

The Pioneer

The Newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

OCTOBER 2008

www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk



The Last Post

Pioneer Reunion Weekend 2008



■ John and Terry at the Reunion Weekend 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Steve, Tiny and Wives at the Reunion Weekend 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Jimmy Winters with wife & friends at the Reunion 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Ex QM Graham McLane at the Reunion Weekend 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Taff Durnford and his wife at the Reunion Weekend 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Checking the temperature of the beer at the Reunion 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Norman Brown presents CO with painting

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Col Barnes presents CO with Col McAdam's medals

Picture: Paul Brown

The Pioneer



Front Cover

Royal Pioneer Corps
Association reunion
weekend July 2008

Picture: Paul Brown



Back Cover

Painting of 23 Pioneer
Regiment marching
through Bicester

Picture: David Cosby

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It was nice to see so many attend this year's Reunion Weekend in July, both regulars and those attending for the first time. All the feedback that I have received has been positive as highlighted on the letters page. A record 173 beds had to be booked and with those just attending for the day I estimate that between 350 - 400 members attended. This must be a record since our 'home' moved from Northampton. Once again I must thank 23 Pioneer Regiment for the work they put into the weekend to make sure it was a success.

Unfortunately next year most of the Regiment will be deployed either to the Gulf or Cyprus, so events will have to be curtailed. We will still guarantee that a good weekend will be held.

Have you seen our website www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk lately, if not go online and have a look. We have put online the past newsletters, have a shop, updated the forum and have an online gallery about to go live. In fact you will be able to see this Newsletter before it even goes to the printers! If this is sufficient for you please let me know and I will not send a hard copy to you - this will save in postage costs.

As you can see opposite we have changed the Association email address it is now:
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

I hope you find the articles in this Newsletter interesting, we try to keep articles varied and are always keen to accept stories so why not put pen

to paper. Articles are always more interesting when submitted with photographs.

I try to please most members during the one and half days per week that I am paid, unfortunately it appears that I cannot satisfy all - see article on page 54. It is gratifying, however, to report that both my son and I received many messages of support so we must be doing something right. The instigators of this 'Vote of No Confidence' should do something positive for a change!

Finally may I offer my congratulations to the following:

Liam Dealtry on being appointed the Mayor of Bridlington.

John McDonough on his recent marriage at the age of 72.

Pete (Taff) Thomas on his recent birthday - Fifty (he must have had a hard life!).

Stan Hussain on the award of the MBE in HM Queen's Birthday Honours List. Stan is to receive his medal on 30 Oct 08 and it is hoped to have photographs etc in the next Newsletter.

Finally with this Newsletter we are, as usual, enclosing Christmas Draw tickets - please give this Draw your support as the funds raised help to keep the Association running.

If you find that you are able to sell more tickets please let me know and I will gladly send you more!

Norman Brown

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PAST EVENTS

■ MR & MRS I Dewsnap attended Founders Day at the Royal Hospital Chelsea to watch our In-Pension Micky Hull march with the rest of the In Pensioners at Founders Day.

This is the birthday of Charles II as well as the date of his restoration as King in May 1660. It is also known as Oak Apple Day as it commemorates the escape of the future King Charles after the Battle of Worcester (1651) when he hid in an oak tree to avoid capture by the Parliamentary forces'.

The Pensioners are usually reviewed by a member of the Royal Family. During the course of this celebratory day the statue of Charles II in Figure Court is partly shrouded in oak leaves, and all participants in the Parade and spectators wear sprigs of oak leaves to commemorate the King's escape from forces after the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

The statue was re-gilded in 2002 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

■ TAFF (Peter) Thomas celebrated his 50th birthday by holding a large party in his village hall Community Centre in Roade.

Over 150 friends and family were invited but because of the atrocious weather only about 110 managed to attend.

Colleagues who had served with Peter during his 22 years service travelled from all over the country to help him celebrate. Former members of staff at Simpson Barracks also attended.

His wife Christine prepared a five star wonderful buffet, everyone attending congratulated her on such a wonderful spread.

As mentioned earlier the weather was awful. An example of this was Dusty Bryant and his wife Zanaib were late attending so were contacted on their mobiles. They informed the gathering that they were outside in the car park but it was raining so hard they were waiting for the conditions to ease a little before leaving the comfort of their car!

The party went on until the small hours and the Northants Army Cadet Force Band gave a wonderful light display demonstration.

■ THE 300,000 members of the Armed Forces who served on Operation Banner in Northern Ireland, were honoured at a service in St Paul's Cathedral, London, on Wednesday 10 September 2008.

The service was held in the presence of more than 2,000 veterans and their families along with The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Baroness Thatcher, Tony Blair, Defence Secretary Des Browne and Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup.

Thanks were given to the many Servicemen and women from across all three Services who served in Northern Ireland.

The commemoration also remembered the hundreds of Service personnel who gave their lives helping to bring greater peace and stability to the Province over a 38 year period, the longest deployment in British military history

Amongst the many Pioneer representatives were Capt Teague, Sgt Leslie and Mr J Hatfield, Mr R Lynch and Mr P Meaheer.

A true pilgrim helps the heroes

Gruelling 707k walk by Capt. (Retd) David Mills



Picture: David Mills

THE 'Help for Heroes' Camino de Santiago walk is all over now. After 27 days walking approximately one and a half million paces from the 1st-27th June 2008, climbing numerous mountains and not a little pain, the end came when I entered the Orbisco Square in front of the Santiago Cathedral of St James.

I decided to run the final 8 kms. The feeling of satisfaction and joy at reaching the end of a 707km walk is just too much to even begin to describe here. Suffice to say that all the trials and tribulations encountered along the way were washed away in an instant as the cathedral came into view from the nearby hills. My legs received new power and I was propelled along on a wave of emotion and adrenalin towards the ultimate goal.

After a mandatory 'photo shoot' to ensure the 'Help for Heroes' T-shirt was recorded, it was off to the 'Peregrinos Office' to claim my official certificate. This proves, along with the daily 'Credential Peregrino', that the walk was completed all the way on foot and that I was indeed a true 'Peregrino' (Pilgrim). I was then equally forcefully propelled along to the nearest purveyor of alcoholic beverages so I could quaff a couple of 'cañas' in celebration despite the relative early hour.

As the city came to life at the start of another new day, hundreds of other similar walkers began to enter the square and quietly completed their own private and personal prayers for safe deliverance. Small groups began to form as people began to recognise others they had met along the way and whose company they had enjoyed at some time or another.

One of the most enduring and gratifying parts of this journey is the way in which people of all customs, creeds and

nationalities are able to transcend language and bigotry and form bonds which in many cases leads to long friendships.

It is my personal opinion that the core values of those that travel the 'Way of St. James' are consideration, courtesy, caring, community spirit, cheerfulness and courage. Armed with these, people set out to find their own way and in doing so generate bucket loads of happiness for others.

The hardships induced by a combination of the weather, the lack of personal comforts, blisters etc. or just the loneliness that is common can have a negative effect on even the strongest character. So, just when you are feeling sorry for yourself along comes a blind person, someone in a wheelchair or a 90 year old on their third trip.

For myself I found I needed all the resolve and training acquired during 30 years in the Army to motivate myself at times. When my pains were at the worst, I just imagined that at least mine would be over soon whereas those who will receive benefits from the Help for Heroes Campaign will have to endure years if not a lifetime of pain.

The Camino de Santiago is not something to be undertaken lightly but is a once in a lifetime experience. Unlike me who was forced by circumstances to 'do it' in a short period, those who are able to take their time gain a most profound and wonderful view of the world and its inhabitants. No TV, no papers, no negativity, just ordinary people doing an extraordinary thing.

You still have time to make a donation to the Help for Heroes charity. Go to www.helpforheroes.org.uk or www.justgiving.com/davidmills1



■ Our Chelsea In-Pensioner, Mr Micky Hulls, showing that his aim is still spot on.

Picture: Paul Brown

‘The old and bold met’

The Association Reunion Weekend was held on the 4-6 July 2008

THE weekend started with a “Bring a Boss” in the Corporals Mess where all Old Comrades were invited. Luckily the weather was sunny and warm and the patio area and lawn were used. Here the “Old and Bold” met and had lengthy discussions and reminiscences with the serving members of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC.

This was followed by a reception in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess where the mess provided a tasty buffet. Some members left to tour Bicester town centre and most settled in the Olde Pioneer public house where the landlord is the grandson of the late Sgt George Rushby who was once Provost Sergeant in St David's Barracks - it must be a small world.

Saturday morning dawned with heavy showers and wind, this it was thought, was going to spoil the weekend. However, the sun shines on the righteous and as the morning progressed the sky luckily cleared. Ex Cpl John Killeen had volunteered to march us to the War Memorial as he wanted revenge on one of his old Sergeant Major's who had given him a hard time on the drill square - Maj (Retd) C Markham. It is believed that the marching contingent was the largest for many, many years. In addition the number of spectators was also greatly increased. Following a very moving Service by the

Regiment's Padre and the laying of wreaths by a young soldier from the Regiment and Mr Paddy Ennis on behalf of the Association, the Old Comrades marched off and gave an eyes left to the CO of the Regiment.

The Annual General Meeting of the Association was then held, the minutes of which are shown on page 48. During the meeting the Chairman of the Association presented the CO of 23 Pnr Regt the mounted medals of Col McAdam for display in the Officers Mess. It should be noted that in addition to the fact that he was a substantive Colonel after 6 years service at the age of 28 (which must be a record) he was also Treasurer of the Association from 1953 until 1976.

Mr N Brown also presented the CO with a painting depicting the Regiment led by the CO marching past the Olde Pioneer public house in February of this year. This was to thank the CO for the help he receives from his Regiment in running the Association.

Following the AGM events moved to the Sports Field. Here, the Regt had arranged a marvellous blend of both static and arena displays together with the obligatory beer tent! Four hours of events then followed including a display by the Leics & Northants Cadet Corps of Drums, this Corps of Drums had once been

cap-badged Pioneer. Each Squadron produced displays showing their skills and two money making stalls towards the fund raising for the ABF. These were enjoyed by all, the strong man events and the tug of war proved exceptionally popular as ever.

In the evening proceedings moved to the Garrison Theatre. 350 tickets had been sold for inside the theatre and the entertainment was provided by the Group “Classix” who specialise in 60's sounds. Outside the theatre, where another 400 tickets had been sold, there was a Karaoke and Disco. A BBQ meal was provided for all thanks to the chefs of the unit. Also outside was a Miami Fairground ride for the more adventurous, this proved extremely popular especially after a few beers.

Following this a number of members retired to the Sergeants Mess for a final nightcap or two. Once again the Regiment served us well, the organisation was first class, the meals were good and the beer was cold and well priced!!

A total of 173 beds had been booked and it was estimated that between 350 and 400 Old Comrades attended the weekend. It was also pleasing to see our one In-Pensioner, Mr Micky Hulls, in attendance - he was the one in the scarlet coat!

FUTURE EVENTS

■ THE next 'Meet' of the 39/93 Club planned for October 2008 has had to be cancelled for a number of reasons.

The next gathering will now take place in early March 2009 - further details can be obtained from the Club Secretary Mr Les Rowley (01628 890913).

■ THE field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 6 November 2008 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 suitable identification as entrance to the Field will involve 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.

The field will be open from 9 to 5.30 hours until Saturday 8 November 2008. Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held.

■ A LONDON lunch will follow the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 6 November 2008.

It will be held in the Marquis of Westminster, Warwick Road, London (approx 400 yards from Victoria Station).

Bookings can be made to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt Royal Logistic Corps, St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

The cost will be £15 per head.

■ LAST year 4,000 service veterans marched at the Cenotaph Parade, Whitehall of which 25 members were from the RPC Association. This year we have been allocated 30 tickets; these can be obtained on application to the Association on a first come first served basis (it should be noted that 19 tickets have already been requested). Please note that only ex service personnel are allowed to march, wives/girlfriends may only attend as spectators (unless they themselves served).

Did you know the original Cenotaph was first prepared as a temporary wood and plaster structure for use as a saluting base in Whitehall during the First World War Victory Parade, held on the 19th July 1919. A decision was taken to re-erect the Cenotaph in a permanent form on the same site. The unveiling of the stone structure on the 11th November 1920 was combined with a ceremony to mark the passing of the body of the Unknown Warrior for re-burial in Westminster Abbey. The first of the annual ceremonies of remembrance took place at the Cenotaph on the same date the following year.

This silence is marked by the firing of a field gun on Horse Guards Parade to begin and end the silence, followed by buglers sounding The Last Post.

Following the Parade it has become the custom for all marchers to have a meal and a drink in the Civil Service Club, Old Scotland Yard (located 250 yards from Whitehall).

■ NOTE for your diary - The Royal Pioneer Corps Association Reunion Weekend has now been announced and it is to be held on 3rd-5th July 2009.

Full details will be shown in the April 2009 newsletter.

New Lancastria medal instigated

First medal of its kind by Scottish Government

THE sinking of the troopship Lancastria 68 years ago claimed the lives of an estimated 4,000 people, mostly troops of the British Expeditionary Force (over 400 of which were Pioneers).

A commemorative medal has been awarded by the Scottish Government in recognition of the ultimate sacrifice of the victims and endurance of the survivors who were aboard the ship on 17th June 1940. The event was sponsored by Christine Grahame MSP.

Major Jimmy Atkins whose father, 13006047 Pte Charles Kendon Atkins, was a survivor travelled to Edinburgh to collect the medal. The following was read out at the presentation:

"Major Jim Atkins, on behalf of survivor Charles Atkins. Major Atkins has travelled from Northampton for the presentation and his father served with 73 Company Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps."

Other Pioneer recipients were:

Mrs Mavis West, on behalf of victim George Braidwood. Mrs West travelled from York. Her father, a Lance Corporal was serving with the 75 Company, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps at the time of his death. His body was not recovered.

Mrs Barbara Rutter, on behalf of victim Hubert Hickerton. Mrs Rutter travelled to Edinburgh along with other family members from Worcester. Her father served with 73 Company AMPC at the time of the disaster. His body was not recovered, although he is commemorated on the Dunkirk memorial 200 miles to the North of St Nazaire.

Mrs Margaret Kennedy on behalf of victim Henry McGuire. Mrs Kennedy's father was serving with the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. For almost 68 years Mrs Kennedy and her family from Aberdeen believed his body had not been recovered. All they knew was that he was lost at sea. Last week they learned that his body was recovered and is buried at St Hilaire-de-Riez.

Mr George Smith, on behalf of victim Norman Smith. Mr Smith is from Belshill. He understands his father had been recommended for a VC for his repeated attempts to save drowning men around him. As the oil caught fire in the water Mr Smith of 75 Company AMPC, was overcome and pulled from the blazing sea. He returned to Plymouth but on the 20th June 1940, 3 days after the sinking he succumbed to his wounds and is buried in Plymouth war cemetery.

Status of the Lancastria commemorative medal:

"The Lancastria Commemorative Medal has been instigated by the Scottish Government to officially recognise the sacrifice of victims and endurance of survivors of Britain's worst ever-maritime

disaster when the HMT Lancastria was attacked and sunk off the coast of Saint Nazaire, France on 17th June 1940.

It is an official commemorative medal and the only restriction on wearing it apply to those veterans or recipients who may be wearing official UK service personnel uniform. In other words present UK service personnel in uniform. Survivors should wear the medal on the left breast and relatives are permitted to wear the medal on their right breast jacket/suit.

Existing UK regulations (Foreign and Commonwealth Orders Regulations 1969) on the wearing of commemorative medals apply to those instigated by foreign governments and those commemorative medals instigated by private organisations or companies. The Lancastria Commemorative Medal has been officially commissioned by Scottish Ministers who are formally appointed by Her Majesty The Queen.

The First Minister, as "Keeper of the Scottish Seal" pledges allegiance to The Queen when he or she takes office. The seal is the means of signifying Crown approval for all actions of the Scottish Government including the instigating and presentation of the Lancastria Commemorative Medal. In this regard the medal is distinct from the debates and controversy which have occurred related to other commemorative medals."

This is the first medal of its kind ever instigated by the Scottish Government.

On page 32 is an article by Major AGW Tonkin which appeared in The Pioneer, issue 11, dated 2 June 1947.



■ Jimmy with Alex Sammond MSP Picture: J Atkins



■ Sir Martin Bell and Steve Barron at the National Arboretum, Staffordshire

Picture: Steve Barron

Bosnia Herzegovina

Steve Barron (ex 522) attended an official commemorative service

ON Thursday 22 May I attended an official Commemorative Service which was held at The National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire, to mark the withdrawal of UK Forces from Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH).

The service was attended by HRH The Princess Michael of Kent, Minister of State for the Armed Forces Bob Ainsworth, Chief of the General Staff General Sir Richard Dannett, and BiH Defence Minister Mr Selmo Cikotic. Many top ranking Officers of all three armed services were present to mention a few, General Sir Michael Jackson and Field Marshall The Lord Vincent, various members of Parliament and BBC Bosnia war correspondents of the time Sir Martin Bell and Katie Adie.

Also present were hundreds of veterans from across the UK and the families and friends of those who paid the ultimate price in bringing greater peace and stability to a country once ravaged by a bitter civil war.

I was deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina during the last Operation Grapple in 1995 under 20 Armoured Brigade and Signal Squadron as part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) Pioneer Defence Section for six months. Although based in Split, I had the privilege to travel

around theatre reaching Mostar, Vitex, Prozor, Novi Travnik, Maglaj, Bugojno, Zenica, Sepce, Kiseljak, Tomislavgrad, an overnight return sorte to Gornji Vacuf with 664 Squadron Army Air Corps in a Mk 7 Lynx Helicopter and as far North West as Tuzia, whilst assisting the Joint Commissioned Observers (JCOs) deliver a winterised Land Rover, all on a voluntary basis whilst not staggging-on at Divulje Barracks.

Following the Royal arrival of HRH Princess Michael of Kent, four Sea Harriers GR7 Fixed winged planes carried out a formation fly-pass over the Arboretum and crowd stands to start the service in true military fashion. General Dannett gave the welcoming address followed by several hymns with music provided by The Band of The Parachute Regiment.

Wreaths were laid inside the Memorial on behalf of HRH Princess Michael of Kent, the Government and Armed Forces of the UK, and the Government and people of BiH. During the wreath laying Vedran Smailovic, the "Cellist of Sarajevo", played a musical tribute to the UK personnel and their efforts to help his country. Vedran famously played his cello for 22 consecutive days in Sarajevo in 1992 to honour the deaths of 22 civilians

who were killed when queuing for bread during the bombing and shelling of the city. At the end of the service, two Sea King Mk 4 from 845 Naval Air Squadron and 846 Naval Squadron carried out another fly-pass.

The UK's 15 year deployment in BiH saw the country in its very darkest hours through to the peaceful and more hopeful place it is today.

British troops, including past and present members of 23 Pioneer Regiment on the ground helped to save thousands of lives. All of our contributions during deployment were vital, and part of a unified international effort which resulted in the negotiation of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. Unfortunately, this success did not come without cost. More than 100,000 UK personnel contributed throughout the 15 year deployment playing a vital peacekeeping role in support of the UN, NATO and the EU. Sadly over 50 UK service personnel made the ultimate sacrifice.

A small number of UK Forces remain in BiH attached to EUFOR, NATO and the Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Sarajevo.

The event was finalised by a hearty buffet lunch and drinks before heading home.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **VETERANS** who served in the armed forces at any time are now entitled to receive a Veterans Badge.

Since the Armed Forces Veterans Badge was launched in September 2004, over 500,000 have been awarded.

To apply for the badge contact the Veterans Agency on 0800 169 2277 or visit www.veteransagency.mod.uk

■ **MAY** we take this opportunity to thank all who purchased Draw tickets a profit of £2,700 was made. Results:-

- 1st Prize - Mr A Redford, Sunderland
Ticket No 38584
- 2nd Prize - Ann Lynes, Warrington
Ticket No 43528
- 3rd Prize - Mr E Erdmann, Rugby
Ticket No 48504
- 4th Prize - Ms AM Ayres, Prudhoe
Ticket No 06019
- 5th Prize - Pte Low, 206 Sqn
Ticket No 05761

Congratulations to Alf and here is a letter that he sent in...

Hi, I want to thank you for the cheque for £1,000 which I received today, it is the first time I have won such a large amount of money. I intend taking my 2 sons and their wives out for a meal and the remainder will go towards replacing a small timber conservatory I built about 27 year ago. Thanks again Norman and I do enjoy reading the magazine. Kind Regards - Alf Redford.

■ **WE** are currently looking to establish an RLC Association Branch in Cyprus for former members of the RLC, RAOC, RASC/RCT, RPC, ACC and RE PCS.

Letters have been written to members of these Associations to gauge the level of interest and announcements will be placed in the local media.

Those who have served in the Forming Corps, but are not members of their Associations will also be most welcome to join the Branch. Initially it will provide an opportunity for the occasional social gathering, and depending on the membership could develop a little more formally to include parading a Branch Standard (funded by RHQ) on Remembrance Day.

We will also seek support from the Cyprus based RLC Officers and units. Please contact Jonathan Knowles at RHQ The RLC or Drew Elgeti in Cyprus who has agreed to be the initial point of contact. His address is PO Box 70199, 4161 Kato Polemidia, Limassol. Email: delgeti@hotmail.com

■ **THE** Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Family Association (SSAFA) Forces Help needs you. There are over 10 million people eligible for help from SSAFA Forces Help and they provide a reliable caring and trusted service to more than 50,000 people each year.

Volunteers can give as little or as much time as they can spare. There are positions for people interested in practical case work as well as other roles such as team leaders, treasurers and fundraisers.

If you would like to be part of the important volunteer team that cares for those who have left the services please get in touch. Training is provided and all out of pocket expenses are paid.

Please contact Mr Glen Smith, Branch Support Advisor Membership, 19 Queen Elizabeth Street, London SE1 2LP. Telephone: 0207 463 9273. Email: glen.s@ssafa.org.uk

Nostalgia group or village people

Nostalgia group hold their meeting at redcar



Picture and words: Supplied by Nostalgia Group

THE Nostalgia Group held a Group Meeting at Redcar on 13/14 June 2008.

Preparations were carried out by Allan Sutcliffe and the presentations were obtained by Neil Taylor and Alan Tuplin with Alan's wife Christine making a presentation frame for the guest of honour, Capt Mat East. The Group would like to thank Mat for attending.

The main event was on the Saturday evening and presentations were made to the Landlord of the Clarendon Hotel, Mat who received his frame, model and

pendant, Steve Kohut who received the LS&LS Medal (Long service and long suffering) for 23 years of marriage to Linda.

John Barlow received his pensioners' battle bus and finally Neil received his new boots.

A pendant was presented to members of 100 Pnr Sqn (V) which they intend to hang prominently in their bar.

Arrangements are already being made to hold a similar event in 2009.

More photographs can be found on page 55.

Spot the cuneo mouse

CUNEO painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Sword Beach was the codename of one of the five main landing beaches in Operation Neptune, the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944. By 1st August 1944 there were over 35,500 pioneers in Normandy. D-Day + 79 there were 231 Coys and over 68,000 men.

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse (sometimes lifelike, sometimes cartoon-like) which was his trademark and somewhere in this newsletter we have hid a Cuneo mouse!

They can be difficult to detect, and many people enjoy scouring his paintings to find one.

Did you spot the Mouse in the May 2008 Newsletter? It was, of course, on page 48, in the right hand side of the photograph. We made it to easy for you, however it should be a bit harder to find in this issue!

The first correct entry received was from Mr E Layman, he will be receiving his prize shortly.

Can you spot the mouse in this issue of the newsletter? (and the one on this page does

not count!).

The first person that emails me with the location of the mouse will win a prize!



George Pringle's Story

George Pringle's early life and service from Oldham to Salerno

Report: George Pringle
Picture: George Pringle

THE lead up to any Great War is something one cannot ignore, for while we lived in peace as Hitler raves, in other countries the people are already his slaves.

I often ask myself how was it possible for me an ordinary well behaved citizen to become embroiled in such tragic circumstances as a war. My life had been a normal one attending school until 1934 and then seeking employment. I was an active member in the two local churches- Christ Church Bootle and Orrell Park Baptist Church. As I attended the latter from the age of eleven I became a member of the 37th Company Boys Brigade. I rose to the rank of Lieutenant and every week had been a happy one. As the Secretary and Treasurer of the Church Youth Social Club, my evenings were very busy. I was also a member of the Liverpool Pembroke Athletic Club where I was a useful member and did my bit to help the Club win the assortment of trophies. My life was therefore mapped out for me and why not as my friends and I enjoyed every minute.

However, during this period certain happenings were taking place which were to take control of my future life. An Austrian called Adolf Schnickelgruber - later changed to Hitler decided to put a country, namely Germany, back into power. The degrading of his adopted country Germany after World War One soon began to fester in his mind and body. In consequence by devious means he became the German Chancellor and Dictator. The result was his powerful and brain washed Army began a series of occupying other people's countries which he believed had been part of Germany before 1914.

He then marched in and occupied Austria in March 1938 - Sudetenland in October 1938 - Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and finally Poland on September 1st 1939.

As Great Britain had an agreement with France to come to the aid of Poland if Germany invaded their country we were obliged to fulfil our obligation. By the 1st September most of the population of Great Britain knew that we could be soon at war with Germany, but, we all hoped and prayed it could be avoided. At that time I was working at Messrs J Bibby & Sons and had been told my job would be of importance to the country so I would be exempt from joining the Armed Forces. On September 3rd the Churches were filled with people who had decided to pray to God for his divine help. At Orell Park Baptist the service was recessed at 11.00am while the minister Rev AJ Kellam turned on his radio which he had specially brought in to hear the Prime Minister Mr Chamberlain make his special announcement. Great Britain and France had demanded Germany to withdraw their troops from Poland by

11.00am September 3rd or we would declare war on this country. Hitler decided to ignore our request or demand - "so we were at war with Germany". Prayers were said on behalf of the youth in our Church and Country.

However, on the September 2nd, I was finishing my night shift when all the employees of militia calling up age - 21 years - were called to the office and were told our employment was no longer required. The firm must have known what was going to happen for a law stating all employees called up by the Government must be re-instated after the cessation of hostilities. Note the date September 2nd - the passing of the law was September 4th - a date when I was unemployed. In the post on that date was my calling up papers requiring me to attend the local Army Medical Centre. I was the first in my family to be called up and the last one to be de-mobbed.



I reported to the Medical Centre which was held in Renshaw Street Central Hall. The place was full of bewildered young men all ignorant of what was going to happen to them. We were placed in rows in alphabetical order and told we would be called out in that order. The hall had been sectioned off into cubicles where we were told to go to and collect a test tube and to urinate into it as a sample and pass same to the doctor. Though I had been in the Boys Brigade and to lots of camps and also mixed with members of Pembroke Athletic Club I found the action of passing water was an impossibility. I felt embarrassed, but, the Doctor said it was a frequent occurrence and I would be later 'requested' to fulfil my obligation. I returned to my seat and next to me I found a friendly chap who said I had done the right thing and if I carry on like that I would not be called up. By now I had been medically examined and as I was able to breathe I was passed A1. Only the testing of my urine remained between 'civvy' street and the Army. The medical staff though kind are a cunning lot and they gave me a large drink of water in case I was feeling thirsty. In 15 minutes I was asked to go into a special room and so armed with my test tube I resigned myself to what ever fate would befall me.

My effort was successful so much so I could not stop and the tube was full and so

the rest of my effort poured onto the floor. It was what the Army needed and soon I was told I would receive my calling up date in due course. That drink of water was my downfall or maybe it was the start of a new life.

By now the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) comprising regular and Territorial Forces were already in France to meet face to face with the enemy. The enemy however were fighting in Poland a few hundred miles away our BEF had time to build defensive lines and build up their logistics. The border between France and Germany had in peace time been reinforced by a stronghold of concrete and barbed wire coupled with concrete bunkers housing their artillery. This was thought to be an impossible barrier so our forces were moved up to the borders between France and Belgium. They could not advance any further as Belgium was a neutral country. This situation lasted for months and I was

unemployed so had to find work from somewhere. When I called at firms my age was a deterrent to employment and I was contacting the army recruitment office in Liverpool begging them to take me on immediately. I could have signed on as a regular soldier, but, at that time it was 22 years. I finally found work in a Tannery in Field Lane, Litherland but after 6 weeks I was told they had to release me owing to the re-instatement law. Finally I had a job in the Hunters Handy Hams in Broadgreen where my brother Bill worked as a foreman. My job was making sausages, black puddings, chicken and ham rolls etc etc and filling 20,000 tins on each night shift and the monotony spurred me on to be called up for the Army.

The War in France was in a static period known as the 'Phoney War' and conscripts for the Army were not urgently required as the Government thought sufficient numbers were still on active service to cope with any emergency.

Into the Unknown - Blitzkrieg

Our Army of Regulars now called the British Expeditionary Force Marched into France - into the unknown of course.

They prepared the ground for defence or attack but sadly in later months so many did not come back.

Months passed by and the 'Phoney War' continued until the 10th May when the Germans having already occupied Poland with the help of the Russians decided to turn their attention to the Western region of Europe. They by-passed the French Maginot Line and invaded the neutral countries of Holland and Belgium. I think panic struck the British and French armies for no declaration of War on Belgium and Holland had been declared by Germany.

The Dutch though fighting bravely were no match for the might of the experienced German Army who "blitzkrieged" their way to Belgium where the BEF had rushed their forces up to the Belgium border. Soon

Belgium forces were forced to surrender and soon even after gallant fighting the BEF and French were slowly driven back. It was decided to withdraw to Dunkirk a port on the West Coast. The 51st Highland Division were given their orders to cover the retreat and fight to the last man. Slowly the Dunkirk beaches were filled with soldiers awaiting their turn to go aboard any ship of the Royal Navy or ferry boats even private yachts all of which had been ordered by the Government to sail to Dunkirk. The beaches were being bombed and machine gunned while more troops inland destroyed all our transport-stores-petrol dumps etc to stop the Germans from using them. After the fall of Dunkirk and the rescue of over 330,000 troops had been made and they were safely back in England it must have dawned on our Government as they realised we stood alone that the situation was in a perilous state. The debris left on the beaches of France was enormous and our troops in Great Britain were going to be short of equipment. Great Britain was the only country left to continue the fight against the mighty Nazi power of Germany and her allies consisting of Hungary, Rumania, Austria and Italy. The enemy in one month of fighting had invaded and conquered Poland, Norway, Belgium, France and Holland. Anyone standing on the white cliffs of Dover in the month of June 1940 and gazing across our strip of the water the English Channel only 21 miles wide would feel tangibly that we were alone and we would be the next conquest by Germany.

Only our Prime Minister felt different as with his rousing speeches in Parliament and on the radio he attempted to bolster the spirit of the British population. Winston Churchill when in his first years in a boarding school failed his English exams and had to study for a further 12 months. His speeches during the War always lifted the hearts of people and after the catastrophe of Dunkirk and the threat of invasion by the Germans that is what the people needed. With the words of Mr Churchill, "We will fight on the beaches, we will fight on the landing grounds, we will fight in the hills, in the towns and villages, but, we we'll never surrender" ringing in my ears I was again "requested" to report to the Medical Centre in Liverpool. I was amazed when I was told I was unfit for the infantry and classified as A3 - the reason I had "FLAT FEET" - I felt disgraced. My friends in the Boys Brigade had all been passed A1 and most of them joined the Kings 5th Infantry Battalion or the Royal Air Force, I felt degraded and shunned. I was not to know at that time that the grade of A3 probably saved my life as infantry casualties were often 50% or more of their total numbers. I was also not to know until later that 80% of my Army life would be as a member of a Regiment to be known as support troops for the infantry - thank goodness for flat feet!!

Again with Mr Churchill's words, "The battle of France is over, now the battle for Britain begins" ringing in my ears and with the hope that if Adolf Hitler knew I was soon to become a soldier he would immediately ask for an Armistice as the postman delivered my calling up papers. At that time my eldest brother Ben aged 31 years was working for the Government by driving Forces personnel from one depot to another which was a very important job at that time and his double decker bus covered thousands of miles. There was a shortage of Forces' transport as the vehicles had all been left in France. My sister Lou (aged 27) and Ann (aged 25) were all

working so there was only my Dad and Mum to say their sad farewells and try to cover up their tears. My other brothers Arthur (aged 19) and Ted (aged 16 years) were not at home. Arthur was on an early shift and Ted was already in the Royal Navy as he had joined up when he was 15. My youngest sister Grace who was 13 years was in school. So with my calling up papers, travel permit and my 2/6d (12 1/2p) postal order I sailed forth waving my good-byes and determined not to show any emotion.

It was July 18th 1940, and it was to be July 28th 1946 before I was a civilian again.

Called to the colours - Why me?

My life now changes from a "Civvy" to a soldier, I went in as a lad came out much older. To be trained as a killer in the Kings Army.

There is no doubt I must have been real BALMY

At Lime Street station I noticed a number of military personnel who seemed to be in charge, but, I decided to ignore them as I was still a civilian. Suddenly there was an almighty roar as one of the military decided to make his presence known. "Anyone here going to Oldham-Manchester or Yorkshire then come over here sharpish". That was it I suddenly realised the Army knew about me and was going to welcome me with open arms. Like hell they were. "You and you and you get in here for Oldham. Transport will meet you at the station and escort you to your next destination." Have you ever seen sheep rounded up by a sheep dog, well that was us except our dog had 3 stripes on his sleeve. He carried a clip board and as we gave our names in a quivering voice he ticked them off and soon he had completed his job. "This train will not stop until it reaches Oldham so do not think of getting off as my clipboard will be in possession of a Corporal who will do his duty by making you all feel at home".

