
- a. Grants. 226 grants for benevolence were made during the year (26 were refused) and a sum of £85,837 was paid (£81,735 in 2003). £44,270 was paid by the RPC Association and the remaining £41,567 by the ABF.
- b. Income. Income for the year was £119,733 compared with £126,249 in 2003, this reduction was mainly caused by a decrease in income from legacies which were £510 in 2004 and £20,271 in 2003.
- c. Expenditure. Expenditure for the year was £128,634 compared with £116,565 in 2003.
- d. Portfolio. RPC Association has investments with a market value of £1,464,007 compared to £1,598,699 in 2003. This reduction is due to the value of the Association's property, 51 St George's Drive, being reduced in value by some £145,000.
- e. Derby and Christmas Draws. The overall surplus on these draws' was £8,470 (£6,722 in 2003).
- f. Copy of Accounts. If any member wishes to receive a full copy of the accounts they should send a large sae (46p stamp) to HQ RPC Association.
23. It was unanimously agreed to accept this report.

#### ITEM 5 - GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

24. The Derby Draw 2005 made a profit of approx £3,500, winners have been notified and cheques have been forwarded, the full results will be shown in the next Newsletters. It may be interesting to note that the winner Mr McTeage only joined the Association 2 years ago and

served in the Corps from 1944 to 1947, I hope he enjoys his £500.

25. So far this year we have recruited 20 members, some who only heard about the Association through an article in the British Legion magazine advertising this weekend. Three of these new members actually served during WW2.
26. It is pleasing to receive favourable comments on the new look Newsletters it is also a pleasure to receive articles from members, please keep them coming.
27. This afternoon I intend to have a small stall on the sports field to sell items, I have plenty of the new Corps ties which show the Corps badge on the blade of the tie, these are reasonably priced at a very modest £7.50.
28. The Northampton Branch is planning to organise a visit to Normandy in late September or early October, for those not living in the Northampton area but would like details of this trip they should let me have their contact details.
29. Also in Northampton on Sunday 14 August there is to be a ceremony to celebrate VJ Day at the war memorial in Abingdon Square followed by a reception in the TA Centre, Clare St, if you would like to attend please let me know over the weekend.
30. Items from our small 'shop' are shortly to be advertised on the website and payment will be able to be made by pay pal.

#### ITEM 6 - ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

31. 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 HJ Hickman, Lt Col PA Jones, Capt A Mycroft, Capt M East and Mr N Brown
32. The meeting also elected Lt Col MJ Bennett and WO1 (RSM) J Frame who had been nominated by the Council for the two vacancies caused by the resignations of WO1 (RSM) W Dilkes and Mr C Mullaney.

#### ITEM 7 - APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

33. It was unanimously agreed that the firm Saunders and Wood be appointed as auditors for the forthcoming year.

#### ITEM 8 - ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

34. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting would be published in the next Newsletter.

#### ITEM 9 - ANY OTHER BUSINESS

35. One member thought the reception on the Friday had been overcrowded and noisy.
36. A request for a meal on arrival was requested, this would be investigated for next year.
37. It was suggested that the names of those members who had sadly died during the year previous to the AGM should be mentioned during the Church Service.
38. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1300 hours.

**N BROWN**  
Secretary



# Reminiscences *of a WW2 Pioneer Officer*

by Captain I W Haxell

At the age of 18 I enlisted in one of the local TA Units, 2/6 Bn Essex Regt, formerly Infantry, but converted to AA Searchlights becoming soon 444 Battery 65th Searchlight Regiment. I rose steadily to the rank of Troop Sergeant and after a spell as an Instructor on radar-operated searchlights at 2nd AA Division School and a good many months as acting Troop Officer (there was a dearth of Officers in ASA Command) my Battery Commander in 1942 persuaded me to apply for a commission. All went well until it was discovered that my eyesight precluded me from a commission in the RA. The only arm of the service open to me was the Pioneer Corps, so I opted for that. Having survived the eccentricities of WOSB at Spondon, I was sent to a pre OCTU at Wrotham in Kent for two weeks. This catered for all units in the army. This place was a disgrace - filthy food, overflowing latrine buckets and all candidates were treated as raw recruits, a mistake repeated at OCTU and resented by experienced NCOs such as myself.

