

THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION



13011512 PRIVATE
J. TANCRED
PIONEER CORPS
5TH DECEMBER 1943 AGE 43

A TOKE
AND RE

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2006

c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC - St David's Barracks - Graven Hill - Bicester - OX26 6HF
T: 01869 360694 F: 01869 360695 E: pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk



The Royal Pioneer Corps Association Shop



< **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. **£7.50**



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



^ **Cufflinks**
solid silver **£20**



^ **Cufflinks**
bronze **£13.50**



^ **Tie Pins**
lovely **£3.50**



^ **Seasons Greetings Cards**
x10 **£2.50**



^ **Wall Shields**
hand painted **£20**



^ **Wall Shields**
85-93 badge **£20**



< **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire **£7**



< **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire **£7**



< **"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**



< **"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. £10**



^ **Photograph CD's**
The Association has a large number of old photographs taken over the years. They are now available on CD's (each CD contains approx 400 photographs).

- They are:
- Named, partially named vol. 1
 - Named, partially named vol. 2
 - Unknown
 - Reunion Weekends
 - WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club
- £2 per disc**



^ **Bronze Statue**
why not order & collect at Reunion Weekend to save postage **£60 + £5 postage**

Please send cheques payable to RPC Association with your order...

Royal Pioneer Corps Association
c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC
St Davids Barracks
Graven Hill
Bicester OX26 6HF

Editorial

In the postbag I have included a large number of letters thanking me for the work involved in making this year's Reunion Weekend probably the best ever. I must state now that this was only possible with the hard work put in by 23 Pioneer Regiment. The Regiment returned from a four week strenuous exercise and only had ten days to prepare for the Freedom of Bicester Parade and the Reunion Weekend, a remarkable achievement.

Many members commented on the high standard of drill and turnout of the Regiment. I would also like to thank those members of the Association who marched behind the Regiment for their high standard, even our 'escort' WO2 Kev Cole was impressed! Special mention must also be made on the standard of catering that was enjoyed over the weekend. The Chefs worked long and hard to ensure that all buffets and meals were of the usual exceptional quality.

In the photograph section I have included a large number of photographs of the Parade, a CD Rom containing over 250 photographs can be purchased from the Association at a cost of £2.

In the Last Post section we are recording 27 former members of the Corps whose deaths have been notified since the last Newsletter. Two of these, ex Sgt G Rushby and ex LCpl W Robertson, attended the Reunion Weekend. Our condolences are passed to the families of all those recorded.

The April Newsletter resulted in 85 envelopes being returned to the Association marked 'Gone Away', although a few have since informed us of their new address it does mean that those members are now lost to us until we have their new details. It also meant that we wasted 85 x 49p stamps. However we have recruited 31 new members so far this year some of whom actually served in World War 2 and did not know that the Association existed. Please pass the word at every opportunity.

I have included in this Newsletter an article from ex RQMS PG Smith describing his service in the Corps. Mr Smith joined the Association on 20 January 1947 - this is before I was born, honestly! Is he the longest serving member? Similar articles are required, why not put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard).

In the letters page you will see a letter from John Hatfield on re-forming a Northern Branch, I understand that it is the intention that once formed, the Branch will hold meetings and functions in various locations in the North, if you live in the North please give it your support.

Finally I must thank all members who purchased Derby Draw tickets, a profit of £3,100 was made, this is one of the few remaining methods of obtaining funds for the Association. The results are shown on page 18, the first prize went to a member of 522 Sqn Pte Rolobatitoo. He was instructed to report for interview with his CO not knowing why although the Adjutant had hinted that it may be for disciplinary reasons. When given his cheque for £500 he was both a happy and relieved man.

Tickets for the Christmas Draw are attached please give it your support, we will be happy to supply further tickets on request.



THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2006

newsletter contents

Page

1	The headstone of Pte J Tancred, 187 Coy PC
2	The Royal Pioneer Corps Association Shop
3	Editorial / Contents
4-5	Letters to the Editor
6	Past and Future Events
7	Approaching Normandy
8	Message from Chairman RPC Association / The Warm Front Team / Defence Discounts Directory / Who is a Veteran
9-12	The Liberty of Bicester Parade Photo Gallery
13	Dunkirk: Fight To The Last Man by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore
14-15	Minutes of the 58th AGM RPC Association
16-17	Six Years in the Life of a Pioneer by Ex RQMS PG Smith
18	Lost Trails & Obituaries / Derby Draw 2006 Results
19	Photo Gallery
20	Pte J Tancred



Registered Charity Number: 801733

Patron

HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

Vice Patrons

General Sir John Stibbon KCB OBE,
Major General G W Field CB

President

Brigadier H J Hickman CBE

Chairman

Brigadier C B Telfer CBE

Honorary Treasurer

Major E R Elliott

Controller / Editor

N Brown Esq

Typesetting / Design

P A Brown



c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC - St David's Barracks
Graven Hill - Bicester - OX26 6HF
T: 01869 360694 F: 01869 360695
E: pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk



Letters to the editor

Dear Mr N Brown,

Thank you for publishing my article on the publication of my book 'Kings Own Enemy Aliens'. You've got a first. So far you are the only one who has published these details, although it seems to have found a lot of approval. Funnily enough almost more in the States than in England.

It remains to let people know when the book is actually published and how much it'll cost. It now looks as if the publication date would be some time next month but as far as the price is concerned I haven't a clue - as yet.

I'll let you know everything as soon as I know it and, if you like I'll send you a draft note for insertion in the Newsletter. Incidentally, yours must be the poshest newsletter in England. I'm used to getting newsletters run off on home duplicators and such like.

Regards,

Peter

(Ed note: now published ISBN 0 85303 693 4)

Hello Norman,

WOW! Received the Newsletter yesterday and astonished at the result of my article. I never thought that it warranted such treatment. The use of the three photographs clearly demonstrated the designer's art. Congratulations to your Son.

I look forward to the possibility that some 10 Coy or 349 Coy personnel may still be about.

It's a sad time for me just now as my wife died recently, we had enjoyed being married nearly 64 years. She would have appreciated the treatment which you gave to the article as she read the typescript before it went off.

Best Wishes.

Bill Forde

Dear Sir,

Just a short note to let you know I do appreciate the Newsletter Magazine and update information. I'm a strong supporter and will continue to be.

Yours faithfully,

FJ Stevens

Dear Mr Brown,

We know that the RPC are a hard act to follow, but how did you manage to have your 59th Past and Present Officers' Dinner in October 2006 (Apr 06 Newsletter, page 20). Well done!

Yours sincerely,

Kirsten Jones

(Ed note: when I was serving I was taught always to have an immediate excuse, this time it is "you failed to notice that the Newsletter was distributed on 1 April!!") - this mistake was also noted by Bill Rowland

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the letter from Ex Sgt Bill Rowland re Sgt Kelly. I joined 146 Coy in Bezerta in Sep 43 and from there took part in the Salerno Landings. The very night of the Sgt Kelly incident myself and a man from Liverpool named Giles went into no-mans land with two REs to clear anti personnel mines and lay a white tape for infantry to follow. When the attack went in I remember that a young infantry officer strayed from our markers stood on a mine and was left with a very smashed leg. He refused medical attention stating to medics that he had stood on the mine and ordered them to look after his men who had been wounded by the mine. He himself died in a few minutes, he must have known he could not be saved. He was a very young man in his very early twenties.

I often think of him, a very brave man indeed. I believe Sgt Kelly was awarded for his deed that night but I am not sure. I was also with Giles and man named Atkinson also from Liverpool when in the next street from us in Naples the main Post Office blew up from a mine left by the Germans. The office had been taken over by the Americans and they suffered some loss there.

All for now, thanks to Bill Rowland,

Richard (Dick) Wood

Dear Norman,

May I applaud 23 Pnr Regt RLC being honoured with the Freedom of Bicester, this is only gained by getting the respect of the inhabitants of Bicester through good behaviour. May I remind you that 146 Coy were afforded that honour by Thurso, North Scotland. After our initial training we employed to fortify Scrabster Bay, a water inlet off the North Atlantic for a safe haven in bad weather or to lay up from U Boats. We gained the privilege through respect. Unfortunately we had no band, but we did have CSM Munto, ex Black Watch, who acquired the Pipes & Drums of the Black Watch.

On one occasion I re-visited Thurso on holiday, I made it known I was a Sergeant of that Company and was then treated like a Lord.