At Oldham we boarded army transport-open trucks, to make our way to Mumps a village a few miles away. By now we had a chance to size up the other inmates and try to work out where they came from and what kind of person they were. The journey was not very comfortable, but, we would soon learn nothing was to be in our future life. Arriving at a building called Earl Mill we were ushered in through a massive door and told to wait. Waiting we were soon to learn was a predominant practice, but, by now we were making friends and cursing our luck by being of the of the wrong age at the wrong time. Why had we been selected to join the Army at this special time? Would our future be decided by any of the people sitting here? What had we done to deserve this awful fate?

Very soon I heard names being called out and the recipient would walk forward to a desk and stand there. What was said I didn't hear, but soon my name was called and I marched (Boys Brigade Fashion) to the desk. Checking my details I was given an Army Number and told to remember it as it would be required on numerous occasions. My number was 13056452 and I was one soldier together with another 299 who would form the 175th Pioneer Company. At that time, though, the Company was part of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC). To make room for other recruits, we were told to go outside and report back at 1600 hours. We all

wandered outside into the streets but hadn't a clue where to go as we were all strangers in a strange city or rather a village. I had been told by my Uncle George that always mate up with someone bigger than yourself as it was handy to have a giant with you in case of trouble. I looked around and spotted a couple of lads who looked tough, but friendly, so meandered over to them and said, "D'ye know where there is a cafe". They looked at me and said, "God, a bloody scouser".

We introduced ourselves and found one was named Jimmy Addison from Burley near Leeds and the other was Frank Bennet from a village near Birmingham.

We were to remain "buddies" until 1945. Jimmy had been a bouncer in a club in Leeds while Frank was in the building trade, later we all mated up with "Jock" Alexander, a painter, from Possil Park in Glasgow. Eventually we found a cafe who would accept our 2/6d

postal order in exchange for some food. As we were about to enter the cafe we were tapped on our shoulder by a man and a lady who asked us if we had just been called up for the Army. We looked vacant at first and said in a weak, miserable and tired voice, "Yes, and we are not allowed to return until 1600 hours". They took us into their home and told us to make ourselves comfortable while they prepared a meal for us. The man or I should say benefactor had been a soldier in WW1 and had been wounded. He had worked in the cotton mills but when his parents died they had left him some money in their will. In the first few months of WW2 he and his wife had noticed strangers wandering around and they found out they were all conscripts and waiting to join up. They contacted their neighbours and they in turn contacted others and at a general meeting they decided to hold functions such as dances, whist drives etc to raise funds. The money raised was to pay for the meals of anyone who had to report to Earl Mill to join up. Very soon our hunger had been sated and we were telling them of our experiences in life and we were all having a good time until our host reminded us of our time to return to the depot at Earl Mill.

We could not remember the surnames of our generous hosts except they were called Bill and Annie. Bill gave us all some advice when he said, "Never make your friendship so close as you may risk your own life or the life of others while trying to save your comrade". I remember going back to the village at Mumps on one of my 48 hour leaves some months later and found the area had been devastated by a land mine. No one knew where Bill and Annie had gone or if they had died, I felt miserable and so sad because they had been so friendly to us and helpful.

On our return to Earl Mill which was to be our "home" for the next 6 weeks as we did our basic training. We were "welcomed" by a pint-sized illiterate man who was wearing a khaki uniform with a polished brass crown on the sleeve near the cuff. He stood there stiffed back and upright. His uniform was pressed with knife edged creases down his trousers reaching his shiny black polished boots. He was to be our Company Sergeant Major, CSM Langdon. He attempted to put us in some form of 3 ranks with a space between each of uniform length. He then walked slowly up and down spending a few seconds in

‘My life now changes from a Civvy to a soldier, I went in as a lad came out much older. To be trained as a killer in the Kings Army.’

front of each man and then moving on and on until he had finished his inspection. He then stood in front of us and made himself known. He then informed us he had the worst job in the Army as he had to turn what he called rabble into a trained fighting force. It was then I realised that we had to learn a new language as every noun was predominated by a 4 letter word beginning with "F". Jimmy Addison said to me, "I hope he doesn't bury me 'cause the phase to Ashes & Dust to Dust will never sound the same".

After a while we realised we had to be kitted out and so at the double we were led to a Quartermaster's stores and formed up in a single file. On a long table or series of tables in front of us were a collection of items which were then given to us as a Corporal (wearing 2 stripes on his sleeve) called out the item and this was ticked off the logistic record by an accompanying Lance Corporal (wearing one stripe on his sleeve). We collected a Greatcoat, a battle dress BD, a suit of denims and lots of other things. We were then marched and were careful not to drop anything as we had signed for all this gear, to our quarters. Up two flights of stairs and then entered a very large room with the sun shining through the windows. The room was stifling hot and smelt of oil and grease and we were each allocated a space approx 7ft x 4ft, this was our living and sleeping quarters. The Corporal had left us for a while so we all set about making sure any friends we had made were bedding down near each other.

This was my first occasion when I realised the value of mates especially like Jim or Frank who by their size were able to ensure we kept enough space for Jock and also George Hayward (Chunky) so we formed a hugh square and any intruders were politely removed. George Hayward, who was a Cockney, had been a useful amateur local boxer. As we had a rubber sheet I suggested we lay that down first and put our kit on it to keep it clean and avoid the dirty floor. We then were ordered to the basement of the building where there were bales of straw and what looked like sacks.

The sacks were of Hessian, but the only opening was on the side approximately a 2 foot slit with 4 tapes dangling from the end sewn on the sack. We soon learned the object was now to fill the sack, officially called paliasse, with straw. The more you could cram in the better for it apparently soon evened itself out as you lay on the object to sleep. We tied the ends of the tapes together and carried the paliasse upstairs to our appropriate place. My group of five lads sat on our paliasses and waited our next order.

A Sergeant appeared and we gazed in admiration as he was immaculate and seemed to have a "friendly" face. We stood up on command and he marched to the end of our row of recruits and proceeded to count us off up to thirty. He stood in front of us and said, "I am now your Sergeant, for my better and your worse, my name is Aylesbury, always Sergeant Aylesbury, now what is my name? We replied in various quivering tones "Sergeant Aylesbury". "Louder", he shouted and we did our best. "Now go down to the mess room and take your mess tin and your enamel mug, after your meal report back here in 20 minutes." We literally fell down

the stairs in our haste. "Where is the mess?" we shouted as we followed each other in a head long charge of the Light Brigade. We lined up breathlessly and waited our first Army meal. Two thick hunks of bread, like door stops, and some meat inside them and a wad of cake and a mug of hot tea.

We all sat down at tables and consumed our ingredients. I opened my "sandwich" and could not believe my eyes, chicken and ham roll, yes, exactly what I had made at my job in Hunters Handy Hams ever so long ago. Looking around the faces. I could see nothing but disgust on their faces and shouts of "What is this shit they've given us." I observed a discrete silence, because, I would have been massacred if I had owned up that I was the maker of the concoction. (I owned up many months later in another part of my story) We dashed back up the stairs and found our Sergeant waiting for us. He wasn't too happy as we had been absent for 25 minutes. We learnt our first lesson, always be punctual. The rest of the evening was spent listening to our Sergeant who gave us details of what was expected of us now we were in the Army.

The first thing we had to do was to use the items contained in our "hussif" or housewife, which contained needles, cotton and grey wood. The sewing on our uniform of our name and number after writing the details on tags occupied the next hour. Vests, underpants, socks and shirts were all to be tagged as they were to be sent to a laundry at least once a week, and, we hoped they came back.

We spent the rest of the evening sorting out our webbing-belts and gaiters or anklets web. How to attach our large pack to the webbing, how to attach our small pack, how to attach our water bottle, our bayonet holster.

We had a soldier with us who was a great help as he served in WW1 and had joined up again in 1939. He had been a Sergeant and luckily he was in our Section which was No 3. He was an asset and proved to be in the next few months. The notice board contained our Part 1 and Part 2 Orders and if you failed to read them you hadn't a clue as to your orders for the next day and you would be in big trouble.

Reveille next morning was at 0600 hours and we washed and shaved in cold water. The ablutions were in the basement of the Mill and we were running up and down the stairs like mad men.

We all dressed in our denims as our Battledress (BD) was used only for special parades etc. Breakfast was ready at 0630 hours and we all dashed down the stairs again with our mess tins and enamel mugs. The food wasn't too bad, sausage, baked beans and porridge, a chunk of bread and a mug of hot tea. (How we would have loved this food in later years on overseas services). At 0800 hours we were on parade and a more motley lot of men you could not imagine.

We were given our first drill orders mostly to get us to line up in 3 ranks and in size order. "Get fell in, tallest on the right, shortest on the left." The word shortest was substituted by a wording sounding like "shortarses". After about an hour we were dismissed and made our way to our selected area in the Mill and we were instructed by the Lance Corporal on the

mysteries of assembling together our webbing and kit etc. We were also told where we could purchase blanco, a substance like hard chalk coloured khaki, and mix same to the right consistency so as it could be applied to the webbing to give a smooth finish. It was left to dry and we all hoped it would pass inspection on a later parade in the afternoon. We were also shown how to polish out boots, one with dubbin for general use, one pair to shine so brightly it would reflect your face like a mirror. This latter pair of boots were only for ceremonial parades or CO's inspections. Back on the parade ground after our dinner, did I say dinner?

The potatoes were hard, cauliflower and cabbage unwashed, of course, it contained meat (caterpillars). The pudding was doughy, but we ate it all up as we were hungry. The afternoon from 1300 hours until 1600 hours, we again learnt the elements of marching in step, left and right turns in the correct Army manner, the about turn which caused several men to fall over. However, we were progressing slowly and after dismissal we returned to the Mill and a dash down the stairs for our tea. Thick sarnies with 'butter', jam and cakes with tea.

The evening was spent polishing brasses and our boots. We cleaned the latter with a rubbing movement with a rag and boot polish. Circular movements and an occasional splash of free spit. With a puff of hot breath we hoped that would be the final polish.

We carefully hung-up our webbing and clothing in a steel locker and very carefully placed our boots in a position where nothing could scratch them.

Our next day was similar except the CSM asked for volunteers to step forward if they wanted to sign on for seven years and three years in reserve. We all stood still and inwardly chuckled as we hoped to be back home by Christmas 1940. It was to be Christmas 1946 before I became a civilian. I learnt all the officers and NCOs taught me because there was nothing else to do as we were confined to "barracks" (CB) until our 6 weeks training was finished and we could behave and act like smart soldiers. I remember a young soldier named Stan Ingham was so bored he decided to go Absent Without Leave (AWOL) and spend the weekend with his family. He was picked up by the Military Police (MP or Redcaps) and returned to our unit. He was put on a charge and subsequently given a 14 days sentence in a Military Prison (GLASSHOUSE).

He returned after his sentence and was the smartest soldier in our unit. In the "glasshouse" everything is carried out at the double, inspections of hygiene or kit were made at any time of the day or night and punishments varied accordingly. In later years he was wounded at Salerno and died later in hospital. ■

'What is this shit they've given us. I observed a discrete silence, because, I would have been massacred if I had owned up that I was the maker of the concoction.'

if you have a story send it to...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC
St David's Barracks
Graven Hill
Bicester OX26 6HF

or email us at:

royalpioneer corps@googlemail.com



My life 1939–1946

Hugh Peter Sinclair was in 8 section, 219 company AMPC



Report: Hugh Peter Sinclair
Picture: Hugh in India and Hugh today

APRIL 15th 1939 – arrived by ferry in Harwich from Hook van Holland as a German-Jewish refugee, aged just turned 18.

May 1st 1939 – found job as clerk in Bloomsbury House, the central office of the Jewish Refugee Committee. Wages: £1 per week. Had a room in a boarding house in Regent Square, Bloomsbury for 11/ shillings a week.

June 12th 1939 – arrived in Liverpool as cinema projectionist trainee. The cinema was a 'flea pit' located in a very deprived area. No prospects whatsoever. Returned to London 18th August 1939, barely two weeks prior to outbreak of WW2. Resumed job at Bloomsbury House.

22nd August 1940 - enlisted at No.3 Recruiting Office in Euston in the AMPC, a few days after a Government announcement that genuine refugees from Nazi Germany could join the AMPC (Army No 13051357).

My army life started a few days later in Westward Ho!, Devon, where recruits were billeted in a pre-war Butlin's holiday camp. I found myself in 219 Coy. Section 8. The company moved to nearby Ilfracombe in September 1940, billeted in hotels. The average age of the men in section 8 was around 25/35, except for 4 younger chaps, Lucas, Jack, Herbert (John) and myself. We were known as the 'Nursery'. Lucas eventually joined the RE and served in Yugoslavia. We became close friends and he was best man at my wedding in 1949

sadly he died about 2 years ago. I am also still in occasional contact with Herbert, who was in the REME and now lives peacefully in rural Derbyshire. Jack unfortunately disappeared from my horizon in 1947.

From Ilfracombe, section 8 was posted to Northumberland late 1940, where we worked with and learnt our first swear words from Australian lumberjacks. We were billeted in Lord Runciman's house - a very lonely place in the middle of nowhere. The nearest place of 'life' was in Seahouses, where we spent most of our Saturday evenings at the Dunes Hotel and in a small canteen run by two or three lovely local girls. After Northumberland, section 8 postings included Long Eaton (Derby), Potterspurty Lodge (Northants), where we built Bren gun carrier emplacements, Long Marston (Warwicks) and RAF Wittering.

In July 1943 I transferred to the 55th Training Regiment RAC in Aldershot, where I qualified as a 'Grade A' Driver/Mech on Centaur and Cromwell tanks. Our troop was issued with tropical kit and embarked in Greenock on ss.Strathmore (23,000 tons) for an unknown destination early December 1943, with several thousand men aboard. We slept in hammocks in the holds, which also served as living quarters with wooden tables and benches screwed to the floor. We sailed in a large convoy, flying barrage balloons from every vessel, through an extremely rough Bay of Biscay. Virtually everyone on board was seasick and sanitary conditions had become horrendous. Eventually we passed Gibraltar

and sailed through the Mediterranean in much calmer seas. Many of us scrambled to the top deck at night to sleep in the open. The ship sailed through the Suez Canal and we knew then that we were not destined to join the 'Desert Rats'. The ss.Strathmore bunkered in Aden and finally, early January we reached Bombay. We had been at sea for what seemed to have been forever. Now we were very much aware of the bad smell in the port!

Next stop Poona. More training on Sherman tanks. Spent some time in military hospital with hepatitis and was medically downgraded. My unit was posted to join the 14th Army and took part in the battle of Imphal.

I was now 'on my own' and had several postings as driving instructor attached to other units in Karachi, Hyderabad and Deolali. Eventually I landed in GHQ New Delhi, Adjutant General's Branch, Org.19 where I spent a very interesting 18 months or so in charge of an office. I met one other former AMPC chap in New Delhi, Johnny Bryant, for whom I was best man when he married an Anglo-Indian girl in New Delhi cathedral. As far as I am aware there were only very few other ex-AMPC men like myself serving in this part of the world.

My discharge group was 33 and I left New Delhi in July 1946, homeward bound from Bombay, again through the Suez Canal but under infinitely better conditions compared with the outward voyage.

On the 23rd September 1946 I received my army issue civilian suit and a memorable and proud part of my life came to a happy end. ■

The Hall Story

Fred's journey from Westward Ho, to Austria, via Monte Cassino

Report: Fred Hall
Picture: Fred Hall

I HAD my papers for my medical examination in February 1940. Then, having passed the medical I had to wait until I received the actual call-up papers in July 1940, just after Dunkirk. When I had my medical I stated I would prefer the RAF. This was not to be. I had to report the following week at Westward Ho centre.

This centre was used for a Basic Training period of three weeks for personnel who were drafted into what was known then as the Pioneer Corps, which today is known as the Royal Pioneer Corps.

The Basic Training consisted of things such as drill, saluting practice, rifle drill, learning parts of rifles, how to clean and how to load a rifle. Strange as it may seem, we received no shooting practice at all in Basic Training. That had to come later, when we were formed into companies. We had one other drill which they were very, very strict on, and that was for air raids. All of a sudden, no matter what you were doing or how you were dressed, you would get a warning that there was an air raid going on and you had to assemble. At the Westward Ho centre we always seemed to have to run uphill into the trees. I remember this happening once after a mid-day meal, which wasn't very funny to us, and I had to scramble into my boots and didn't have time to tie them up, and running up the hill I had more of a job to keep my boots on than anything else!

After three weeks we were formed into companies, consisting of approximately four hundred men. We were then posted to various parts of England. My company was posted to Felstead in Essex, and we were billeted in what was a private school for boys which had been taken over by the Army. We were given various duties. We had to work in conjunction with the Royal Engineers. If air-strips were bombed you were expected to be called out to clear them for aircraft landings, and if there were raids on bridges or anything of that nature you had to be prepared to help with the unloading of Bailey bridges, which the REs would then install.

It was while we were at Felstead that myself and one or two others didn't take too lightly to having to do drills such as marching and guard duties. I thought I can't go on pick and shovel work or bridge building, or even burying the dead. I had done various jobs in the barracks, amongst them Dining Room orderly. Then I was picked to be Officers' Mess waiter for a short period. So, having seen notices that

clerks and cooks were wanted we decided to have a go at this. However the clerks' positions were filled and so one fellow whom I was friendly with, who came from Sittingbourne in Kent, said what about going in for cooks, which we did. This alleviated any strain on our feet, and any strain on my mind as I wasn't very fond of any other type of Army work! I was relieved when they told us to report to the Cook Sergeant. After a short period of time in the troops' cookhouse I was sent to place in Buntingford, the HQ of the Pioneer Corps, to relieve the cook there for

cooking for them.

We spent quite a lot of time in Scotland with other regiments and with the Royal Navy who taught us how to land from landing craft. In July 1943 we were on our way to Sicily for the invasion. The ship was a Dutch liner called the Marnix [Marnix van St Aldegonde], now converted to a troop carrier. It made one more trip, and how lucky we were, because it was sunk on that trip, bombed by the enemy. It was all very nice going over on the boat until we had warnings that we might be torpedoed! We were told by the officer commanding the troops on board that ship what we would have to do if we were taken prisoner. We were told that we would only have to declare our name, rank and number and that we would have to destroy any personal papers, including our Army pay book. It wasn't nice to think that you might be torpedoed at any moment, but fortunately for us we made quite a safe landing, although up to our armpits in water.

The Canadians had been sent in on another island to put the Germans off the fact that we were landing in Sicily. I remember that the fellow who had gone along with me to become a cook thought it was great fun - and so did everyone else - to see just him with his rifle walking along the beach at Sicily with about two hundred Italian prisoners with their hands on their heads. They willingly surrendered, whereas we expected all sorts of hostility. The only thing that scared me at Sicily was when going down the rope ladder off the boat, some silly devil above me got his rifle pointed down at me, and got the bolt called in the ladder. My thought was that any minute it might go off and hit me.

Having done a short period of time in Sicily, which was more of a watchful event than anything (the majority of Italian servicemen had been taken prisoner) we moved into Africa for a rest period in the desert near Tripoli. We were there for some four or five weeks, after which it was decided that we were to be on the invasion of the Italian mainland, and land at Salerno.

Whereas Sicily was a very peaceful landing, Salerno was just the reverse. As we landed off the tank landing crafts in the day-time and in very brilliant sunshine, we were actually being bombed from the air by the Germans. The aircraft were flying so low, we could see the pilots and the gunners just absolutely laughing at us as they machine-gunned us. Some of the sights weren't very pretty at all. Several fellows that I knew were hit and I remember well one in particular. A little fellow who was not with our company, who I had made friends with in Scotland,



■ Fred on his Tenth Day at Westward Ho, 1940

him to go on leave. This then resulted in me being sent on an eight week cooks' course at Brentwood, and passed out as a cook. After that I went back to my own company and after a short while became Sergeant's Mess Cook. This continued until late 1942, when we were sent to Scotland on beach training to learn how to go along with any invasions that might take place.

I was often sent on detachment with certain sections of the Company to cook for them, some times for weeks on end. Then came long stays back with the Company, and I found myself in the Sergeants' Mess,

shook my hand as he went off the boat under his serial number. I followed him a little while later with sixteen men who were assigned to land with me. I saw him only a little while afterwards laid on a stretcher with the medical corps looking after him. He saw me land and wanted to see me. This poor devil had already lost one arm and was likely to lose the other one, he was so badly hit. I often wonder what happened to him. He was one of the many that were very badly hit by this absolute lunacy of the German aircraft.

After landing at Salerno were all told we would have to proceed to a certain beach. Various members of the company were told they should go to Amber beach or Red beach, or Green beach, and then you were given one point for meeting up with the whole company. This all seemed very stupid to us, because none of us knew Italy, but we had to walk around and find these various beaches. This was all very hairy at the time as you didn't know where you were going, who you were going to meet, or who was going to be firing at you.

Anyway, we managed to overcome these things pretty well, so that after a few days we pulled further in to Italy to a place called Torre Annunziata just below Naples. Then in January of 1944 we embarked on the invasion of Anzio, perhaps the worst of the three landings, also gradually getting nearer Mount Cassino.

It was a very, very cold day when we landed, and the Germans had been aware of the landing and had already vacated the place. But they hadn't vacated it without leaving some very nasty booby traps behind. Two or three fellows in a company alongside us couldn't resist looking in a bungalow window and noticed how the table was laid out with all the beautiful cut glass on the table. We had already been warned not to go into places, not to touch anything. But these three fellows, being inquisitive, decided to go in, and the first one that went in picked up one of the glass tumblers from the table which had been laid for a dinner meal, and of course it was booby trapped, and that was unfortunately the end of those three fellows. They were killed more or less outright. These were the sorts of things the Germans had done in vacating the place. They had very craftily booby-trapped a lot of the places in the area. But apart from that, Anzio again was rather a walk-in, though the worst was yet to come.

Having got ourselves established in Anzio we were to remain there for six months. This wasn't at all a picnic, because we used to get shelled all day long from the big guns up on Mount Casino, and bombed practically all night by the German aircraft. I remember well one particular Monday morning, when a number of the fellows in the company I was with were down on Anzio beach-head unloading a boat that had come in with rations for various companies. I was supposed to be one of the cooks on duty to make their mid-day meal down to them. I didn't feel particularly well on this day, and I asked the messing officer if someone could take my place, to which he agreed. These thirty-eight men - including the cooks, who had just arrived - were killed when the

Germans came over and bombed the boat they were unloading. Some of them were just blown to bits. I might have been one of those.

While we were at Anzio, as Officers' Mess we were billeted in a big house called the Casa Bianca, which was on a big hill. This was a wonderful target for the Germans when they used to come over and bomb. It was at the time when a lot of men had begun to dig in and sleep underground, and there were only two of us in the building in the upper floor, one being the company Sergeant Major, the other myself. I must admit we had been drinking together the night before, and I slept rather heavily. I remember waking up in the very early hours of the morning just as dawn was approaching, hearing this funny whistling noise. I went to get out of bed, and suddenly realised that this was a bomb coming down from a German plane.



■ Fred in Italy, October 1943

So I quickly got myself back on to the bed - which were bed-springs which we had looted from various places which had been bombed - and covered my head over with the blankets, as I slept under one of the big windows. In the next flash the door blew open opposite me. I just managed to peep up over the blankets because I'd had a shower of glass come down over me as the bomb exploded, and I shook the glass off. This terrific red flash came past me. It shot past my bed and straight out through the wall. There was a terrific hole in the wall, I remember. I'm sure to this day that if I hadn't got my feet back on the bed in time I would have lost them. That big ball of red was in actual fact red hot shrapnel. So I was very lucky on several occasions.

I remember that Anzio became so bad that with regard to sleeping at night we had

to dig in. That is we had to sleep underground, and the orders were that you must sleep five or six feet down.

Fortunately it was in the summer months so it didn't prove too much of a hardship with the cold. Having survived the taking and retaking of Mount Casino by troops fighting up there we were eventually pulled out of Anzio and went further north into Italy.

When peace was declared we found ourselves in Milan for quite a short stay. While at Anzio I found myself promoted to Officers' Mess cook. I had long before become one of the Army Catering Corps clan, remaining attached to my old Company. I must say it was a good move as my army mate was batman to the Captain.

We moved to just outside Venice, to a place called Mestre. From there things were then going quite peacefully which brought us round to 1945, when the war with Germany was over. We were able to spend day-leaves in Venice, and various places in that area, until we moved up through Italy, through the Brenner Pass into Austria to look after German prisoners of war who were building huts for displaced persons, under our instructions. While at Villach, in November of 1945, I was picked with certain other members of the company, to travel home to England on leave for twenty-eight days. This was to be my first leave for two and a half years after leaving Scotland. Even though it meant me going home to my wife and parents I still had mixed feelings about leaving the company. I felt that it would have been much better if I had stayed until I was finally demobbed. But I was chosen to go, and so I went home, and after a few hours of travelling I did begin to feel the great excitement of once again seeing people who I had left behind, wondering whether I would ever see them again at all. And having reached England the excitement grew more intense as the hours went by, and I remember well landing at my home town, getting off the train and proceeding home.

I met some of the fellows on the train going back, and one of them asked me where I was going. I thought that was a bit strange as I had been in for a number of years. It appeared that the company we had left had been disbanded and he amongst others had been informed where he was to go. I, for some reason or other, never

received any notification. So we all went back to transit camp in Villach, which by that time was very snowed up. You walked up to your knees in snow if you went on to any track which hadn't been cleared. It was very cold. I spent Christmas in the transit camp because nobody knew where I was to go. All the others had departed. Having spent ten days in the camp, and having repeatedly asked if they had heard anything about where I had to go, I finally had to find out for myself by going to the Royal Corps of Signals (or Corps of Military Police) in Villach. It was a small shack in a back street, consisting of two MPs. By my giving them information of a certain officer who used to be in my company, who I knew had moved to a company in Klagenfurt, they were able to tell me within about eight hours. I had been posted to

Group HQ at the Colonel's request. (He often dined at our mess.) But I couldn't go for another week because there wasn't a train.

The week went by, and when I got on the train one of the first people I saw was one of the fellows from my old company. I travelled with him, taking the best part of a days' journey. Eventually I landed up in Graz, in the late afternoon of Christmas Eve 1945: a very nice town, and, I was to find, very nice people. The Colonel's driver was waiting with the car for me. I was at HQ, and was cook to a Colonel and his various officers. I had become Officers' Mess cook after having done troops' cookhouse and Sergeants' Mess cookhouse work. I had by this time established myself equivalent to a Corporal Cook, and passed a further cook's course in Italy. This particular Colonel had asked specifically for me when the company was disbanded.

My stay in Graz turned out to be a particularly happy one. I spent four glorious months there. I met various civilians who were very nice, and I was amongst a nice bunch of fellows. This was from January of 1946 until the end of April 1946, when I

eventually left Graz to go home for demobilisation.

I landed in England early in May. It was a Saturday night. I can see us quite clearly now getting off the boat train at Dover having come across from Calais. It was a very rough landing, much rougher than in the November when I had come home. I can remember well, people hanging over the side of the boat bringing up their hearts, looking a bit green as we crossed over. A lot of them were other service fellows. Several of them were Queen Alexandra nurses. We were then all hustled into a special train that was waiting at Dover Station and eventually landed at Aldershot.

Unfortunately it was much too late to go through our complete demob that night, so they put us through the preliminary period after giving us a meal. They paid us, gave us so many free cigarettes, and so forth. They asked if there was anything you wanted to keep out of your kit. I don't think there were many who wanted to keep anything much. We'd all seen it for six years. We'd all had enough of it. We all knew what khaki looked like by that time!

So we went as far as possible through the particular stages at Aldershot, but it was too late for us to be taken to Woking to get our civilian clothes.

So we had to stay at Aldershot that night. On the Sunday morning we were taken to Woking and we were taken into a very big hut. In fact, once inside it was like going round Marks & Spencers. Instead of having girls in very neat dresses or overalls, you had what was known as the ATS, which was the female equivalent of the Army, standing there in their khaki uniforms behind the counters ready to serve you. You were allowed to pick a suit, raincoat, hat, shirt, socks, shoes, tie, anything that consisted of your wearing apparel. This was then taken to a final checkout, and after that, if you hadn't got everything, this particular ATS girl would tell you that you needed something, and would get it for you. It was then put into a special box and done up for you. Having signed for it you went outside the building and waited for special coaches to take you to Woking railway station. From there you then made your own way to wherever your home town was. ■

Remembrance Day

Originally called armistice day, the name changed at the end of World War II

Article: Norman Brown
Photo: Paul Brown

ON the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 the guns of Europe fell silent after four years of the most bitter and devastating fighting. The Armistice was signed at 5 a.m. and six hours later, at 11 a.m., the Great War was finally over...

Remembrance day came to symbolise the end of the war and provide an opportunity to remember those who had died. Originally called Armistice Day but became Remembrance Day at the end of the Second World War in 1945 to include all those who had fallen in the two World Wars and later conflicts. Following the publication of a letter in the London Evening News it was proposed a respectful silence to remember those who had given their lives, this was brought to the attention of King George V who issued a proclamation which called for a two minute silence.

Following the first silence on 11 November 1919, the Manchester Guardian reported: "The first stroke of eleven produced a magical effect. The tram cars glided into stillness, motors ceased to cough and fume, and stopped dead, and the mighty limbed dray horses hunched back upon their loads and stopped also, seeming to do it of their own accord.

Someone took off his hat, and with a nervous hesitancy the rest of the men bowed their heads also. Here and there an old soldier could be detected slipping unconsciously into the posture of 'attention'. An elderly woman, not far away, wiped her eyes, and the man beside her looked white and stern. Everyone stood very still... The hush deepened. It had spread over the whole city and became so pronounced as to impress one with a sense of audibility. It was a silence which was

almost pain... And the spirit of memory brooded over it all".

The second Sunday of November was Remembrance Sunday. At 11am a two minute silence was observed at war memorials, cenotaphs, religious services and shopping centres throughout the country.

The Royal Family, along with leading politicians and religious leaders gathered at The Cenotaph in Whitehall for a service and all branches of the civilian and military services represented in ceremonies throughout Britain and the Commonwealth.

The following extract from a poem called 'For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon was read at these services:

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them.

The significance of the poppy as a lasting memorial symbol to the fallen was realised by the Canadian surgeon John McCrae in his poem 'In Flanders Fields'. The poppy came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice made by his comrades and quickly became a lasting memorial to those who died in the First World War and later conflicts. Scarlet poppies grow naturally in conditions of disturbed earth throughout Western Europe. The destruction brought by the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th Century, transformed bare land into fields of blood red poppies, growing around the bodies of the fallen soldiers. In late 1914, the fields of Northern France and Flanders were once again ripped open as the First World War raged through Europe's heart.

Tickets are still available for this years Cenotaph March in London, contact RPC Association ASAP if you are interested. ■



Prisoner of War

The Second World War seen through the eyes of a prisoner of war

Report: John Burrows
Picture: John Burrows

JOHN Burrows was a CQMS in the Leicester Regiment and was attached to 605 Coy Pioneer Corps. This Company was one of our Companies which were captured when the German Forces overran Greece in 1941.

John kept a diary recording his early postings, capture and more surprisingly his time as a Prisoner of War for over four years. The diary describes the poor conditions, lack of food and nearly being bombed by his own side in the last few months of the war.

He gave this diary to his son Ken shortly before he died aged 66 in 1967. Ken recently painstakingly transcribed the diary and put it online (to read the full diary, go to: www.theburrowstoryonline.com).

605 Coy surrendered to the Germans in the Greek town of Kalamata on 29 Apr 41. After marching towards a camp near Wolfsbert, Austria they were joined by 500 Russian prisoners on 23 October. During his stay at the camp his wife Constance sent food, records, books and cigarettes via the Red Cross to the prisoners from Duncan Road Working Men's Club in Leicester.

Left Southampton on H.t.Levassa on 15-9-38 for Palestine, Disembarked at Haifa on the 28-9-38 posted A.M.P.C.Depot Sarafand on 4-1-40, left Sarafand with 605 coy 6-11-40 and went to Abbassia Egypt, left Abbassia on 20-11-40 for Mersa Matruh and arrived same night. Constructed pipeline from Kilo 10 to Kilo 29. Then left for Sollum on 7-1-41 spend a month at Sollum and went by road to Tobruk. Left Tobruk on 17-3-41 for Greece arrived and disembarked at Piraeus on 20-3-41. Slept some time at camps at Daphne, Old Phaleron, Ana Liosa until finally moving to Korovanos were we worked, in conjunction with the RAOC, (Here met Major Dixon whom I last saw in India as a Lt in Leicestershire Regt). Easter Sunday April 6th Germany declared war on Greece our troops at this time holding positions in Olympus Mountains.

21-4-41 the airforce at Kukuvasos evacuated the aerodrome and went back to Egypt.

22-4-41 We received orders at 3pm to evacuate camp at 7pm. Loaded up and went to main station in Athens, no trains so we had to return to camp.

23-4-41 Left camp at 2am Entrained and left at 5am bombed and machine gunned all the way to Argos, on arrival found that

our ship the SS Ulster Prince was aground so spent the night in an orchard.

24-4-41 SS Ulster Prince dive bombed all day hit and set on fire in last attack. (Ulster Prince was lost during the evacuation of Greece in 1941.) Left Argos at 9pm convoy of 125 lorries for Kalamata by a rotten mountain road.

25-4-41 in hiding near Kalamata the harbour bombed all day, our airforce moved nearer town at dusk.

26-4-41 spent day hiding in drains ditches, at 7pm moved to harbour to be taken off, no boats came.

Baker deserted the coy and bolted.

29-4-41 gathered in the square on sea front and surrendered to Germans at 7 am, marched to a large field and counted, at dusk we marched to an old greek barracks and slept on parade ground no food all day.