After 1 week's leave, I reported to Pioneer OCTU at Beckingham in Lincolnshire. A strange mixture of incompetence and excellence. The admin was poor, classroom instruction abysmal, but field craft and explosives very good. My platoon was in the hands of a Lieutenant, formerly a Guards CSM, and a Captain Carter (Dynamite Dan) and 2 Regular Sergeants, all three from the Essex Regiment.

The Camp Commandant had at one time been in the Cavalry and strode about in his riding breeches smacking his riding boots with his crop. The man was a frightful snob and could not stand most of his cadets. On my final interview, he reviewed my progress and then asked for my father's occupation. When I said Headmaster, he perked up and said,

"Public School of course." On being told "State School", he sighed, looked out of the window and said "No background, but I suppose you'll do". He made similar comments to many other men. The mistake, above all was to lump us all together, irrespective of length of service, so that we had a mixture of men with 6 months service in the Pay Corps holding back those with several years experience.

I was commissioned on 1 Jan 43 and posted to 8 Smoke Company NCC in Newcastle. My Company Commander, was a good soldier, very efficient and friendly, but fed up with the fact that he commanded a company of the Non Combatant Corps (men who had registered as conscientious objectors, but been granted only partial exemption from military service). They would not salute or march in step as this was "militarism". They all had books issued by an organisation telling them of their rights and never hesitated to write to their MPs if they felt unfairly treated.

After a short spell there, I was sent to 818 Smoke Company at Billingham-on-Tees, where we smoke screened the ICI works efficiently, often under appalling weather conditions. Our OC, Major Buckingham, was first class and with the exception of a useless 2IC, all officers were good. I was made Welfare Officer and when I protested that at 23 I did not have the experience, the OC said, "You'll soon learn and as the youngest here you will be more resilient". I did very soon learn!

In 1944 Buckingham was replaced by a Major Flood, also efficient but soft hearted. If he had to sentence a soldier to any punishment tears would roll down his face afterwards. In Apr 44 we were moved to London to screen the docks from Tower Bridge to Greenwich. We really could not understand why, as few

bombers were coming over, but quite a few high flying reconnaissance planes. Then one morning we heard that D Day had begun and we realised that Mulberry Harbour caissons being built in the dock basins had gone under our smoke. After that we were rather in limbo except for the attentions of V1 and V2 attacks. We gave help to ARP units where needed, but it soon became obvious we were to be disbanded. Several of us finished up at the pioneer Holding Unit in Prestatyn. We were not popular as no-one had told the camp we were coming. However, we had an enjoyable 3 weeks or so helping with Regimental duties playing football or hockey or sorting out problems for men who were going abroad.

I was posted to 33 Group where a good cunning OC Major Frere had installed himself with the 2IC Capt Tennyson D'Eyncourt (ex Guards) the CSM, CQMS and about 10 staff in Uckfield House, truly luxury for wartime.

The bulk of the unit was in Seaford under the command of Lt Laurie Higgins and myself, also a Lieutenant by then. They were billeted in requisitioned houses all over the town. Although they all turned up for duty, we gave up all attempts to enforce anything like "lights out". >

*"As I spoke German and French... I found myself with 24 other pioneers on my way to India..."*



Picture: Captain Haxell 4th from right, middle row and section of the Records Office



Picture: Indian Pioneer Corps Pipe Band, parading before Sunday Lunch, Christmas 1945

From there we had working parties all over the place, sea defence works on Hayling Island, helping to build a transit camp at Newhaven, coal heaving in Shoreham Harbour, running a sewage farm not far from Seaford and least favourite, helping Canadian Engineers clear mines from Brighton Beach.