All the Best and every success to the Pioneers,

Bill Rowland (Ex Sgt 146 Coy 1942-1947)

Woodend Arden, Argyle

Dear Sir,

You kindly published the photograph of the 1955-56 Football team at 523 Coy RPC at Suston Leice commanded by Maj J Leech and I had one response from Pte Seabrook from Preston.

The last week I offered copies FOC under "Service Pals" on Ch 4 and had a happy talk with former CSM Frank Lusby who came to the Coy from Egypt, then to COD Weedon and then Bicester or Gaydon. Despite the decades of a gap we recalled the 'good old days' with the fine Pioneers who assisted the RÈME at Old Dalby base, Leics and whose football team were a match for the Leicester City Police and the Depot Royal Leicesters who had several professional players retained at the Depot at Glen Parva barracks if only to boost the team performance... that could be done by a clever OC during National Service days. Our RPC boys were very competitive and tough, be it said.

Frank Lusby has long since hung up his boots and gaiters and I have sent him the latest Association Newsletter along with a copy of the team photograph. Nostalgia is a wonderful gift to have and although the modern army does not want National Servicemen at that time it did an immense favour to millions who, in general, admit to it being a time of learning, maturity and excitement with discipline.

Kindest regards to all serving and retired,

JS Coleman, Capt (Retd) and formerly Pte 23031664



3 Green Lane, Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk. NR30 5EW

Dear Sir,

I completed my basic training at Saighton Camp, Chester in 1949 and was then posted to Tingewick Camp, Bucks where I served most of my National Service apart from 3 months when I was attached to Bicester Garrison then for a while to a place I can just remember, Arncot. Here we were attached to REME.

I would appreciate if any members have any photographs of these camps they could let me have, I will gladly pay the postage. I still think of the times when we used to go the cinema at Bicester Garrison and our week-ends at Banbury.

Best wishes,

RB Symonds

The following letter was received from the daughter of a lady who the Association had helped since the death of her husband.

Dear Sir,

My father found himself on a beach in Normandy on D Day + 1 in 1944, from which he was to fight his way across France into Germany during those terrible days of war. No doubt together with his comrades, he felt that there was little about the army for which he should feel grateful for bringing such privation into his life.

He sadly died in 1969, never to know what the army had done for him now in caring for his dear wife, my mother. Indeed the army looks after its own as they say. I have not words with which to properly thank you for your unstinting help and concern for us all. Bless you for what you do.

Hi Norman,

I would like to say a very very big thank you to you and the Corps Association for allowing my wife and myself to stay at St Davids Bks for the Royal Pioneers Corps Reunion Weekend. We found it very well presented and welcoming, I for one enjoyed myself meeting up with old mates and making new ones.

Once again Norman a stirring show on your part , long may it continue.

Cheers

Tony Tuplin

Hello Norman,

It was nice meeting you for the first time, although I did not know it was you selling the tickets until I asked. Well I did enjoy the Association Weekend and made some new friends to keep in touch with, it was strange sleeping in the old Barracks.

Was there a good write up in the local news paper on the Parade, we could not have asked for better weather. I look forward to seeing our photo taken in the Church.

Regards,

David

Dear Norman,

I am just writing this letter to you to say "Thank You" for the Reunion we had at the weekend. It was a great weekend for everyone, I myself had a good time meeting mates that I had made in Cyprus years ago.

So once again, a big Thank You.

D Mullan

Dear Norman,

Through the medium of the postbag in the April edition of the Newsletter, here you find me a very happy man because of my letter I was contacted by Dick Wood who joined me as a 19 year old in time to land at Salerno, a very hard landing. He remembers well the incident where Sgt Kelly got his award, he remembers too the part I played in the incident.

He also remembers Sgt Kelly returning with a Tommy gun, which he cherished. He also recalls of an occasion when we were put into forward positions to act as porters for the Guards Division. The first procedure was to make certain the field kitchen was erected followed by providing a latrine. This consisted of digging the regulation 6'x3' hole with an oil drum each side and a plank to suspend your buttocks precariously on. When we moved it was filled in and on the ground a cross marked foul ground was left. Two ladies walked up the road, saw the cross, bowed their heads and crossed themselves, they later returned with flowers and duly placed them there! I wonder to this day if marking the ground 'foul' is still practiced.

Thank you for such a fine paper, how I wish I could attend the reunion at Bicester as I did at Thurso when my 146 Coy got the Freedom of the town also in the Victory March in Tunis. Good Luck and Thank You.

Bill Rowland (Ex Sgt 146 Coy)

Hi Norman,

Just to let you know on the progress of the re-formation of a Northern Branch of the Association. We have at least thirty individuals who are interested in the idea of the branch and are offering their support.

We would like to know if you could place something in the newsletter about the formation of a Northern Branch and if anyone is interested would they please contact me on 0772 5358096, or Allan Sutcliffe on 07949 723301. As this would help us inform members of our intentions. Also Allan has asked if you could also mention in the newsletter about the RPC Nostalgia Group that is up and running on AOL, the address for this is www.aol.co.uk/groups. Also I would like to inform members that I have my own personal webpage on geocities and the address for that is www.geocities.com/johnhat_52 I have a few links on there to various organisations. Thanking you for your help in these matters.

John Wm Hatfield

Dear Norman,

I feel I must write and congratulate you, and everyone else involved in organising this year's Corps Weekend, there can only be one word for it, FAULTLESS. Because of ill health I had been unable to attend the last three years, but it seemed to me for me that this Reunion was worth waiting for. The icing on the cake was the Freedom march through Bicester, I was a little disappointed at not being able to carry my standard on the parade, but I was afraid to take the chance. I would like to thank the young man, Mr Dennis Gimes, who stood in for me at such short notice, he did a wonderful job and I'm sure that if you ever wanted another standard bearer in the London area he's your man. It was good to see so many old friends again, too many for you to name, and of course making new ones. Could I take this opportunity to thank two ex RSMs, Fox and Thomas, for being so concerned about my well being whilst I marched.

Once again Norman thanks for a wonderful Corps Reunion Weekend, and God willing I shall be with you next year. Peace and Good Health to every one in the Association.

Derek Luker (Taffy)



The Royal Pioneer Corps Association
c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC
St Davids Barracks
Graven Hill
Bicester OX26 6HF

or email us at
pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk



PAST & FUTURE EVENTS

REUNION WEEKEND

7/8 July 2006



What a Weekend! This year's Reunion Weekend held during the weekend 7/8 July 2006 must be ranked as one of the best ever; numerous letters have already been received confirming this. It started with a reception on the Friday evening in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess where approx 350 people attended, luckily the weather was perfect (as it was for the whole weekend) and people could over-spill onto the lawn. This was the first occasion where the 'Old & Bold' could meet the 'New Boys' and the conversations were long and varied.

On Saturday morning everyone was bussed to Bicester for a Church Service which was held in St Egburt's Church. The RLC Band played in the Church and all ex RPC personnel were delighted to hear the RPC March being played. The Church Service was followed by a Freedom March through Bicester. 23 Pnr Regt RLC having been granted the Liberty of Bicester in April had chosen the Reunion Weekend to exercise their option to march through the town with 'Bands Playing and Bayonets Fixed'. They had very generously asked that the Old Comrades of the RPC Association march behind them. Approximately 65 marched led by three Association Standards, the older members being spectators. It is pleasing to report that everyone kept the step although it is always much easier when a band is playing! Even our 'drill instructor', WO2 Kev Cole RLC, was surprised at the high standard of the marching, especially the halt. A few commented that they felt choked-up when the large crowds clapped and cheered as they marched past.

On return to St David's Barracks a reception was held in the Officers' Mess followed by a programme of events held on the Sports Field. Once again this proved to be a great success with the events being well organised and varied. The evening function was held in the Garrison Theatre which unfortunately is limited to an attendance of 350. This, as expected, was a sell-out and again a great success with varied entertainment and an exceptionally high standard of catering. Those unable to obtain a ticket were not disappointed as there was also entertainment outside together with a pig roast.

On Sunday morning a short Service was held at the Corps War Memorial when wreaths were laid by a serving soldier of 23 Pnr Regt RLC and Mr Les Rowley on behalf of the Association. This was followed by the Annual General Meeting. The minutes of which are on pages 14 & 15.