30-4-41 left Kalamata at 3 pm in cattle trucks (50 men per van) arrived at Tripolls at 8 pm where we had our first food for two days (one loaf between 5 men slept or tried to sleep in open fields, bitter cold.

1-5-41 left Tripolls at 9 am and arrived Corinth at 4 pm marched to Greek barracks converted to prison camp given a meal of rice at 7-30 pm.

2-5-41 organised into groups of 100 according to nationality myself in group E30, one meal of rice.

7-5-41 Two meals of macaroni and one biscuit, we hear that Greek civilians may be allowed to bring in goods and open a market for us we still have our money.

9-5-41 One meal of rice and one meal of macaroni with one biscuit. An Australian Officer who was trying to get something through the wire was fired at by a German guard and shot through the face and arm.

10-5-41 One meal of rice and one meal of haricot beans and one biscuit. Market now open, we are able to buy beans, onions and cheese. Troops are now cooking extra food consisting bean and onion stew.

2-6-41 One meal rice, one meal lentils one and half biscuits. Orders out for first stage of our move from Corinth my group is due to leave on 5-6-41.

4-6-41 Move cancelled for twenty four hours.

5-6-41 Left at four am.

6-6-41 Reveille 2am, paraded 3am marched off at 4-30am for Kalambeta station, a distance of 15 kilometres arrived 8am and entrained in vans. Left for Athens at 8-30am arrived Rouf station at 12 noon, rations issued in station yard, entrained 3-30pm left at 4pm.

7-6-41 Detrained at 2-15am at Grabis (Gravia) marched off 3-30am carrying all our kit, we are going to Lammar a distance

of 30 kilometres and the road is over the mountains and through the Lammar pass. This was a terrible journey and no words can describe the agony. We were not fit owing to the food we had had during the six weeks at Corinth, men who fell were shot and left on the road. The heat was terrible, we eventually arrived at Lammar at 4-30pm, the British MO Maj Hiel who should have been with us on the march arrived on a lorry at 5-30pm and then refused to give any of the men treatment. As we arrived at the station a Cpl of the 4th Hussars dropped dead, we entrained and



■ Inside the Prisoner of War camp

27-4-41 in hiding all day moved to other side of town at 6pm at 6-30 pm about 50 German planes came over and caught troops on the move, no casualties but some narrow escapes.

28-4-41 at 3pm told by commander that German forces were not far away and if we did not get away that night we should all be prisoners next morning as the Brigadier intended to surrender all troops, concentrated on beach at 9 pm, nine destroyers and 2 cruisers came in and after a quarter of an hour left again without taking anyone off (Why?) our OC Coy Capt

left at 6pm.

8-6-41 Detrained at 7-15am beyond Parrissa and marched across pontoon bridge as the railway bridge over the river had been blown up. Entrained and moved off at 12 noon. Arrived at Solonika at 6pm and marched to Greek Barracks.

12-6-41 Breakfast half mug of tea half a biscuit, dinner lentils half a slice of bread, half mug of tea. 1500 men left for Solonika No 2 camp about three miles away.

16-6-41 Breakfast as yesterday, dinner pea soup. 2000 including myself left after dinner for no 2 camp this is near the British War Cemetery containing graves of British and Imperial soldiers of last war. End of 7th week.

19-6-41 Tommy, aged 14, many happy returns of the day Tommy wherever you are. (Tommy was second son).

22-6-41 Rumour circulating round the camp that 2000 of us may be leaving shortly. End of 8th week.

24-6-41 Breakfast tea, biscuit and bread, dinner pea soup. At 2-30pm fell in with others for move to an unknown destination (probably Germany). Issued with rations for three days consisting of three biscuits, half a loaf, and a small tin of meat per man, left camp at 5-30pm for railway station, entrained in vans 50 per van at 9pm and left at 9-45pm.

25-6-41 Now in Yugoslavia, small portion of soup issued at 8pm, we are locked in the vans. Two men got away from my van during the night at 9-30pm train stopped and men were checked when it was revealed that 40 men were missing.

26-6-41 Still in Yugoslavia soup issued by Serbian Red Cross outside Belgrade station.

27-6-41 Still travelling through Yugoslavia. Soup and bread issued at 7am by Red Cross. This is the first time we have been out of the vans for the purposes of nature we have two petrol tins which have to be emptied through the ventilation slots. Crossed the frontier into Austria at 8pm, we spent the day picking lice off our clothing but they are just as bad the next morning.

29-6-41 Fifth day of travel, arrived at Wolfsberg station at 3-30pm and marched to Stalag XV111A, went in tents on arrival and again a meal of bread and jam this being the first solid food for 48 hours.

30-6-41 Bathed and deloused and placed in different compounds, sleeping in wooden bunks of three tiers in old stables. Kits searched and POW numbers given, Germans took away all articles of value especially those made of gold such as watches, rings, cigarette cases etc. Private Harold Grey and Private Thomas Night died (dysentery), end of 9th week.

3-7-41 450 of us paraded at 6-30am to go to a working camp Left Stalag at 7am train, rations consisting of a loaf and a tin of blood meat between five issued to us, marched to Wolfsberg station and entrained (in vans) and left at 8am, arrived at Spittal at 10pm shunted into siding where we spent the night.

4-7-41 Left the vans at 5am and marched to a camp beyond Stalag XV111B when we were given breakfast of coffee and a loaf between three men, given dinner at noon and then divided into parties. My party of 100 left Spittal by lorry at 2-30pm for Strachit camp where we arrived at 4-30pm there were already 60 men here, the job is road making.

5-7-41 Reveille 5am, given drink of coffee at 5-30am and paraded at 6-15 am marched three miles through the forest and worked from 7am to noon when we marched back to camp. Saturday afternoon is a half day and we spent the afternoon scrubbing out our Barrack rooms.

6-7-41 Kenneth aged 9, many happy returns of the day Kenny (Kenny was the forth son). Day off, food not too bad.

18-7-41 Came in from work at dinner time owing to stomach trouble. Started to rain at 7pm, went lavatory 22 times during the day had no food.

20-7-41 60 men including myself left to open up a new camp picked up 17 men from Spittle and 43 from around and reached new camp at Maltatal at 3pm.

29-7-41 Had sudden order at 1.00pm to get my kit ready to go to Wolfberg, left for Spettal at 2.00pm and arrived there at 5.30 p.m. Spent the night at the French hospital.

30-7-41 Left spittal camp at 6.00a.m. and entrained at 6.30a.m. (beach this time) no rations issued for journey. Arrived at Stalag at 7.00pm. Informed guard that we had no food all day but took no notice of us and locked us in the guard room. Lesley aged 11 many happy returns of the day.

31-7-41 Deloused and saw English M.O. given meal of bread and jam this being our first meal for 48 hours, given nothing extra for the day we had missed.

1-8-41 Saw German MO who passed me as fit without looking at me or asking me what was wrong. Detailed to go out to working camp the same afternoon and I refused to go. Working party of 507 left at 2.00pm (minus myself).

3-8-41 1,000 men came in from Salonika. These were captured on island of Crete.

8-8-41 The Germans refused to allow British Red Cross food parcels to be issued, these parcels have been in camp for a fortnight.

11-8-41 Red Cross parcels issued today after waiting for over a fortnight. Contents were tins of herrings, tin of chicken and ham roll, tin of margarine, tin of carrots, tin of syrup, tin of black current puree, box of cheese, packet of tea, tin of milk, packet of sugar, packet of biscuits, bar of chocolate, packet of sweets, fruit bar, tin of meat and veg, tablet of soap.

16-8-41 Germans threatened all full rank WO's and NCO's this morning. Threat is that if they still refused to go to work or go to working camps they will be made to do one hour of PT each day from 4.30am to 5.30am under a German instructor together with other such punishments, as they think fit. No one worried much over this. Some volunteered to go to work. We learn later that the PT affected medical orderlies only.

17-8-41 Working party of 50 left at 5.30am. Number 4 barrack room is isolated as they have nine cases of diphtheria. Hope this does not spread.

18-8-41 At work at Wolfberg station unloading Red Cross parcels and clothing from Geneva.

21-8-41 Pte Wolfendon New Zealand forces died at 3.00pm.

23-8-41 Pte Wolfendon NZEF buried in Wolfberg cemetery. WO's and NCO's asked to go out in charge of working parties just to supervise and not to work. No guarantee could be given so no one volunteered, (there is a catch somewhere). Number four barrack out of isolation. Working party left at 7.00am.

24-8-41 Working party of 150 men left at 6-30 am all WO's and NCO's put on fatigue all day, this is the German idea of getting their own back.

26-8-41 An American Commission visited the Stalag to day and inspected it, they were not allowed to converse with any of the prisoners. The Stalag was also visited

and inspected by the German General in charge of prison camps.

29-8-41 All senior ranks this morning refused to do any kind of work outside the camp area, Jerry cannot understand this and so far has made no effort to get round it.

1-9-41 Worked in German vegetable garden during afternoon managed to pinch a few cucumbers and tomatoes while the guard was not looking.

3-9-41 Second anniversary of outbreak of war, not many left in Stalag now. No further prisoners coming through from Solonika we wonder where the other three or four thousand have gone.

4-9-41 According to the American Commission which recently visited us, we are getting the same amount of rations as the civilian population, if that is so the country must be in a bad way as regards food. We now get tea, what it is made of remains a mystery.

5-9-41 Jowett has returned to Stalag he was working on a railway job but is now in hospital as he has something wrong with his leg. It is getting very cold and I am wondering how we shall fare when the winter really comes as most of us have only one blanket which we brought with us from Greece it is hoped that the Germans will issue some shortly. Another case of Diphtheria.

6-9-41 Today I got a new battle dress and overcoat in exchange for my old ones. Eleven men who escaped from various trains en-route from Solonika were brought in to-day they were recaptured in Serbia Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and other places.

10-9-41 Jerry does his best to keep us cheerful by telling us of his marvellous successes in Russia they are quite serious and really believe these stories themselves although we know it is only propaganda to keep up their spirits. German guards get a little more than us in the way of food and their pay is one mark per day, according to his newspaper and wireless England has by this time lost all her navy and airforce. This is done for the benefit of the civilians who are told only what the German authorities think fit.

12-9-41 Quite a lot of men have come in from working camps and farms during the past few days. Conditions at some of these camps are getting worse as at some places the Red Cross parcels are being withheld from the men, at other places the guard are taking the cigarettes that are sent from Stalag.

13-9-41 Things do not seem to be going right for Jerry the food question is worrying him, we have not had any meat rations from him for some time and what we have had has been horseflesh. It is a good job we get one or two tins of meat in our parcels or I don't know what we would do, the general health of the troops is good considering the conditions we lived under for the first three or four months.

16-9-41 About another fifty men came in from working camps during the weekend they must be getting short handed at some places but I don't intend to have another go yet. Many bets have been made as to when the war will be over the majority think they will be home for Xmas (but they don't state which one).

17-9-41 Rumour circulating that British troops have landed in Norway again and that British troops are also helping the Russians. Its marvellous how these stories circulate and where they come from but they give us something to talk about, we exist on rumours.

' Barrack Room isolated - 9 cases of diphtheria '

18-9-41 We heard this morning that America have been in the war since the 3rd of the month wonder how much truth is in this story. It will be interesting to read the English papers when we get back as the German authorities have notified us that we are not allowed to have newspapers or magazines sent from England. At times it is a wonder they allow us to breathe, there is one thing he can't break and that is the British spirit, he cannot understand it and never will.

19-9-41 New huts are being built, rumour has it that they will be occupied by the German camp guard and that the prisoners will be moved to their present accommodation. Whilst our present huts will be got ready for Russian prisoners who are expected. All Naval and Royal Marines POW have been brought in from working camps they are expected to go to a Naval prison camp somewhere in Germany. The majority of them are from HMS Gloucester and HMS Greyhound which were sunk off Crete after the attempted evacuation of Greece.

20-9-41 Latest threat from Jerry is that in future the Red Cross parcels will not be issued to us instead they will be kept in the stores and issued to us a tin at a time as we require them. The tin will be opened and the contents emptied out, all the small pinpricks that make life unbearable the Germans inflicted upon us but our turn will come some day.

25-9-41 Quite a lot of mail came in to day and it is the German office in the town being censored (hope I get one). All prisoners still suffering from wounds have been informed they stand a chance of being repatriated.

26-9-41 Eighty eight POWs including medical orderlies left at 6-30 am on the first stage of their journey to England. At least they have been told that is their destination although they may be going to some hospital where they may be able to get better treatment. Letters are coming through spasmodically. Because some of us don't turn out in the morning to get the early morning tea (which is not worth drinking), the Commandant has deprived us of our tea meal. Only the British prisoners are affected that was the reason given to us. A deputation is going to see him tomorrow and until we get satisfaction no work will be done.

27-9-41 Again only one meal served to us, the latest excuse is that rations have been cut down, the Commandant is again to be interviewed and on his decision rests whether we do any work or not, we know what to expect if we refuse to work.

28-9-41 Still only one meal and there is some talk of our rations being cut further if that happens I don't what we shall do for although we get our Red Cross parcels there is not sufficient to make up for the meals we are being deprived of.

29-9-41 As regards the tea meal we have been informed that it has been stopped by order of the German high command and that the same things is happening at all POW camps. The Frenchmen here are still getting two meals a day so I cannot see how it can be an order from higher up, as the French gave in they are treated differently.

30-9-41 The question of one meal a day seems to be definite now, according to the Geneva Conventions we are supposed to get the same rations in quantity and quality as the German depot troops but it does not say who will provide it. Jerry has seen the loophole and says that the rations he gives us plus our Red Cross parcels make our

total rations more in quantity and quality than the German soldier receives so therefore from now onwards he is only going to give us one meal a day which is cooked in addition he gives us our bread ration of one fifth of a loaf per man and one ounce of margarine per man per day (perhaps). We get the German meal at eleven o'clock in the morning and for the past few days it has been cabbage soup.

3-10-41 all Naval and Royal Marine POWs have been warned that they are leaving tomorrow morning. They don't know where they are going but have been told it is quite a long journey, I think they are going to a camp in Germany or Poland.

4-10-41 All Naval and Marine ratings together with some merchant service men and French Naval men left at 5.30am. It is given out that they have gone to the special Naval camp some where in Silesia. Hitler made a speech last night and as usual

all sorts of rumours are flying around.

6-10-41 A Frenchman who died yesterday was buried at 4-30pm all senior ranks paraded. This afternoon for the purpose of finding out if the rank they held was genuine some men have put up stripes to dodge going out to work, Jerry has got wise to this as the number of senior ranks has increased from day to day.

7-10-41 Another parade of senior ranks this afternoon for checking purposes this time. We had to show our pay books to substantiate our claim to being WOs and SNCOs.

11-10-41 A very dull and cold day with rain shall not be surprised if we do not have snow soon, Jerry is trying to get us down again by circulating stories that Russia will be finished shortly and they will soon reach Moscow when that is done he says he will take England. He said that a year ago but he is no nearer.

12-10-41 500 men who have been working on an aerodrome at Letweg during the past three months returned to Wolfberg today. A complaint was made some time ago about this job as it came under the heading of assisting the enemy in war work according to the Geneva Convention, POWs were not allowed to do any kind of work that may help in the war. When the complaint was made the Germans made the excuse that it was a civilian aerodrome and therefore did not come under the heading of war. This is ridiculous as there are no such things as civil aerodromes in war time. It was reported to the American mission when they visited Stalag they in turn reported it to the International Red Cross at Geneva with the result that the job finished and the men came back.

14-10-41 Our compound is being divided into two parts and wired off, the other half we are told will accommodate 3,000 Russians (when they come).

16-10-41 The four men who got away last night were caught at midnight about two miles from camp the silly idiots were walking quite calmly along the main road. In consequence of this escapade we had check parades all day culminating in a big one which lasted until 8-30pm when every man was checked individually all had to show his identification disc as his name was called, these parades will carry on daily until further notice.

17-10-41 Sgt Mullern of No 106 battery RHA died this afternoon, he leaves a wife and two children the eldest a boy of 16.

19-10-41 To-day was general moving day. The compound for the Russians is almost finished so the British had to move to number 1,2, and 3 huts. It was a rotten job but it had to be done, eventually it was finished and the process of settling down is starting all over again.

20-10-41 I attended the funeral of Sgt Mulhern this morning the German method is different from ours but all the same he was buried with military honours. The coffin was covered with the Union Jack and the Germans provided a firing party.

23-10-41 Five hundred Russian prisoners arrived at 8-30am. They were in a terrible condition, a quarter of them were boys of 16 and 17. Four or five of them were dead when the vans were opened at the station. It appears they have been travelling round for three or four weeks the idea being for the people to see them so that Jerry can say "Look what we are up against" (Propaganda De Luxe). None of them were soldiers, just peasants who were roped in when Jerry invaded the Ukraine. A further nine died outside the delousing hut.

24-10-41 The treatment of the Russians by the Germans is inhuman. They were beaten, kicked and whipped then they are locked in and only come out for meals. Four more died today.

25-10-41 Treatment of Russians still continues, because we threw some cigarettes over to them Jerry threatened to lock us in. More of them died today, they are starving. As Russia is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention the poor devils have no chance or redress.

27-10-41 The number of deaths among the Russians to date is 36.

28-10-41 A further ten deaths amongst the Russians, one of them was struck on the head with a rifle butt by a German. The Russian went for him and after taking his rifle away got him down and tried to strangle him he was pulled off and put in the guard room.

29-10-41 Heard this morning that the Russian who attacked the guard has been shot. The bad treatment still goes on, they are regarded by the Germans as animals. The reason given by Jerry for this treatment is because the Russians are killing all Germans including wounded instead of taking them prisoners.

30-10-41 Apparently it was a false rumour about the Russian being shot, he is still in the guard room. According to the latest information he is sitting in a chair with his hands tied at the back, a rope is around his neck and tied to a beam in the roof so that every time his head goes forward when he tries to sleep it is jerked back again by the rope. Some more died today.

7-11-41 The castle working party left at 5-30am this morning when they got to the station ten of them were separated and told they were going to a magnesium mine they refused and came back to Stalag. It was a dirty trick on the part of the Commandant as he had promised the whole 35 that they would go together and the reason he had asked for SNCOs was because it was a special job of work.

8-11-41 Seven more Russians died. Jowett saw German MO today and got marked DO which means he stands a good chance of repatriation.

10-11-41 End of 28th week. A party of 40 (20 English, 10 AIF and 10 NZ) went to cemetery and put wreath on German Cenotaph.

11-11-41 ARMISTICE DAY. 19th Anniversary of my wedding. Memorial service held in camp, church service and two minutes silence.

'500 Russian prisoners arrived in a terrible condition'

12-11-41 Six more more Russians died today they are not getting any better treatment. They are kicked, struck and knocked down on the slightest provocation.

19-11-41 To date between 150 and 160 Russians have died, seven more today.

20-11-41 Six Russians died, three men who went out on the castle job a fortnight ago came back today when they went they were told they were going to repair an old castle and turn it into a hospital, these men report that there job was road making.

21-11-41 Plenty of troop trains passing through here towards Italy. Volunteers have been asked to replace the three who came back from the castle job no one came forward. Germans claim to have sunk Aircraft Carrier "ARK ROYAL", this is about the sixth time they have sunk it.

27-11-41 The German guards are now offering us money for tins of meat etc from our parcels. They won't get any of mine at any price, chocolate has not been seen in this country for over seven years. One month to Xmas.

28-11-41 Jerry had us all on parade this afternoon with all kit and blankets, we are only allowed two blankets so all over that number were taken away and the same was done with spare kit. The Oberet came and because we were not fell in to his satisfaction he drew his pistol and after a bit of movement he said that he would shoot anyone that moved, at this announcement we gave him three cheers and started laughing. For this he summoned extra guards who surrounded the parade with loaded rifles, as a further punishment for our behaviour he has ordered that on Sunday morning we shall all do one hour of exercise.

9-12-41 Typhus has broken out in the Russian compound and twelve Russians died of it last night. We hear that two Frenchmen who work at the baths have contracted it.

10-12-41 Driver Harrison of the RASC died yesterday evening (TB), three guards taken to hospital suspected of having Typhus. Latest is that Japan has declared war on England and America. German papers reported that a few hours after declaration of war Japan bombed Manilla and Singapore and had also landed troops at Hong Kong and Shanghai.

11-12-41 Driver Harrison buried in Wolfsberg cemetery. Hitler made a speech last night and in the course of it stated that Germany had declared war on America.

12-12-41 The whole of our compound is now in quarantine owing to the Typhus outbreak, up to present about 20 Russians have died. This quarantine means that no one is allowed out of camp. No mail will come in or go out and all our Xmas arrangements look like falling flat. We shall be deloused again, the disease is carried by lice so long as we keep ourselves and our surroundings clean we shall be taking reasonable precautions. All troops in our compound on the advice of the senior British MO are having their head shaved and all hair removed from the body this is being done without anyone complaining as we all realise it is for our own good and to prevent the epidemic reaching our compound. Up to present we have a clean bill of health. The Germans could not help contacting it as they had to have sentries on duty on the Russian compound.

13-12-41 For the second day we have no water supply in the compound, how we are expected to keep clean and beat the Typhus is beyond me. We all look like criminals now that heads are shaved.

15-12-41 Delousing and cleaning out of barracks commenced this morning with no

1 barrack. All straw from our beds is being burnt, beds scrubbed and rooms sprayed with gas. Men and kit going through delousing centre in batches of 25.

16-12-41 Scrubbed out room this morning we are not allowed out of compound except in organised parties with an interpreter. Food being issued at present by Jerry is rotten, the potatoes stink and are uneatable. The quarantine will hold up the repatriation of LZs, all German guards going through delousing centre.

17-12-41 Got through the delouser at 2am, we are now, at the request of the MO, sleeping without mattresses.

18-12-41 The only Germans now on duty are those on the searchlight platforms. The French doctors have refused to have any anything to do with the Typhus cases so the senior British MO has taken over the whole camp. The Frenchmen who were in charge of the delousing centre also refused to carry on so their job has been taken over by a party of British. We look like having a poor Xmas, we are not going to get a Xmas parcel from the Red Cross. The parcels store is in the town and now that we are in quarantine our Red Cross representative is not allowed to go out to get the parcels. The Germans a few days ago promised to bring the parcels to the camp but they have not kept their promise.

19-12-41 Two German soldiers died this morning. Our Red Cross representative has asked the Oberst twice every day this week to be allowed out with a party to get parcels for Xmas but have refused each time. He is going to have another go tomorrow.

20-12-41 Two Frenchmen died today. All kinds of restrictions are placed on us but they are all for our own benefit so we have nothing to grumble about. Negotiations are still in progress to try and get parcels in.

23-12-41 A party of men were allowed to go out this morning to the parcel store so we are now assured of our parcels. Some mail was allowed to come in today but it was mostly Australian. The French are being deloused, some of them kicked against it, so they were given a dousing by Jerry. One Xmas and one ordinary parcel issued tonight to each man with 75 cigarettes. Four Russians died this afternoon, coffins for them are just rough and ready affairs and two bodies are placed in each. We made a collection for the Russians enough food and cigarettes were collected to give each Russian a parcel of food and about 20 cigarettes.

24-12-41 Some more mail came in this afternoon, we are all ready for tomorrow and we are going to celebrate as well as the circumstances permit. There are eleven of us in my room and we have pooled all parcels to make a slap up feed we also have a few bottles of beer saved up.

25-12-41 Xmas Day. Church service held at 10am, everyone in high spirits, a lovely warm day. A Padre has now joined the Stalag from an officers' camp and has given us quite a lot of news. Xmas day meals provided by Germans: breakfast bread and jam, Dinner Cabbage soup, tea nothing. Provided by ourselves from Red Cross parcels: breakfast tea, toast and various commodities. Lunch steak, Irish stew and tomato pudding. Dinner 5PM soup ox tail and turtle fish herrings in tomato sauce, joint roast pork mincemeat balls, veg carrots, peas, beans. Sweet xmas pudding and custard, jelly, xmas cake, biscuits and cheese, beer and cigarettes. Toast to all our dear and loved ones at home.

26-12-41 Boxing Day, another fine but a

cold wind blowing off the surrounding snow capped hills, slight snowfall in the afternoon, Xmas now over and all looking forward to the New Year. Reports are reaching here Typhus has broken out at Russian working camp and also among the troops on the Eastern front.

27-12-41 A German died today and one of their doctors has Typhus. The Oberst was approached again on the subject of allowing mail to go out. His reply was that no mail would leave camp until the place was free from Typhus. Up to present the Germans seem to be the worst sufferers of Typhus, it is justice for what they did to the Russians when they first came.

31-12-41 Camp Commandant again approached to see if we could send out mail. It was pointed out to him that the people in England and the colonies would get anxious at the lack of news. He was adamant and said none could go until the Typhus ban was lifted, however he is allowing a letter to go to Geneva to inform them so that the news can be sent to England where the Red Cross will be able to inform all next of kin that all are in good health and the reason why no mail is being sent. We let in the New Year as best we could, the camp band paraded round the compound at midnight, and were chased by the guards who tried to get the instruments.

1-1-42 New years Day, the Germans took away the band instruments this morning because they paraded around the compound last night.

2-1-42. Ten more Russians died today, taken away late afternoon. The quarantine looks like lasting for an indefinite period. Rumour going round that we may be moved to another Stalag. For the first time Jerry has admitted in our camp news paper that he has retreated on the Eastern front.

4-1-42 The French are being deloused there are about 1,600 of them it will take some days. The Commandant will not let up on the restrictions until the whole camp is thoroughly clean.

5-1-42 The Commandant had us all on parade at 8.15am (the parade was ordered for that time) but we were not there until 9 o'clock, and then 541 paraded out of a total of 800. As usual he read the riot act and threatened us with all sorts or punishment, anyhow we had no bread issued today and another parade has been ordered for tomorrow. The only good thing he said was that the isolation might finish at the end of the week. We have had no outside news for some days we get a lot from German papers which are smuggled in but we can not believe everything in these because the civilian population are not told the true state of affairs.

6-1-42 Paraded at 8am and marched round the compound for half an hour for exercise, this was one of the best things that could have happened as some of the men have been staying in bed until midday, the bread we did not get yesterday was issued to-day a loaf between 6 instead of 5.

7-1-42 Another morning parade Jerry says our discipline is getting slack and in future we shall parade every morning. Yesterday and to-day we were not allowed out of the compound for meals (they were brought up to us). As the Russians are being deloused the Typhus has almost died out but Jerry is not taking any risks with the Russians and they are to be deloused once a week.

8-1-42 Latest rumour concerning the Eastern front is that Russia has recaptured part of the south of Russia and cut off a

‘Christmas Dinner - Cabbage Soup’

large part of the German army. In the far east Japanese troops are reported to be only 125 kilometres from Singapore, this news according to the German in charge of our compound, was on the radio yesterday. The only food we have had for some days is potato stew (with little potato). Snowing for past 48 hours, small amount of mail came in.

9-1-42 Jerry is getting his own back again by parading us at various hours and keeping us waiting in the snow. Four coffin loads of Russians taken away at tea time, four bodies in each and filled with lime they are stuck in a hole dug in the hill side.

13-1-42 According to the newspapers the Japanese lost four war ships and fifteen transports whilst trying to load reinforcements on the Philippine Islands. The same paper reported that the English had evacuated Singapore and that HMS Barham had been sunk in the Mediterranean.

14-1-42 To-day we paraded to be inspected by some German General after standing and waiting most of the afternoon he came but would not enter our compound, perhaps he was afraid of catching something. We could have given him a few fleas but nothing else as we stopped breading lice a long time ago, it is bitterly cold and the ground is covered with ice.

15-1-42 Hitler made a speech in the course of which we said the nation was facing a serious time and that there would be grave news later. He was reported to have said that he could have beaten England alone but not with Russia and America against him as well.

23-1-42 The quarantine ban has been lifted to-day and normal camp life will start again. Mail can now go, as a start we have been issued with two letters and a further two will be issued on Monday. We shall get all we lost during the isolation period. Water supply still frozen.

24-1-42 First working party has been detailed and will leave on Monday. Quantity of mail came in, private parcels will start to be issued on Monday so I shall no doubt get the parcels that have been lying in the store during the quarantine period.

25-1-42 It looks as if our water supply will remain off until the warmer weather comes, the pipes are underground and can not be reached as the ground is like iron. A meeting has been held and it has been decided to report to the next visiting commission the conditions prevailing in Stalag. At present 850 men are accommodated where only 500 should be, the sanitary arrangements are best left unspoken about and as for the food.

6-2-42 Red Cross visiting commission expected here today, so all complaints are being prepared. A Sgt who put in his letter that the only good Germans were dead ones, was reported by the sensor and in consequence has received twenty one days imprisonment. A German order has been published which prohibits the singing of the national anthem at the conclusion of concerts and church services, anyhow we still continue to sing it! Another order states that any POW who has saved money while working, may be permitted to lend it to any country under the German flag or to any country occupied by Germany, but under no consideration may he send it to Great Britain or any dominion. A member of the Yugoslavs arrived tonight they have come from some camp somewhere in Holland and are being repatriated to their homes.

07-2-42 About three hundred French (most medical orderlies) left for their homes

this morning.

08-2-42 According to a speech Hitler made a few days ago, he says he is going to wipe out Russia when the winter is over and then turn his attention to England, (sez.he).

10-2-42 Jerry is going to have another search and it is said that any extra kit including stuff we have had from home will be confiscated, our favourite hiding place is to knock a couple of boards out of the ceiling and put the kit in the rafters, he never thinks of looking up there.

12-2-42. The German papers report today that Singapore has fallen to the Japanese.

14-2-42. Another 2000 Russians came in today they came from Stalag XV11D, Marburg, where they have been for some months.

15-2-42 A large number of NCOs came in from working camps, many of the men are making preparations for when the warmer weather comes.

20-2-42 Complaints are coming from working camps that clothing and boots dispatched from Stalag are not arriving and the parcels that are getting there have part of the contents missing. Jerry has ordered that by the 1st of March all prisoners in Stalag shall only have in their possession, one suit, one overcoat, one hat and two shirts, everything else including boots have to be handed in, any thing sent from England in private parcels which is of a military pattern will be confiscated. In place of boots we are to be given a pair of French sabots. The reasons given to us are (1) that it is to put a stop to attempted escapes, that is eye wash because anyone in possession of civilian boots or shoes can keep them. (2) all the stuff is wanted for the men at working camps, that also is a lie because sufficient overcoats, suits, boots, towels, socks etc have been sent out. Anyhow there promises to be a dust up when the day comes to hand them in.

25-2-42 With reference to our complaint we made about the accommodation here, we had a visit from a German General from Berlin who inspected the camp to see if the complaint was genuine. Something may come of it according to how the German mind works.

26-2-42 We heard that in consequence of a slight naval affair that took place in the English channel a short time ago. The German ships Gresnau and Prince Eugene were sunk whilst the Scharnorst was badly damaged but got away.

28-2-42 We have run short of coal and wood for our stoves and Jerry has no transport available to get any in. It appears that all available transport is being used by the military for other purposes. A loud speaker has been installed in the centre of the camp and we now get wireless programmes and news (German).

5-3-42 The Germans this morning carried out a snap search at breakfast time they descended upon us without any warning, they were looking for civilian money, civilian clothing, maps or anything that would assist in escaping. They also think we have a wireless hidden somewhere owing to the fact that we get news almost as soon as they do. They dropped in on us quickly but we were just a little quicker and they found nothing. We heard that French factories near Paris which Jerry has turned into armament factories were bombed as was also the aerodrome at Le Bourget, the French POW did not take to kindly to this item of news.

6-3-42 About 3,000 letters came in to-day but it was all old stuff. According to reports it was the Renault motor factory near Paris that was bombed. Since France capitulated this place has been turning out tanks for the Germans, it appears that pamphlets were dropped some time ago telling the French to stop working for the Germans. Apparently no notice was taken of the warning so it was bombed, according to reports it is stated that about 600 French people were killed and also a lot of Germans, this will give the French who are working for Jerry something to think about.

7-3-42 All POW who have at various times tried to escape were yesterday afternoon sent to a Strafelerag, one of them has already made five attempts. News has come in of four men who got away from a working camp, they got into Italy and were caught breaking into a shop looking for food. As they ran away two of them were shot and killed, the other two are back here and it was they who told us. A Russian who tried to get into the French compound last night was shot and killed by the sentry.

8-3-42 As the Germans will not give us any coal or wood for the purposes of cooking, drying clothes etc we have begun to take any spare wood we can find, parts of the inner roof are vanishing. I occupy a small room with nine others, last night the occupants of my room pinched one of the doors of the crap house and we burned it in the stove. I have not mentioned it before but one of my room mates is Don Wright, it was rather a surprise meeting him at Corinth because the last time I saw him was at Catterick camp just before I went to India he was then in the Regt and in the same Coy as myself he is now in the AEC.

9-3-42 Germans admitted today about the bombing of the factories near Paris, but usual for the purposes of propoganda they say we dropped the bombs on residential quarters and killed civilians.

11-3-42 The German radio reports that the Dutch Island of Java has been fully occupied by the Japanese and that 15,000 British and American and 95,000 Dutch were taken prisoner.

13-3-42 43 today. Big marquees have been put up in the Russian compound and another big batch of them are expected. I do not envy them having to sleep on the ground in this weather as it has turned terribly cold again.

14-3-42 Jerry admits in his papers that he has evacuated Kharkov on the eastern front.

15-3-42 We heard that the Paris factories (admitted by the Germans in the papers) had been bombed again on the night of 8-3-42. 1,200 Russians arrived this evening, they have come from some camp in Romania where they have been for sometime. Anyhow they seem to be in better condition than the previous batches that have arrived.