After a time, as I spoke German and French and had volunteered for NW Europe, I found myself with 24 other pioneers, on my way to India, seconded to the Indian Army. We arrived in Bombay Docks on VE Day - no celebrations! We were sent to the IPC Depot at Jalna, a well run disciplined camp with some 28,000 Indian troops in residence. We had a Pipe Band, open air cinemas, sports fields and swimming pools. After a short spell on Regimental Duties under a first class Indian Officer, Capt Abbe Ram, I succumbed to a near fatal attack of amoebic dysentery. Some weeks in hospital were followed by sick leave in Simla. While there the atomic bombs were dropped and so for us it seemed it was nearly over. When I returned to Jalna, I was sent for by a marvellous Lt Col Fairley, an old India hand, who told me that with the medical category I now had I would never get out of the camp to an operational unit and asked me to join his records office team, in particular to stamp out some fraud in the family allowance department. I said yes and never regretted it. I

soon stopped the swindles and so got my third 'pip'.

Apart from the normal duty I became Sports and Entertainments Officer for the whole depot and with help from our Provost Marshall, Capt James Tate managed to alleviate the boredom of life in a large depot. The next job was demobilisation, which was a difficult job because many of the Sepoys did not want to return to their home villages, but we could only issue travel warrants in accordance with their records. Many pleadings had to fall on deaf ears. It seemed they all lived in Calcutta or Bombay.

In early 1946 an unpopular edict came from UK saying that Officers over a certain age with families were to be given priority over younger men for repatriation. This went down like a lead balloon. I had already served 6 years and some of the "chosen few" had not been in more than 3.

Suddenly everything changed and without enough notice to hand over properly, a number of us were on the train to Deolali. I had never seen so many tents, men and luggage all apparently in a terrible mess. But, no, things were under control and after 72 hours we were off to Bombay and to England aboard a lovely ship the "Stratheden". I found it very difficult to adjust to post was England. ■



**Picture:**  
British Officers seconded to IPC HQ Jalna, 1945



**Picture:**  
British Officers of HQ Jalna 1946

discharged 17 July 1934 as physically unfit for any form of military service.

*Brown* - Enlisted RA on 17 November 1938 and discharged 9 January 1939 - having made a false mis-statement as to marriage on enlistment

*Jones* - Enlisted the Queens Regiment on 13 May 1939 and discharged on 5 March 1940 - ceasing to fulfil Army physical requirements

*Green* - enlisted Pioneer Corps on 29 March 1940 and discharged 16 February 1942 - permanently unfit for any form of military service.

*Black* - enlisted RAC on 8 March 1942 and discharged on 27 October 1942 - having made a false answer on attestation.

It is noted that his Character Assessment went from Very Good to Good to Fair and, finally, Very Bad.

### Case 3

My Army Number is "2". Pte HW Skinner enlisted into the Pioneer Corps on 26 Oct 39 and was invalided out of the Army on 18 Jun 40. Both during his service and after discharge he was convinced that his Army Number was 2.

The mystery was only solved when a copy of his Record of Service was obtained from Records, this showed his number as 13000002.

During World War 2 each Regiment and Corps was allocated a block of numbers, the Pioneer Corps were allocated 13 million. This makes Pte Skinner the second person to be enlisted into the newly formed Corps.

who was ?  
13000001 ?  
(prize for the first correct answer)



# Personal Records

Whilst weeding the files the following service details have been found...

### Case 1

A CQMS served with the Corps from 19 June 1940 until 13 October 1948. Nothing unusual in that until one looks at his previous service; he first joined the Imperial Yeomanty on 13 February 1901 and served until 11 August 1905. He then joined the Gloucester Regiment on 16 December 1905, transferred to the Dragoon Guards on 3 April 1906 and served with them until 8 September 1919.

His service therefore spanned some forty-eight years, is this a record? He was born in 1880 and was released one day after his 68th birthday!

### Case 2

This man enlisted into the Army 5 times using different names (we have changed names):

*Smith* - enlisted Green Howards on 12 September 1929 and discharged on 3 October 1929 - having made a false statement as to age on enlistment.