During the weekend we welcomed, for the first time, our new In-Pensioner ex LCpl M Hull, who was used as 'Right-marker' on the march. We hope he enjoyed his first visit to Bicester and hope it is the first of many. The Association, once again, thanks the Regiment for hosting us. The organisation was first-class especially in view of the fact that the Regiment had only returned from a month's exercise 10 days previously. What was achieved in those 10 days was remarkable and a credit to all members of the Regiment.



60th RPC PAST & PRESENT OFFICERS DINNER

Officers Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment, Bicester,
Friday 13 October 2006

This is to be held at Officers Mess, 23 Pioneer Regt RLC, on Friday 13 October 2006, further details can be obtained from the RPC Association.

WOs & SNCO's PIONEER REUNION CLUB LADIES DINNER NIGHT

Saturday 14 October 2006

This is to be held on Saturday 14 October 2006 in the WOs & Sgts Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, further details can be obtained from The Secretary, Reunion Club c/o RPC Association.

FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE

Westminster Abbey, Thursday 9 November 2006



The Field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 8 November at 1100 hours, when a short service will be given. Members attending the planting of crosses at the Corps Plot (No 136) are asked to arrive by 1030 hours. It would be prudent to bring a means of identification, entrance to the Field will involve passing through Police security checks. All those attending must be prepared to stay until the reviewing party has departed the Field. The use of

large 'intrusive' camera equipment is not allowed, personal hand held cameras are acceptable.

The field will be open from 9 to 5.30 hours until Saturday 10 November 2005. Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held, see details below.

LONDON LUNCH

Thursday 9 November 2006

This is to be held following the Field of Remembrance in the Marquis of Westminster Restaurant, Warwick Way, London. The cost of the meal is £15 per person please send your cheque to RPC Association to arrive before 25 October 2006.



CENOTAPH PARADE

Sunday 12 November 2006

Last year 27 members marched at the Cenotaph, this year we have been allocated 30 tickets; these can be obtained, on application, to RPC Association on a first come first served basis.

Following the Parade it has become the custom for all marchers to have a meal and a drink.

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Plough Hotel, Northampton
Saturday 2 December 2006

Christmas party is to be held at the Plough Hotel, Northampton on 2 December 2006 (1930hrs).

It will consist of a three course Christmas menu with disco and late bar. Cost £15 per head (£10 for OAP's & unemployed).

Full details can be obtained from Mr N Brown (01604) 403338.





APPROACHING NORMANDY

from the diary by
CQMS FH LUMMESS

May 20th 1944 Sergeants' Mess in Camp R5- one of many camps along South and South East Coast. Stationed just outside Felixstowe-part of Second Wave. Three CQMSs' round table, two from Royal Tanks, and myself. Discussing prospects-they insist average Pioneer too old for job-anyway whole set up only to scare Jerry. "Your old men will never see France" they say. Think they're wrong-average age men in my unit 35-five over 50.

May 29th 1944 General "Flap" on parade. Company split into six parties-I have 15 men-get cooks, butchers, barber and all non-marchers.

May 30th 1944 Slept on road last night-this morning truck moves into convoy with nine tanks. Breakfast stew and tea, could not tell difference. Off to hards. Ship pulls up to concrete hard, lowers ramps, we dismount from lorry and climb two each on to tanks. Sea looks awful wet, sun shining, so "All's well". Tanks soon embarked-we are on lower deck-no cover-water splashes over occasionally. Put to sea-can only look up- see sky, barrage balloons, and gulls. Sun on wrong side-must be going upstream-must be rehearsal after all. Ship's complement nine tanks and their crews, two RAF men, 16 Pioneers, plus one barrage balloon.

June 4th 1944 Still stuck in river-life really monotonous-no contact with outside world. Tank Colonel returns to ship-maps and orders issued. Briefs his men-says to make for Bayeux-to hold town if Counter-attacked. Hour later man finds he has measles-hurried off to hospital-probably only private at large in England who knows "when and where".

June 5th 1944 Engines start up 0900 hours-move in convoy with 200 other craft. Join forces with another convoy mid-day-steam out of Thames.

June 6th 1944 Through Straits without incident-pass Isle of Wight-turn South. Tank radio gives news the invasion is on-loud cheers-everything going well-"we'll see when we get there". Due touch down on beach H plus 1630-that's midnight. Weather pretty rough. I'm lucky, not sick, like Captain. Food is from Compo packs-tin of Irish stew. Never

realised there were so many ships or shapes of ships.

Arrived off-shore about dusk-early for our appointment-near Arromanches-large fires burning-lots of noise-shells dropping in town on left. Tank boys making their fourth landing-look and sound bored-seem just not interested. Glad my fifteen men are taking it the same. Slight break in monotony-Oerlikons on ships open up-Navy's day off-Jerry flies through-we get wet from splash of near-miss. Sailing parallel to coast-only see mushrooms of orange flame. Wish we could get ashore. This damned, flat bottomed, square-nosed brute of a barge jumps twice with every wave. Bump into four other boats-lose part of the railings on the stern. CSM of Tanks suggests we prepare to disembark. My men mount two each on a tank-stand on outside and cling to turret-suddenly remember one or two prayers I learned at school.

Each man carried full equipment, plus rifle or sten and pick or shovel. We are to lay tracks to connect beach and coastal road-help wheeled vehicles ashore. Estimated 2,000 vehicles will pass over our piece of road in twenty-four hours.

June 7th 1944 0200 hours, cold-very cold-don't know why sea does not freeze. Tour ship and ask men how they feel. Much too cold to answer. Water splashing over the side-men wet as well as cold. Ship's captain signals Beachmaster for permission to land. Informed beach much too full of wrecks to attempt landing in dark. Try further up. Go to cook's galley-cook away on bridge doing ack-ack duty. Find store to TSM powder from Compo-brew up. Tea takes half an hour to make-stagger out on deck-amazing the way soldiers smell tea-lasts five minutes. Try three times to land on three different beaches. Reply from the last beach a red light "keep off".

0400 hours and the skipper decides to anchor till day break. Boys get their blankets out-throw them over their heads-sleep upright on back of tanks. I tuck my six feet under sink and sleep on iron floor of galley.

0600 hours and cook arrives-get up aching all over-prepare to brew tea-not

interested in Operation Overlord-only want both feet on something firm-don't like going up, then down, round and round, all day, all night. Existence on LCT is Devils' torment. Manoeuvring again to contact shore-feel a bit brighter-two hundred yards out we drop anchor astern. We creep in. On the right is a three ton lorry with water over its bonnet-six RAF types sitting on the canopy waiting to be rescued. They treat it as a joke-British spirit. Thirty yards from beach crew sound for depth-twelve feet-too much for the tanks. Creep closer-depth down to six feet. One tank with two RAF men and their balloon are away-climbs four foot slope to ramp-hesitates-plunges forward. Engines working beautifully-sigh of relief from all-engine chokes-tank stops-sticks in four feet of water-confidence evaporates. I warn men to be prepared to swim. Next tank is away with two of my men aboard-chugs merrily through the water-reaches firm ground. Smiles again! Next tank away but water rising-tank sticks ten years from dry land-not so good-Greek barber one of my men marooned. Two tanks gone-skipper unhappy and pulls out. Try again and all get cracking. Don't even get my feet wet. Call the roll, find two missing-find a RE who tells me where the rest of the company is "seven miles along the beach but don't use the coast road as it's mined". Start a march through soft sand-meet CSM-never so pleased to see a CSM in all my life. Contact Company HQ at last-dead tired-every time I close my eyes I see ships, ships, ships. Concentrate stores in one point-men dump kit-fall in on parade-the road must be built. Already what was yesterday a corn field is now an "autobahn" of Somervelt track-some rifle fire on hill-side two hundred yards away-too tired to be interested. Want a cup of tea but fires forbidden.

June 8th 1944 Waken to find I have fallen asleep on the grass verge. Work until main job finished-then sleep-unwashed-unshaven-unhappy. ■

*"Too tired to be proud
- just glad it's all
finished - would not
have missed it for
the world..."*



MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN, R.P.C.A.
Brigadier CB Telfer CBE



Dear Member,

Those of you who attended recent Annual General Meetings or have read previous issues of the Association Newsletter will realise that we are now in the final stages of convergence of our Association with the RLC Association Trust. It is over 13 years since the RLC was formed with the amalgamation of the RAOC, RCT, ACC, RE PCC and, of course, our own Corps and the time is upon us to take the next logical step to complete that amalgamation.