17-3-42 Reported that the German troops who were cut off at Leningrad and the Crimea capitulated.

21-3-42 Water is on in the compound for the first time for nearly four months.

23-2-42 We shall soon be sleeping without a roof on the building if it vanishes for firewood at this rate, anything burnable goes in the stove and if the beds were not needed they would go too.

24-3-42 The Oberst inspected camp today he went off the deep end because we would not pay compliments in the German way, it has been pointed out to them that we will do things in the English style but under no circumstances will we salute in the German method.

‘Hitler warned of grave news later’

25-3-42 The International Red Cross visiting committee paid a visit today, the usual complaints were made such as overcrowding, lack of fuel, no water supply, sanitary conditions etc, but I don't suppose the Jerrys will do anything about it. When the commission speaks about these things to the German High Command they promise that they will be seen to, but as soon as the commission has gone Jerry forgets. A Maori died in hospital tonight.

26-3-42 The Maori (PTE DIX GERRARD NZEF) who died last night was buried this morning.

29-3-42 It was given out on the radio (German) that British forces in co-operation with the navy had attempted to land on French coast at St Magairre where the Germans have a submarine base. The report went on to say that the attempt was a failure and that many prisoners and all material had been taken.

1-4-42 According to the news that came through today the 16th German Army is cut off at Kharkov and heavy fighting is taking place near Smolensk. We heard that St Mayairre was a Commando raid which had been a success.

3-4-42 Good Friday. Now that the weather is warmer a lot of men are going out to working camps. Many POW who have tried to escape are back here doing imprisonment, some of them have had hard luck in getting near the Swiss border whilst others have gone astray and landed in Italy no one has yet succeeded in getting clear away.

13-4-42 Spr Hearn of 42 Coy RE died at 4pm (TB). An order came out today that POWs would stand to attention when spoken to by any German soldier failure to do so will result in punishment, (the guard room looks like being over crowded) because no one intends to take any notice of the order which is ridiculous.

28-4-42. 24 POW were tried by courts martial in Wolfsberg to-day and they got sentences as follows. 17 received 4 years imprisonment, 5 received 2 ½ years imprisonment, one received 6 months, and the other was acquitted. They were kept in the town prison for some time awaiting trial and during that period they created a disturbance daily and smashed up the cells they occupied.

30-4-42. According to the German news they say that during a raid over Germany our planes had deliberately dropped bombs on the Cathedral at Lubec, as a reprisal they say they have bombed the cities of York, Norwich, and Bath.

1-5-42 News came through to-day of an happening at Stalag XV111D (Marburg) it appears that a German guard shot four men (two Australians and two New Zealanders) who had refused to work. Their story is that the four men are dead, but nothing has happened to the guard.

15-5-42 All LZs paraded today at the Commandants office they were asked what country they would like to go to, so there does seem a possible chance of their going home I hope so because Jowett can then take a message for me.

19-5-42. Today completes my 20th year of military service. Had my photograph taken this morning. Volunteered to go out to a working camp where some of my friends are.

29-5-42 Posters have been placed on the walls in Wolfsberg warning the civilians against talking to prisoners when they are out working.

4-6-42 All stoves have now been taken

out of rooms and have gone from the Stalag.

20-6-42 Left Wolfsberg at 6am en route for Zedlach arrived Klagenfurt at 8.45am and left for Villach. Left by lorry for Mitteldorf and arrived at 6pm, walked three miles up mountain side to the billet and arrived at 7pm, renewed acquaintance with a lot of old friends.

22-6-42 Went to work, the job is constructing a road through the hills to connect up with the village of Matrci five kilometres away. Hours of work are Reveille 5.40am, coffee and bread 6.15 am, parade 6.40am fifteen minutes walk to work start at 7am, break from 9.15 to 9.30. Dinner 12 till 1pm break 3.15 to 3.30 finish at 6pm.

28-6-42 Fred Rampling, Joe Smith, Fred Wooten and Bill Walker who came here with me a week ago made a break for freedom to-day.

1-7-42 News to-day that our fugitives have been sighted, two guards went out to search.

14-7-42 We heard to-day that our escapees have been caught and are now at Stalag where they have been sentenced to 21 days imprisonment (hard lines).

30-7-42 Received a food parcel from AMPC Depot Sarafand. Contents 1 tin of milk, 1 tin of sausages, 1 packet of biscuits, 1 tin of sweets, 1 tin of meat extract, 1 tin of cocoa, 1/2lb chocolate, 21 cigarettes, 1 tablet of soap.

5-8-42 Four new men arrived from Stalag they brought the news that all non working NCOs have been moved from Stalag to Spittal so Jerry has at last carried out his threat against the "Nix-Arebeiers".

9-8-42 Three men who came four days ago got away during the night in consequence we were kept outside almost all day being checked, rechecked and searched.

24-8-42 Germans now admit that British troops landed in France, Dieppe. Their account is that we bombed the town. But they took 1500 prisoners and chased out the remainder they also say that during the attempt they sank 4 Cruisers 2 Destroyers and brought down 58 of our planes whilst they lost 17 planes.

23-9-42 A new Commandant has arrived to take over the camp, at last it seems we are getting rid of the old one who has led us a dogs life, we took everything

he could throw at us and we still kept smiling, that only seemed to make him worse, anyhow he is likely to go, and the new chap seems a decent sort.

28-9-42 The storm which came yesterday finished in the early hours of this morning, parts of our road collapsed, we heard from one of the guards that a railway bridge had collapsed near Lieng, and a train had been wrecked. This is the only railway line to our area it may mean a delay in our mail and parcels. No news of Red Cross parcels.

30-9-42 More news of the storm damage coming through, a bridge on the way to Lieng is down, that means this end of the valley is cut off until the bridge is repaired. British POW are repairing bridge so it should not take long.

7-10-42 Our old Commandant went to-day, (Thank God). Two new men joined the camp. All of us have been issued with identity cards which we must carry with us.

21-10-42 A new order has been published by the German Supreme Command, under this order POWs are only allowed to receive eight letters per month and to send two letters and two cards per

month. We shall get our letters and cards issued on the 10th of each month and they will be sent to Stalag on the 15th of each month, how long this order will remain in force we do not know nor do we know the reason for it. Heavy storm to-night with snow and sleet.

30-10-42 It is reported that British have started an offensive in Lybia. It is now over four months since Jerry reported that he was only eight kilometres from Alexandria but they don't seem to be getting any nearer or they would have said so.

2-11-42 To-day is a general holiday for the civilian population, this day is known as the day of Remembrance for the dead already killed in this war, all the village went to church.

8-11-42 50% of camp allowed out for a walk of three hours duration this afternoon according to orders from Wolfsberg this walk is to be a weekly affair for all POWs.

11-11-42 Armistice Day. 20th anniversary of my wedding. Reference my entry for corresponding day of last year, sorry to say my hopes are not fulfilled. We observed the ceremony of the two minutes silence. Heard that combined British and American force had landed at Oran in Morocco.

12-11-42 Germans admit in their papers about the landing at Oran they also say that they had to leave behind at Mersa Matruh 9,000 German wounded who fell into British hands. They must have evacuated that place in a violent hurry.

18-11-42 We heard that the forces which landed in French Morocco are now about 570 kilometres from the Libyan border and are advancing towards Tripoli the base of the German Italian forces.

20-11-42 German radio admits that Tobruk has again fallen into our hands and that we had taken many prisoners and much material, later in the evening this was confirmed together with the news that fighting was taking place to the north west of Tobruk.

23-11-42. Latest news is that we captured Benghazi.

5-12-42. Latest news from desert is that our forces are only 60 kilometres from Tripoli, it is stated that when the Germans marched into unoccupied France the French fleet at Toulon and Brest got away, those ships that were unable to get away were scuttled so that they would not fall into German hands.

14-12-42 A commission connected with work of POW visited us today to decide whether we stay here or go to the old camp at Matrei, the work there is draining fields and ditches which in this weather is not at all desirable. We are all determined to stay if we do have to move, I for one shall apply to return to Stalag as I am only a volunteer worker.

15-12-42 News to-day is that we have taken a lot of prisoners in and around Tripoli.

16-12-42 Rumour going round that the campaign in the desert is practically over and that at present house to house fighting is going on in Tripoli.

24-12-42 Christmas parcels issue to-day. The Commandant has told us it is quite likely no mail will come in for the next fifteen days as the German post offices will be dealing with German mail only for Xmas and New Year.

25-12-42 Xmas Day. We had a better time than at Stalag last year. Here the meals are supplied by Germans and ourselves.

By Germans: Breakfast-nothing, Dinner-Mashed Potatoes and Pork, Tea-Cakes of Various sorts

Ourselves: Breakfast-Bacon, Egg and

‘Received a food parcel from AMPC Depot Sarafand.’

Tomatoes, Dinner-Tomato Soup, Fish cakes, Tea - Steak and Macaroni, Mashed Potatoes, Veg, Xmas Pudding with Chocolate Cream, Fruit Trifle, Beer, Cigarettes etc.

Go as you please social evening in the mess room, we had of course the same wish as twelve months ago i.e. that we are home for the next Christmas (We Hope).

4-1-43 Work recommenced after eleven days holiday we did not feel like it.

6-1-43 Rumours circulating that the British and American forces have made contact in Tripoli area and encircling the German and Italian forces. Wonder where the November mail and the June clothing parcels are.

11-1-43 German orders posted to-day inform us that the ban on outgoing and incoming mail has been lifted, this means that once again we can send our mail weekly. The reason the ban was put on, according to the Germans, was because the German POWs in British hands were not being allowed to send sufficient mail.

12-1-43 Temperature at 6am -15. A large town (name not given) in Austria has been heavily bombed. Heavy snowfall all day, now much warmer.

16-1-43 Latest news concerning the desert is that the German Italian forces are now gradually being pushed back towards Tunis.

24-1-43 We had the news to-day that the fighting on the desert had finished, it is supposed to have been given out on the German radio that they have successfully evacuated Tunis.

1-2-43 Reported that Goering made a speech on Friday night, and Hitler on Saturday morning. We also had news that a meeting had taken place in Morocco between Churchill, Roosevelt and Chan-Kei-Sheihk.

2-2-43 News from the Eastern front is that the Russians have captured Stalingrad and in doing so have taken over 150,000 German prisoners we have known for some time that Stalingrad was surrounded and cut off.

3-2-43 It is reported that the force who tried to relieve the garrison of Stalingrad were also cut off. We also heard that the Chief of the German Navy (Admiral Von Raeder) had resigned his post.

4-2-43 The German papers are full of the Stalingrad affair, they admit the place is in the hands of the Russians, but they maintain that all troops have successfully got away. The Russians, are according to reports, now attacking Rostov which they expect to take any time. We get all our news before it is put in the paper and we don't get it from the German radio.

5-2-43 German papers report a meeting between Churchill and the Turkish Foreign Minister in Cyprus, they are still very bitter over the fall of Stalingrad.

6-2-43 The news papers today carry a message to the relatives of the people who fell at Stalingrad by saying that they died so that Germany can live.

10-2-43 The boss on the job today told us that the Germans are evacuating the Caucasus area, (that is news coming from a German). German youths of sixteen are now being called to the colours, four in this village have had their papers and leave on Saturday.

26-2-43 Our Commandant went for examination today to see if he was fit for service as he had both legs frost-bitten on the Eastern front, they wanted to take his legs off but he refused to let them operate,

he can walk alright but he has stiff legs and can't bend his knees.

3-3-43 The German newspapers are creating over our Air Force, they report that on a raid on Cologne we bombed the Cathedral and hit several hospitals in the process.

4-3-43 According to reports the Russians are still doing well, and our camp newspapers confirms this and says the Russians are stronger in man power.

6-3-43 We heard that Berlin had had its heaviest air raid to date.

11-3-43 Papers full of bombing of Berlin (described as a terror raid) also heard that Munich had been visited again.

23-3-43 Report of heavy fighting at Kharkov which Germans claim to have recaptured.

15-4-43 Heard today that our 8th Army and American forces have met in Tunisia.

17-4-43 Germans admit that the situation in Tunisia is desperate and they are evacuating.

18-4-43 The whole camp turned out today to search for a doctor who is missing somewhere in the mountains, he is on holiday from Leipzig. He went out two days ago and has not been seen since, we searched the top of the mountains while the civilians searched the valleys, we found no trace of him but later in the evening we heard his body had been found at the bottom of a ravine.

19-4-43 Taking cable three miles up the mountains.

20-4-43 Today is Hitler's Birthday, all houses had flags out (hope the RAF dropped him a few birthday presents). Same work as yesterday.

3-5-43 Two years as a prisoner. We heard good news to-day concerning Tunisia.

11-5-43 Heard today that the fighting in Tunisia had ceased.

12-5-43 The news we heard yesterday concerning Tunisia was confirmed to-day. It appears they tried to get out their best troops by troop carrying planes. A large number of wounded German soldiers arrived in the district to-day, the hospitals cannot cope with them so for the purpose of convalescence they are being sent out to villages and billeted at various farms.

17-5-43 We heard that during the evacuation of Tunisia the Germans lost 44 transports full of troops.

20-5-43 The Germans admit the finish of affairs in Tunis, they say it was due to lack of water and stores.

21-5-43 From our usual news agency we learn that in Tunisia we captured ten German Generals, sixteen Italian Generals and approximately 300,000 men.

1-6-43 All Italian workmen in this district have been sent back to Italy the two that are working for us told us it was for the purpose of demolition owing to the heavy bombing of Italian towns. Came home in heavy rainstorm and got soaked.

3-6-43 Rumours of the occupation on the island of Sardinia have reached us.

15-6-43 No work today owing to heavy rain. We heard today that the Island of Pantallera had been occupied by our troops. Heavy hailstorm and snow during afternoon.

17-6-43 The German papers confirm the occupation of the Island of Pantallera. Another bitterly cold day with sleet and snow.

24-6-43 Nearly half of us are working for the local farmers.

25-6-43 According to reports Sicily is being heavily bombed and Italians are

evacuating.

2-7-43 The German papers today are emphasising the fact that during the so called terror raids on Germany we have destroyed 143 churches and cathedrals.

7-7-43 Four of the lads were told tonight to pack up as they were going to another camp (a paper mill) 17 kilometres along the valley. They refused to go so the Commandant is phoning his company at Lieng, tomorrow will bring some result.

9-7-43 The four men for the paper mill at St Johann left at seven o'clock this morning. I think this camp is slowly splitting up and it is possible more may leave shortly, I have no idea where we will all go.

10-7-43 The end of a perfectly miserable week. It has rained every day and it is still pouring down. We heard today that a British and American force had occupied the island of Sicily, the main fear of the Germans at present is that we shall attempt an invasion of Italy no doubt they are afraid of the Italians giving in.

13-7-43 We have been told by our camp Commandant that we are going to a new camp at Dolsach which is about five kilometres the other side of Lieng.

14-7-43 German papers admit our occupation of Sicily. Still a lot of conflicting rumours as to whether we shall move or not, the civilian foreman on the job says we shall not move at all.

15-7-43 The latest news concerning Sicily is to the effect that all enemy resistance is at an end and the entire Island is now in our hands, the mainland Italy is only five miles across the straits of Messina and how soon will it be before we invade. The papers are full of the news and they have the wind up as they fully expect Italy to give in if they are invaded. This news has bucked us up tremendously, we are practically on the Italian border here at Zedlach and if our troops get into Italy some of us will have ideas of trying to join them. One of the men who went to the paper mill came back tonight.

27-7-43 Left camp at 6am for Spittal and arrived there at 2-30pm, saw Dentist at 4pm put on urgent waiting list and shall be sent for when needed.

28-7-43 Left Spittal Stalag at 9-15am missed the train for Lieng (on purpose) and had to wait for the 2-30pm, arrived Lieng at 4-30pm and went to German Barracks where we slept the night.

29-7-43 Left Barracks at Lieng at 6am and picked up a lorry at 8am this took us to Habin nine kms from Matrei. Waited until 2pm for lorry going to Matrei, arrived Matrei at 3-15pm and got to camp at 4.30pm.

3-8-43 On our return from work tonight we were met with the news that the camp was closing down, when the excitement had died down it was revealed that twenty men were going to a place called Gummern near Villach and the remainder to the quarry at St Johann.

4-8-43 No work, sorting out and packing up, all the villagers are very downhearted at the idea of our going away as we have become so well liked. Orders are that we leave tomorrow, all kit went down hill tonight.

5-8-43 Reveille at 4-30am, said farewell to the Lager at 5-30am, went down to the main road and loaded kit on lorry moved off at 6-30am. Dropped thirteen men at St Johann, it was hard to part company with them having been together for a long time. Arrived at Lieng at 8-45am and loaded kit onto the train left at 12-30pm arrived Spittal at 1-45pm had to wait until 5-15pm for the Villach train, arrived at Guman

'Germans lost 44 transports full of troops in Tunisia.'

station at 6pm the camp is about 200 yards from the station, and the job is railway work. The hut that was waiting for us in a filthy condition and sleep was out of the question owing to the live stock. There were already twenty nine men who had been here for a year and they had not made any attempt to get the place cleaned up for us, I slept on the table. We are only about five yards from the actual railway line and all night long trains were roaring past with stores, guns etc for the Italian border which is only a matter of three miles away.

6-8-43 We spent the day scrubbing and disinfecting the building which looked a little better after our efforts, all day long trains loaded with planes, tanks, guns and stores have gone past. There are certain indications that Jerry is expecting something in Italy and is busy preparing for it.

7-8-43 Still cleaning out, about twenty troop trains went through and a like number carrying war materials.

11-8-43 Finished work today at 2pm. We really do not know what is going through to Italy as most of his heavy stuff goes through during the night and it is too dark to see even through the line is only few yards away.

15-8-43 Seven new men came today from a quarry three kilometres away. It seems rather strange that all small out of the way camps are being withdrawn and placed in camp along side the railway and I'm wondering what lies behind it.

17-8-43 We are still fighting hard for better accommodation and better living conditions. We have stopped doing contract work until our demands are met.

18-8-43 As a result of our complaints concerning our living quarters etc, we were today visited by a German Major and Captain. The effect of it is that we have been promised a new hut in three weeks time. On that condition we are again doing contract work but if the new hut does not materialise in the promised time there will be more trouble.

19-8-43 Trains carrying AA guns went through today the troops were wearing tropical kit and it was noticeable that the trousers were of the same pattern as our own Battle dress.

26-8-43 News of bombing Vienna.

1-9-43 Principal item of news in our camp newspaper is the capture of Sicily.

3-9-43 Commencement of 5th year war. An ambulance train full of wounded passed through, apparently Italy is not a safe place to be at present.

4-9-43 We got the startling news today that the allied forces on Sicily had made a landing in Italy the place we were told is Balabrea. In confirmation tonight's paper admitted the landing. This has given us something to talk about.

5-9-43 A trainload of smashed German planes passed camp at seven this morning from the direction of Italy.

7-9-43 Three men tried to get out of camp last night. Twenty new men arrived.

8-9-43 The Italian town of Bolzano about 30 kms from here was bombed last night.

9-9-43 Today we got the amazing news that Italy had capitulated.

10-9-43 The news is that Marshall Badoglio has handed over the country and that Italian troops are now fighting against the Germans. An engine driver told us that Italian prisoners would be coming through later in the day and at 2.30pm the first trainload came through. It seems strange to see his ally of yesterday now going into captivity. Wonder how long it will be before we see our planes over.

11-9-43 Two more trainloads of Italian prisoners went through this morning.

12-9-43 One train of Italian prisoners these are troops who are on the side of the king.

13-9-43 Last night a trainload of German 'Tigertanks' passed through en route to Italy. Today's news is cheerful, all Italian naval vessels that managed to get away have gone to Alexandria or other British ports and the Italian Air Force has gone to Cyprus.

14-9-43 A trainload of English Colonial and Indian POWs passed through, they are being transferred from prison camps in Italy.

16-9-43 The news from Italy is that we are landing parachute troops up to eight o'clock tonight, ten trainloads of Italians had passed through and this is only one line leading from Italy. They are all going to Spittal. I don't know how they will accommodate them.

17-9-43 Slow progress in Italy, owing to Germans blowing up bridges etc as they withdraw.

18-9-43 News from Spittal is that the English prisoners who passed through here a few days ago, are at that place. Some are old prisoners who were captured in the desert and have been in Italy a year or more. Others are new ones captured during the invasion, amongst these are parachute troops some of them only left England a couple of months ago.

20-9-43 Trainload of Italians passed through at noon, on this train was one van filled with English lads, the train stopped in the station but the guards would not let us speak to them, from what they shouted they were either commandos or parachutists, the Italians said they had come from Florence.

22-9-43 A tragedy occurred today as we were coming back to go for dinner (we always walk along the line to and from work), today our young German guard (aged 18) was knocked down by an engine and killed instantly. He only came a month ago and was quite a decent kid he was walking at the rear of us and stepped out of the way of a train coming from Villach but did not notice another one coming at the back of him, from now on no more walking along the line.

29-9-43 News from Italy is we are doing well. Russians reported to have taken Solensk.

1-10-43 Train load of prisoners came through this morning from Italy, about a dozen vans contained English and Colonial troops, remainder of train contained Yugoslav civilians who had been causing trouble to Jerry, he describes them as bandits.

25-10-43 No sleep all night, still high temperature with severe pain in right side taken on stretcher to station at 1-30pm and put in guards van on the train. Arrived Spittal at 2-40pm and taken to Hospital, examined by British MO, and put to bed at 5pm. Remember nothing more until I regained consciousness on Wednesday.

28-10-43 Breathing easier but pain still bad, it appears I have Pleurisy and Pneumonia the orderlies tell me I have had a rotten time during the past forty eight hours.

29-10-43 Man in next bed to me named Nash (A Canadian) died at 9-40am.

6-11-43 An Indian brought into my ward at 5pm died suddenly at 11-45pm.

30-11-43 Air raid alarms which lasted all morning.

16-12-43 Started work again, first day for nine weeks. Air raid warning went at 1pm.

17-12-43 We heard today that Innsbruck was bombed two days ago. In consequence our railway line here is congested with traffic, and passenger trains are running hours late.

23-12-43 Work to day consisted of clearing snow from railway lines and points.

31-12-43 We were awakened last night between eleven and midnight by air raid warning, we could hear heavy explosions. Saw old year out and new year in.

16-1-44 Air raid alarm went just before noon we heard explosions from the bombs and then for the first time since being prisoner we actually saw our planes. They had apparently bombed Klagenfurt railway junction which is about 50 kilometres from here, we watched the planes for about half an hour while the AA at Villach engaged them (unsuccessfully). We were delighted to see them sail unconcerned through the shell bursts, we counted nearly sixty planes. This is the first time they have been around this area although there have been plenty of warnings and we are all hoping to see more of them, this has bucked us up immensely.

18-1-44 We had confirmation of the raid on Klagenfurt, much damage was done to the Aerodrome, Barracks, Station and a factory that makes Aeroplane spare parts. Unfortunately some British, French and Russian prisoners have been injured. One big camp holding 500 POWs is near the railway. Bombs were again heard falling about eleven o'clock last night over the mountains, it was probably Tarvis which is just over the border and in a straight line about five miles from here. At eleven this morning we again heard bombs and saw the burst of AA fire it was in the direction of Tarvis.

20-1-44 According to the English wireless the raid on Klagenfurt was a success, one British prisoner was seriously hurt and the civilian and troop casualties are in the region of 400. It has certainly livened things up in this area.

16-2-44 Left at 7am for Wolfsberg, left Villach at 1-20pm, arrived St Viet 3-45pm and left again at 3-55pm arrived at Zeltweg at 6pm, left Zeltweg at 8-30pm and arrived at Wolfsberg at 10-30pm arrived in Stalag at 11 pm, and spent the night in the bunker.

17-2-44 Spent the day renewing old acquaintances I have not seen since leaving Wolfsberg in June 1942, the place is still in the same dirty condition.

18-2-44 Left Wolfsberg at 7am, arrived at Ober Drauberg at 9-15am, left there at 11-30am and arrived at Villach at 2-30pm, left Villach at 5-45pm and arrived in camp at 6pm, was glad to be back.

22-2-44 Air raid warning sounded at 12-15pm, shortly after the all clear had gone our planes came over from the direction of Spittal. To the north of the camp we saw seven waves totalling about 60 planes, a quarter of an hour later to the south we saw another three waves of bombers and about twenty fighters, no bombs were dropped so we have no idea what the objective was, however the AA opened up but it was to cloudy to see much.

25-2-44 Air raid alarm at 11-30am and 12-15pm, our bombers came over, they flew right up the valley from Villach. We counted 121 planes fifteen of them sailed right over the camp, we wondered who was going to get it. The AA at Villach opened up

'Camp newspapers report capture of Sicily'

but they just ignored it, shrapnel dropped in the camp. We hope to see a lot more of them in the future.

26-2-44 We heard today from Spittal that one of our planes came down in that area yesterday and that two American fliers are in Spittal hospital. Jerry has put a guard on their room and only the doctor and orderly are allowed in together with an English speaking German Officer, this is to prevent them telling us news of the war.

7-4-44 Heard that yesterday's raid was in the Stiermark District.

23-5-44 News today from Italy is that we have broken Jerry's lines at Casino and have taken the town, he is now retreating to the Adolf Hitler line.

30-5-44 Air raid warning at 10am, from noise of explosions it sounds like Klagenfurt direction, all clear 11-40am. Camp visited by Mr Mc. Laver the Padre of the New Zealand YMCA, Evening Service held at 8-30pm. Remainder of evening spent listening to stories of various oflags, Stalags, camps.

1-6-44 In connection with Tuesday air raid warning it appears that the objective was the Stiermark district. Two of the lads who got back from Wolfsberg tonight told us the planes passed over Stalag XV111A, one appeared to have engine trouble so he unloaded his bombs which fell just short outside the camp.

6-6-44 We got the news this afternoon that we had carried out an invasion of France, this was confirmed later with details such as; In the early hours of this morning Allied Troops landed in France at Le Havre and Cherbourg 4,000 ships of all descriptions took part. The coastal batteries of this area had 5,000 tons of bombs dropped on them last night. Churchill is stated to have made a speech in which he says "We have a plan and what a plan". Other details are that Parachutists were dropped and at several points we have made progress, meeting with little opposition. The camp is wildly excited at this news, which was on the wireless this afternoon. News from Italy is Rome has fallen and our troops are 5 miles beyond the river Tiber to the north of Rome. We are now waiting to see what the German newspapers say about the invasion.

7-6-44 According to the latest news and confirmed by the German papers we are now holding a front of 150 kilometres which stretches from Le Havre to Cherbourg, our news is that everything is going well.

8-6-44 The latest news is that we have also taken Calais.

9-6-44 Air raid warning went at 8-55am all clear at 11-30am, during this period 150 of our bombers were seen.

12-6-44 End of 162nd week. We heard today that our troops in Italy are now a 100 kilometres north of Rome. In France they are doing well and have reached a position forty kilometres from Cherbourg, Jerry admits in his papers that troops and supplies are still pouring in.

29-6-44 Heard today from a reliable source that Cherbourg had been taken, and in Italy Florence was expected to fall within a few days.

30-6-44 According to the English wireless the news of yesterday is that the Germans in France had lost 60,000 dead and wounded and a further 50,000 including three Generals being taken prisoner. The same report stated that the Americans had lost 40,000 in dead and wounded.

20-7-44 We heard today that yesterday's

raid was on Munich and 1,000 planes took part. Everybody is anticipating an early end to the war, and the latest estimate is that it will be over in three months.

21-7-44 Air raid warning this morning at 10-10am, at 10-15am our bombers came over and up to eleven o'clock we had counted over 500 as they were not very high. Fighters which we recognised as Lockheed Lightnings came right over. Villach and Klagenfurt AA positions opened up on them, they circled Klagedfurt inviting trouble but no planes came to have a go. One Lightning actually circled and went back again through the AA fire. At 1-30pm the planes began to come back and continued to go over until 2-30pm all of them were subjected to intense AA fire but as far as we could see they all got through safely even including one bomber which did not turn aside but carried straight on over the actual AA positions. He bore a charmed life and most deservedly got through. The all clear went at 2-45pm. By the general direction taken we think that both Innsbruck and Munich were visited. This is the largest number of planes we have ever seen pass over this area and we hope to see them again for the sight of them cheered us up immensely.

22-7-44 Planes were heard at 11-30pm last night and again about 2-30am this morning when the AA opened up.

25-7-44 With hardly any warning bombers began to appear at noon most of them headed south towards Italy, but one wave of ten came straight over the camp towards Villach. Intense AA fire greeted them but they were too high. High in the air there appeared a huge cloud of dust which was the first indication that anything had happened. We certainly did not hear the bombs, then ten planes came round again and disappeared in a Southerly direction. At 2pm we all had to turn out and were taken to Villach by lorry. It appears that eleven to fifteen bombs were dropped and all with the exception of two hit in and around the station. Our job was to clear the lines and fill in the craters in readiness for new lines to go down, we finished at 10-30pm and got back to camp at 11-30pm. After a good wash and supper we got into bed half an hour after midnight.

27-7-44 According to information about fifty of sixty were killed and about 200 injured at Villach. It is now stated that twenty six bombs were dropped.

1-8-44 We heard to day that Turkey may break off diplomatic relations with Germany. The Turkish parliament meets on Thursday to decide the question.

2-8-44 The news from all fronts is very good from our point of view. We heard that General Rommel had been seriously injured when his headquarters was bombed. It is quite possible he may be dead.

4-8-44 Today's German newspapers report that Turkey has broken off diplomatic relations with Germany. They also report that Rommel has been slightly injured in a car accident.

7-8-44 Good news concerning our forces in France. It appears they are making for Rennes and St Nazaire.

8-8-44 Latest news from France is that our armoured columns are doing well. St Mayairre we hear has been taken. Another column has taken L'Orient a third one is in striking distance of Brest and a fourth one has struck west from Rennes towards Le Mans.

15-8-44 News today is that Archenton,

Brest, Vannes, St Mayairre and St Malo have been taken by our forces with 6,000 prisoners at the latter place. Twenty divisions of the 7th German Army have been cut off in the La Mans area for ten days out of the last eleven, Genoa and the South of France have been bombed continuously so something looks like happening round there. In Italy we are informed that Florence has fallen to our troops.

16-8-44 The paper publish the news that a landing has been made by Allied forces in the South of France between Toulon and Cannes, from our own source of news we heard that the troops comprised Free French, English, Canadians and Americans and the force is commanded by Maitland-Wilson.

17-8-44 Further comments by the papers about the landing in South of France it appears that we have landed more men and material than we landed for the Cherbourg affair. All we are concerned about is how long Jerry will stick it. We have a sweepstake running for the date for the end of the war.

24-8-44 The war news today is distinctly good, we hear that Paris, Toulon and Marseilles have been taken, whilst the Russians have taken Jassy in Rumania.

27-8-44 Air raid alarm at 10am. A few days ago we heard a rumour that Rumania had given up and were seeking protection from the Allies, yesterday's newspaper confirms this and describes it as King Mickals betrayal of Germany.

28-8-44 Newspapers report that Bulgaria has broken away from Germany and that Rumania is bringing pressure on Hungary.

1-9-44 News today is that in Northern France the Allied forces are now only five miles from the Belgian Border and 17 miles from Dieppe. In Italy the town of Pesaro on the Adriatic has been taken.

2-9-44 German papers admit that they have evacuated Verdun and Aniens, and that the fighting is taking place near the Belgian Border.

4-9-44 The news today is very good, according to the British news the forces in Southern France have crossed the Belgian border and we have even heard that Brussels has fallen into our hands. In the South our forces have crossed the Alps into Northern Italy and are moving towards Turin.

5-9-44 News today is that we have crossed the frontier into Holland and that we are now striking at the Siegfried Line.

8-9-44 The news today is good again, according to reports Rotterdam in Holland has fallen and also Strassbourg and Saarbrucken. The Russians are reported to be twenty five miles from Belgrade.

11-9-44 During the past three days twelve Red Cross trains full of German wounded have passed through. It seems as though he is emptying the Hospitals of Yugoslavia, Rumania etc.

23-9-44 Another spot of excitement, air raid warning went just before noon whilst planes were overhead they were too high to be seen. About two o'clock we saw about thirty fighters coming back, three of them (Lockheeds) flew over Villach, AA posts which had a go at them (without success), shortly afterwards the bombers came, keeping well away from Villach, they came from the direction of Munich.

5-10-44 We heard that yesterday's raid was on Munich and the Brenner Pass and that 700 to 750 planes took part.

11-10-44 Air raid warning at 11am, two large batches of bombers passed over at 11-30am. Planes heard circling above the clouds. Bombs dropped at Weisenstein that's the next station to ours four

‘News of the allied landing in France’

kilometres away. They tried for the chemical works there but owing to the cloudy weather it was not hit.

12-10-44 Air raid warning at 8-45am, all clear at 9am, Six planes seen at 2-30pm but they were very high. Red Cross train full of wounded passed through at 3 pm.

16-10-44 Air raid alarm at 10am, wave after wave of bombers came over, there must have been well over 500 of them. They went in all directions, we don't know yet where the damage was but what we do know is that Spittal and Villach got a dosing, the all clear went at 2-15pm.

18-10-44 In connection with the raid on Monday the following places were visited. Klagenfurt, Villach, Spittal, Lieng, Linz, Salzburg, Marburg and Drauberg, heavy damage and casualties at Marburg and Salzburg.

4-11-44 Air raid warning at 10-30am, twenty fighters passed over at 11am heading north, at 1-30pm bombers appeared from the north and went due south all together we counted about 290 planes, it was for once a good clear day and it was a grand sight.