*Smith* - enlisted Green Howards on 7 January 1933 and

# Blitz

The

It was in 1940 as the Battle of Britain was being fought  
We had to put our rifles away as digging we were taught  
The Army formed a special Battalion to dig in London Town  
And search for all the bodies as the bombs were falling down  
So day after day and night after night we toiled until we fell  
We were all so tired and weary and our bodies ached liked Hell

The RAF fought the Battle of Britain against the German Luftwaffe during the months of August and September 1940. The German objective was to eliminate the RAF so it would be incapable of opposing the invading troops which formed the spearhead of "Operation Sea Lion" scheduled for 15th September. The Luftwaffe had about 2,500 planes against the 600 in operation by the RAF. The targets were the airfields in SE England and to put them out of action. After many days and weeks the Luftwaffe had failed in their object thanks to the heroes of the RAF pilots and ground crews. Just when it seemed that Hitler may succeed a German bomber dropped its load of bombs on London causing some damage. Winston Churchill was outraged and in retaliation ordered the RAF to bomb Berlin. Hitler was now furious and ordered Field Marshall Goering to annihilate London and demoralise the people who he hoped would cry for 'peace'.

On the ground the conditions for the residents were appalling and soon other cities suffered. 300 tons of bombs were being dropped in one hour. Fires raging like beacons, but, instead of weeping and wailing there was a new camaraderie amongst the people. Meanwhile the RAF were bombing the ports where the German invasion fleet was based and very soon the Germans called off the planned invasion so England was saved from extinction and slavery to the German race.

Winston Churchill spoke to the nation on the radio "Let us brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts a thousand years men will say, this was their finest hour," and as a tribute to the RAF "Never in the field of conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." But still thousands of people were

still being made homeless by the air raids and it was obvious that the prime target of the Luftwaffe was the cities and especially London. All Civil Defence personnel were put on alert and as Churchill had witnessed the indiscriminate bombing by the Germans during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 he knew what chaos could be caused to the buildings, the roads and the spirit of the people.

London Council knew the importance of keeping roads clear, so as the traffic could circulate and flow freely and this was of paramount importance. They also knew the clearing of the debris from the bombed buildings and the search for living people in the ruins was their top priority. The collection of dead bodies was now only a secondary consideration. Churchill was aware of the fact the CD and Air Raid Personnel (ARPs) could not cope on their own it required the skills of the Army to assist in everyway. As there was no fighting taking place in England by the Army apart from manning the coastal defences and the AA guns and as the threat of invasion was no longer a practicality there was no shortage of men who could be utilised in London and other cities.

So Churchill asked for the most intelligent, adaptable and hard working men to be sent to London. So I, with the rest of 175 Company (350 men) were seconded to the "London Battalion" which in the end comprised of 53 Pioneer Companies totalling 18,500 men. We were transported by train from Preston to Euston station and climbed aboard the Army Lorries driven by the RASC to where we were to be billeted. As our Company was to cover a district in West Ham we made the Isolation Hospital in Roman Road our HQ.

The East wing of the building had been bombed so we occupied the West

Wing. All the windows had been blown out in the recent air raids so we were unable to have lights as they would be shown to any German plane overhead and of course a black out was in force. Roman Road was a straight road of about 880 yards and was a nightly target for the bombing. If you were on night duty after a hot meal you changed into your denims, collected a pick and shovel and climbed aboard your transport. NCOs had already been informed where you were to go. On arrival the Officer in charge detailed which roads were blocked and required clearing. The council provided wheel barrows and tippers and work commenced. Despite the bombing during an air raid we continued working until a blast on the officer's whistle informed us the bombs were dropping nearer and so we took cover.

This alternating system of working and taking shelter continued until the sounding of the All Clear by the siren and then we could continue our job in peace after a roll call. This was the time when our cooks from the HQ came up and delivered Dixies (pails) of hot tea and thick sandwiches of corned-beef. When our section area of the roads had been cleared and traffic was able to move with caution we returned to our HQ and paraded for a roll call. There was never a night when we did not have casualties. After returning our tools (cleaned) to the QM stores we washed, shaved and went to sleep. On alternate weeks we would be on day time working with the same procedures, however, there were not many day air raids. At certain times as the air raids took their toll on the citizens of West and East Ham we were called out to assist on clearing debris from bombed houses and trace for victims of the air-raid who maybe, and we always hoped, were alive. We were also told if we heard a ticking noise like a clock we have to evacuate immediately as it >

might be an unexploded bomb. However, I remember on one occasion we were within reach of 2 babies with their mother when the mother told us she had heard ticking and we had to laugh as we told her the alarm clock wasn't broken. We could not leave them even knowing it was actually a delayed bomb as we knew we could save them given 5 more minutes. We called our Sergeant and he asked for volunteers and several lads came forward to help us. We were successful and then the Army bomb disposal squad came and carefully dug for the bomb and defused it. Did we get a hero's welcome, no we got a bollocking from the CO at HQ for disobeying his orders. Still c'est la guerre.