The Forming Corps' have until now, retained manpower cover to run their Associations, however, this is to cease from April 2007. That factor causes us to re-arrange our affairs to ensure continuing serving Army support in meeting our Benevolent Fund responsibilities and to ensure continued support for our fraternal Association events. This can best be achieved by embedding the management of our Benevolent Fund and Association assets with that of the Royal Logistic Corps Association Trust.

The process started in October 2004, since when the RLC has very successfully and satisfactorily administered benevolence for ex RPC personnel. The next stage in the Convergence process is to transfer all Association funds and assets to the Trustees of the RLC Association Trust. A binding Charter of Convergence has been agreed and signed by all parties, which ensures that Benevolent grants will be handled with the same degree of care and prudence as hitherto. Our Association fraternal programme of events will also continue as before. Our target date for the assignment of our assets is 1 December 2006, with full Convergence achieved on 1 April 2007. The incumbent Chairman of your Association sits on the RLC Trustees Committee and we have seats on the RLC Benevolent Committee, the Museum Committee and the Heritage Committee thus ensuring our interests are properly represented.

Your Association will remain in being with an executive committee and branch structure within the RLC Association. Newsletters and all functions, including Reunion Weekends, will continue and be administered by our current Controller on a part-time basis.

There will be a Royal Pioneer Corps Association for as long as there are members. No matter how old we get or how few we become, these new arrangements will ensure that we can manage our affairs efficiently and effectively.

Your Council joins me in wishing you and your families every success for the future and we hope that you will be able to give your support to the Association by attending events and in any other way you can.



THE WARM FRONT TEAM

A government funded scheme

Warm Front is a government-funded scheme which provides grants to make your home warmer, healthier and more energy efficient. The following energy-efficient improvements of up to the value of £2,700 can be provided. To qualify for a Warm Front Grant, the householder must own their home or rent it from a private landlord and must receive certain benefits.

- Insulation improvements
- Loft insulation
- Draughtproofing
- Hot-water-tank insulation
- Heating improvements
- Gas, electric or oil central heating
- Repairs to your existing heating system
- Converting a solid-fuel open fire to a glass-fronted fire



Further details can be obtained by telephoning 0800 316 6011 or emailing marketing@eaga.co.uk or by post from: Emma Finlay, Marketing Department, Eaga Partnership Ltd (MK754) FREEPOST NAT 13708, Eaga House, Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1ZL.

DEFENCE DISCOUNTS DIRECTORY

Replaces the former Forces Discount Brochure



The new Defence Discounts Directory replaces the former Forces Discount Brochure. Its aim is to provide the Defence Community - Regulars, Reserves, Veterans, Cadets, MOD Civil Servants and their families - with access to meaningful benefits which are not available to the general public.

Outsourcing has allowed substantial improvement to the scope and presentation of the Directory, and an improvement in the discounts and other benefits being provided.

A dedicated website has been established at www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk. This will enable all members of the Defence community to access the Discounts Directory, and will provide links to advertisers' own websites.

WHO IS A VETERAN?

10.5 million of us!

Veterans are former members of HM Armed Forces (Navy, Army, RAF, regular or reserve). The term applies to all UK ex-servicemen and women.

Are veterans all elderly?

Certainly not! This is a common misconception, but veterans can be any age from 18 – 100 plus. As soon as anyone leaves the Armed Forces they become a veteran. Hundreds of thousands are in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

Are National Servicemen veterans?

Yes. The youngest is now 62 plus.

Who else can be called a veteran?

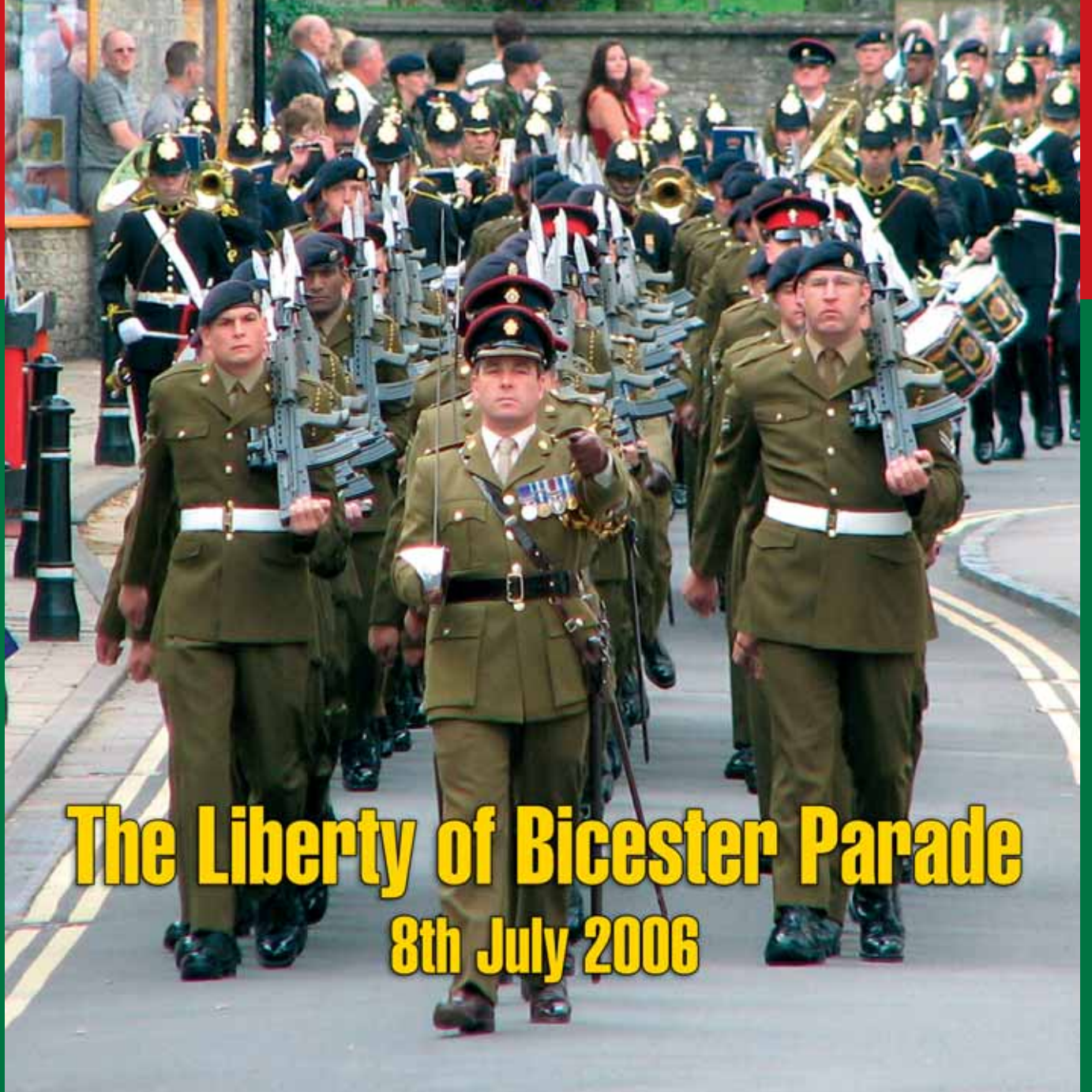
Veteran status also applies to a number of special groups such as those who once served in the Polish detachments under British command in WWII and Merchant Mariners who saw duty in military operations.

Do you need to have seen action to be a veteran?

No. Veterans need not have served overseas or in conflict, only as part of the 'trained strength' of the Armed Forces.

How does Veterans Agency support veterans?