11-11-44 Armistice Day. Air raid warning at 10am, planes appeared at 10-15am. For two hours we had planes all around and over us, they were coming from all directions, we saw five dive down on Villach, bombs were dropped about ten kms away and also in the Spittal area.

15-11-44 When we got up this morning the snow was over two feet deep and it was still snowing, snow stopped at 4pm. Air raid warning at 9-10am planes were heard circling until 1pm.

17-11-44 Air raid warning at 10am, bombers and fighters in all directions. Two single bombers dropped bombs on Villach and an hour later nine bombers came down the valley, they passed over our camp (and put the wind up us) and dropped their bombs on Villach. A lot of these were time bombs and we heard them going off late at night, most of them were dropped in and around the railway. Spittal and Lieng were also bombed.

22-11-44 Air raid warning at 11am, bombers appeared at 12-15pm at 12-45pm six waves totalling 31 planes came swinging down the valley, they passed over our camp and then swung towards Villach. They let go together and our huts shook, all clear went at 3-10 pm. These planes were so low that it was impossible for them to miss the target, there is no AA at Villach. No trains came through for the remainder of the day.

23-11-44 We heard some details of yesterday's raid, the main station at Villach is in ruins and also part of the town. Trains are beginning to come through slowly, telephone communication is cut off, they wanted us to go there on demolition work but in view of the danger of time bombs we jibbed at it.

3-12-44 Air raid warning at 9-45am, planes over but could not be seen owing to low lying mist, mist cleared later and planes could be seen. Five single bombers at intervals came over camp from various directions and dropped their bombs when they were over Villach. This followed an all night raid which took place last night when we heard planes from about 8pm until the early hours of this morning.

7-12-44 Planes over between four and five o'clock this morning, for an hour they circled round and round, everyone was soon out of bed, bombs were dropped and later we heard it was well to the other side of Villach.

8-12-44 Planes were over again between four and five this morning, at 4-45am a

load of bombs dropped not too far away, by this time we were all in the shelter. A quarter of an hour later another plane came over and dropped his bombs, these landed a quarter of a mile from camp and they are the nearest we have had. It certainly shook us up, shortly after another heavy load was dropped towards Villach. At 7-20am we had another heavy explosion which proved to be a time bomb and we have been informed there are still two more time bombs to go off. As these are only a quarter of a mile away we do not feel too comfortable.

10-12-44 To day we were suddenly dropped on by a party and the camp was searched, nothing was found. Such things as views of the Country, ink, indelible pencils, etc which we were encouraged to buy from the canteens are now forbidden, even personal photo's which have not got the censors stamp are taken away from us.

16-12-44 Air raid warning at 10-30am (this seems to be usual time), from 11am to 12-30pm a bomber formation passed over. This time they did not keep over the mountains but came across and passed directly over our camp. They were in parties of thirty we counted over 700 and then got tired of it. They started to come back at 2pm two parties totalling 14 swung over and made for Villach. They passed over and turned north, a quarter of an hour later they appeared again and passing over camp they made for Villach, the leading plane dropped four red flares and then we heard the bombs, the second wave came along and they let go, this time they came in from a different angle, the weather was fine a beautiful clear sky.

17-12-44 Air raid warning at 11am, 32 fighters in parties of sixteen circled overhead and formed rings in the sky, bombers appeared ten minutes later but they were to the south of us. At 11-15am a lone bomber came down the valley and Villach received its usual dose. Ten minutes later another came and repeated the dose followed by another a quarter of an hour later. The main body came back about 12-30pm from the last batch of ten, two swung off and again Villach got it.

18-12-44 During the raid on Saturday the West Bahnhof at Villach was hit and an oil train set on fire this is the station on the line running to Italy.

19-12-44 Air raid warning at 10-30am (clear sky), thirteen bombers passed over but did not drop anything, a quarter of an hour later another thirteen came over, six dropped bombs on Villach West Bahnhof and the other seven dropped them on Villach main station. At 2pm when we thought it was all over four flights totalling 24 came sailing over they circled off towards Klagenfurt and came around again. One wave of six dropped bombs on Villach.

25-12-44 Xmas Day. Reveille 5-30am caught train at 6-30am for West Bahnhof, where we worked filling in bomb craters, alarm went at 10-30am and we were in the shelter until 3pm, finished work at 5pm and got back to camp at 7pm (what a merry Christmas).

26-12-44 Boxing Day. To West Bahnhof as yesterday. Alarm went at 11am, waves of bombers went over and Klagenfurt was heavily bombed. At 1-30pm two waves came over Villach, the second lot dropped them on the main station and wrecked it, two singles planes dropped their bombs on the West Bahnhof only a hundred yards from where we were working.

28-12-44 Warning went at 9-40am. When we got back to camp we heard that fighters had been down strafing along the line, some bullets came through the camp but fortunately no one was hurt, a short distance away two bombers collided one came down and seven persons were seen to bail out.

12-1-45 Snow is still falling for the sixth successive day and it is now very deep, all the camp lads stayed here and cleared the station, stopped snowing after tea.

31-1-45 Fighters were over Spittal shortly after 11am, four of them circled and suddenly dived (so did we) and strafed Spittal station. Half an hour later three others arrived, two circled high up and the other came along the lines about 50 feet up, he went past the station and circled to come back as he came back the AA on the train caught him. He flashed passed us with his plane on fire, he was trying to climb but suddenly nose dived and crashed about half a mile away it was a horrible sight. At two o'clock in the afternoon 7 more fighters appeared for an hour they played hell down the line and then went home.

1-2-45 The body of the pilot who crashed yesterday was found today he must have been dead before the plane crashed as he was thrown out. His body was cut in two, he was identified as an American aged 19 his name was Ben Jackson and he came from Tennessee.

5-2-45 Bombers went over during dinner hour and we heard later that Villach had been bombed, glad I am at Spittal.

14-2-45 Air raid warning at 11-30am. While we were walking home from Villach we had to take cover as best we could in the trees. Seven waves of bombers totalling 40 planes bombed Villach.

18-2-45 Air raid warning at 11-20am at 12-15pm machine gunning heard in the direction of Villach. Four Mustangs suddenly appeared over the hill heading in our direction they passed over and we heard firing further up the valley. Half an hour later we again heard planes and firing towards Villach, and then we had to make a sudden dive for shelter as about 14 to 16 Lightnings come along. Two of them passed over camp at a height of about a hundred feet, for about half an hour we heard them straffing up the valley presumably at Rothenthurn.

21-2-45 At St Ruprecht could not start work until after dinner owing to air raids. Lightnings and Mustangs straffing station, home at 6-30pm.

23-2-45 Working at Gummern, shortly after 8am a train loaded with transport passed through towards Spittal at 8-30am heading west. Planes caught the transport train up the valley and straffed it for half an hour. Shortly afterwards eight Thunderbolts came over camp and made for Villach which they machine gunned, all clear at 3-45pm. 24 bombers dropped bombs on Villach.

27-2-45 Working at Gummern. First passenger train had just left Villach when three thunderbolts dived on it, this was at 7-45am. Five more planes joined in, then they proceeded up the valley, for an hour they played hell round Weisenstein and Feictrity and them went on to Rothenthurn. They then came back and had a go at Villach, six locomotives were caught, and the gas works set on fire. At 1-20pm another eight came over and proceeded towards Spittal, at 3-35pm another eight came on the scene and staffed Rothenthurn and district.

28-2-45 Another day of strafing, Lightnings

'Xmas Day... working filling in bomb craters'

and Mustangs strafed Seebach, St Veit, Ormoldstein and Gummern. A train full of troops and horses in the sidings outside camp was shot up.

1-3-45 Working at Villach. Alarm went at 12 noon so we started to walk home when about a mile and half from Villach 17 bombers came over so we dived for cover. Despite the AA fire that went up the first twelve dropped their bombs, from where we were standing it appeared as if the target was the main railway station but we shall see when we go to work in the morning. We are now a little scared of going to Villach as we travel on the first train and it was caught two mornings ago.

3-3-45 Ten fighters passed over at 10-30am. The results of the strafing two days ago at Rothenthurn are now known. A military train consisting of food and ammunition was dived bombed the train was wrecked and set on fire the food could not be saved owing to the exploding ammunition.

5-3-45 Working at Gummern. At 7-50am without the slightest warning 16 Mustangs came over, they made their way towards Rothenthurn where they caught a goods train. The engine was put out of order, they then came over camp and after having a look around went towards Villach. As I write this at 4-30pm we have just had a mass evacuation to the shelter owing to the sudden arrival of eight Thunderbolts which are looking for trouble they have gone towards Villach.

6-3-45 At Gummern. At 7-45am our usual visitors arrived, this time they were five Thunderbolts. A goods train was pulled up about 300 yards away so they dived on it owing to some miscalculation they missed the engine and the incendiary bullets set fire to houses in the village of Puch which is at the side of the railway, for two hours we were fire fighting and helped to salvage household goods. The fire was eventually under control and only four houses were destroyed.

7-3-45 At 8 am eight Thunderbolts swooped over the valley, they went up as far as Spittal but apparently they could not find anything so they came back and went in the direction of Villach. After tea it commenced to snow. We have been informed of a cut in rations and from tomorrow our bread ration will be one loaf between eight men instead of five men.

9-3-45 Something big is on today, bombers coming over in waves from 11am until 3-30pm, all of them together with hundreds of fighter escort went north so I expect it is Munich, Vienna etc.

10-3-45 Working at Feistritz. Eight Thunderbolts operated at Rothenthurn and Spittal between 9am and 9-20am then they came down the valley but no targets were available. Five Mustangs came over at 1-10pm and without any warning opened up on the village which was set on fire similar to last Tuesday, it is a mystery because no trains were in sight. We were fire fighting again.

13-3-45 Waves of bombers with fighter escort commenced going and carried on until 1-45pm, they started to return at 3pm two or three lone ones came back over Villach and successfully got through the AA fire.

16-3-45 Working at Feistritz. Two trains of transport and troops went through but a third one was suddenly pounced on by five Mustangs and set on fire just outside Feistritz at 10-45am. At 1-10pm a further eight came over, they gave a couple of bursts at the transport train and then went on towards Spittal, where they dropped bombs at 4 pm. Another eight came over

and for a quarter of an hour they circled our camp and we really thought we were for it. Anyhow they pushed off up the valley and we breathed again.

17-3-45 At 7-50am eight Mustangs came over, they caught a train near Weisenstein and shot up the engine.

21-3-45 Alarm again at 10-45am, waves of bombers started to come back at 12-45pm. Several lots went in the direction of Klagenfurt. At 1-55pm fourteen came over and despite the AA fire from the Villach guns they all dropped their bombs. At 3-20pm a further six came over, the AA greeted them and they had to break formation, they dropped their bombs however, but whether any damage was done or not we shall not know until we go to work in the morning. We are still working at Villach and walking home each day. Today we were given the choice of three things. (1) Do night work from 10pm to 5am. (2) Work all day from 7am to 4pm. (3) Do contract work. In connection with the latter we are to make up the time lost during air raids.

22-3-45 Bombers came back shortly after dinner. At 8-15pm the alarm went and a later a plane came over dropping flares the whole of Villach was lit up. Bombers then came and heavy bombs and fire bombs were dropped until 8-45pm, the all clear went at 9-30pm.

23-3-45 We heard that St Veit and Klagenfurt were visited by night raiders last night. In connection with the raid on Villach on Thursday night it appears that two of the bombers collided resulting in the death of both crews. At 10-15am today fighters appeared to straff around Villach and two came around the camp, as no railway engines could be seen they contented themselves with knocking out lorries and anything else that moved on the roads.

25-3-45 Alarm at 7-50am. The first train from Spittal to Villach (which incidentally had five AA trucks attached to it) had just left Gummern when four Thunderbolts caught it. It was soon dealt with and then they proceeded up the valley, we heard several heavy explosions we shall know what it was tomorrow as we are working at Feistritz instead of Villach. We heard later that on the attack on the train three were killed and thirteen were wounded. At 8-15pm the alarm sounded and bombers arrived, after flares had been dropped the show went on over Villach until 8-50 pm when they departed.

26-3-45 Working at Feistritz. The heavy explosions we heard yesterday morning were caused by the explosion of two trucks loaded with shells, we found a hell of a mess when we got there, the two vans were immediately behind the engine and as that was the prime target the ammunition vans got it. The blast must have been terrific as buildings hundreds of yards away were shattered. In connection with last night's raid on Villach fire bombs were dropped and a large area near the railway, including the gas works, was set on fire. The fire lasted until 3am this morning and explosions could be heard all night. The news is good from all fronts and once again we are all anticipating an early end to this life.

28-3-45 Rained heavily all day. We heard today that the war may be over in two or three weeks (we hope).

29-3-45 Alarm at 7-50am, eight thunderbolts, four of them operating between Feistritz and Rothenthurn, caught two trains and put the engines out of

action, the other four had a go at something around Villach.

31-3-45 Alarm went at 10-45am, planes heard but sky overcast, sky cleared a little. Flight of bombers passed over and dropped bombs on Villach at 12-10pm, at 12-25pm three waves totalling 26 came over and dropped their Easter Eggs. At 12-50pm a further 34 repeated the dose and at 1-05pm another batch totalling 23 planes gave Villach a further shock, up to present this is the heaviest raid on Villach, the AA tried hard but without success.

1-4-45 Warning at 7-30am, ten thunderbolts over at 7-45am, they vanished in the direction of Spittal, all clear at 8-45am. Warning again at 9-45am. Reconnaissance planes were over all day, at 4-15pm a wave of seven bombers passed over camp heading due south. At 4-30pm three waves totalling 28 planes came down the valley and dropped bombs on Villach. Another lot of bombers passed over ten minutes later and then six dive bombers appeared, they dived on Villach for about twenty minutes and then came over our way. They had a good look at us and then went on towards Rothenthurn where they had a go at something, they came back shortly after and had another go at Villach. All clear went at 5-30pm.

2-4-45 Alarm at 7-50am. Whilst at work at Feistritz six fighters came over. A train was standing at the signal 200 yards from the station, despite the AA fire from the light AA on the train they soon made short work of it.

The fighters that were over Villach last night caught nine engines so they had done a good job of work..

6-4-45 Today was a very hectic one. Fighters over from 6-30am to 6pm. No rest is given to anything in these valleys and hardly anything moves during the day.

7-4-45 Fighters appeared at 6-55am, alarms going continuously, full alarm went at 10-20 am, bombers going over in relays until 3-30pm, all clear went at 4-30pm. War news during the past few days has been very good and we are eagerly awaiting the final day, we are convinced it cannot be far away.

11-4-45 Alarm went at 10-55am. The Red Cross Commission visited the camp, they told us that we should not be here much longer and also informed us that Vienna had been completely occupied by the Russians yesterday. We also heard that Hannover had been taken.

12-4-45 At 5am today the German radio broadcast the news that Vienna had fallen and also mentioned the loss of Stuttgart on the Western front. Alarm went at 9-45am. Relays of Lockheed Lightnings came over, they dive bombed Arnoldstein in the Hermagor valley. At this place is a bridge carrying the main line into Italy so it appears they are closing the gap, thus preventing anything going in or coming out of Italy. Dive bombing lasted until 11-15am when bomber formations started to come over, they went up the valley so evidently it was either Sasyburg or Munich. News of street fighting in Graz.

13-4-45 News today of the Death of President Roosevelt.

14-4-45 War news today is to the effect that on the Western Front the towns of Hannover and Erfurt have fallen and we are four miles from Bremen. The Russians are reported to be fifty kilometres to the west of Vienna.

20-4-45 Today is Hitler's Birthday but no flags are flying anywhere.

‘Terrific blast shattered building hundreds of yards away.’

21-4-45 War news today is wonderful, the Russians are only twelve kilometres from the centre of Berlin and are shelling it on the west. We have taken Dessau and are at Leifig which has fallen. The Allies and the Russians are only 40 kilometres apart. In the south the Russians have advanced 80 kilometres to the west from Vienna towards Ling. We are now waiting for the news of the fall of Berlin. Our area where we are is now the farthest from the actual front and we are in danger of being cut off and we shall also be in danger from bands of troops who are cut off and will commence to carry out guerrilla warfare. I hope we shall be able to get out in time. In Italy we have taken Bologna which is described as the greatest victory since the fall of Casino.

23-4-45 We are all waiting the news of the fall of Berlin and wondering when it will be. We have stopped sending mail as we consider it will not get through. We have heard that Stalag at Wolfsberg are expecting to move at a moments notice and are packed in readiness.

24-4-45 Air raid warning at 10am. Just clear of Villach when 12 Mitchell Marauders came over in three waves of four, the second and third lot dropped bombs on the West Bahnhof. After that the sky was not clear of planes from 10-30am until 2-30pm. Bombers were coming in all directions, whilst for an hour five bombers had a go at something in the Hermagor valley at Arnoldstein. Some of the bombers dropped pamphlets while going over. According to last night's German wireless Hitler is supposed to be in Berlin and he broadcast a message in the course of which he said the war depends upon Berlin, if it does not fall the war will go on, but if Berlin does then all is lost.

28-4-45 Today's news is good our forces in Italy have got the Germans on the run and we are meeting no opposition. That perhaps explains why we have not seen any planes yesterday and today. The best news is the fact that Mussolini has been caught near the Swiss border by Italian partisans, who by the way have taken, Milan, Turin and Genoa. The 5th Army are reported to have reached Genoa. Around Berlin the Russians and Allied troops are reported to have met at Torgau. We hear

that Stettin, Bremen, Spandau and Potsdam have fallen. Raining.

30-4-45 End of 208th week and end of 4th year as a POW. War news today is as follows. In Italy our forces have occupied Venice and have crossed the Piave river, in a straight line they are a hundred kilometres (sixty two and half miles from us). Partisans have taken Trieste. Mussolini was tried by the Partisans and executed. It is reported by the British radio that Hitler died in Berlin yesterday afternoon but the Germans say he is ill. Munich is occupied by Allied troops. We have heard that the main Stalag at Wolfsberg have been moved, we in this area are in danger of being completely cut off (heavy snow falling).

2-5-45 Fighters over at 9-30am. Conflicting reports today concerning war news. From three different sources we heard that the war had finished between Germany, England and America but the Russians are fighting on, this is very strange and we can't understand it.

3-5-45 It appears that the German Army in Italy have capitulated and also the whole of Western Austria. This morning we were told that our troops were in Udine. No one went to work this morning, at 2pm we were told that our troops are expected in Villach by this evening as they were reported at Turvis which is 31 kilometres away. We are eagerly waiting to see them.

7-5-45 Two of the guards pushed off to day, the gate of the camp had been open for the past four days.

8-5-45 At eleven this morning one of the lads came tearing in from Villach with the news that British troops were in town. At 2-30pm a lorry arrived with two members of the Grenadier Guards to take us to Villach to meet the lads, words cannot describe our feelings especially when we got there and saw the Grenadier and Welsh Guards. Spent a happy evening with them.

10-5-45 Busy hunting up local Nazi leaders who have given us a rotten time.

11-5-45 Left Gummern for the last time for Villach at 9am, left Villach at 12 noon for Klagenfurt aerodrome and arrived 3-30pm, spent the night there.

12-5-45 Enplaned in a De Coutea troop carrying plane and left Klagenfurt at

5-50pm on our first stage. Landed at Tarvisio in Italy at 6-45pm, where we spent the night, this was my first time in the air and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

13-5-45 Left Tarvisio at 9-45am on our second stage, passed over Venice at 9-55am kept on down the Adriatic coast and then across Southern Italy to Naples where we arrived at 12 noon. Went to repatriation camp. The only thing I can say about Naples is that it smells horribly. Right opposite the billet is the Vesuvius volcano but it is not working today.

14-5-45 At 9-45am passed through processing centre this was followed by hot showers and medical inspection, 3 inoculations and vaccination, drew new kit from QM stores and then went to see the Interrogation officer, finished at 12-30pm. 125 leaving tomorrow for England, that leaves my group first on the list so I have high hopes of leaving for England on Wednesday.

15-5-45 Orders are up and I leave tomorrow for England by air.

16-5-45 Left No 2 Repatriation Camp at 8am for Pogliamiona aerodrome. Enplaned on Liberator bomber took off at 9-45am for England, passed over the Anglo beach then over the island of Corsica, passed over the coast of Southern France and Nice and made for Marseilles. Skirted Paris and met the English channel at the mouth of the river Seine, crossed the channel and passed over Ramsgate, landed at Dresford aerodrome in Buckinghamshire at 4-30pm. Given tea and sandwiches in the hangers, taken by lorry to camp of the 6th Northamptonshire Regt, saw MO, x-rayed and issued with kit, supper at 10 pm, pay at 10-20pm.

17-5-45 Left Hartwell Park at 4-15pm for Aylesbury station, left for London by special train at 5-30pm arrived London 7-15pm. Spent the night at Salvation Hostel, left Euston at 8-30am arrived Stafford 11-10am, left 11-40am arrived Stoke 12-15pm, left at 1-35pm, arrived Longport 1-45pm

22-5-45 Went to Leicester on tour of investigation, stayed at YMCA,

24-5-45 Left Leicester brought Maureen with me.

26-5-45 Letter from Paymaster with pay book and money order. ■



Royal Pioneer Corps Association Reunion Weekend

4-6 July 2008



I hung up my sixth cap badge

WHEN I hung up my sixth cap badge, I decided to retain membership of those Regimental and Corps Associations to which I still belonged: but which were by then reduced to four in number.

I am therefore still in receipt of many newsletters during any one year. If I repeat the compliments heaped on you by other correspondents to *The Pioneer*, I can only say that I have plenty to compare with your editions and others and have no hesitation in saying again what we all know. Yours are the best.

I resolved, as very many others have done on retirement, to write my memoirs! Thirty years later I remembered what I had

resolved to do and got down to it and have completed what I am determined will be the final draft, which is titled "A Military Gypsy" (or From Footslogging to Flying and Police to Pioneers).

It was something of a coincidence therefore to find in your May edition letters and a notice, relating to five officers who figure in my piece: Bennett, Colville, Cooper, O'Connell and Salmon. Sadly two of them have already passed on.

Those still with us can be assured that their reputations (as far as I am concerned) remain intact.

With kindest regards
Colin Davey Lt Col (Retd)

Chunkie mayor

JUST Just a quick one for you, if you go onto Bridlington Town Council web site (just search Bridlington Town Council)when you get on to it, click on your council then click on town mayor and then you will see a picture of me in my RPC tie, I had the cuff links on as well but I don't think you can see them.

I got elected mayor of my town on Wednesday night and I will hold the position till May 2009, there will be more photos of me on there soon with my blazer with Corps badge and lapel pin (need to get some blazer buttons off you when I have a few quid spare). Still flying the flag for the Pioneer Corps, all the best mate.

Liam Dealtry 25000381 (Ed: Well done!)

Ammo box Very mixed sort of book pyramid

I WOULD like to know if there is anyone else still alive who took part in the first team of Pioneers at the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1966.

There was about 30 of us mainly from 206 Company RPC, Long Marsden, Stratford upon Avon. The team built a Pyramid out of Ammunition Boxes. I think the dimensions were; - "Base" there were 6 base boxes, per side and I think a total of 36 base boxes for each of the first two layers. To complete the pyramid each of the layers of the pyramid were made up of single ammunition boxes. The first layer of single boxes started one ammunition box width's in from the edge to create a step effect.

When the pyramid was finished there were a total of 13 men standing on different layers. there was one man on each of the corners of the base level, these were dressed as First World War soldiers, the next four men were dressed as Second World War soldiers, the third set of four men were dressed as modern soldiers in different styles, Combat, Fatigue, Work, and number two dress.

The last man standing on the top of the pyramid was a Junior Soldier in number One Dress. Each base box was made up of 'four ammunition boxes banded together' before the problem of keeping the four boxes to stay together there was lots of trials and tribulations, but eventually everything came together.

The boxes were transported on steel framed bogies with rubber wheels. If anyone is interested in the rest of the story, regarding the training and the eventual show that we put on, I will continue at a later date.

I am now living permanently in the Commonwealth of Dominica, in the West Indies. Over the last 18 months I have been writing poems, again if you are interested I will send you some of my work.

Best regards.
John R C McDonough. 23652392 Ex Cpl

I WAS pleasantly surprised to see a review of my book "A Socialist at War" in the current number of "The Pioneer".

I did not expect it to be of much interest to you and the RPCA due to its political content and only sent it to you out of courtesy as I felt the Association should be aware of anything written about the Corps.

My original motive for writing the book was annoyance that the Corps is hardly mentioned in all the military histories and TV programmes I have seen.

Then I realised that any new wartime history would merely be a repeat of Major Rhodes-Wood's book.

I then thought that if I interspersed accounts of my personal experiences with chapters about the Corps history it might be justified. And I could hardly recount my experiences without mentioning my political motivations. Hence a very mixed sort of book! Congratulations on "The Pioneer" it is a very interesting magazine.

Best wishes - **Harry Ratner**

Recruiting later this year

IT IS great to see that the Regiment continues to go from strength to strength, I only wish that I was still serving. The new look magazine is great and I think I can say on behalf of the rest of the old and bold, very well done.

If any Ex-Pioneers want employment, then the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be recruiting more Security Managers later this year and next year. If they would like further information or

details of the position then just drop me a line. Just had a look at the new website and it is great to see all the hard work that you and your son have put in. The site will be a hit with all us oldies.

Take care and thanks again for keeping the spirit of the Pioneer going.

Gary Thompson
Regional Security Manager, British Embassy Amman, (Abdoun, PO Box 87, Amman 11118, Jordan)

Sorry about my tumbling

ONCE AGAIN I have the opportunity to thank you for your support to 3 'Old Codgers' in arranging transport to and from St David's Barracks.

I am sorry about my tumbling act which wasn't very clever and required the alertness and assistance from some very agile soldiers. Some say I did it to get a print-out in your famous Newsletter. All I can say is thanks to everyone concerned and I hope it is not an annual occurrence. Les Rowley said later to his mates "Did you notice how George kept his hand on his wallet all the time?". I never did like him anyway!

We three musketeers Hughie Rooney, Bill Sears and myself enjoyed the weekend and met many old friends to converse with at

all times. May I also thank some of the regular Army soldiers who assisted us with our luggage as climbing stairs is not our forte these days.

I must not forget to thank the charming lady as she ensured we were safely transported to our billets after the function.

May I also thank all the senior officers who gave us permission to use the barracks for our Annual Reunion and Memorial Service.

Yours in comradeship - **George Pringle**
P.S. Norman, the reunion to be held in July 2009 is the 70th anniversary of the formation of the Pioneer Corps except when I was conscripted into the Army it was then known as Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC).

New photos



■ Burma Section Passout Parade, June 1963

Picture: Frank Berry

THE Newsletter which took over from the Corps Magazine is becoming a classic with the introduction of actual accounts of those who served in all forms of the Pioneers.

I enclose a CD with some photographs that cover from 1963 through to 1974/75, hope that you can make use of them.

It is with regret that I am unable to

attend the Reunions now due to an increase in medical problems, but I am in contact with Frank (Paddy) Lyle and Dave Pearsall.

Along with your son, keep up the good work. **Frank Berry**

(Ed Note: thanks for the photographs, they have been added to the library)

Good Hangover

JUST A short message to say thank you for all your hard work you put in over the corps weekend.

The new look magazine is great and I think I can say on behalf of the rest of the old and bold, very well done.

It was good to see some old friends that I have not seen since the 1980's and I know without you the weekend would never get

off the ground thank you for your dedication to the Royal Pioneer Corps and all who have served.

I'm still sporting a good hangover so it must have been a hell of a do.

Well mate going back to Afghanistan soon so stay safe and hope to make it again sometime.

Dougie Durrant

Distinctive army no: 22812345

MANY THANKS for the latest copy of the Newsletter, which as usual is full of interesting articles and news.

As a point of interest I wonder if any other Pioneer has a more distinctive regimental number than mine? It is 22812345.

I am looking forwards to another interesting reunion meeting in July, which should be a great event.

Your assistance and hard work in organising everything is very much appreciated. Best wishes - **Maurice Grange**

Derby Draw overtook by the crunch

I AM sorry to have to return Derby Draw tickets, but as I am on pension things are a bit tight, what with rent, council tax and utility bills it doesn't leave much to play with.

I would still like the Magazine sending, it gets better every issue.

Sincerely Yours, - **No name supplied**

(Ed note: thanks for your nice comments on the Newsletter, you do not have to buy tickets to receive this. It is appreciated that times are hard, if you are unable to sell the tickets just inform us and we will not send any more to you).

The Pioneer



■ PLEASE find enclosed winning tickets!!! All the best **Brian Hope**

■ MANY thanks for another great weekend. We look forward to next years reunion. Thanking you once again. **Mr & Mrs P Powell**

■ CAN I pass on my congratulations for a great corps weekend well done. **Kevin Ludkin**

■ THANKYOU for a remarkable weekend, it was great to see a lot of my old mates, and (don't tell them your name PIKE) some real veterans. All your hard work was very much appreciated by all, (and the band was fine). Hope to see you again **Gary Harding**

■ I WOULD appreciate if you could convey my thanks to all for their hard work at the weekend, I for one realize how much organisation is required and are very grateful to you and any support that you may have had for the end result. Thanks again I had a great time. **Paul Busby**

■ THE elusive mouse is hiding in the picture on page 48 middle right hand side. Love the magazine. See you in July. **Bob Setterfield**

■ I JUST wanted to write and thank you for a really great weekend. I can only guess how much work, on your part, it took to make it so good. Would you also give a big thank you to all ranks of 23 Pioneer Regt. I'm now looking forward to next year, thank you so much. **Dennis Gimes**

■ MARGARET Thorne here just to thank you very much for sending me the Corps Magazines they took me back. I would also like to thank you from all my family for mentioning Rick in one of these, it was very important for us all to let the Corps know it had lost another brother. **Margaret Thorne and family**

■ ONCE again you did us proud, the whole weekend was excellent. **Gary McQueen**

■ I WOULD like to take this opportunity to say thank you for such an enjoyable weekend and for finding me accommodation at such short notice. Thank you for the hard work that you put into the weekend and for making it an enjoyable experience. **John Hatfield**

come on, send us a mail...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC
St David's Barracks
Graven Hill
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or email us at:
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

Tragedy of the Lancastria

First published in The Pioneer, issue 11, dated 2 June 1947



Report: Major AGW Tonkin
Picture: Supplied

THE sinking of the 16,000 ton Cunard White Star liner "Lancastria" on the 17th June 1940, has been truly described as the greatest sea tragedy of all time and, to the best of my knowledge, no official record concerning it has been published. Indeed, although the facts of her sinking were immediately known to the Germans, the news of her loss was not made public in this country until 26th July 1940.

At the time of the occurrence I was serving as the one and only subaltern with 46 Coy AMPC, commanded by Maj DG Carr, and Capt (later Lt Col, commanding 6 Group) RS Sim MBE as 2nd in command. We had left Rouen on the 8th June, presumably for evacuation, but we quickly received instructions to take up a position of defence at le Neubourg, the defence consisting of 46 Coy AMPC, plus one French 75 and a couple of machine guns! However, we got away from there and reached Lisieux and eventually arrived at Nantes.

My memories of Nantes are twofold, one of amazement that the town appeared to be carrying on in the same manner as if the Germans were still the other side of the Maginot line and the other a grudging appreciation of the efficiency of the Base Cashier who succeeded in getting my account at Cox's debited with 500 francs, which I had drawn as late as the 14th June!

On the following day, at about an hours' notice, we proceeded to an airfield near St Nazaire and there we hung about until the next evening when we, at last, received orders to march to the docks. A tender was just loading when I brought the Company alongside, only to be told that it was practically full and there were no more going out that night. I managed to squeeze 1 Sergeant and 15 ORs on-board and they at least were saved the catastrophe of the following day.

We camped out on the quay that night

and were on the first tender in the morning. Many other tenders quickly followed and it was not long before the "Lancastria" had between 5,000 and 6,000 on board. Even so we still remained at anchor although enemy planes made two reconnaissance flights over us in the early afternoon.

When the actual attack was made, at about 3.45pm, I had just gone to my cabin which I was sharing with my OC, so I have never been able to confirm or refute the very general impression that the bomb came down through the ship's funnel. The force of the explosion was certainly terrific and completely spoilt two very good whiskeys and sodas which I had just poured out! The ship almost immediately took a heavy list and on making my way forward I found it was impossible to do anything as the water was pouring in and the place an absolute shambles. The loss of life from the explosion alone must have been very heavy. I then made contact with Capt Sim (as he then was) and CSM (later Major) FW Hall. The latter had the bad luck to get a dislocated ankle, but we were able to get him to the upper deck. By this time the ship was sinking rapidly (I believe she went down within 20 minutes of being hit), and the three of us took to the water.

I made for an overturned life boat some little distance away and thanks to the help of a Sergeant, who was already there, I was able to clamber on to it, but the thick oil on the water made swimming nearly impossible and doubtless contributed to the loss of life.

The enemy plane was still hanging around, machine gunning men in the water. Fortunately, the arrival of a RAF patrol drove him off. I would like to pay particular tribute to the excellent morale of the men who were in the water with me for over an hour, and the rescue work carried out by the small French drifters and our own destroyers was indeed splendid.

I was eventually picked up by the destroyer "Highlander" and never shall I forget the wonderful kindness of the Senior Service. They could not do enough for us.

The total loss on the "Lancastria" was subsequently given me by a Staff Officer, who was on board, as 3,300.

In my own Company the loss was approximately 50 per cent, and I believe this fairly general.

On returning to England I was asked, by the GHQ, 2nd Echelon, to submit a report of the occurrence to War Office, and on referring to my copy I find that the following AMP Coys, in addition to my own, were said to have been on board: 28, 50, 62, 67, 73 (of which Major (Later Lt Col) JH Courage was OC), 75 and 108.