We were not interested in bomb victims belongings as the ARP and police would search and recover them in due course. People discovered alive were carefully removed and passed to the Medical Corps or ARP. The bodies of dead people were left until the air raid had finished and we had a chance to remove them and lay them out in rows to be identified later.

I remember entering one badly damaged house where 3 or 4 of our lads were already looking for any members of the family who lived there who may still be alive. We told the ARP warden that there was no one in the debris and he said.

"There was a doctor lived there, but he has been killed in his surgery which had been destroyed. Some of the lads came out carrying about 4 or 5 books which I assumed were medical records or information. These books were guarded as articles of great value until we arrived back at our HQ when we threatened them with all kinds of torture if they did not reveal to us what kind of books they were. Eventually the whole Company, except the NCOs, learned of the presence of the books as the new owners decided to make some money by charging 6d (21/2p) if you wanted to be put on the reading waiting list. The order of receiving the books to read was arranged by using the last 3 numbers of your Army number - my number was 13056452. Everyone waited for their turn day after day - week after week. What was the subject of the books? Everyone even those who had read them would not reveal the answer - it was a closely guarded secret.

Thousands of people were made homeless by these air raids as London was attacked for 76 consecutive nights and all raids did not cease until May 1941. So from August 1940 until May 1941, 44,000 civilians died and 103,000 were injured. The number of casualties in 175 Company was small in comparison - 11 dead and 22 wounded. Finally in mid January 1941 it was decided to release our Company who

had served a 4 month tour of duty. We all deserved the respite thought it meant active service duties in Preston. I never had the chance of reading the famous but mysterious books as before the final inspection of our kit and billets the books had disappeared. I was not worried as apparently they were all about sex and the bromide in our tea prevented any excitement.

Our OC, Maj Ostle MC, received the following letter from the Lord Mayor of London on behalf of the Mayors of the surrounding towns, "Relations with the local authorities and the civil population were very good as night after night and day after day for a period of 120 days which comprised a period of 76 successive bombing air-raids the Pioneers shared the dangers with them and helped tremendously in their hours of need".

The OC also received many letters of praise and gratitude from civic leaders, Councils and individual citizens for the work the Company had carried out in West and East Ham. It was said that the Pioneer Corps deserved the right to march through London with fixed bayonets - colour standard flying and drums beating, but, this honour though deserved was not conferred on the Corps and so we could not enjoy that privilege so rightly earned. ■

*"It was said that the Pioneer Corps deserved the right to march through London with fixed bayonets, colour standard flying and drums beating..."*



## LOST TRAILS

The following are trying to re-establish contact with members. If no contact details are shown contact through the Association

### MULLEN

Danny Mullen is trying to contact people with whom he served between 1957 and 1961 in Cyprus and Africa. Please contact [s.tweed505@btinternet.com](mailto:s.tweed505@btinternet.com)

### TALBOT

Mr T Talbot is looking for anyone who served with his father Dennis Talbot attached to 263 Coy for Op Muskateer in 1956. He was shot in the leg 'by someone pushing around'. Contact [pushbutton2begin@aol.com](mailto:pushbutton2begin@aol.com)

### BIANCHI

Mrs Brenda Rogers (nee Bianchi) writes, my father Pte Attilio Bianchi 13076779 was in 190 Company serving in NW Europe and was killed as the result of an accident on 23 Jun 45, he is buried at Sage War Cemetery Oldenburg, Germany. (Plot 2, row F, Grave 8). I was very young when he died and I have no memory of him plus we did not have a photo of him. My dad is just a big blank spot in my life. I would love to be able to put something there. I was hoping that some of the men my dad served with could remember something about him, or may have a photo with my dad in it. I would be most grateful for any bit memories that they may have of him. Contact [kevinnn@bigpond.com.au](mailto:kevinnn@bigpond.com.au)