It administers payments to veterans injured or disabled through service in the Forces and to widows, widowers and civil partners of those killed in Service. In addition the national Veterans Helpline and website provide sound advice on many topics. Enquiries may also be redirected to a range of organisations that work in partnership with the Agency to support the Veterans Community. When you need help and don't know where to go, start here: 0800169 2277

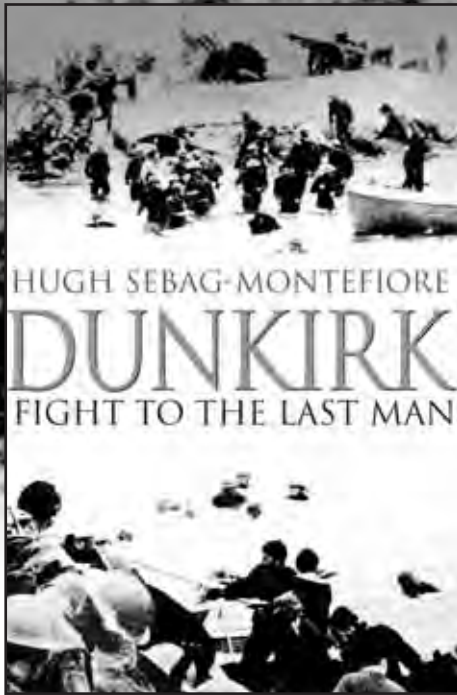


The Liberty of Bicester Parade

8th July 2006







This recently published book contains a new angle on how the 1940 British Expeditionary Force came to be evacuated from Dunkirk: it was not just because of the courage of the men on the beaches being rescued by the Navy and those celebrated little ships. According to author Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, the evacuation would never have taken place had it not been for the bravery of the British soldiers who were left behind to hold back the Germans while the evacuation went ahead.

The book also contains an account of how the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps personnel behaved during the battle for Boulogne. It is sad to report that many of the pioneers panicked when the Germans attacked. Time and again they are described in contemporaneous reports as a "rabble" who fired at their own retreating troops, mistaking them for Germans, and who tried to rush onto the destroyers sent to evacuate the port without waiting to be invited on board.

However there is also a redeeming description of the way one group of pioneers stood their ground and repulsed attack after attack. The AMPC's 5 Group commanded by Lt-Col. Donald Dean VC were on the north west side of Boulogne's perimeter on 23 May 1940. When they spotted a tank rolling towards their makeshift barricade, they could have been forgiven if they had hastily withdrawn. They had no anti-tank guns or artillery. However as the tank began to climb over the barricade, Dean had his men pour petrol onto it and ordered them to light the fuel with a match. It went up in flames forcing the tank to back off. No German armour approached the barricade again.

5 Group's willingness to stand and fight meant that there was after all no weak link in the perimeter around Boulogne; the garrison commander had initially feared that he would not have enough troops to encircle the port. As a result most of the troops in the town were able to make an orderly retreat to the ships

waiting to rescue them, and the majority were evacuated.

Dean remained in the town until the very end. When the last destroyer came into the port, and was filling up with men including many pioneers, Dean insisted on going round the inner perimeter telling the men they must run to the ship or be captured. Then he returned to the ship to ask for more time to round up those remaining. According to Dean: "The Naval Officer said that he was already dangerously overloaded and top heavy, that dawn would break shortly, that he would not wait a moment longer and if I did not get on board he would leave without me. Not wishing to be taken prisoner I walked aboard. I believe that I was the last to get away from Boulogne."

Dunkirk: Fight To The Last Man by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore is published by Viking/Penguin and is available at most bookshops. Price £25. ■





MINUTES OF THE 58TH A.G.M. OF THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION held at Bicester on Sunday 9th July 2006

Chairman :
Brig C B Telfer CBE
Secretary :
Mr N Brown Esq
Members Present :
38

After welcoming members present, especially those attending for the first time, and receiving apologies from Brig HJ Hickman, Col RF McDonald, Maj PJ Fleming, Maj GF Crook, Capt M East, Mr T Appleyard, Mr D Maddison, Mr J Killeen and Mr D Bryant the Chairman opened the meeting at 1115 hrs.

The Chairman thanked the CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Lt Col MJ Bennett, for again making the Association welcome to St David's Barracks and commented on the organisation and efficiency shown by all members of his unit. He also thanked the RSM 23 Pnr Regt, WO1 J Frame, for allowing the Association to hold its AGM in his Mess.

ITEM 1 . MINUTES OF 57TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 57th Annual General Meeting had been published in the October 2005 Association Newsletter and were unanimously agreed.

2. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2. REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

3. Lt Col MJ Bennett, CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, gave the following report:

4. Once again, 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 Brigadier Jonathan Downes. The operational role of the Brigade is to enable British Army operations world-wide from both ends of the strategic coupling bridge utilising the full range of our Assault Pioneer and Artisan skills. Flexibility is the key.

5. 187 (Tancred) Squadron trained an enlarged Troop of 1 + 35 as the Force Protection Troop with 3 Composite Logistic Regiment in Basra and deployed them on Op Telic 5. The Troop deployed to Iraq in May 2005 and returned in November for some well deserved post operational tour leave. Both Lt Joe Brown and SSgt Chandler did extremely well in tough and testing conditions.

6. Never missing an opportunity to show off our military skills we entered teams into both the Cambrian Patrol and the RLC Gore Trophy in November. The Cambrian Patrol was conducted in some of the worst storms seen in Wales for several years and a significant number of teams, including ours, were forced to withdraw due to the risk of exposure. In the RLC Gore Trophy, we finished 2nd and 3rd in the regular team event behind

Cdo Log Regt losing out on the Falling Plate Competition.

7. Surprises are never far away in this Unit and in November, we were nominated as the formation to lead a Tri-Service force on Op FRESCO (West Midlands). Fire fighting training was conducted at the Fire Services College, Moreton-in-Marsh. We eventually deployed RHQ, 144 and 206 Sqns complete reinforced by 522 Sqn. Locating ourselves in a Forward Holding Area in Bramcote, Nuneaton, we manned 12 temporary Service Fire Stations throughout Birmingham and Coventry conducting fire fighting operations. Thankfully, the industrial dispute was eventually settled and the operation was terminated with no loss of life or serious injury to servicemen or the public. This represents a major success for 23 Pioneer Regt RLC. We were actually able to get back to Bicester in time for Christmas.

8. The Regiment deployed on Exercise COMPLETE PIONEER using 187 and 522 Sqns in March 2006 to Thetford to test the Regiment's new BOWMAN digital communications and conduct a mission rehearsal of Theatre reception tasks as well as low level tactics. The Regiment remains the most advanced and fully converted RLC unit to this new and revolutionary communications system. 144 Squadron deployed its echelon in full to resupply the other Squadrons. The weather conditions were a severe test of morale reaching minus 6 on most evenings. Nevertheless, we coped and learnt some valuable lessons. 206 Squadron at the same time sent a Troop to Canada in March with the Royal Engineers on Ex WARPAIN where the soldiers used their extensive artisan and assault Pioneer skills to refurbish several training areas and construct a sophisticated trench system that can be attacked by exercising troops.

9. Throughout this time, 518 Sqn were our nominated sub-unit to reinforce 29 Engineer Regiment RE on the forthcoming deployment to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK. The Sqn deployed a Troop to Oman for 2 months to conduct some preliminary operations whilst the remaining 2 Troops conducted OPTAG and pre-deployment training on local ranges and Beckenham and Yardley Chase training areas, familiar to many 'older' Pioneers we know! The Squadron deployed in mid-March and assisted with the construction of 3 military camps and other supporting infrastructure tasks for the up and coming deployment of 16 Air Assault Bde later this year. Needless to say, the conditions in the south of Afghanistan were extremely arduous, fierce temperatures, dusty and dry conditions and work conducted over a vast area. 518 Squadron completed the task and brought all of the soldiers' home safely and better for their experience. As well as his duties as Squadron SSM, WO2 (SSM) Jenkins was employed as

the Engineer Regiment Operations WO with the responsibility for tasking the Engr Sqns as well as the Pioneers. Once again, Pioneers showed their real value in contributing to successful operations.

10. Finally, in supporting our GOC's major FTX of the year, the Regiment deployed to Cumbria and Scotland for most of June this year. We built and established a 500 man tented camp with all its supporting infrastructure and processed through in the region of 4,500 regular and TA soldiers onto and off the exercise. Our twinned TA regiment, 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) also provided a composite Pnr Sqn in order to practice integration of our contingent component. Both 187 and 522 Sqns and the TA gained some very valuable training with other Arms and some good lessons for the future. We emerged from a very testing exercise with full credit and our reputation enhanced, again.

11. The Regiment continues to support Bicester Garrison and Bicester Town at every opportunity. 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, Councillor Dr Adjit Bhart. We have supported the Garrison Fete and the celebrations for 900 years of Ambrosden. 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. We have established good contacts with Bicester Town Football Club and have taken part in a number of charity fundraising events with them. Reciprocally, they have offered to help the regiment team with its pre-season training. I leave it for you to judge how successful our Freedom of Bicester Parade and Reunion have been. On behalf of this Regiment, I would like to say how proud we were that you marched with us on this momentous occasion.