In endeavouring to place on my record my recollections of this tragic event I would ask the indulgence of those of my readers who were also on that ill-fated ship and whose knowledge and memories of the affair are probably far better than my own.

The following units lost numbers shown:

Base Depot	6
HQ Labour Centre	1
Mauritius Company	1
16 Company	1
26 Company	1
32 Company	1
39 Company	6
40 Company	2
43 Company	1
46 Company	86
50 Company	92
52 Company	1
53 Company	39
61 Company	1
62 Company	3
63 Company	2
66 Company	3
67 Company	5
68 Company	1
73 Company	92
75 Company	35
82 Company	6
104 Company	1
108 Company	10
115 Company	1
208 Company	1
233 Company	1

TOTAL 400 ■

Smokey Joes

Part I of a soldier's experience of life in wartime smokescreen companies



Report: EK Bradley
Picture: RPC Archive

THIS is the story of one man's war - mine. Any reader looking for heroic tales of derring-do in the face of a ruthless enemy should read something more heart stirring.

Initially, my story concerns the bringing together of three hundred men from all walks of life (one third of them were not even British) and the trials and tribulations suffered before they were molded into an efficient Smokescreen Company of the Pioneer Corps.

From there my tale proceeds to the forming of a Smoke Mobile Company, but this time a little nearer the action: at times we were almost as big a menace as the enemy. We proceed then to Holland and Belgium where the buzz bombs and V2s had made us redundant and, as a consequence, we were re-mustered as Labour Companies. Finally, it was Germany where, in the aftermath of war, we helped supervise the movement of those countless thousands of slave labourers who had been sealed up in Festung Deutschland throughout the war.

My first reaction on being transferred to the Pioneer Corps was one of shame and indignation. It didn't take too long for me to realize however that many of my fellow Pioneers were better men, and soldiers, than I would ever be and certainly no worse than those I had left behind in the RASC.

My second reaction was an acceptance of the situation. Finally, however, I reached the stage where I felt that I was as good as any other soldier, in fact a darn sight better than some I had seen slovening around our towns and cities.

I would like to make it clear that not all Pioneers had it as relatively easy as I. There were Pioneer Companies in every theatre of the war; they were in France before Dunkirk, in North Africa, Italy and Burma, not forgetting the European campaign from D Day onwards. On all those fronts they served with distinction: the Royal prefix wasn't dished out with the rations, it was earned.

To avoid any possible embarrassment some of the names have been changed, nevertheless, I am certain that many of the characters will recognize themselves and it is to them, and all the men I served with, and under, that I extend my fondest salutations.

We may not have been heroes, reluctant or otherwise, but we served to the best of our ability, and that's the nub of it.

Chapter 1

Acaster Malvis was a fighter station a few miles from York. It was September 1941 and I was employed there as a steel erector's mate. I must surely have been the only steel erector's mate employed by Babcock and Wilcox who was afraid of heights; so I suppose I was fortunate in the fact that the blister hangars I was helping to erect only reached about twenty feet at their highest point. Funny, I thought, how I can walk a nine inch wide scaffold board with ease when it is only five feet from the ground, yet the same board assumes the width of a clothes pole when it reaches twenty feet. My main concern was whether the job would be completed and I would be transferred to another site, involving the scaling of tall buildings and chimneys, before I was called to the colours. A letter from my parents eliminated that worry and I worked my notice prior to spending a few

days at home before my induction into the Army, safe in the knowledge that all airborne troops were volunteers.

An early end to hostilities due to my call up was knocked on the head however when a second letter from the military authorities arrived to inform me that I need not report to the Fifth Training Battalion, RASC at Matlock Bath in Derbyshire until the thirteenth of November. Five more weeks of freedom was a nice thought of course, but I was skint, so the only answer to my financial insecurity was to get another job. I reported that same day to the Labour Exchange. The counter clerk sent me to a local builder who told me to report to his Foreman who would set me to work the following day helping to lay a three inch layer of concrete on the flat roof of a department store as a shield against incendiary bombs. The store was the largest in town, also the highest, at least sixty feet. "Roll on my call up" became my constant cry. Five weeks later I was reduced to the lowest form of animal life - a Private in the British Army.

I saw the needle go into the arm of the man immediately in front of me in the queue. "Bloody hell" he half shouted "That hurt". "Hello," I thought, "it looks as though I have competition for the Coward's Trophy," and I stepped forward one pace to receive my TAB jab, with a fresh hypodermic I noticed. I had done the poor lad an injustice however, as later events were to prove.

It was our first day in the Army. We had performed all the usual chores associated with newly inducted recruits like drawing a rifle and bayonet, a uniform, toilet items and eating irons; we sent our civilian clothes home in untidy parcels and we each filled a palliasse with clean straw

prior to claiming a bed space on the wooded floor of an old building called the Fishpond: so named because of the stone tanks outside stocked with goldfish.

"Because of the TAB inoculations you have all received, the next forty-eight hours are your own" announced the Sergeant. "But don't get any ideas, the Navy get no time off because they get their TAB in two separate whacks; you lot have had the full dose and you'll know all about it in a couple of hours, so take my advice and get your heads down."

I had pulled up with a lad from Middlesbrough and we decided to ignore the Sergeant's advice and slip into the NAAFI canteen for a cup of tea and a sandwich, later to be called a char and a wad, but that was when we had become old soldiers, all of seven days hence. Once we had finished our snack and established that the NAAFI girls were at least thirty years old, and what eighteen year old soldier wants to chat up an old woman? We started playing a game of snooker. Halfway through the frame I began to shiver and found some difficulty in holding the cue. I looked at my new found mate Ginger and saw that he was having the same trouble, so back to our billet we crawled and just about made it into our respective flea-pits. I don't know about Ginger, but I remember very little about that particular period other than the Sergeant calling us at the end of the statutory forty-eight hours.

The following day, after eight hours square bashing in our new boots, we line up again for an ATS injection and a vaccination. We were all quite elated afterwards when the Sergeant informed us that if we were successful in passing our four weeks training we would be awarded seven days leave. What a carrot to dangle before the donkey! We bashed that square something rotten; never before, or since, have I seen such an enthusiastic band of men, myself included. My elation however was to be short lived.

The notice board displaying daily orders informed us that all recruits whose surname began with A, B or C should report to the dentist the following day. I was not looking forward to the trip as I had a large double root under my gum, the result of a butchered extraction two years previously, and my fertile imagination went to town as I pictured the scene of carnage as the Dentist hacked and slashed at my gums in an effort to extract the offending half molar.

I had only been in the chair three minutes and I was wondering when he was going to finish his examination and start operating when he stopped whatever he was doing to ask if he was hurting me. "No Sir" I replied. "Then why are you pulling such a face? "Just in case you do Sir," I replied. He laughed heartily and presented me with my large clawed root. "Alright, you can go," he said. "The rest of your teeth are good, look after them." I left the surgery in a mild stupor, wondering how he could have removed that vicious tooth stump in three minutes flat without me feeling the slightest twinge of pain.

I must say that in countless visits to various Dentists throughout my time in the Army, whether for fillings or the odd extraction, I never ever experienced any pain.

The next few days saw us involved in the usual military bustle; when we weren't letting Australia know with our boots that we were still there we were in the barrack room indulging in a mad orgy of spit and

polish. Our odd periods of recreation were governed by our pockets. Two shillings a day hardly allowed us to paint the town red, especially after we had purchased boot polish, button polish, blanco, razor blades, toothpaste, plus the compulsory haircut – barrack room damages came later. In any case we were too exhausted to indulge in extra curricular activities other than the odd game of snooker and the inevitable char and wad in the canteen.

Came the twelfth day in my role as a protector of the realm and the large scab which had formed over my vaccination was knocked off during an unarmed combat session to reveal what looked for all the world like a bullet hole in my left upper arm: the fact that I was left handed hadn't helped. I went on parade the next morning with all the symptoms of a dose of flu and the feeling that a steel band was being slowly tightened around my head. I seemed to be going through the motions of rifle drill at a distance as though it was someone else shouting "One two three, one two three, one" as we executed slope arms, present arms, fix bayonets and all the other military drill movements we were required to master before being considered competent enough to face the vicious Hun in combat.

The big lad who had complained of the pain experienced whilst receiving an injection on our first day was in the same rank as me but two men to the right. The Sergeant brought us to attention and the big lad suddenly fell flat on his face in a dead faint. "Fall out two men and take him to the MI Room" bawled the Sergeant who had no doubt experienced many such incidents. "There goes his seven days leave," I thought. Two hours later I was slow enough in my response to a command from the Sergeant to attract his attention. He stood in front of me, staring into my eyes; he was a strict but very fair NCO, certainly not one of the military bully boys I had heard about, but never seen. "Take this man's rifle" he ordered the man next to me. "Now remove your webbing and battle-dress blouse lad" he said to me. "Roll up your left shirt sleeve," he added, and I did to reveal my festering bullet hole. "Fall out and report to the MI Room lad," he commanded. I remember walking into the Medical Inspection Room where a Captain in the RAMC looked at my arm. I also recall climbing two steps of an Army ambulance, and that was all until I woke up two days later in an Army hospital, or CRS as it was called, meaning Camp Reception Station.

I awoke to the gentle touch of a VAD Nurse dusting my arm with powder and I felt as though I had indulged in a mammoth binge the night before. There were twelve beds in the ward, each of them save one occupied by a recruit whose vaccination, like mine, had caused a high fever, or whose injection had produced rather severe side effects; the exception was a soldier from Stockton with a badly poisoned thumb which had swollen to twice its normal size. The man in the next bed to mine was the one who had collapsed on the square and when I saw his arm I could understand why; from the elbow to the shoulder his arm was inflated like a balloon and the skin had turned a dirty green. He must have been injected with a blunt or dirty needle, although he was never told as much.

Doctor's rounds were conducted by a Captain Jones, a gentleman in every sense of the word. He looked at the hole in my

arm. "Beautiful!" he exclaimed. I told him that my brother in the Navy and my sister in the ATS had suffered the same post vaccination symptoms, as had my father in the Army during the First World War "If theirs took as well as yours then your family will never contract smallpox," he declared and moved off with his instruments to the patient with the septic thumb; one quick stroke of the Doctor's scalpel and he was out, and out of his pain too.

All twelve of us were discharged after two weeks, but not before the Doctor had written in our AB64, Part One, - "Two weeks military training only" and signed – Captain Jones, RAMC. I was not to realize the significance of that notation until much later in my Army career. Bang went our seven days leave of course. I suppose we could have appealed to our Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Gates, who, rumour had it, was the Gate in that well known product Cow and Gate Milk Food; others said the names had been transposed. I never even saw him, although at a later date questions were asked in Parliament about a Lieutenant Colonel Gates who had instructed men under punishment to respond to the sound of "Hi de hi" with a loud "Ho de ho." The defaulters, doubling around the square with a pack full of sand on their backs did not respond too heartily to that military edict. I think he was promoted to full Colonel shortly afterwards. Well after all, there was a war on.

We were transferred to Fulford Barracks in York and by the middle of December we were moved again to a Command Supply Depot which had been established in an old airship hangar near the village of Barlow a few miles from Selby in Yorkshire. I was employed in the Supply Office and spent my long monotonous days computing the condiment rations for a division of troops in the area. It was the most boring job I had ever experienced, although if I had applied myself to the work, who knows, I may have been elevated to greater heights, perhaps even computing the tea, sugar and milk would not have been beyond the bounds of possibility! Fate decreed however that I was not destined for the higher echelons of food distribution in the RASC, or Aly Slops Cavalry as it was still called; the name originating from the First World War, when the bottles of sauce for general issue were labelled "Aly Slopers."

The powers that be, in their wisdom, had guessed, quite rightly as it turned out, that the Luftwaffe would be stepping up its bombing of the larger towns and cities of Britain, so that besides extra anti-aircraft guns and searchlights, it was decided to extend the defences of those areas by the addition of smokescreen cover. Thousands of men would be required to form Smokescreen Companies and we just happened to be available, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. We were being transferred to the Pioneer Corps; oh, the indignity of it all!

The draft left in the second week of January; I was held back for seven days for some reason, since forgotten, and I left the camp, alone, safe in the knowledge that my successor, no matter how thick, would be unable to match my incompetence so far as the dishing out of salt and pepper to the troops was concerned.

With rifle and full kit I was dropped off by a lorry at Selby station where I entrained for York. I then boarded a train for Birmingham and I changed again for Wolverhampton where I left the station, eight hours after starting out, to be

'Eight hours square bashing in our new boots'

confronted by a six inch layer of frozen snow. It was the third week of January 1942, the worst winter of the war; I had nothing to eat for ten hours so I was anxious to find a warm billet. "Drill Hall, Cocker" answered the native in his strange accent. "Strite oop Doodley Strite, across Princess Square and yow there riley". After a five minute freezing trudge through the blackout I entered the Drill Hall where I was confronted by the Company Sergeant Major of an infantry mob. "10665997 Private Bradley reporting for duty, Sir" I announced. He looked at my cap badge. "There's no Service Corps here lad, you've got the wrong place, it's West Park Drill Hall you want," he said. "It's turned seven, too late to find the place now. Go to the cookhouse and get something to eat, tell em I sent you, then get your head down on the floor here with the lads till Reveille." I reported to the Corporal Cook who gave me sausage and mash, bread and marge and a mug of hot tea. I can almost taste that meal now, to a hungry young man it was a rapast. By ten o'clock I got my head down, and with my kitbag as a pillow, a borrowed palliasse and two blankets, I was out to the world until six o'clock the following morning.

I made some enquiries; apparently the West Park Drill Hall was not on a bus route so I stood opposite my previous temporary abode with no particular plan in mind, hoping, I suppose, that someone, somehow, would recognize my plight and help me. An empty coal lorry stopped behind a fifteen hundredweight Army truck which looked as though it had broken down. I asked the coalman the way to West Park Drill Hall and he told me to "Op oop". He negotiated the Army truck and ten minutes later I was reporting to the Orderly Room Sergeant of 823 Smoke Company, Pioneer Corps

I was billeted in the Baths Hall. A wooden floor over the swimming bath accommodated enough beds to sleep about two hundred men, whilst the "newer" Baths Hall next door served as our cookhouse and dining room. The remainder of the men, making up a Company of three hundred, were accommodated in an old church hall a mile away.

Our operational smokescreen duties depended upon the moon so that after darkness fell during a lunar period we would be herded onto old buses and driven to the outskirts of Wolverhampton, the location varying depending on the direction of the wind. The town was surrounded by smoke pots standing at intervals of about twenty yards, each pot resembling a larger version of the old Harper paraffin heater. The tank filled with diesel oil, had a tubular metal chimney about 9 feet tall which was capped by a removable cowl. The idea was that in the event of an air raid we would run along the roads firing our flint guns into the aperture of each tank which was primed with paraffin soaked waste. It was a cold, dirty, lung congesting job when we "Lit Up", although that was hardly ever in anger due to most of the air raid warnings being false alarms as the Luftwaffe were looking for richer pickings in Birmingham only twenty miles away. Having said that, however, I still fail to understand why Wolverhampton was never paid the same attention by German bombers as some other British towns; after all, from a war production point of view Wolverhampton had the Boulton Paul aircraft factory where the well known Defiant night fighters was built. The Villiers Company were making torpedoes and there were various smaller Companies

in and around the town who were making no small contribution to the war effort. We knew there was a decoy timber and hardwood town built not too far away: I wonder if it received the bombs meant for Wolverhampton? Perhaps, one day, someone will write about the part played by those decoy towns scattered around the British countryside and whether or not they justified the time, material and labour spent on them; or is their mention still covered in 1986 by the Official Secrets Act?

Sitting in an old bus parked in the windswept countryside for more than twelve hours every night in near Arctic conditions was no sinecure believe me. The first couple of hours were not too bad as we amused ourselves by indulging in a little community singing, usually led by the liberal sprinkling of Southern Irishmen aboard. Even today, when hearing the strains of that lovely old Irish song "The Mountains of Morne" issuing from the radio. I automatically think of Long Johns, leather Jerkins and pilots helmets. No. I'm not going bonkers in my old age. You see we had a Commanding Officer, a Major Willis, who would, I am sure, have given his right arm if he thought the sacrifice would alleviate our hardship. He must have scoured the country to provide a batch of pilots helmets, circa 1918, and they were most welcome, especially with the ear flaps pulled down; some of those singers were rubbish anyway!

Several of the Irishmen in 823 Company were deserters from the Irish Army who had become bored serving a neutral country and had come to England to see some of the action. They were very smart, competent soldiers and most of them attained the rank of NCO. The British Government, no doubt with the IRA troubles fresh in their minds, were not taking any chances, consequently, recruits hailing from Eire were until later in the war, inducted into the Pioneer Corps and their dreams of action went up in smoke, so to speak!

Another ethnic group in the Pioneer Corps were the Jews. They were all refugees from Hitler's anti-Semitic tyranny, although the manner in which they had been treated since their initial landing in Britain led one to believe they were all sympathizers to the Nazi cause. I suppose the only excuse for the British Government's poor treatment of the Jews was its almost obsessional fear that there may have been a Fifth Column hiding within the hordes of refugees entering the country. History was to prove however that the number of Nazis involved in espionage within the UK during the war was negligible, although that is easily written with hindsight.

All the Jews I met in uniform were pleasant, intelligent men, many of them qualified in both the arts and sciences. The Pioneer Corps Regimental Holding Unit near Prestatyn in North Wales for example had formed a first class orchestra composed almost entirely of Jewish musicians; whilst one man in our Section, besides being a fine mathematician, spoke five languages fluently; yet they never aired their superior knowledge or questioned military authority. I don't know about their fighting ability as, like my own, it was never put to the test.

Most people were, and probably still are, under the mistaken impression that the Pioneer Corps was made up from an assortment of semi-cripples, illiterates and nut cases; we even gave ourselves the rather derogatory title of "Chunkies" by

substituting Pineapple Chunks for Pioneer Corps. We had the odd couple of neurotics and psychopaths of course, what branch of the Army didn't? I understand there were a few PC Companies whose members were never issued with firearms, although I had no actual experiences of them personally. The only "Nutter" I ever came across was in the same Section at Wolverhampton. Johnnie's moods, like our smokescreen duties, were destined by the lunar periods so that his behaviour ranged between a kind of childish tetchiness and sheer aggression, depending on what stage the moon was going through. I well remember him smashing in the wooden panels of a door with his bare fist and the resultant damage to his hands which required hospital treatment.

Only one man could humour our "Loony" and that was Jimmy Cook. A big, overweight, genial Private, he had both personality and the power of leadership. The very mention of mental hospitals would send Johnnie into a violent rage, whilst "Trick Cyclists", as he called them, were absolute anathema to him. Nevertheless Jim managed to talk Johnnie into it, providing that Jim accompany him to the Army mental hospital. That was the last we saw of Johnnie and I must say we all breathed a sigh of relief. Jimmy Cook was promoted later in the war to Sergeant and no doubt ended it as a CSM; if he didn't then he should have been.

During the non lunar periods we were kept busy on various assignments. Every morning we would parade in the street to be detailed off in batches. So many men would be sent off in lorries to inspect the hundreds of smoke pots in and around the town; any damaged pots would be taken to our repair depot, established in an old farmyard, whilst the remainder would have their tanks topped up with diesel oil sludge. Another squad of men would be numbered off to work the railway goods yard where a wintry day spent unloading heavy slabs of snow covered pig iron was guaranteed to daunt all but the stoutest hearted. My favourite work however was during the harvest period when we could volunteer to act as labourers for some of the bigger farmers in the area. The powers that be decreed that we be paid the princely sum of one shilling and sixpence (7 and a half

'It was a cold, dirty, lung congesting job'

p) per day; refreshment money it was called. Our willingness to volunteer was motivated, not by the money so much, as the fact that the area was swarming with Land Army Girls who tended to spoil us, besides, all the time we were wielding pitchforks we were dodging guard and piquet guards.

The cushiest job however, and the daftest, was the "Corn Patrol". Every day for four or five weeks harvest time squads of men armed with rifle and bayonet were detailed to patrol all the cornfields in the area. Apparently, word had come through the European grapevine that Hitler intended bringing Britain to her knees at least, or at most achieve an early victory, by destroying our cereal crops through the use of poisonous airborne sprays. So far as I recall we received no instructions regarding the kind of action we were expected to take should we be confronted with any evidence of crop spraying; nor do I remember anyone ever questioning the intelligence, or otherwise, of such operations. The general consensus of opinion was, I suppose, that if you cop a cushy number you should keep quiet about it.

I also volunteered, during that summer of 1942, to spend three weeks under canvas with forty nine other volunteers in a large field near Assorts Common, Upper Weland near Malvern in Worcestershire with a Company of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment who were responsible for feeding us. The purpose of our presence there was to carry out certain building work within Malvern College, including the erection of a wire fence around that part of the building occupied by a branch of the Civil Service.

The work was pleasant enough, the weather was beautiful, but the food, whilst being well enough cooked, was insufficient to satisfy our healthy appetites; in fact it was obvious that we were not receiving our full rations. Consequently, we made a complaint through the officer in charge of our detachment, a young Second Lieutenant whose name escapes me. We hardly expected to get anywhere with our complaint, nor were we disappointed. What we did get was a lecture from the Royal Warwickshire duty officer reminding us that we were at war against a vicious enemy whose U boats were sinking our merchant ships faster than we could replace them. He concluded his stirring Churchillian oration with the immortal words, "Thank your lucky stars you are here, in the middle of this green and pleasant land. Bear in mind that you could be much worse off – in North Africa for instance, eating bloody sand sandwiches". He then retired to the officers mess tent where, according to one of our Chunky news men, the Officers dined from a white clothed table and drank white wine and port. No doubt the thieving cooks were too busy redistributing our food around the local populace to hear the buzz of resentment issuing from our tents.

With certain exceptions, including Malvern, I found Army food quite adequate both in quantity and quality; in fact I would suggest that the vast majority of NCOs and Other Ranks serving in the British Army during the war, having been brought up in the aftermath of World War One and a worldwide depression, like myself, had never been fed so well, certainly better than the millions of civilians existing on their wartime rations.

During non lunar periods, and when we were not bringing our agricultural expertise to bear outside the precincts of the town, we would spend our free evenings in Wolverhampton. Promenading was the name of the game, there was very little else we could do. With a maximum of ten bob (50p) in our pockets, and that was on pay day, we could hardly paint the town red. Instead, we paraded up and down Dudley Street chatting up those members of the opposite sex, who were also parading, in the hope that they would be chatted up and, in the absence of a few dozen tall, dark and handsome commando sergeants, they had to put up with us as a very poor second best.

I well remember a particular evening when a pal and I were standing outside the Hippodrome gazing at the photographs of the stars appearing there that week. We were skint, with not even a penny each for a cup of tea in the Forces canteen above Burtons. We spotted the reflection of an officer in the glass and to avoid saluting we assumed a more than passing interest in the photographs. The officer halted directly behind us, "Hello lads, have ye no got anything better to do?" It was our

Lieutenant Hamilton, a firm but kindly Scot, with, if I remember right, an MC from the First War. We both turned sharply and issued a smart salute apiece. I have forgotten our answer, but I do recall him giving us half a crown each (12 and a half pence). "Enjoy yourself lads," he said, and off he went before we could thank him as profusely as we would have liked. Perhaps it was just as well, as the sight of two soldiers grovelling at an officer's feet might have attracted some attention!

Lieutenant Hamilton was only one of several officers I served under in the army who lived up to the requirement of being not only officers, but gentlemen. Our Officer Commanding, Major Willis, could, most certainly, be included in that category.

The half crown each was well spent. I can't recall the exact price of everything, but I know we managed two tickets to the "Gods" in the Hippodrome, a packet of Woodbines and two halves of Mitchell and Butlers ale each, and we were still left with enough for a char and a wad apiece. If wealth is related to ones needs, then we were pools winners that night.

Mention of the Hippodrome also brings back memories, this time of a girl (no, not those kind of memories!). I had the night off, but my pal hadn't, so, with the price of a ticket in the "Gods", and two-pence over, I decided to see, and hear, my favourite singer, Issy Bonn; he was a London Jew who could have put these modern group "Howlers" to shame!

I sat there, suspended in space, watching the opening tumblers, then the conjurer (the world's worst sleight of hand man could fool anyone from that distance). I extracted the last of my Woodbines from its crumpled packet and, like a scene from a Hank Janson novel, a hand reached over, flicked a lighter, and lit my cigarette. I looked around and in the half light I saw the face of a very attractive brunette, about eighteen I guessed. "I only came to see Bonn," she whispered huskily. "Me too," I said, and we sat back to enjoy our favourite singer's rendering of "Someone's Rocking My Dreamboat".

Two hours and two of her cigarettes later we left the theatre. She was still enthusing about Issy Bonn as we entered the little amusement arcade at the far end of Dudley Street. In an effort to impress her as a big spender, I squander my last two pennies on the pinball machine, then I offered to take her home which, after an hour probing through the blackout, we reached.

"From now on I'll always think of Rocking My Dreamboat as our song," she declared as we stood outside her front door. The thought crossed my mind that she

"Lt Hamilton was not only an officer but a gentleman!"

had only known me for three hours and here she was, talking like a wife. I was on guard! She then proceeded to relate a hair raising tale of the sexual exploits of her brother in law and elder sister. The verbal pictures she painted were so explicit that it became obvious to me that she was either a highly imaginative sex obsessed liar, or a very efficient peeping Tom. I was given no time to find out which however, as the front door opened and a large looming shadow commanded "In".

I have never had a sense of direction, in fact if someone turned me round three times in my own back garden I'd be lost; so I stood there in the inky blackness trying to decide which way to point my nose.

"So deep is the night, no moon tonight" I was whistling as I bumped into the unlit street lamp. "Of course there's no bloody

moon tonight" I mumbled to myself, "The only time there's a sodding moon out you're working!" Three hours later I stumbled into the billet, swearing to restrict all further encounters with the opposite sex to the hours of daylight.

As mentioned previously, it was bitterly cold on smokescreen duty during the winter lunar periods of 1941/42. So cold in fact that we almost welcomed the wail of the air raid siren, whether true or false. It's true that we hardly felt like war heroes running up and down the frosty roads igniting the primed smoke pots with our flint guns, but the bustle did take the ice from our guts. It mattered not (except to the asthmatic few) that we were enveloped in clouds of thick black choking smoke for two or three hours, the fact was, the blood was pounding round our veins; we were almost alive again!

The rule was that following those infrequent occasions when we "lit up" a hot bath was forthcoming. By the time we had returned to our billet we were cold, black and hungry. Recent arrivals to the Company would be acting out their "Western" charades, like negro cowboys, "Ai'm a callin' you Kincade" and suchlike challenges were issued as they drew their flint pistols. Any "Old Hand" subjected to such humour would threaten the offender with the promise of a white eye; the colour changing to black once we had all soaked ourselves for the allotted fifteen minutes per man.

I particularly recall one man who would wash his hands and face but never get into the bath; such eccentricities are quickly spotted by a Company of men living in such close proximity to each other and it wasn't long before he was given a good scrubbing.

Freezing, singing and the constant stamping of feet in those old buses was not to spread over into the winter of 1942/43. Our caring OC, Major Willis, had used his influence in high places to procure several prefabricated huts which were erected at intervals around our smoke circuit. Each hut had an iron combustion stove and an allocation of coke, which was fed into it as into the jaws of a hungry wolf, until the whole unit, including half the chimney piping, glowed like a furnace. With a mess tin of hot soup each and another of cocoa plus a thick wedge of bread and marge, all delivered at 2 am, life indeed was becoming more tolerable.

That was in the winter yet to come however. Meanwhile, during that summer and autumn we spent our days farming, loading pig iron, in fact any kind of work demanding hard labour commensurate with low outlay.

Attached to our Company was a Sergeant of the Army Education Corps who was there presumably to pump some air into our educational vacuum. His main preoccupation however, whilst at the same time trying to teach us the difference between conical, cylindrical and zenithal projections, or the geographical position of the Antipodes, was his more than passing interest in the younger more handsome members of the class.

What the less literate in our ranks thought of Mercator's ability to portray the image of a round world on a flat map could be gauged by the amount of snoring emanating from the rear seats so that within a couple of months our erudite lecturer was removed to more distant latitudes, perhaps even the Antipodes, and he was replaced by one of our own senior NCOs.

Sergeant Jenkins was a Welshman and a Communist, his politics having been

inspired, no doubt, by a hard poverty stricken life spent in the land of the leek between two world wars. He was also an excellent teacher, his main subject being gas and the protection of our eyes, skin and lungs from same. There was a limit to that subject even to Sergeant Jenkins, or, as he was dubbed, "Gas" Jenkins. Consequently, in an effort to hold our interest, he would spill over into several other subjects in the knowledge of which he appeared to be adequately equipped.

"Gas" would stand on the stage, built at the end of what served as both our dining and school room, his ruler pointing to a large map of Europe pinned to the blackboard.

"Festung Europa" he declared, rapping his ruler against the toe of Italy loudly enough to wake up the back row to the fact that they hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about. "Fortress Europe, how are we going to breach it? You in the front row, what's your theory?" As I had no intention of breaching Festung Europa if I could possibly avoid it I had never ever given the subject any thought.

Nevertheless, I managed to flannel my way through Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia and Austria in an attempt to batter down Deutschland's back door rather than the conventionally accepted front door of France and the Low Countries.

"Plausible, but highly unlikely" he opinioned. "You there, Private Goldberg, you're from middle Europe, have you any theories on how we're going to conquer the Kraut?"

Private Goldberg was a quiet, intelligent, thinking man who, for reasons of his own,

treated the subject far more seriously than most of us. "Invade Sardinia and Sicily from North Africa Sergeant", he answered. "Build up two invasion fleets, one to attack Italy, the other the South of France." Gas assumed his thinking man's pose, "And what will the Germans be doing whilst we're building up those forces?" he questioned. "So long as the Allies ensure massive air superiority Sergeant, very little; however, I'm only a Private, what would you suggest?" I swear there was no hint of sarcasm in his voice.

Sergeant Jenkins pulled back his shoulders, at the same time polishing the ruler against the pocket holding his first field dressing. "I would attack Sicily from North Africa" he expounded; "Then" tapping the map in the correct location, "I would invade the toe of Italy with two armies, one forcing its way up the western side, the second up the east. At the same time I would prepare a main force in the south of England ready to invade Normandy once our other forces had established themselves in Italy."

What our Sergeant proposed was, in effect, what happened two years later, except that I failed to mention the American/French invasion of Southern France. May 1, Gas, over forty years later, mark you ninety nine out of a hundred for tactical planning!

Like the majority of our generation, my education had been sadly lacking. I left school on my fourteenth birthday well versed in the three R's and clutching a

reference from the Headmaster to the effect that I was an intelligent boy who had been extremely unfortunate in not obtaining a free place to the local grammar school. The government of the day had imposed massive cuts in their education budget with a resultant reduction in the number of free places allowed (Rings a bell today somewhere).

I joined the crowded ranks of underpaid errand boys and tore around the posher parts of town on my hundredweight carrier bike delivering tailor made suits and sports jackets to the more fortunate and

sartorially elegant members of the populace. Eager and excited in the knowledge that at the end of my first week I would draw the princely wage of 6/6d (thirty two and a half pence) for sixty hours work (Did I hear some screaming idiot say "Those were the days!")

I joined the army even less educated than the day I left school, having forgotten most of my learning. I was therefore academically unqualified for any branch of the Service.

Neither did I qualify as a square bashing NCO, but for different reasons. I lacked the deep chest, square jaw and loud voice so necessary, I considered, to the acquisition of that Field Marshal's baton we were led to believe could be aspired to by dint of sheer hard work and intense interest. By no stretch of the imagination could I be considered handsome. Although presentable enough to attract perhaps a few members of the opposite sex, I was aware that what suited them did not necessarily

'I was promoted on Monday and charged on Wednesday'



suit the army. In short, I lacked the military bearing to be considered "NCO Material".

Armed with those facts of life there was no soldier more surprised than myself when I was given a stripe. Not that I was taken onto the establishment strength as a junior NCO may I hasten to add. No, it appeared our OC was in favour of encouraging likely candidates for promotion by uprating a couple of young hopefuls every so often to the exalted rank of acting. Local, unpaid Lance Corporal and, if they satisfied all his military requirements, they would be appointed to the establishment proper when vacancies occurred due to transfers.

My elevation to the ranks of the higher military echelons was to be of extremely short duration however, to be precise, three days.

I put my stripe up on a Monday and on the Wednesday following I was put in charge of that night's picquet, which meant being responsible for six men "guarding", with wooden sticks, our smoke pot repair depot based in an old disused farmyard situated two or three miles from Wolverhampton.

I posted the first two men on the gate whilst the rest of us moved into the Nissan hut to light the stove and sort out our rations for the next twelve hours, tea, sugar, tinned milk, bread, marge and a couple of large tins of pilchards.

We made up our double bunks and whilst the others sat around chatting I stood at the hut door surveying the weather. It was a blustery evening with just enough rain coming down from a thick black sky to suggest a rough night ahead. By the time the third pair of picquet sentries were relieved at midnight it was blowing a gale and the rain was belting down like oblique stair rods.

At about 12.30 am, or 0030 hours as the army would have it, I donned my gas cape and braved the storm to locate the two sentries. I found them sheltering in the tiny, leaky cabin we used as a dry toilet; they obviously preferred gassing to drowning. It was then, as I looked up to the sky, and had my eyeballs battered in the process, that I made my fatal mistake!