### BROWN

Mr AW Brown would like to get in touch with any of his old pals of 47 Company. They served in N Africa, Italy and NW Europe under command of Major Milligan. Contact 01303 265634

### RUMSEY

Mr Adrian Rumsey is trying to get in touch with other members of the Corps of Drums with whom he served. Contact 07963557747

### FALLON

Mr Jimmy Fallon is trying to get in touch with friends who served at 206 from 1969 - 1973 especially Joe Brown, Joe

Lynch, George West, Pete Ward, Mick Flaszynski, Brummie Gauntlett, Glen Forrester, Terry Weightman, Scouse Lencham and any members of the boxing team at that time. Contact [bravo2zoro@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bravo2zoro@yahoo.co.uk)

**HOPE** Mr C Hope (24705106) is trying to find old friends especially those who served with him at Venden. Contact [LueneburgColin@aol.com](mailto:LueneburgColin@aol.com)

### WHIPPS

Mr TE Whipps is trying to locate any members of 251 Coy in the 1956 era. The photo shows Burwell, Bagly, Snell, Tommy, Trew, Peckham, Cook & Harper.



### MY NAME IS VINCE BYRNE

I live in Columbia, South Carolina. I was a staff sergeant in the US Army and served with some members of the Pioneers at camp Wolf, Kuwait where I was a team leader of a mobile biological detection unit. I was born and raised in Fife, Scotland. I have been trying to touch base with the soldiers who I will never forget during the opening stages of the war. I met a young lad called Tim, he worked at the mortuary point and was an outstanding soldier. I also met the chaplain and believe his name was Paul, also the Sgt Major.

My heartbreaks at the memories of our serviceman coming back to camp Wolf in body bags. Being a jock American soldier I would swing by their tent for a brew and pick up a newspaper, what a superb outfit of men they were. If you

can help me, I would be grateful. Thank you SSgt Vince Byrne. [vincebyrne@earthlink.net](mailto:vincebyrne@earthlink.net)

### I WAS A L/CPL IN THE ROYAL CORPS OF SIGNALS.

Stationed at Le Mans when the Dunkirk evacuation was taking place. Myself and a Signaller were left at our signal office when our section was moved to the north coast to join the evacuation. About the 20th June we both left for St.Malo on motorbikes and headed north. We had no instructions as our officer and Sgt. had left with the section previously. To cut the story short we eventually arrived at St.Malo docks. We dumped our machines in the dock and boarded a coal barge which appeared to be filled with members of the Royal Pioneer Corps. They told us they were about to take off and hoped to reach England.

I do not remember the exact date, but we left St.Malo in the evening and were lucky enough to be overtaken by darkness and arrived off the beach at Weymouth the following morning. We eventually landed and were put up in tents on Weymouth football ground. I would like to be put in touch with any of the lads who were on that coal barge, as we all lost touch and I spent the rest of the war in the Far East. My name, Robert Edward Walker, army number 2590010. Tel: 01524852538. [walkerone@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:walkerone@tiscali.co.uk)

### DE LA HEY, LESLIE

If you know the whereabouts of this man please pass details to HQ RPC Association 0207 834 0415.

### GREGSON

Miss Kelly Gregson is trying to find her father, Colin Edward Gregson, with whom she has lost contact. He left the Army in 1982 after 9 years service starting as a Welsh guard and finally in RPC. His army number was 24326212. Contact [starbear@btopenworld.com](mailto:starbear@btopenworld.com)