12. 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. 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. We defeated 3 major infantry sides this year and made it to the semi-final of the Army Cup losing out 8-10 to 1 RWF in the last minute. We did manage to win the 4 Division 7s and made the semi-final of the 4 Division 10s competition. The Regiment has fielded a highly successful shooting team, winning through the CORPSAAM and 4 Division SAAM to compete at Bisley where we finished the highest placed RLC unit in several competitions. The Regimental football team continues to make excellent progress competing in



the RAF London League against some very large RAF air stations, Brize Norton, Lyneham, High Wycombe, Uxbridge, Odiham to name a few. We did reach the semi final stage of 2 of their cup competitions this year. In the same league, our male and female cross country teams have been highly successful.

13. In addition, the Regiment continues to provide static and mobile displays to support the RLC recruitment at ATRs Basingborne and Pirbright and RMA Sandhurst as well as hosting several visits to Bicester from the RLC Young Officers courses throughout the year. Both our recruiting and retention appear to be holding up well and the future looks very bright for our Pioneers.

ITEM 3. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

14. The Chairman stated that he would include his report with item 8 on the agenda - Convergence with RLC.

ITEM 4. HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

15. In the absence of Maj ER Elliott, the following report from the Treasurer was read by the Secretary:

a. A full copy of the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2005 can be obtained on application to HQ RPC Association, please send a large s.a.e. with 49p postage.

b. The Association is in a very healthy position following the sale of 51 St George's Drive, which raised £1,275,000. Our total assets at present are just below £1.6 million.

c. This healthy position enables us to proceed with the transfer of funds in December of this year when Association assets are transferred to the RLC Assoc Trust. This is part of the convergence process and the Chairman will give the reasons for this in his report; suffice to say we have written guarantees that future costing of both Benevolence and Fraternity will be fully met.

d. In 2005 243 applications for assistance were received and 223 grants were made at a total cost of £91,489 of which the ABF paid £45,372 and we paid the remaining £46,117. This was an increase of £5,500 on the previous year.

e. The profit on the Derby and Christmas Draws in 2005 was £7,172 which was a drop from the previous year of £1,300.

16. Mr W Goode asked for confirmation that there would be no change in the way grants were made, this was given.

ITEM 5. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

17. The Derby Draw this year made a profit of £3,100, unfortunately this was some £400 less than year. The first prize went to a Private in 522

Squadron here at Bicester.

18. It is pleasing to report that so far this year 31 members have joined the Association and 41 joined in 2005, a number of these are Second World War Veterans who for one reason or another did not know of the existence of the Association.

19. On a disappointing note, 85 envelopes were returned "Gone Away" on the distribution of the last Newsletter, these members are now lost to the Association until we receive their new addresses. If members are in contact with old comrades please ask if they receive the Newsletter, if not let me have their address.

20. It would be appreciated if those who had taken photographs over the weekend please send a copy on disc to enable us to include them in the photo gallery.

21. The statue of the Pioneer Axeman was now available at a cost of £60.

22. The Chairman then placed on record thanks to Mr N Brown for his continued hard work during the last year especially the production of the Newsletters, the web-site and in recruiting new members. His comments were unanimously supported by those present.

ITEM 6. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

23. 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: Col A Barnes, Maj ER Elliott, Col PJ O'Connell and Lt Col J Starling

24. The meeting also elected Lt Col JA Stevenson RLC who had been nominated by the Council for the vacancy caused by the resignation of Lt Col RA Cave RLC.

ITEM 7. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

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

ITEM 8. CONVERGENCE WITH RLC ASSOCIATION AND CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

26. The Chairman reported that the sale of 51 St George's Drive had been made at a price well above the estimated value. This outcome was helped greatly by the policy of the Trustees over the years in maintaining the fabric of the building to a high standard.

27. Convergence of our Association with that of the RLC Trust Association will be complete on 1 April 2007. At that time public funding for the General Secretary/ Controller post ceases. The Chairman re-iterated that we would have seats on the RLC Association Trust Committee, RLC Benevolent Committee, RLC Heritage

Committee and the RLC Museum Committee. Coupled with the retention of the services of a part-time General Secretary/Controller, funded by the RLC Trust, the task of managing our Association business effectively for the continuing benefit of members would be secured for the longer term. All functions, including Officers & Sergeants Dinners, Field of Remembrance, Cenotaph Parade, Branch activities, 39/93 Club and, of course, the Reunion Weekend would all continue as at present.

28. The Chairman then invited the AGM for a formal acceptance of the proposal to transfer all the assets from the RPC Association to the RLC Association Trust to complete Convergence in accordance with the formal agreements reached between the RLC and the RPC Trustees. The proposal was carried unanimously.

ITEM 9. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

29. The date of the next Reunion/Annual General Meeting would be 6/7 July 2007.

ITEM 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

30. The Secretary requested that appreciation be recorded for the hard work which the CO and members of 23 Pnr Regt RLC had done to ensure that the Weekend was a success. This had been achieved in a breath-taking 10 days following the Regiments return from a month long exercise.

31. Mr Ennis stated that the Pioneer Association was losing its identity and history. The Chairman confirmed that the history of the Corps was well recorded, the CO 23 Pnr Regt replied that both Pioneer Regiments were proud of their history and Col O'Connell gave a reply saying how proud members of the Corps were of their history.

32. It was then asked if the RPC Flag could be flown during the Reunion Weekend, this would involve ceremonial protocol and would be investigated. (After minute note: this would not be possible).

33. Mr Fawcett thought that the Pioneer March should have been played during the march through Bicester. The Chairman replied that he had felt proud when the Band played the Corps march during the church ceremony

34. Mr Thomas reported that 27 people had marched in the RPC contingent at the Cenotaph in November 2005 which was a record and due to Mr N Brown. Mr Thomas then stated how delighted and proud he was to see a field of 'Red and Green' when he entered the RLC Tent at Twickenham this year for the Army v Navy game with so many of the Regiment wearing their distinctive top.

N BROWN
Secretary



Six Years

by Ex WO2 (RQMS) PG SMITH

(Ed note: who joined the RPC Association on 20 Jan 47.)

in the life of a Pioneer

In October 1939, at the age of 21, I registered for military service. However, at the medical I was classified Grade 3, unfit for Service (short sight). Then came Dunkirk after which anyone who could walk, see and speak was considered fit for service!

I received an order to report to No 1 AMPC Trg Centre, Westcliffe-on-Sea on 4 Jul 40, there were no uniforms available so we had to continue wearing our "civvies" for a few weeks until Denims were issued. Periodically we were moved around from one tented camp-site to another, first Doddington Park, Nantwich, then Criccieth, and then to Pwllheli. Six of us were sent from Pwllheli to an NCOs Trg Course at St Austell and on our return we found that the camp had been evacuated and was in the process of being dismantled. After a couple of days, we were sent to No 11 Centre at Oldham, which was situated in the former Earl Mill. Then I was given 7 days leave.

I recall the following events, first in Criccieth a Church Parade was called. "RCs and CEs" were told to step forward and were marched off. In my innocence, I thought that I, a Methodist would be allowed to go to my own Church. Not so! All those left, and there were quite a few, were put on trench digging. Needless to say, on future Church Parades I became CE. Then in Pwllheli, our Instructor was a Sergeant in the Highland Light Infantry and all drills were carried out at HLI pace, try it sometime! Finally when in St Austell we were going to a Cinema one evening, but at the last minute decided to stay in Camp and clean equipment ready for the next day. That night, the cinema was hit by a bomb.

The day after I returned to Oldham from leave, 19 Oct 40, sixty Londoners (myself included), were transferred to York and taken on the strength of 40 Company, where we found ourselves among 200 Geordies and Scots, mostly ex-miners, who had experienced the

Dunkirk evacuation. The OC was Maj Probert who although short in stature was a strict disciplinarian. He stood no nonsense but always had the welfare of "his men" at heart. It was through his guidance that 40 Company became known as one of the 'crack' Companies of the Corps.

The main functions of the Company at this time was to supply working parties for the RAOC Depot, the Command Supply Depot and Coal Dumps in Rowntree's Factory, I worked on all of these in turn. I was promoted LCpl in Feb 41.