Looking at those two men huddled together, wet through and freezing cold in that stinking bog, I decided to send them back to the hut. After all, I considered, what self respecting Fascist agent would be abroad gathering cryptic data regarding the repair and maintenance of smoke pots on such a vile night, or, if bombing was the object how could we be located by the Luftwaffe through about tens miles of dense cloud. Besides, after such a bout of deep thinking I was tired, so we went back to the hut, stripped off to our underwear, called a temporary halt to the war and crashed down in our fleapits.

I was awakened from a deep untroubled slumber by what at first sounded like a distant roar, turning, ever so gradually, into a loud bellow which I recognized as a nearly human voice shouting "Turn out the Picquet". Raising my head my bleary eyes gradually focused on the most unpopular man in the Company and, standing alongside him, a firm contender for the same role, the Orderly Officer. For the purpose of this tale let me call them Sergeant Schweinhund and Lieutenant Pork.

The stove had gone out and I stood at the side of the bunk shivering violently in my vest and long johns. The rest of the picquet were standing by their own beds assuming the same posture.

I know the word harangue means a loud, noisy, public address or a vehement

speech. To my ear the word sounds like a cross between hanging and harassing. After Lieutenant Pork delivered his harangue I felt that the latter definition was more to the point and I was left with the distinct impression that the ringing of church bells to signify the invasion of Wolverhampton by the vicious Hun would be heard at any moment and it would be all down to me for allowing the picquet to crash their bones down in the middle of a storm.

Sergeant Schweinhund took a note of my name and number and six hours later my Army Form B252 was being read by the OC. Apparently, because I had been in charge of a stock picquet and not an armed guard, I was charged under Section 41 of Kings Rules and Regulations which, if I remember correctly, described my crime as conduct prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and military discipline. Consequently, instead of being shot at dawn against the drill hall wall by half a dozen myopic Chunkies, I was severely admonished by Major Willis and my stripe was taken away. "You are a young man who has much to learn about responsibility," were the Major's final words as I was marched out of the Company Office.

The German army was tearing through Russia, the Japs were continuing to spread their rising sun across the Far East, the Eight Army was experiencing setbacks in North Africa and I had lost my stripe. The situation did indeed look black for Britain!

It was New Year's Eve 1942 and I was drinking a pint of muddy beer in the makeshift bar set up at one end of our dining room to satisfy not only the thirst of those couples coming off the dance floor, but also the members of the Company who either could not dance, or, being masochists, were only there for the beer. I had carefully studied all the unescorted talent and decided to join the latter crowd.

The Company was holding its quarterly dance and this was my fourth visit. I was bored stiff and after an hour or so I decided that any more of that swill at 6d (two and a half pence) a pint would create a void in my stomach, as well as my pocket, so I jostled my way to the toilet just in time to see Corporal Carr's prostrate form being carried out by two Lance Corporals, his "appendage" lying limp outside his unbuttoned trousers. Privates Murphy and Donovan sauntered out buttoning their own trousers, at the same time assuming the role of concerned spectators.

It was common knowledge to all, other than those in authority, that Corporal Carr, who was hardly renowned for his tact and diplomacy, had incurred the wrath of those two burly Irish lads and they had sworn revenge. From evidence given by Corporal Carr later, it appeared that they had followed him into the toilet and, approaching him from the rear whilst he was in the process of discharging his recently imbibed ullage, they had kicked and belted him unconscious.

"No, Sir," Corporal Carr told the OC, "I didn't recognize my assailants, they never gave me the opportunity to see their faces, and they never spoke, Sir." "Case dismissed for lack of evidence," declared the Major.

We realized why the Corporal had failed to adjust his dress before leaving.

A week after that incident a rumour began to circulate around the Company to the effect that we were all being transferred to the South Coast. I welcomed the thought of a move; after all, I had been in

Wolverhampton for nearly a year and the nearest I had been to the War was lighting up smoke posts with my flint gun. Housewives were doing the same to their gas ovens every day in their kitchens!

Not that I had any big ideas on the part I would like to play in the War. All the men of courage had volunteered for RAF aircrew, Commandos, Airborne, Parachutists, etc. No, I was one of the couple of million men who steered clear of trouble, volunteered for nothing yet, nevertheless, accepted with a moan or a grin all the trials and tribulations that tended to beset the lowly soldier no matter how hard he tried to keep his head down.

If the truth were known, I would not have wanted to be a civilian again until the war was over. The rumour turned out to be only half true; only fifty men were on the draft, which included a couple of my mates, but not me. I contacted a Private Steel, who had no desire to leave the town as he was married to a local lass so, between us, we arranged with the CSM for me to take Steel's place.

Two days later, in full marching order, we left Wolverhampton station, almost a year to the day since I had arrived – our destination was Portsmouth.

I sometimes wonder what path my life might have taken if I had not volunteered for that draft. I can only guess. In the meanwhile, the moving finger wrote, and that was a fact.

We detrained at Portsmouth Town station and formed threes outside the main entrance as the sirens wailed out an air raid warning. In the twenty minutes it took for us to reach Victoria Barracks the all clear had gone and the warning sounded again as we marched through the main gate.

As last, I felt we were in the War!

After an hour spent drawing bedding and generally settling in we joined a long queue outside the cookhouse. We were hungry enough to eat a scabby horse, as they say. We did better than that; it was egg and chips, an absolute luxury in those days. I felt ever so slightly concerned, would questions be asked in Parliament when it was discovered that, as the result of a gross military error, three hundred "fit" men had been transferred to a convalescent home?

Back in the barrack room rumour had it that one man, after yaffling his egg and chips in double quick time, had donned spectacles and a false moustache then, assuming a crouching stance, he had shuffled up the queue again to draw a second helping. I can't vouch for the truth of the tale as I was not a witness; although I have no doubt that it actually happened. The War had created a huge melting pot of humanity and I had some strange bed fellows, including the son of a famous cough cure manufacturer who, incidentally, had a hacking cough and a self confessed house breaker who kept his hand in by dipping same into his mates' kitbags.

The following morning, on parade, we were addressed by our new OC who, rumour had it, had been a milkman in civvy life; so what, I thought. Perhaps he'll show a little more understanding of us working class than the usual run of the mill middle class ex bank managers, or the Hoorah Henry champers for brekkers types from the upper crust who used us peasants to further their ascent up the military ladder. Furthermore, I thought, ex milkman or not, the OC must have something going for him to achieve such a meteoric rise from Private to Major in less than three

'The Haslan as a mass of pipes, knobs, gauges and valves'

years.

"Welcome to 805 Company," he declared. Then went on to inform us that we would henceforth be known as 805 SM Company, Smoke Mobile that is. Half of us would be taught to drive and, in a fourteen day course, we would learn to unravel the mysteries of the internal combustion engine. The other half of the Company would be taught to operate the Haslan smoke producing machine which would be towed by the three ton Bedford lorry. Would be drivers were to attend the same course in the creation and maintenance of smoke, but at a later date.

The Major stressed the importance of Portsmouth in the general scheme of things, although he made no reference to the promised Second Front. Nevertheless, it was stirring stuff, so much so that most of the Company were still awake on their feet when he finished.

Came the next day and I found myself one of the "You's" in the "You, you and you" batch of "volunteers" selected for the impending driver mechanics course.

Four full days grinding along Southsea front in a three ton Bedford with a nerveless instructor sitting alongside, and a further three days labouring up Portsdown Hill towing a smoke trailer, plus the fact that I had not killed anyone in the process, and I was a qualified driver. The fact that I mastered the art of double declutching and reversing my trailer downhill onto a matchbox, even now, after all these years, never fails to amaze me.

The following seven days were spent in the classroom learning about induction, compression, power and exhaust; inlet and outlet manifolds, big ends and butterfly valves. Initially, however, we had the initials WOFLTB drummed into our heads. These initials stood for Water, Oil, Fuel, Lights, Tyres and Brakes, all of which a driver had to check before moving off proper.

The theory of the internal combustion engine I could assimilate, the practicalities remained a near mystery and, after passing the final examination, parrot fashion, I promptly forget the little I had learned. Forty four years later the only maintenance I am capable of carrying out on my own car is restricted to changing and cleaning the points and plugs and keeping the battery working; although I did, once, spend a full day carrying out an oil change!

After two months spent tearing around Cosham, Portchester, Fareham and back again to Pompey in our lorries and trailers we were sent in batches of two dozen to Compton Verney, a large mansion near Kineton in Warwickshire, where we spent ten days learning how to operate the Haslan smoke machine.

I can only describe the Haslan as a mass of pipes, knobs, gauges and valves contained about a twenty foot long trailer. Diesel oil was fed from a 500 gallon tank on the lorry itself and passed through all the above mentioned paraphernalia to the base of a huge cowed metal chimney at the rear end of the trailer. Smoke was produced by priming an aperture at the base of the chimney with paraffin soaked cotton waste after the outlet valve had been opened. The idea, I think, was that the oil would be shot up the chimney in a fine spray which would be converted into fine globules as it became warmer. By the time the globules reached the top of the chimney they had been converted into thick black smoke which emerged from below the cowl, as from the funnel of a destroyer protecting its convoy.

Those practical types who could prove

their mastery of all that plumbing by lighting up and producing good black smoke at their first attempt were, at the end of the course, awarded a Premier pass. My AB64 Part One shows that I received a pass, but minus the Premier.

By the end of April we were a fully trained Smoke Mobile Company lacking only a base from which to operate. The other half of Victoria Barracks was occupied by 846 SM Company which served, smoke-wise, the whole of Portsmouth and its environs. Our job was to protect Portsmouth from the other side of the harbour should the wind be blowing from the West. By basing us outside Gosport we could cover, given the right wind conditions, not only Portsmouth, but Gosport and the many Naval and Fleet Air Arm establishments around that town.

Towards that end, and in full marching order, with rifles at the slope, we marched down to the Portsmouth chain ferry and crossed over to Gosport prior to marching the three miles that separated us from our new home – Fort Brockhurst.

By the middle of the nineteenth century Lord Palmerston had decided that any threat of invasion by our then arch enemy, the French, would be initiated from the Cherbourg area; consequently, a ring of forts was built around Portsmouth to repel the Frog invaders. They were dubbed "Palmerston Follies", and Fort Brockhurst was one of them.

Approached by what was once a drawbridge spanning a deep moat was the keep, also surrounded by a moat. Separated from the keep by a large drill square were our barrack rooms set deep under the surrounding ramparts which, I mentally noted, made them almost bomb proof, their only "weak" points being the entrances which faced onto the square.

There was a NAAFI canteen situated at one side of the square, facing the keep and, after going through the usual settling in routine and the partaking of a makeshift meal, a pal and I decided to seek out whatever succour the NAAFI could offer a couple of weary squaddies.

We entered the canteen, which was quite large, with a small stage and a moth eaten snooker table at one end and an open bar at the other. The place was empty except for two Royal Engineers leaning on the counter chatting to two NAAFI girls dressed in their familiar blue uniforms.

I took one look at the shortest of the two girls, an attractive five foot two brunette, and, male chauvinist that I was, I decided, there and then, that she was the one for me.

My pal and I stood at the counter waiting to be served. After five minutes they were still engrossed in conversation, seemingly completely unaware of our presence. We were tired after that long march from the ferry and perhaps just a little irritable. Those two soldiers were the rearguard of a vacating Company of Royal Engineers. Could the poor service be the girls silent protest at losing the Sappers in exchange for the three hundred Chunkies they had seen limping and stumbling over the drawbridge that afternoon?

"Excuse me Miss, but what does the Latin inscription mean around that plaque?" I asked of the attractive brunette. "Oh," she replied, looking up at the NAAFI motto, "That means serving those who serve," she answered. I felt the collar of my battledress blouse, "And what do you think this is? Pinstripe bloody worsted?" I demanded. The proverbial dripped pin

could have been heard as the two Sappers glared at us and we glared back. However, they must have considered that in view of their impending departure a little discretion would prove the better part of valour and they beat a nonchalant, if inglorious, retreat.

I asked for two teas and two Nelson cakes. The brunette also beat a retreat, but to the other end of the counter "You serve them Freda," she almost shouted, "I will never, ever, serve that sarcastic pig!" then she stormed out of the canteen into the kitchen.

Seven weeks later Camilla still refused to serve me. Seven months later, on Christmas Eve 1943, we were married, and in four months time I trust our son and daughter will be present to celebrate our forty fourth wedding anniversary.

We settled in very quickly at the Fort. The whole summer was in front of us which, because of lighter nights and mornings, resulted in later parades and earlier returns. The daily sick parade became smaller so that more men were available for night duty, and, as a consequence, more nights off were allowed.

Preparations for the invasion of the invasion of the Continent were starting to get under way. In June 1943 all the roundabouts in the area were being reinforced, it didn't take a military genius to guess that they were being strengthened to accept an inflow of tanks.

One cloudless June afternoon a German reconnaissance plane, flying high over Gosport, was destroyed by the first shell fired from an ATS crewed heavy ack ack battery situated next to the Fort. We watched the pilot parachute down over Lee on Solent. Luftwaffe hit and run raiders over the area were becoming more frequent and strange huge concrete structures were being built on the coast immediately west of Gosport. Things were beginning to hot up.

The Company was being run, and very efficiently, too, by our Regimental Sergeant Major, I only wish I could remember his name. A solicitor by profession, he had been an officer in World War One and, apparently, only age prevented him from again being commissioned. Our new OC, Major ?, was known as the "Mad Mullah". The only time we saw him was on morning parade where he would stand, facing us,

"I will never, ever, serve that sarcastic pig!"

neurotically pushing his cane under the rim of his cap until the peak fell over his eyes; he would then adjust his cap and repeat the procedure every couple of minutes. He had an immobile, poker face with deep-set, unblinking eyes which gave me the impression that the man had no feelings for his fellow men and on one particular day, not long after his arrival my assessment was confirmed.

Due to changes within the ACC our food, which, until then, had been pretty reasonable, deteriorated to such an extent that we rose as one man in the dining hall and made an official complaint to the orderly officer, a young Second Lieutenant awaiting his second pip. After tasting a forkfull he declared the food to be both "Palatable and adequate". "Perfectly good, well cooked food, no worse than that enjoyed by the officers' mess" was his verdict. He then stated that, in his considered opinion, night duty was not providing us with sufficient exercise. He promptly decreed that on the following day, instead of turning into bed after returning from night duty, we would parade on the

square in battle order to be conducted on a six mile route march around the Fort Gomer/Gosport area to work up an appetite for lunch.

After the route march we had three hours sleep before going out on "Smoke" again. If my rifle hadn't been so rusty I'd have shot him!

It was around this time that half the Company were instructed to hand in their rifles in exchange for Sten guns, whilst the other half were issued with the new skewer bayonet to replace the flat bladed conventional type.

Those men with Sten guns were issued with two magazines, each containing twenty eight rounds of 9mm ammunition, and marched off to the range to acquaint themselves with the new weapon. From a distance of twenty five yards we blasted away at cardboard cutouts of Wehrmacht soldiers. After exhausting our ammunition the dummy Deutschers remained undamaged. The only excitement occurred when a man mashed a finger between the bolt of this weapon and the barrel.

Meanwhile back in our barrack room, drama was in the air. We had a Lance Corporal, a genial six foot two Welshman who had detailed one of his men for guard duty that night. Little Jock was a hard case, who, whilst not a trouble maker, could prove extremely stubborn in the face of authority. Jock objected strongly, it wasn't his turn for guard he stormed. "You're on guard tonight and that's it," said Taffy. As he turned to walk away Jock picked up his new bayonet and drove it into Taffy's thigh. Jock was court martialled and awarded fifty six days detention.

That summer and autumn of 1943 passed pleasantly enough, with a couple of diversions to relieve the boredom that sameness induces in young men.

I was given a new job, along with Jimmy Cook and Ginger, under the supervision of a Corporal in the Royal Corps of Signals, we were set to work operating a newly installed PBX switchboard situated in the heart of the Keep. The new job suited me fine, eight hours on and sixteen off; it gave me more time to court my little NAAFI girl, Camilla, who had finally succumbed to my flannel. She was, in fact, the only girl I had ever taken seriously. I will, however, leave the hearts and flowers stuff to the Mills and Boon writers who, I am sure, are better equipped than I in dealing with the subject of romance!

The PBX was housed in a room about twelve feet square with one barred window set in the four feet thick outer wall and was approached through a long narrow corridor. The only furniture was a chair set in front of the PBX unit and

next to that a bed for the night duty man. I walked along the corridor to start my first night shift and, just before I reached the entrance to the switchboard a huge pregnant rat came running towards me. I stopped in my tracks and the rat actually leaped over my shoulder before scurrying across the drawbridge.

That was at 10 pm; two hours later I switched off the main room light and turned in, leaving only the blue 'Police' light on above the PBX. I was awakened some time later by the sound of rustling; I opened my eyes and saw a large rat sitting on the chair only a foot away from my face. I watched the rat's progress as it jumped off the chair, pulling my newspaper along by its teeth, and finally disappearing in a cavity in the wall under the window. It

didn't take us long to establish that the whole Keep was alive with the horrible vermin.

I didn't like rats, so it was just as well perhaps that the Signals Corporal felt the same about my face (how did he think I felt who had to shave every day?). Anyway, he had obviously deduced that the dislike was mutual and as a result of that chemical reaction between us I was back on "Smoke" after only four weeks. Not that it made a great deal of difference as a fortnight after that we moved out of Fort Brockhurst, stock and barrel, just before the Canadian Scottish and Winnipeg Rifles moved in.

Our new abode was Haslan Barracks in Gosport, situated south of Haslan Naval Hospital and a few hundred yards west of the submarine base HMS Dolphin and the MTB base HMS Hornet, the place had been built as an Army barracks but prior to the war it had been utilized as a Borstal institute for young offenders. Its location, close to the seafront and well away from any civilian habitat, made it ideally suitable for that purpose. However, I was not a young offender and it certainly did not suit me.

The only pleasant memory I retain of Haslan Barracks was being married from there on Christmas Eve 1943. The lads in the cookhouse had made our wedding cake and I carried all three tiers in an open topped cardboard box down to the Gosport ferry. It was a really nasty winter night; in fact the sea was so rough between Gosport and Portsmouth that the ferry after mine was decreed the last of the evening, or at least until the weather improved.

I lurched down to the cabin below, placing my precious cargo on the seat beside me. We pitched and tossed our way towards the opposite shore until about half way across, a bigger than usual wave hit us and an extra violent lurch of the ship sent my box flying across the cabin and I ended up staggering around like a drunken matelot, trying to recover the three tiers of our wedding cake which had shot out of the box and were rolling around the heaving deck. I disembarked at the Hind, silently hoping that the incident did not portend a rough passage in the sea of matrimony. I needn't have worried.

I remember that winter well. It was rough one, especially so when we were on smoke duty. We would parade at 3pm where each driver was given a smoke point

number, each number representing a specific location in the Gosport/Lee on Solent/Fareham area. Off we would go in our lorries, towing our smoke trailers behind us. Arriving at our destination we would go through the usual drill in

preparation for making smoke in a hurry, if required, and then we would spend the next sixteen hours trying to keep warm.

Only in the event of a frost warning were we allowed to sit in the cab of the lorry and that was solely to run the engine for ten minutes every hour. In an effort to counter the intense cold we would don every item of clothing in our kitbags before going on parade. Long Johns, under vest, two pairs of socks, shirt, woollen jumper and battle-dress, over that lot we would put on our denims, then an overcoat, followed by a leather jerkin and a scarf. With heavy boots and gaiters at one end and balaclava and steel helmet at the other, looking for all the world like bloated dung flies, we were ready to face the elements. For the first couple of hours anyway, then the cold

would set in. Gradually biting at the feet and gnawing at the finger ends, it would spread to a man's very innards and it was at that point we started jumping up and down in a hysterical effort to keep the circulation going. It never really worked, for the simple reason that we were carrying so much weight in clothing that before we became warm we became worn out, it was a cleft stick situation.

A typical winter night on smoke duty would be spent, say, at a point on the sea wall just south of Gosport. With a freezing wind howling around us and sleet slashing our faces we would be jumping and gyrating in a frenzied attempt to keep warm, at the same time bemoaning our fate and cursing the hierarchy for failing to recognize that even the intrepid Luitwaffe would be hard put to penetrate our defences and carry out a bombing attack in such vile weather conditions. But no, only ten tenths cloud would send us scurrying back to our warm fleapits; so we continued our enforced calisthenics until the sheer weight of our extra clothing caused us to collapse wearily alongside the rear wheels of our trailers in an effort to gain some scant shelter from the biting wind, at the same time issuing a fervent prayer for the early arrival of the soup and char wagon.

Had I been aware of their plight, my heart would have gone out to those two million Bosche soldaten fighting on the Russian front.

There were a couple of distractions from the cold monotony of that first quarter of 1944. Firstly, I set my smoke machine alight, or, to be more precise, we, that is my Scottish operator and I, carried out the act of near arson. We had drawn up at our allotted smoke point one raw night in January slap bank in front of a large detached white house on the Southampton road, just east of Fareham, and Jock was my operator for that night.

Born and raised in the slums of Glasgow, Jock was a right little claymore clashing hard case. I had always prided myself on my knowledge of accents but my pride took a tumble the moment my Gaelic colleague opened his mouth. I found that by really concentrating I could comprehend something like a quarter of what he was saying. It hardly helped when he became excited, for instance, when the owner of the large white house came out to inform us that he had just had the building "Snowcemmed" and that there would be hell to pay if we lit up our "useless contraption" that night and dirtied his lovely white walls in the process.

To say that Jock went mad would be to understate the facts. The arrogant guardian of the white house retreated behind his wrought iron gates a split second before Jock went into what I thought was an epileptic fit. From the stream of invective issuing from his mouth I understood only one word in every four, all of them of Anglo-Saxon origin. Jock told him, between screams, that we were there for his protection; we were guardians of the coast against the might of the Bosche bombers, or words to that effect. I think. It was too late however, halfway through Jock's tirade the "President" retired behind his front door.

Two hours later Jock also retired behind a barrier of sullen silence. Four hours after that the duty Sergeant tore down the main road on his motorbike, stopping at every Point to inform each driver and operator of a "Red Alert", which meant - "Make Smoke".

The information gave Jock a new lease of life. "We'll teach that arrogant civvy git.

'He went down like the proverbial sack of spuds'

Where did he get his white paint from anyway? The black marketing ponce wants locking up." Were only a few cleaned up examples of his comments. He then jumped onto the trailer, frantically turning valves, knobs and levers as though his life depended on it.

"Ready to light up," Jock shouted. It was more of an order than a statement, I picked up a handful of cotton waste soaked in paraffin, stuffed it into the "Firebox" and lit up.

We looked up and down the road, peering through the blackout for any sign of activity from our neighbouring machines. "No, not a dickybird," declared Jock as I stood there, quite proud of the fact that we were the first to make smoke. With Jock even more elated as he watched the hated white house disappearing in a thick blanket of choking smog. Our elation was to be short lived however, as a couple of minutes later Jock adjusted a couple of valves. There was a whoosh of flame from the base of the chimney which, within a few seconds, became a raging pillar of fire.

I jumped on the trailer and turned off the fuel supply. I remember thinking it was the first time I'd been warm all evening! By that time the other machines had lit up and the duty Sergeant roared down on us on his motorbike through the man made fog. "This is Pompey, not bloody Blackpool, get that effing fire out, there's an air raid on," he bawled.

Jock and I made an ineffective effort to quell the flames with sand, at the same time screaming inane orders at each other in a pathetic attempt to convince the Sergeant of our efficiency. Needless to say, it had the opposite effect. Meanwhile, the duty officer had turned up in his utility and he, in turn, issued orders, but to his driver. "I say driver, do try to find a fire extinguisher; we do appear to be presenting Jerry with a sitting target."

The situation was hardly improved by the advent of the president who emerged from his driveway, coughing and cursing through a thick cloud of acrid smoke. "Put that bloody fire out you effing pyromaniacs," he screamed.

"What seems to be the trouble, sir?" asked our young officer. "Trouble, trouble, I'll tell you what the effing trouble is mister. Not bloody satisfied with ruining my white front with their bloody smoke, they deliberately set fire to that thing so I'll be bloody bombed by those effing planes."

As one man we turned our faces to the sky. Not that we could see anything through that dense smoke, but we did hear something. The familiar thrum, thrum of the engines told us we had uninvited guests and the fact that they were of Teutonic origin spurred Jock and I on in our pathetic efforts to subdue the fire. Three lorry extinguishers later the flames were doused, whilst across the creek came the crumpling sound of bombs being dropped on Portsmouth.

"That could have been my bloody house," bawled the president, between fits of coughing.

"Calm down sir, it wasn't," said our officer.

"Don't bloody patronize me," shouted the president, "I'll go to the top of the tree and have their guts for garters."

"If you feel you have a legitimate complaint sir, I would suggest that you go through the proper channels," suggested the officer. "Incidentally," he added, more to himself really "Where does one obtain enough "Snowcem" to paint a detached house in these days of shortages?"

"That's my bloody business," answered

the president before crunching up his driveway and disappearing into the "Whitehouse" in a cloud of swirling smoke.

We heard no more on the subject. Jock reckoned the whole affair had been whitewashed.

The second distraction, although a minor one, did help to divert our thoughts from the incessant monotony of smoke duty, bed and grub.

A boxing tournament was to be held in St Vincent naval barracks, Gosport, and all three Services in the area had been asked to offer contenders. We came up with the "Swede Basher". A sturdy lad from Norfolk, about twenty one years old, his bullet head, square jaw and bull neck gave the lie to the anthropologists claim that Neanderthal man was extinct. His nature however belied his build and looks, in fact he was a gentle chap who wouldn't say boo to a goose, but someone in authority, not recognizing the Basher's lack of aggression, had talked him into entering the middleweight class on the promise of six weeks excused smoke duty whilst he was under training.

Each morning early, and every evening, would see the Basher jogging around the smoke circuit, spurred on by the cheers of the boxing fans as he passed each smoke machine, and undeterred by the boos from those spoil sports who only saw him as a "fly boy" enjoying the forty two nights off at their expense.

There had been some improvement in our food since the last complaint, but we certainly never received the eggs, bacon, steaks and tuna fish enjoyed by our representative of the noble art as part of his high protein diet.

The Basher looked fit as he stepped into the ring and, encouraged by the couple of dozen supporters from our Company who were off duty that night, he flexed his muscles and stretched on the ropes.

"In the red corner, weighing in at eleven stone ten pounds and representing the Army - Private Smith. In the blue corner at eleven stone twelve pounds, representing the Royal Navy - Stoker Higgins." There were cheers all round as the two men touched gloves and the referee stood back to judge the contest.

By this time both contestants had assumed a boxing stance and for seven or eight seconds they danced around each other; the Basher blowing down his nose, as is the wont of all true pugilists. The battling matelot stepped forward and hit our man in the face with a hefty left, followed immediately by a pile-driving right to the Basher's jaw. He went down like the proverbial sack of spuds and stayed there. The referee counted him out and it was all over.

The moans and groans from our supporters were not, I suspected, out of sympathy for poor old Basher, but at the thought of all that good food wasted.

Chapter 2

Spring 1944 brought us not only a change in the weather but also a change in venue.

We were transferred, as a Company, back to Victoria Barracks in Portsmouth. Our lorries and smoke trailers were kept on a large housing estate at Farlington about five miles north of us. The situation suited the lads fine as many of the residents on the estate were quite hospitable, considering the noise and smells we had

introduced into their lives,

Since I was a newly married man I was not interested in getting my legs under anyone's table other than my own. My wife, incidentally, had left the NAAFI and was employed in a local factory making ammunition boxes and wooden crosses in preparation for the long awaited second front, and we were living with her parents in Portsmouth. Sounds like a bit of sinecure you might think, however, there was a fly in the ointment which took the gilt off the gingerbread (if you will forgive the mixed metaphors) and that fly came in the shape of Sergeant Squeers.

It wasn't that the Sergeant disliked me particularly, in fact he was a very firm but fair NCO, but he did have an obsession regarding off duty men sleeping out of Barracks. All men not on night duty had to sign back into barracks by 23.59 hours. That order was promulgated by the OC and Sergeant Squeers had every intention of enforcing it, whilst I had every intention of breaking the rule on those infrequent occasions when I was granted a night off, so war was declared.

Victoria Barracks was surrounded by eight feet high spiked metal railings with a main entrance and a smaller rear gate, both of them well guarded. I found a loose railing in a section almost obscured from the cookhouse by a small clump of trees. On a free night I would slope off round the back of the cookhouse with signing off, lift the loose railing, climb through into Kings Road, replace the railing and be away before you could say sod em all.

The following morning, half an hour before reveille, I walked down Penny Street in Old Portsmouth and into Barracks Street at the rear of the Barracks. Calling into the little newsagents shop on the corner I purchased the Daily Mirror, but not before explaining my position, as a newly married overnight absentee, to the very pleasant lady behind the counter and extracting a promise from her that if ever anyone in authority enquired as to how I obtained my paper she would say that I had called her over from inside the Barracks to sell me it through the railings. I may have been only a Private but I had enough military knowledge to observe the rule stating that intelligent pre-planning before an operation was essential to success in battle.

The first morning I applied those tactics I purchased the newspaper, lifted up another loose railing and was through the archway underneath the Sergeants' Mess without a hitch, or the sight of another living soul. I arrived in the barrack room just as reveille was sounding. My bed had been suitably disarranged by a pal the previous night and, to any casual observer, I had been there all night.

A week later, following another night off, I went through the usual drill, but this time, just as I emerged from the archway, I heard a call from above; No, I hadn't got religion!, it was Sergeant Squeers addressing me from an upper window,

"Stay where you are Bradley."

He strode towards me, at the same time extracting a small notebook from the left breast pocket of his battledress blouse.

"Name and number," he demanded.

"But why Sarge? What have I done?" I answered, assuming my best innocent look.

"Absent without leave overnight, lad, as though you didn't know" he replied.

"But I haven't been outside the barracks Sarge, I've just been to buy a paper from the shop. I whistle and the woman comes out and sells me it through the railings,"

'He was still in uniform as a traffic warden'

and, as though to prove my statement I pulled out the newspaper from inside my battledress blouse. He took the paper from me and checked the date, "Clever bugger aren't you? But you'll get your bloody come uppance cos I'll be keeping a very close eye on you my lad." His face was so close to mine I could smell his last cup of tea.

For obvious reasons I couldn't play the paper ploy again. The good Sergeant was no fool; he'd have the newsagent's shop under observation next time; consequently, I would have to employ new tactics so, I invented a sore throat.

On my next night off I actually booked out and, as usual, I went home. It was a nice Spring evening and I took my wife for a walk around Southsea. At about 1030 I left my wife at the end of Elm Grove, went back to the barracks and booked back in, then I promptly returned to the wife, via the loose railing, and we returned home.

Came the following morning and I sneaked back into the barracks by way of another illicit opening and made straight for the Medical Inspection Room. Producing my tin mug, which I had taken home with me, I asked the Medical Orderly for an antiseptic gargle to ease my sore throat. Sauntering back to the barrack room I again encountered Sgt Squeers, who had obviously been lying in wait. After listening to my explanation he sniffed my mug and marched off muttering his intention to check my story at the MI Room. I'd done it again!

Whoever said, "Pride cometh before a fall" knew just what he was talking about. With the misplaced confidence of youth I thought I knew all the tricks too, plus one, and that extra trick was to be my downfall.

I could hardly come the sore throat gag again so soon after the last one; so, after my next night off, I bought a newspaper again and, observing that my usual point of ingress was unobserved, I slipped through the railings and made my way back to the barrack room and straight into the waiting arms (well, not quite) of Detective Sergeant Squeers.

"Don't bother with the excuses lad," he observed, before I even opened my mouth. "Company Orders – 0900 hours tomorrow. You'll be charged with prowling round the barracks before reveille." He marched off with a look on his face that told the world that he was the cat and I was the cream.

Of course, I had to let my wife know that I was on a charge and, therefore wouldn't be home for several days. However, I was on smoke duty that night and Company Orders the following mornings, so my only chance was to sneak out at the start of an hour long ABCA lecture on current affairs, catch the bus home to Landport, leave a message with my mother in law and catch the next bus back to barracks.

It would have been all so simple, that is if the CSM hadn't been strolling around the perimeter fence and caught me red handed as I was lifting up the loose railing. I considered it politic to inform him of my initial misdemeanour and the following morning was marched in front of the Major who had obviously had a prior word with the two NCOs.

"It is apparent to me that you have been dicing with trouble since the day you were married Bradley," declared the Major. "You must bear in mind that your wife takes second place to your duty as a soldier. Fourteen days confined to barracks, and don't let me see you in front of me again."

The Sergeant Major marched me out.

I sauntered back towards the barrack room, consoling myself with the thought that I would only miss two nights off in the next fourteen days, when my platoon Sergeant called me from across the square. He had, he informed me, recognized my "talent" with a paint brush and, as a consequence, I should change into denims immediately and report to the Maintenance Section where I would be employed painting numbers on the bonnets of all our vehicles for the next couple of weeks.

What a bloody irony! There I was, Excused night duty for the next fortnight, and I couldn't get home because of my fourteen days CB. But the gremlins weren't finished with me yet!

If I remember correctly, a man confined to barracks had to report to the Provost Corporal one hour before

reveille and immediately after tea, until 2100 hours, for extra duties. I lined up in the guardroom on my first day, with fifteen other men under punishment, and the Provost Corporal called the roll.

"McClusky," he shouted, as though we were all hard of hearing. "Corporal," answered the Irishman, "Marks," – "Yes, Corporal," – "Spencer" there was a suppressed titter all round, followed by a roar of disapproval from the "Sturmabahnfuhrer." "Bradley," and I called out "Corporal". There was a pregnant pause as he gave me a look that told me he had my card marked. He then proceeded to allocate the chores. (Incidentally, the Corporal was dubbed the original pig's orphan; the last time I saw him was in 1965, he was still in uniform as a traffic warden, need I say more?).