## OBITUARIES

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

<b>Mr R HILL</b>	29 Jun 05	Wootton (ex Sgt 260 Coy) and also driver at Simpson Barracks
<b>Mr T ROONEY</b>	20 Jun 05	Erskine Home (Served 1941 - 1947)
<b>Mr B McCANN</b> aged 58	1 May 05	Goa, India. Ex WO2 Simpson Barracks
<b>Mr A BATE</b>	12 Jan 05	Ellesmere, Shropshire
<b>Mr P DOLTON</b> aged 49	7 Dec 04	Bidston, Birkenhead. Ex LCpl 522 Coy
<b>Mr W BALMER</b>	11 Oct 04	Bellingen, Australia (Served in the Corps 1942-48). His wife wrote he loved "The Pioneers" and was proud to be one.
<b>Mr BR CORDER</b> aged 67	15 Oct 04	Norwich
<b>Mr DR OSMOND</b>	30 Oct 04	Redruth (Ex CQMS 172 Coy - Normandy Veteran)
<b>Mr E BRANDON</b>	21 Sep 04	Grimsby
<b>Mr T TURNER</b>	13 Dec 04	Swansea (Ex 207 Coy)
<b>Mr MD ROBINSON</b>	21 Jan 05	York
<b>Mr L JARVIS</b>	25 Mar 05	Henley on Thames
<b>Maj GS BERRETT</b>	19 Dec 04	London (Aged 78)
<b>Mr WGE BUCKLER</b>	21 May 05	Plympton (Normandy Veteran and member of 39/93 Club)

<b>Mr JFG SPICER</b>	29 May 05	Birmingham
<b>Mr T McLARON</b>	10 Aug 05	TRBL Crosfield House
<b>Mr TJ LEACH</b> aged 51	27 Aug 05	Swadlincote, Derbys (Ex Sgt Recruit Instructor Anzio Section)
<b>Mr H HELSBY</b> aged 86	Nov 03	Wythenshawe, Manchester. (Landed at Anzio & Salerno with 79 Coy)
<b>Mr JS RODGERS</b>	9 Sep 05	Crewe
<b>Mr GW WICKHAM</b>	15 Jul 05	Maurice House TRBL Broadstairs
<b>Mr R CRIGHTON</b>	22 Jul 05	Erskine Home (Joined the Assoc. in January 1947)
<b>Mr N BEATTIE BEM</b>	19 Sept 05	Filey, N. Yorks (Ex WO2 RQMS, 23 Group RPC (aged 64))
<b>Mrs JOYCE HELEN RYALL</b>	22 May 05	wife of Brig JB Ryall, died suddenly at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital
<b>Mrs JULIE THOMPSON</b>	9 Apr 05	wife of the late WO1 Alec Thompson at Northampton
<b>Mrs EILEEN BENNETT</b>	15 Jun 05	wife of Lt Col (QM) R Bennett, at Lyme Regis.
<b>Mr ARTHUR MASON</b>	21 Apr 05	'Geof' was the documentation clerk at Simpson Brks from 1982 until his retirement and the closure of Simpson Barracks in 1993.





# Royal Pioneer Corps Association



## New Corps Tie >

A new tie is now available from HQ RPC Association, although keeping the same pattern the new one contains the Corps Badge on the blade of the tie.

The photograph shows Sgt D Pettit with the first new tie! **£7.50**

Welcome to the RPC Association Shop...  
Please send cheques payable to RPC Association with your order.



^ Cufflinks solid silver **£20**



^ Cufflinks bronze **£13.50**



^ Tie Pins lovely **£3.50**



^ Tie polyester **£6**



^ Bow Tie adjustable **£5.50**



^ Bow Tie silk **£14**



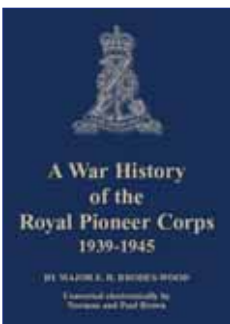
< Blazer Badge silk & wire **£7**



^ Wall Shields hand painted **£20**



^ Wall Shields 85-93 badge **£20**



## < "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 **£11**



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



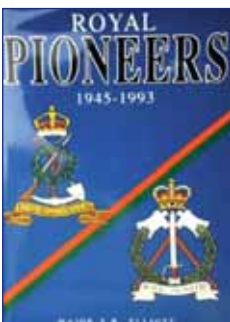
## ^ Photograph CD's

The Association has a large number of old photographs taken over the years.

They are now available on CDs (each CD contains approx 400 photographs). **£4**

The first four are:

- Named, partially named
- Unknown
- Reunion Weekends
- WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club



## < "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 **£14**



^ Seasons Greetings Cards x10 **£2.50**



The Captain  
William  
11. 11. 1914

Dear Sir  
I have the honor  
to acknowledge  
the receipt of  
your letter of  
the 11th inst.

Yours faithfully  
The Captain