In May 41 due to the sickness of the Company Sanitary Corporal I was delegated to assume his duties. The following month the Company were sent on 7 days Embarkation Leave following which we were inspected in full battle order by the ADL Northern Command and put on "Stand By" - this lasted for 12 days. We finally left on 5 Aug 41 and proceeded by train to Gouroch, where we boarded the former PO Liner "Narkunda". Two days later we were transferred to the Polish Liner "Batory" and sailed during the night in a convoy of seven ships to join an exercise off Scapa Flow, which lasted 14 days and included invasion practice.

On return to Gouroch, the Company was sent to Ayr and then to Inverary, in a hutted camp in the grounds of Inverary Castle. Here, the remit of the Company was to supply working parties to the Royal Engineers for Quarries and road construction. I was still Sanitary Corporal!

In May 42 we moved to Yarmouth (Isle of Wight) for a further three weeks training in Beach Landing and loading/unloading of equipment. Then it was

back to Scotland this time to Hamilton and then to Kilwinning before moving to Pollock Camp, near Glasgow. It was here that, in Aug, we were unfortunately deprived of Maj Probert who was replaced by Maj Coventry with Capt Head as 2IC. It was here also that I, following my request, was relieved of the duties of Sanitary Corporal.

On 24 Oct 42 the Company embarked on the former White Star Line "Strathnaver" and proceeded in convoy as part of the Invasion Force of the First Army, which was commanded by General Alexander. We, at that time, did not know our final destination.

On 9 Nov 42 we docked in Algiers Harbour, without encountering any enemy opposition. 40 Company led the troops ashore. We were accommodated in warehouses adjacent to the Docks and very soon working parties were organised to unload ships anchoring in the Harbour. We worked almost continuously for three days with very little rest. In UK, the national press paid tribute to a Company of the Pioneer Corps which had worked for three days and nights continuously, that was 40 Company! My mother sent me a cutting which I still have amongst my mementos. Our main tasks were unloading ships, manning Smoke Sectors and unloading trucks at a railhead. It was here that I was promoted Cpl.

Two recollections of Algiers are that parties of four or six men being put into cargo nets, then a crane swinging them high over one ship and depositing them on the dock or in the hold of another adjacent ship. Not an exhilarating experience! Also for a while we were subjected to air attacks at dawn, the planes coming in with the rising sun behind them. Eventually it was realised that a monument on a hill behind Algiers was used as a 'marker'. Following the removal of this monument the raids were much less frequent.

Eventually the Company was accommodated in a disused school building. An unexploded aerial torpedo landed on a road nearby and, of course, we were evacuated. One night, an Officer (not a Pioneer!) was found, high as a kite, sitting on top of it and singing heartily, fortunately for him it had been defused. He was detained in our lines pending Court Martial.

40 Company were selected to supply a contingent to march alongside French Troops on an Allied Victory Parade on 14 Mar 43. The next day we started a three day (and night) train journey to South Ahras, where we remained for five weeks working on road construction and, as work proceeded, moving along as far as Sukiet. Then followed a four day (and night) train journey as far as Bougie, where the Company was under intensive training, including embarking and disembarking Landing Craft. On 24 Jun 43 we boarded a Landing Craft and 3 days later arrived at Sousse, where, by now part of the 8th Army, we joined 20 Beach Group.

On 5 Jul 43, 4 officers and 107 ORs (myself included) moved to the Assembly Area at Sfax and boarded an LST converted as a Troop Carrier. A short stop was made off Malta, then the convoy proceeded to Sicily and we beached at Cap Passerno on 10 Jul. Owing to the lay of the seabed, the craft could not get near enough to lower the ramp. Consequently, troops fully clothed and equipped, had to jump into the sea (in some cases almost up to the armpits) and wade ashore. Once ashore, working parties were organised initially in the building of petrol dumps. As the advance progressed, 40 Company moved further inland, first to Pachine, then to Marzemeni, where the Company became complete again and worked in the Dock area. Whilst here an enemy plane crashed onto a petrol dump and two members of the Coy, Ptes Peart and Franch, received commendations for their efforts in saving the Dump.

The Company then moved to Scordia and for two months was handling ammunition. In Oct 43, the Company moved again to Ionia and I was drafted into the Company Office for two weeks when the Sergeant was admitted to Hospital. The Company was then split into

three, one part (HQ) remained at Ionia, the second went to Catania and the third to Stracuse. I went to Catania under the command of Lt Hunt and again divided into two, the first party to act as guards on trains in and out of Catania and the other had the rather unpleasant task in assisting with the recovery and re-burial of the dead. We remained here until Feb 44 when the whole Company moved to Taormina.

It is worth mentioning here that in 12 months the Company had six different OCs, not very conducive to morale or pride in one's unit! Unfortunately my association with 40 Company ended here, it was a good Company and I had made many friends.

Pioneer Labour Companies were being formed, consisting of about 200 Italian Prisoners of War, with a core of British personnel, one Lt or Capt, one Sgt and one Cpl. The day-to-day discipline of the POWs was left to Italian Officers. I was posted to 676 Italian Working Company in Syracuse. My OC there was Lt (later Capt) Fleming. The Sgt originally detailed was in hospital so for a while administered fell to the pair of us. Eventually orders were received for 676 Company to leave Syracuse and we proceeded to leave for UK on 12 May 44. This also meant my promotion to Sgt. We travelled by train to Messina, ferry across the straits, then a 2 day train journey to Naples. It is interesting to note that on that journey we only lost one POW, an Officer who managed to slip the net when we were crossing the Straits of Messina.

On 17 May 44 we boarded the former liner "Empress of Australia" and after an uneventful journey anchored off Gouroch on 29 May. We travelled overnight to Lostwithiel, with just one stop, in the early morning, at Sheffield for food and refreshment. After a week settling in, the original British personnel were sent on 14 days leave.

On return from leave I found that the establishment had changed, there was now an OC (Maj), 2IC (Capt), 1 Lt, a CQMS, 4 Sgts (1 as interpreter, 2 as Det Comds and myself) 2 Cpls for employment in the office and 2 ORs, both drivers for the OCs transport and a Bedford Truck. I became a sort of "Dogsbody", deputising or filling in where required. The Company was re-designated 598 Italian PW Coy and re-located to Sidford (near Sidmouth) in the former Sidford Hotel, which today is

the same outwardly as it was in 1944. My duties were mainly visiting and checking on detachments and small working parties which were located in Hostels in various parts of Devon and Somerset, temporary replacement for Sgts on leave etc, and deputising for the CQMS as necessary.

In Jan 45 I was seconded to 648 Italian PW Coy in Truro for four weeks, as acting CQMS. In May 45, 598 Company moved to Taunton and two days later I was given an hour's notice to pack, pending posting to 828 Company PC in Westward Ho as CQMS. This Company had previously been a "Smoke" Coy, hence the number in the 800 series.

In Oct 45 on return from leave I was greeted with "You don't belong here any more, you have been posted to a POW Camp in Bristol as WO2 (RQMS)". I made my way to 124 Italian POW Camp at Yate. Most of the POWs were on detachments and were accommodated where they worked. On arrival at the camp a stray Welsh Border Collie pup attached itself to me and when I was demobbed I took her home and had her for 9 years.

After only a month the Camp was re-located to Bodminster where German POWs were accommodated and the Camp was re-designated 124 German PW Camp, as before day-to-day discipline was left to the POWs own Officers and NCOs.

1946, of course, heralded the year for demob. Although I was encouraged to 'sign on' and possibly obtain a commission I was starting to feel that six years in uniform was enough. So on 11 Jun 46 I reported to the Demob Centre in Aldershot and for the first time in my service received pay without saluting!

Finally, a couple of anecdotes. Firstly when I was posted from 598 Italian Coy the Italians presented me with a finely hand-carved wooden ash tray on which was perched a bird with wings spread in flight. Secondly when I left 124 POW Camp two Germans who had been working in the QM Stores, gave me a polished wood container with sliding mirror in the lid, for my toiletries.

In both cases I considered it a gesture of thanks for the way they had been treated as POW. After all, whatever the Nationality of those taking part in the conflict, weren't they only doing the same as we were - obeying Orders? ■



LOST TRAILS

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

47 COMPANY RPC

Mr A Brown, aged 86, is trying to contact former colleagues from this Coy. During the war it fought in N Africa, Italy, Normandy and Belgium.
Contact: 01303 265634

RAYMOND REDFERN

I served from 1975 to 1981 in 206, 522 and 518 Coys & 3 Inf Bde in Northern Ireland. I am trying to trace some old muckers by the names of:

Mick Wilson
Geordie Caine
Scouse Laven
Steve Jubb

Or any other lads who knew me back in the good old days. Please get in contact with me, i'd love to hear from you.

Contact: redfern_raymond@yahoo.co.uk

BILL AND PHIL POTTER

Ex 68 Coy RPC(V).

Contact Keith Cochrane:

blanche.cochrane@btopenworld.com

HOWES, GEORGE RICHARD (SGT 2038918)

I am trying to locate this person, who I believe may now be deceased. His last known whereabouts was approx 1949 in the East Molesey area of Kingston, Surrey. sandie357@ukonline.co.uk

OLLERTON CAMP, Nr NOTTINGHAM

I served at this camp from 1950/52 training Z men who had been recalled for 14 days training. Does anyone remember the name of the camp? I would also like to contact anyone who remembers me.

Contact Alf Redford

alf@redford246.fsworld.co.uk

HULSE, STEWART (SCOUSE)

Is trying to contact anyone who remembers him. Contact: AH4667 Hulse, HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York, YO41 1PS.

SAGE, GEORGE

Served in 42 and 398 Companies please contact FD Griffiths, 2 Coldwaunger, Sennybridge, Brecon, LD3 8TP

KEWLEY, TED (EX SGT)

Served from 1972 to 1998 in UK, Germany and Ireland. Would like to contact anyone who remembers him especially those from his Corps Football days. Contact mariaedwards21@btinternet.com

LAST POST

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

BURNETT KF (Ex Cpl RPCTC) 28 Aug 05 Kettering (Aged 60)

BROOKBANK W (Ex Cpl 518 Coy) 3 Apr 06 Colchester (Aged 75)

Capt (Retd) CV DUFFIELD MBE 4 Feb 06 South Petherton, Somerset (Aged 90)

GANSON G (Ex 20 Coy) 15 Sep 05 Cheadle (Aged 97)

MUIR DW (Ex Pte 24743749) 7 Apr 06 (Aged 36)

SHERLOCK, TJ (Ex Pte 23376542) 19 Feb 06 Strathcarron (Aged 72)

THOMAS E (Ex Pte 21031534) St Neots, Nov 05

HALL, E (Ex Pte 22873309) Portsmouth 25 Jan 06 (Aged 71)

DURN LG (Ex Sgt 13063081) Weston-under-Edge 5 Dec 05

BRANDRETH P (Ex Pte 22092667) Clifton, Notts 8 Aug 05 (Aged 74)

IOANNOU A (Ex Pte 23642861 - 251 Coy) Enfield, 7 May 06 (Aged 67)

MUNFORD FA (Ex Pte 13016194 - 161 Coy) London May 06

STREATER WA (Ex Pte 23900787) Lowestoft, 28 Nov 98 (Aged 56)

WILKES SJ (Ex Pte 24493781) 19 May 06 Nantwich (Aged 44)

PEERS R (Ex Pte 23640341) 24 Mar 06 Rochdale (Aged 69)

ALEXANDER A (Ex Pte 22256004) 7 Apr 06 Glasgow (Aged 81)

CLEWER DF (Ex Pte 23601638) 11 Mar 06 Telford (Aged 66)

INSCH JD (Ex Sgt 13049147 - served 1940 - 46) 26 May 06 (Aged 93) Birmingham

KAVANAGH P (Ex Pte 13125056) May 2006 Dublin (Aged 94 years)

HAWLEY D (Ex LCpl 23971755) (522 Coy) 8 Jun 06 Nottingham (Aged 60)

NORMAN, G (Ex Pte 13113004) Jul 06 Wallasey

RUSHBY, GW (Ex Sgt 518 & 521 Coys) 11 Aug 06 Bicester (Aged 81)

ROBERTSON W (Ex LCpl 23961171) 6 Aug 06 Berwick Upon Tweed (Aged 65)

BRENNAN R (Formerly TIMPOFSKY) (Ex Pte 240319445) Salford 11 May 06 (Aged 58)

DAVIES HD (Ex Pte 19008085) Barry, Glam Aug 06 (Aged 78)

THOMAS WE (Billy) (Ex Cpl 522 Coy/Sqn) Wirral, 17 Sep 06 (Aged 53)

CRUMP R (Ex CQMS 13042168) Royal Hospital, Chelsea, 22 Sep 06 (Aged 93)

OBITUARY - Capt (Retd) CV Duffield MBE (23 Dec 15 - 4 Feb 06)

Commissioned into the Corps on 24 May 55 and served with us for two years before being granted a commission with the Dorset Regiment, Capt Duffield had a long and varied career.

He enlisted as an 18 year old into the Coldstream Guards and became RSM known as 'The Voice' as it was reckoned that he could be heard some 3 miles away. His first tour was ceremonial duties in London this was followed by a posting to Palestine in 1936. Then after a tour as an instructor at The Guards Depot he was promoted to Acting WO3 PSM - Platoon Sergeant Major a new wartime rank for posting with the BEF. He left France on 25 May 1940 via Dunkirk. He returned to France in the Normandy

Landings. Further postings to Burma, where he stopped a riot and was awarded the MBE, and Pakistan before a posting to Dorchester to the Dorset Regiment Training Centre followed before being granted a commission in the RPC.

Whilst in the RPC he was OC Detachment at Monkton Farleigh Ammunition Depot. He was granted a Regular Commission and joined the Dorset Regiment before final retirement on 29 Apr 59. After a short time as a landlord he joined Local Government and became the Gypsy Sites Officer before retiring in 1981. Wishing to stay active he became an Usher at Yeovil Magistrates Court before retiring at 82!



RESULTS

Derby Draw 2006

Thank you for your support a profit of £3,100 was made, the results are:-

1st £500 - Pte Rokobatitao
13 Tp 522 Sqn, Bicester
(See photograph on the next page)

2nd £250 - Mr PG Smith Isle of Wight (Who very kindly donated £50 to RPC Association) (See his article on pages 16 and 17)

3rd £125 - Mr AG Whiteside
Yaxley

4th £75 - SSgt Shepherd RSF BFPO 40

5th £50 - Mrs BM Smith Salford
Tickets for the Christmas Draw are enclosed with this Newsletter. Do not hesitate to request additional tickets if you think you may be able to sell them.



PHOTO INDEX

- 1 - 3 187 (Tancred) Coy visit Pompeii, Monastery at Cassino, Minturno War Cemetery.
- 4 A smiling Pte Rolobatitoo, 522 Sqn, receives his cheque for £500.00 from his CO, Lt Col MJ Bennett, after winning first prize in the RPC Association Draw.
- 5 Mr N Brown lays a wreath at Normandy.
- 6 Ex Cpl Ted Winkworth (223 Coy) celebrates his 90th birthday at Portsmouth on 23 Apr 06, he was presented with a Corps Tie by Cpl Tony Duncan, Railway Troop Bicester.
- 7 144 Sqn Tug of War Champions
- 8 On 13 July 2006 a LS&GC Medal presentation was held in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Bicester. Seven of the nine recipients had prior service in the RPC, they were SSgt Batchelor, SSgt Jenkins, Sgt Penston, Cpl Barrett, Cpl Durnford, Cpl Mudge and LCpl Ridley. The remaining were Sgt O'Brien and Cpl Ryoler.
- 9 The Garrison Theatre in readiness for 'Pioneer Night' - 8 Jul.
- 10 Old Comrades in St Edburg's Church, Bicester following the Liberty Parade on 8 Jul.



*“I sincerely hope
he will be
remembered for
this gallant act...”*

Major Vivian,
Commanding Officer



Private John Tancred

During the night of 4th December *Private John Tancred* was on his journey down Monastery Hill, Italy carrying a wounded officer. It was bitterly cold and the going treacherous following a day of continuous rain. The details of that night and the following day will never be known but sixteen hours later *Private Tancred* stumbled into an Advanced Dressing Station, handed over the officer to men of the RAMC, collapsed and died. He was forty three years of age. 187 Pioneer Company carried wounded soldiers over steep hillsides under shell and mortar fire for several days without resting. *Private Tancred* was not awarded any specific honour, for courage was the common currency on Monastery Hill and he would have been the last man to wish for any preferential treatment over the infantrymen. The nature of his death was inescapable, “Natural causes - exhaustion.”