I was marched to a small yard at the rear of the guardroom. There were ten feet high walls around three sides and a block of three urinal stalls and two toilets at the other. The Corporal pointed to a large heap of small pewter bowls, a pile of sharp sand and several strips of four by two. "Right lad, I was to see my face in those bowls before reveille," he stipulated. "Masochist," I thought and proceeded to eradicate my fingerprints over the next half hour.

I had just finished the last bowl when the Provost Cpl, with his chest out, stomach in and holding his head erect, marched into the yard, picked up and examined one of the bowls. "These are rubbish lad," he bawled, "You have twenty minutes to get them like I want them," he decreed, then strutted off like a turkey cock.

"Sod him," I muttered to myself and promptly opened one of the toilet doors and sat there, quietly ruminating on my plight, until just before he made a second appearance. "That's better lad, you're learning," he declared as he examined another bowl. I was indeed!

That evening I again reported to the guardroom and was given the worst job – scrubbing out the guardroom and its adjoining rooms – with cold water. Corporal Streicher stood over me for the next twenty minutes and his presence was irritating, to say the least. Then, he kicked the bucket "Come on lad, get moving, put some elbow grease behind that scrubber!" he shouted. I saw red, standing upright, I kicked the bucket hard, sending its contents over his boots. "This isn't CB, this is bloody field punishment," I almost screamed. He shook his feet to disperse some of the dirty water from his boots and gaiters. "What do you mean lad – this isn't CB?" he questioned angrily, "You don't expect to do CB chores when you're on field punishment do you?" The question stopped me in my

tracks and I looked at him long and hard. "I'm on fourteen days CB, are you sure you've got the right man?" I asked. He consulted a list of names on his clipboard; "Bradley, C R lad, that's your name isn't it?" he demanded confidently. "Of course my name's Bradley, but the initials are E K not C R", I replied; the light at the end of the tunnel was becoming clearer by the second – for us both!

"Stay where you are lad, I'm going over to check this lot with the Orderly Room". "If he calls me lad once more I'll fit this bloody bucket over his bullet head", I shouted to an empty room.

Five minutes later the Provost Corporal dashed back into the guardroom, minus his military bearing, in fact he was in a cringing panic. "There's been a mistake, there's another Bradley, or should be, but your name's not on the list", there was a definite tremble in his voice. "What happens to me now then", I asked. "Sod off and I'll see you in the morning", he declared. I experienced a very slight feeling of hope. "If I'm not on the list, then I can go home?" I queried optimistically. "You've got a bloody nerve, no you can't", he nearly screamed. Just bugger off and report to me in the morning, and don't shout your mouth off about this", he added.

It all came out the following day. Apparently, a Private C R Bradley a newcomer to the Company, had committed a far more heinous crime than mine and was awarded twenty eight days field punishment. He had, however, managed to make himself scarce before being sighted by the Provost Corporal. I suppose that the absence of my name from the list greatly assisted the confusion and, in the meanwhile, I was suffering in his place.

I heard no more of the matter. In the meanwhile I served my "sentence", although I will admit it was an easy one as our law enforcer, in an effort to keep me quiet, treated me with an almost paternal affection which, I need hardly add, was definitely out of character.

Looking back now, with the advantage of hindsight and a more mature outlook, my views on the Provost Corporal remain the same. I have, for many years, been of the opinion that a national advertising campaign to recruit an elite SS or Gestapo like force within the United Kingdom would be highly successful, I also feel sure that age would be the only drawback in preventing the old Provost Corporal from being first in the queue.

So far as the CSM was concerned, well, he was a decent enough chap, who was only doing his job. Likewise Sergeant Squeers. He could have caught me at any time he chose, by simply walking into my barrack room after 23.59 hours and noting my absence. However, he preferred the cat and mouse game, and I did give him a good run for his money.

Preparation for D Day were certainly accelerating. By the middle of May 1944 that seven mile wide stretch of the Solent between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight could barely be seen for ships of every description, from DUKWs to LSTs, and dredgers to destroyers; whilst the dockyard itself was crammed to capacity with warships, including a couple of battlewagons. The whole of that vast armada was surrounded by a massive protective ring of anti-aircraft batteries and barrage balloons, backed up by two Smoke Companies.

The Portsmouth/Gosport/Isle of Wight area presented a juicy target for Goering's Luftwaffe, or would have if German resources on the Western Front had not

‘Preparation for D-Day were certainly accelerating’

been depleted by demands from the Eastern Front where war on a much larger scale was being fought against a seemingly invincible Red Army. Stretching the Luftwaffe's reserves even further were the demands on Goering's fighter force in their struggle to protect Germany's cities against our Lancaster bombers at night and the "Flying Fortresses" of the USAAF by day.

Although still operating the conventional smoke trailers we had lately been using the recently introduced smoke pots; these were small canisters full of powdered chemicals which were distributed around the target, then fused individually before being wired to an electrical circuit and, in the event of an air raid, ignited by a pushdown switch. The main purpose of the pots was to provide almost immediate cover for the more important, but smaller targets, until the screen from the mobile trailers could be dispersed over a wider area.

Every man in the Company needed to be proficient in the use of those new smoke pots; so, it was pots one week, and driving a lorry and trailer the next, bearing in mind my unfortunate incident with the burning trailer, my preference obviously lay with the former.

My first real experience with the chemical pots happened one night about a couple of weeks before D Day. We were covering that part of the dockyard between East Gate and the Unicorn Gate and, together with a certain Lance Corporal, we had been allocated a telephone cum smoke point on a bombed plot at the intersection of Sultan Road and Gladstone Street (Now the Elephant and Castle pub).

The only object remaining upright on our site was a telegraph pole, into which we plugged our telephone set. The reason for our presence there was twofold; firstly, to accept air raid warnings from Central Control, which we would then pass on to the rest of the men along the circuit, and secondly, to set off our own section of smoke posts in the event of a Red Alert being received.

The LCpl plugged in the telephone, whilst I connected our pots to the ignition box, the pots already having been set out by the day shift. The junior NCO spent the next two hours talking about himself and I gained the distinct impression that he intended reaching the rank of CSM and he wouldn't be particularly concerned whose face he had to tread on in the process. I won't give his real name; not because of his ruthless ambition, but because of his conduct in the following two or three hours; so, to prevent any embarrassment, I will call him LCpl Boncer.

The chuck wagon had been and gone. We drank our soup and cocoa, ate our bread and marge, then settled down, back to back against the telegraph pole, to face another boring night. Coming events, however, were to prove otherwise.

At about 0200 hrs the phone rang; Boncer answered it. "Red Alert" he announced after putting the phone down. "Let's light up," he added. I pressed our plunger and within two minutes the surrounding streets were full of thick white smoke, and people. They had spilled out from their houses in Sultan Road and were crowding into the surface shelter on the corner; between coughing and spluttering they were cursing, not the Germans, but us! A couple of minutes later came the familiar sound of German raiders overhead. "At least a dozen," said Boncer. "More like five or six," I countered as they dropped their flares.

We had little time to admire the phosphorescent light glowing through

surrounding smoke before the raiders dropped a stick of bombs, the first of which fell about a hundred and fifty yards away in Commercial Road, although, even without that one, the remaining bombs exploded near enough to keep the pair of us pinned to the ground.

As we both lay there face down with soil and small stones pattering down on our steel helmets, I gave a sidelong glance through the smoke at Boncer and wondered why he was scrabbling at the dirt in front of him with his hands. I also wondered whether, as I suspected, those last two bombs had dropped in the Lake Road area; I hoped not.

The rest of the bombs were dropping some distance from us, probably Southsea I thought, a couple of miles away. We stood up and brushed ourselves down as best we could with our hands. I picked up my Sten gun, whilst telling Boncer that I thought two of the bombs had dropped near the In-Laws house in Landport about a quarter of a mile away and that I intended going there right away to find out whether or not my wife and her family were safe.

If there had been an adjacent wall to go up, he would have gone up it. "You can't leave me here on my own: I'll see you court martialled for desertion in the face of the enemy," he almost screamed, "The All Clear hasn't gone yet." Those bastards will be back," he continued, "and I'll be left here on my own."

I could have told him that the enemy bombers would have to fly all the way back to Normandy to replenish their bomb bays, which would give me plenty of time to get back and help him face the Horrid Hun again, even though our smoke pots by then would be expended. Instead I called him a windy sod and told him to charge me when I returned, meanwhile, I was going to see my wife.

I walked down Wingfield Street through the swirling smoke and into Lake Road where a policeman stopped to inform me that a surface shelter had been hit and he was looking for volunteers to help the ARP wardens. After hearing my story he advised me to make my way home, which I did.

I opened the front door as the sirens sounded the All Clear. My wife was sitting in the back room, her left hand heavily bandaged. The house was undamaged but, apparently, she had been about to descend the three steps into the Anderson shelter when a bomb dropped a couple of hundred yards away. It was the noise of the explosion really, she said, that sent her topping down the steps, her out-stretched left hand smashing into the glass shade of a small paraffin lamp. She was not long back from the Royal Hospital where the cut had been stitched. I told my wife I couldn't stay long, but made no mention of the fact that I was absent from my post: then I left.

Arriving back at our smoke point I found Boncer sitting on the ground with his back to the telegraph pole. "How's the wife?" he greeted me with quite pleasantly. As I finished my story he said, "Let's forget about what happened tonight." Whether the declaration stemmed from a spirit of benevolence or the fear of being exposed as a punk, I'll never know; I'll be kind and consider it a little of both.

We were kept at a high pitch of readiness during the couple of weeks preceding D Day. On duty near the harbour entrance we were witness to quite a lot of Naval activity during the hours of

darkness. The huge looming shadow of a battleship, or a heavy cruiser, could be seen silhouetted against the night sky as it left harbour; or the black shadows of a destroyer flotilla prowling the darkness as they glided past the Round Tower en route to their berths in the dockyard.

Duty on the opposite shore at Gosport could be just as interesting. The roar of powerful engines as half a dozen motor torpedo boats left their base at HMS Hornet in the middle of the night; or the long low sleek shadow of a submarine as it quietly phut phutted alongside its berth in HMS Dolphin, were all sights and sounds that created an atmosphere of exciting expectancy. Where had they been? Where were they going? I wondered. We all sensed that something big was going to happen, and soon.

Two days before D Day, in the early evening, my Section was on its way to the Elsan housing estate on the outskirts of Gosport. Turning right in our Troop Carrier, just before Fort Brockhurst, we met the most astonishing sight ever witnessed by any one of us. Everywhere, as far as the eye could see, nose to tail, were tanks, guns, personnel carriers, mobile ack ack: I could hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes; the normally peaceful housing estate had been transformed overnight into what could have been taken for a huge film set. As we threaded our way through the lines, dropping off two men at fifty yard intervals, my feelings were a mixture of awe, wonder and excitement, plus a modicum of dread at the thought that most of those poor sods brewing up around their tanks and guns could be dead or maimed by the end of the week: the selfish thought that I could be one of them that night, if Goering had been hoarding enough bombers for just such a target hadn't escaped me either!

My partner and I had completed the task of fusing and connecting our circuit and were sitting on a low wall fronting one of the semi-detached houses. Even though it was early summer quite a strong, cold wind was blowing and we had donned our leather jerkins which, together with our steel helmets and Sten guns, made us hardly distinguishable from the "real" soldiers around us. I noticed there was not the noise and hilarity usually associated with an assembly of troops: most of the men were squatting alongside their respective vehicles, quietly chatting, whilst the remainder were carrying out seemingly

needless chores. Perhaps they were thinking about their homes and families, or what fate lay ahead for them on the other side. It was apparent that the atmosphere had got to them.

My rather morbid thoughts were interrupted by someone tapping me on the shoulder and I looked around to see a civilian, he obviously belonged to the house in front of which we were sitting. He quietly enquired if we would like a cup of tea indoors. My partner and I were taken slightly aback: after all, what kind of idiot invited men into his house to enjoy his hospitality in the full knowledge that at any time, either on that particular night, or in the future, they would ignite their infernal smoke canisters and fill his house, and lungs, with obnoxious fumes: there must be a trick in it somewhere. Nevertheless, we walked up the short path into his house but not before checking the immediate area for any sign of our Platoon Sergeant.

We sat on the settee in the living room and drank the double whisky each that he

'They turned out to be the most sartorially elegant corpses ever'

gave us and smoked his cigarettes. His wife called out to say she was ready and we were ushered into the kitchen where two plates of egg, bacon and sausages were produced which, with tea, bread and margarine, we got through in ten minutes flat. I thought of the inroads they must have made into their ration coupons in order to provide such a repast.

We indulged only in small talk, no mention being made of either smoke screens or the presence of tanks and guns outside their front door. It must be borne in mind that the British public during the war were constantly reminded by the Media that "Careless talk costs lives" and ubiquitous posters throughout the land exhorted them to "Be like Dad and keep Mum".

One more whisky and a cigarette later we stood up to leave. Our main concern was the Platoon Sergeant and the fact that our feet wouldn't touch the deck if he detected our absence. We walked to the front door and the man shook us both by the hand. "Give Jerry one for us when you get there," he declared. It was only then that it dawned on us – he thought we were real soldiers, on the verge of assaulting Festung Europa!

It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. Two hours later smoke descended like a welcome curtain. For many weeks afterwards we avoided that house like the plague!

D Day turned out to be something of a damp squib, so far as I was concerned that is. After seeing a fair proportion of the Army's massive might assembled in Gosport the previous night I nurtured visions of actually being somewhere on the coast to witness, when it happened, that great exodus from the Solent: instead, I was back in Sultan Road with only LCpl Bonger and the, by now, familiar telegraph pole for company. The only time we were aware of something big happening was during the night when we heard the deafening roar of what seemed to be hundreds of planes passing overhead. We know now, of course, that they must have been the British and American airborne troops who were dropped in Normandy during the hours of darkness prior to the invasion by our seaborne forces. At the time, however, we thought it was another thousand bomber fleet en route to Germany.

We were kept just as busy after D Day as we had been before.

Maritime traffic in the Solent became more fluid as men, ammunition and equipment were ferried across that ninety odd mile stretch of Channel between Pompey and Normandy, in an effort to build up sufficient forces to combat the Wehrmacht, once it had got its second wind.

Enemy bombers, in ones and twos, seemed to be appearing over the Portsmouth area more often; "Nuisance Raids" they were rather inappropriately called: I conjured up a mental image of some poor devil, in a bombed shelter, with his leg hanging off, looking up at the sky and declaring testily "Oh, what a nuisance".

Sleeping out passes had, at last, been granted to married men living in Portsmouth on their few nights off; a more than welcome decree as all the once loose railings had recently been securely welded. One particular night off I spent in the Anderson shelter with my wife and her parents. The Luftwaffe's latest ploy was for one bomber to drop its bombs, then

another would follow, but an hour later, when it too would drop its load, and so on, thus prolonging the agony throughout the night. A stick of bombs was dropped in the area of Victoria Barracks that night; four in Kings Road and the other two on Victoria/Clarence Barracks. Our guardroom received a near miss; however, remained unharmed much to the regret of the rest of us, whilst that old saying about the Devil looking after his own was flogged to death over the next few days. The last bomb dropped on Clarence Barracks which was separated from ours by a drill square. There were no casualties, although four of the Company, including myself who had been out of barracks overnight, returned the next morning to find our beds covered in plaster.

Another story was going the rounds of the Company that morning. I can't vouch for its authenticity as I was not present at the scene of the "disaster". Apparently, the driver of the Chuck wagon, and his mate, were driving back to barracks, at around 0200 hours after delivering the usual soup and cocoa to the men on night duty. A few minutes beforehand a couple of bombs had dropped on Commercial Road, and, as the driver approached the main shopping area, he had to slam his brakes on hard to avoid hitting a body lying in the road. According to the driver's mate, they both sat in the cab, quite shocked over the incident.

Casting their eyes just a little further afield they spotted what appeared to be six more corpses lying amongst a load of broken glass on the pavement. They both felt quite sick at the sight, but slowly, and certainly unheroically, they dismounted from the cab to investigate. The driver gingerly poked the first body with his boot and its head fell off. They turned out to be the most sartorially elegant corpses ever. All were tailors dummies which had been blown out of the Fifty Shilling Tailor's window when a bomb had dropped a couple of hundred yards further up the road.

Knowing those two characters for the comedians they were, it wouldn't have surprised me one iota to have discovered the whole episode had been a figment of their extremely fertile imaginations. It was men of that calibre who kept us going.

It was around this time that we were introduced to a new type of smoke machine. A product of the USA, the trailer was of sleek compact lines, which made our old Haslans look like medieval mobile dustbins by comparison.

More important though, was the fact that the machine, by virtue of the clean, refined oil used, produced a cleaner, nearly "cough-free" smoke: it seems they were used extensively in America for spraying fruit crops. A large four wheel drive Studebaker truck was also introduced to tow the new machine, thus replacing the old three ton Bedford.

This new innovation in the creation of smoke screens came too late however. By August 1944 the war was moving away from Britain. True, Hitler was sending over his V1 self propelled missiles to explode on southern towns and cities, including Portsmouth, and his V2 rockets were being employed to some effect on London, but they only accelerated our redundancy: what use were smoke screens against pilotless Doodle Bugs? Consequently, we commenced our training for the war that was being waged on more distant shores.

His critics can say what they like about General Montgomery, including those American Generals who waxed scathingly on his many "faults" in their

autobiographies written after the war; but not one of them could ever accuse him of not looking after the welfare of his troops. In an effort to avoid many of the pitfalls he had encountered as a young officer in the First World War, he insisted on good health care for his men, adequate food and, whenever possible, ample facilities for keeping clean.

On the day before our training commenced every man was given a thorough medical examination. Those who were not considered fit enough, including officers, were transferred almost immediately to guarding prisoner of war camps or other light duties. Our working uniforms were deeply impregnated with DDT, to counter that scourge of all frontline soldiers – lice. Every man had to run the complete circuit of the United Services Ground to prove his stamina, whilst physical jerks came to mean calisthenics, rather than the line of lead swingers outside the MI Room every morning.

By the middle of August we had been transferred, complete with our latest smoke machines, to an estate near the village of Lower Upham situated between Bishops Waltham and Winchester. Our billets were Nissan huts erected in a wood which had recently been evacuated by American Paratroops.

The bulk of our time was spent in cleaning our machines, route marching and weapon training. We would march to Romsey, about twenty miles distant, in full marching order, where we fired our rifles and Sten guns at various targets on the local range, then bivouac for the night, before marching back the following day. Any man who fell out exhausted along the way, or failed the very thorough chiropodist's examination at the end of the march, was weeded out always assuming that he hadn't been recognised as a lead swinger of course!

One day we were given a lecture on the Mills bomb, or hand grenade where we learned that the weapon was serrated, to assist fragmentation, and that the most lethal part was the base plug, which could apparently decapitate a man. After digesting that jolly little snippet of information we were marched off to a bomb throwing range near Winchester where we stood in zig zag slit trenches and lobbed our grenades at an ancient Bren gun carrier in the valley below. On the course following ours the next day, one very nervous soldier made a clumsy hash of lobbing his grenade and it fell back into the slit trench alongside him resulting in the poor devil being killed outright.

There were no recreational facilities in the camp, so, for the first couple of weeks, together with several dozen others, I spent my spare time rooting through beds of gravel with my bare hands in search of "loot".

Our American predecessors, or at least the overspill from the Nissan huts, had made themselves comfortable by digging slit trenches in the wood, filling them with gravel and erecting their two man tents over them. It was apparent, by the amount of loose change that was found in the gravel, that most of their spare time whilst awaiting D Day, had been spent playing cards. I finished up, at the end of two weeks, with the princely sum of eight and a half dollars in nickels, dimes and quarters, plus six officers shoulder bars, a cap badge and a cheap looking medal which gave no clue to its purpose. One man, obviously anti Yank, reckoned such medals were awarded after four weeks service; another said it could be an overseas award, "After

**'So it wasn't true,
that porridge
clogged the
brain!'**

all," he declared, proudly displaying his geographic knowledge, "England is overseas to them." The subject was closed by one of our Scottish wits who was of the opinion that not only the Yanks, but everyone, should be awarded a medal for living in England! So it wasn't true, that porridge clogged the brain!

Incidentally, in a Winchester pub one night, an American soldier gave me a pound note in exchange for my assortment of US coins. I hope he got back in one piece to spend his £2.50.

I thought my fortunes had changed when the Sergeant Major called me into the Orderly Room to inform me that I had been "selected" to attend a two day course at Southampton University. ABCA, or Army Bureau of Current Affairs, was the name of the game, and it meant that I had to attend a series of lectures dealing with such subjects as the current political climate in the western world, the Beveridge Report, basic economics and how we could achieve full employment in Britain once we had settled Hitler's hash.

My first, and only, lecture given on my return to the camp could hardly be described as a Churchillian style oration. World trade was the text, and I "eased" my reluctant audience into a hypothetical situation in the Seychelle Islands, where, I stated, it would be to Britain's advantage, economically, if we sent a trade delegation out there to assist, inform and encourage the natives to reorganise and expand their agriculture until every participant in that grand scheme has made enough extra profit to enable him to invest in new and more modern tools; all of which would be manufactured in the UK of course! I continued along the same lines, stressing the point that eventually there would be no limit to the British made goods affordable to those fortunate natives once we had wooed them into the right frame of mind.

Any visual response to my weary tale was hardly evident to me as I was facing a couple of rather strong lamps: however, when the answer to my "Any Questions" came back as a series of gentle snores, I realized that either teaching was not my forte, or I had mistaken a captive audience for an interested one.

That night I suffered a nightmare in which dozens of black soldiers were driving around in Rolls Royce cars throwing cabbages at me. I hardly needed a psychiatrist to sort that one out!

Meanwhile, back in the real world, it appeared that all our training had been in vain as we had missed the boat to the Continent: one Mobile Smoke Company was already over there and any more were deemed by the Top Brass to be unnecessary. Not that I was disappointed, a smoke cloud and a Sten gun as protection against the Wehrmacht was hardly my idea of a fair fight. As a result of that decision we were declared redundant as a Smoke Company and ordered to transfer our recently acquired trucks and trailers to a Returned Vehicle Depot near Tadcaster in Yorkshire.

There had been a surplus of drivers for some time and I was one of several men who had been returned to General Duties:

it was as a driver's mate therefore that I accompanied Nobby Clark on the convoy travelling north.

We reached Loughborough at about 2000 hrs that evening (there was no M1 motorway in those days) where arrangements had been made for us to sleep on the wooden floor of the old disused Town Hall. Nobby and I stood talking and smoking on the steps outside our ancient temporary billet when a tall Sapper approached us; (I had spotted the Royal Engineers cap badge). We were making small talk with him for a couple of minutes when, out of the blue, he asked Nobby to fetch some fish and chips from the shop nearby. Nobby was only about five feet four inches tall with that ready wit with which all "Scousers" seem blessed: he was also a hard case. "If you hang on Sir till I get my little white coat and napkin, I'll not only fetch em, I'll serve em to yer," declared Nobby with mock politeness. "Oh, we've got an effing comedian on our hands," said Lofty; at which Nobby took out his false teeth and, wrapping them in

shortage" and a Company of Chunkies would descent on their fields to lift, snag, load and transport their turnips, Swedes and sugar beet for them. It wasn't as though we could indulge in a "Go slow" protest; it was the beginning of winter, the weather was much too cold to hang about, so, we had to get stuck in to keep warm.

Perhaps I may be doing those farmers an injustice; could it have been that they were paying for our services and the Ministry of Agriculture were deliberately failing to pass it on, possibly in the belief that any more than four shillings a day (20p) could transform us into a licentious mob hell bent on finding the road to Sodom and Gomorrah? Well, three times that amount didn't seem to be doing the Yanks any harm!

One particular day it was so cold that one of our lads, whilst topping and tailing turnips with his curved knife, lopped off the end of his little finger; he wasn't even aware of the fact until he saw the blood oozing from his glove.

It was without regret that we entrained for Clacton on Sea to carry out the task of pulling down recently vacated Ack Ack Battery huts. At least we would be doing something destructive!

We were billeted in private houses on the outskirts of Clacton; not quite as cosy as it seems. It was the beginning of December; the houses had been cleared of furniture and floor coverings, whilst the fire-grates were devoid of any kind of combustible fuel and remained that way during the remainder of our stay. We slept on the wooden floors, with palliasses, with only two blankets each to cover us and our kitbags for pillows: we all slept fully clothed, including our boots and balaclavas.

If anyone interested enough in the question would like to know where the flies went in an English wartime winter, I can tell them; under the eaves and ridges of timber built Army huts, that's where. Demolishing the huts, from the roof downwards, we discovered millions of stupefied flies in six inch layers, especially between the plaster-board lining and the roof ridge.

It was bitterly cold, with strong winds blowing from the sea, so we had to work hard, if only to keep warm. One of our Section, a Glaswegian, cut his hand whilst helping to pull down a hut roof; his hand turned septic, hardly surprising with all those flies about and he was rushed off to hospital in Colchester in a very serious condition, although he did survive thanks to the newly introduced drug, Penicillin.

Hospital was also my next stop. After only ten days a wave of influenza spread through our demolition squads like the proverbial dose of salts. I reported sick with several others, coughing, shivering and sweating in a hunched up great-coated line of men awaiting the Medical Officer's examination. Only two of us were packed off by lorry to a CRS; I don't remember what happened to the others; in fact, I couldn't even remember what had happened to me, except for waking up, as though from a ten minute nap, two days later. It appears to be the fashion nowadays for people with a few sniffles, a sore throat



his handkerchief, passed them to me, saying, "Hang on to these teeth Whack while I climb up this big headed bastard." The words were hardly out of his mouth before the stropky Sapper took to his heels and fled. Nobody took the Mick out of Nobby and got away with it!

Arriving back at camp we were informed that the Company was vacating its leafy glade for pastures new. Two days later we were comfortably ensconced in a huddled camp, again in a wood, near Wymondham in Norfolk.

The camp was cosy, which is more than can be said about the work. The war may have made us redundant so far as the making of smoke was concerned, but we were hardly surplus to requirements in the field of labour: in fact that is where we ended up; in a field, snagging turnips.

Those Norfolk farmers must have been laughing all the way to the bank! There they were, exhorted by the Government to "Dig for Victory" and all they had to do was snap their fingers and shout "Labour

and a nasty cough, to claim they have flu; if they were to experience a dose of real influenza they would realize just how exaggerated their previous claims had been.

Halfway through my two weeks stay, I was up and about and beginning to appreciate the comfortable atmosphere of the CRS: the food was good, there was a well stocked library and the VAD nurses were spoiling us rotten.

On the tenth day we were allowed out during the day in our hospital blues. I had palled up with a Geordie Bombardier from the Royal Artillery who, like myself, was recuperating from a dose of flu; he also had a leg wound that had opened slightly to the extent that it was a little weepy. Apparently, he had been amongst the first of the wounded on D Day and, until developing the flu, he had been awaiting orders to rejoin his Battery in France.

The CRS was a fine country house near Colchester that had been requisitioned by the Military, leaving the owner to live in a small ground floor part of the house. It was situated in the middle of a large estate and approached by a long, tree lined drive along which Geordie and I stepped smartly, and into the village, where we made for the nearest pub.

It didn't take me long to discover that Geordie was a regular old soldier. The second we entered that bar he assumed a limp to his left leg. I bought the first round, whilst Geordie was looking around obviously weighing up the prospects of a few free pints. He sat next to a couple of middle aged men on a long bench seat and waved me over. After the first couple of sips from his beer Geordie started to rub his bandaged leg, "God this leg's giving me some bloody stick the day," he complained to nobody in particular, then, lowering his voice to a level just high enough for his neighbour to hear, he said to me "Ar reckon they've left a bit o'shrapnel in there Marrar."

Of course, I saw his con a mile off. He'd set the bait and was waiting for his victim to swallow it; he did, hook, line and sinker, as they say.

Geordie's neighbour spoke in a rather refined London accent, "Where were you wounded soldier?" he asked. "In the bloody leg man," replied Geordie. "No, I mean where, exactly?" asked the man, almost apologizing for his ambiguity. "Ah, Normandy, on D Day," answered the Bombardier in a voice that suggested he didn't want to discuss the subject any further, and he winced again, not too pronounced but just enough for good measure.

The man rose from his seat, walked up to the bar, and returned within a couple of minutes with two double whiskies. "Beer is no painkiller friend; this is what you need," and he plonked the two glasses down on the table in front of us.

I was just a little taken aback. "I'm not in pain," I declared. "You're in hospital blues, that's good enough for me," replied our benefactor. My God, I thought, this is embarrassing; what if he asks me where I bought mine, what do I tell him? – Clacton on Sea? The dreaded question never came however, and five minutes later he left with his friend, but not before buying us a pint of beer each with the parting words, "Sorry it's only beer lads; it seems I've had my ration of whisky."

Geordie winked at me, "Yer diva nar the half of it Marrar." "No, but I'm learning," I answered as I followed him with his limping gait out of the bar; this time,

however, I noticed the limp had been transferred to his other leg.

On the morning of the fifteenth day of my stay I reported to Matron: she was aware that it was the 23rd December and therefore would have liked to send me on Christmas leave; but her orders were to send me to a Regimental Holding Unit near Prestatyn in North Wales. Matron gave me my railway warrant and pass, wished me well and pointed me in the direction of a three ton truck bound for Colchester railway station.

I stood on the platform at Euston thinking hard: should I go to Wales!, or should I travel to Pompey for a few days? My first thought never stood a chance, and I left the station intending to catch a bus to Waterloo. There were two parcel delivery vans outside the station and I heard one of the drivers telling the other that he was bound for Waterloo, so, with the cheek of old Harry, I cadged a lift.

I bought a platform ticket at Waterloo, just in time to catch the 1100 hrs train to Portsmouth and avoid the Redcaps hanging around near the gate. I figured that both Portsmouth stations would be crawling with Military Police so I got off the train at Havant, ten miles short of my destination.

Outside the station stood a blue RN coach half full of matelots, so I cadged a lift to Pompey and the driver dropped me off in Lake Road, only a hundred yards from home, where I spent a very pleasant four days.

The music had to be faced of course. My wife was halfway through her first pregnancy so I asked her not to see me off at the station: when I reached the end of the street I did a smart about turn from that Redcap riddled establishment and caught a bus for Havant, where I purchased another platform ticket, before boarding the fast train to Waterloo: there weren't the number of Ticket Inspectors around then as there are today.

After crossing London to Euston I found that I would need to change trains at Shrewsbury, where I eventually arrived. I called into the RTO's office (Railway Transport Officer) to ask the time of the next train to Prestatyn. A Sergeant Redcap asked to see my pass, which, incidentally, I had altered to read the 28th December: he gave me the departure time and platform number and by teatime I had found my way to the RHU.

I entered that huge establishment feeling quite elated; after all, my neat little piece of forgery had fooled a Sergeant Redcap, why not everyone else? The thought spurred me on, so that it wasn't without a certain amount of contained confidence that I marched into the building marked RECEPTION and reported my arrival. A Corporal clerk took my pass and handed me over to a Lance Corporal, who showed me to my quarters.

That night, just before dropping off to sleep in my newly acquired top bunk, I gave a deep sigh of relief and murmured, "I've made it." In my youthful ignorance I really thought I had.

Housing at least 2,000 men, the RHU had been built before the war as a holiday camp complete with observation tower, ballroom, mirrored dining rooms and chalets. Leisurely recreational pursuits were far from my mind however as I paraded at 0800 hrs the following day to be informed by the orderly Sergeant that I was on a charge for being AWOL.

My common sense should have told me that the Army would hardly be so stupid as

to send a soldier from one unit to another without informing the receiving end of the transferee's expected date of arrival. Obviously, the CRS had notified the RHU of my transfer and the date upon which I should arrive at Prestatyn. Looking back on the episode forty two years later, I am reluctantly forced to the conclusion that in those youthful days I must have possessed about as much nous as the proverbial village idiot.

I stood in line outside the Orderly Room with about forty other men, awaiting my turn to be marched in front of the OC, a Major, whose name shall be anonymous. After the first three defaulters had been dealt with the man on my left was called. He was a black Canadian who was being charged, for the third time, with the unusual offence of "defecating in various fire buckets during the hours of darkness". It appeared that he had, initially, restricted his disgusting nocturnal habit to those fire buckets situated within and without his own hut; however, flushed with success at not being caught, he had extended his horizon to include fire buckets located further afield, in this particular instance the Officers' Mess (I wondered if he had interpreted the sign outside that illustrious building literally, and should he, for good measure, have added the postscript – JUST LIKE US?).

The Major was a big, fat, florid man with a reputation for having a filthy, easily aroused temper. I can't vouch for what happened next as I was still standing in line outside the Orderly Room when the black Canadian was marched in to face the music. The charge was read out and the accused man pleading guilty. When the OC asked him why he defecated in fire buckets, the Canadian told him that he had come over to England to help fight the war, and not to play soldiers in North Wales: he went on to say, in so many words, that the incidents with the fire buckets were his way of expressing his contempt for those responsible for his situation and that included the Major.

Rumour went on to inform us that the Major lost his temper and called the Canadian a filthy black bastard: our nocturnal defecator, responding to the name calling challenge, told the OC that he was a big, fat, useless git who should have been fighting in France, instead of getting fatter by the hour in North Wales.

As stated previously, I can't vouch for the authenticity of that story: I can, however, vouch for the fact that it was an extremely irate Major I faced after being marched into his presence to face my punishment.

The charge was read out I opened my mouth to relate the story of woe that I had concocted: a story which I felt, if I were allowed full rein, would bring tears to his beady, red rimmed eyes. Instead, and before I could utter a word, other than "guilty", he announced "Fourteen days confined to barracks" and I was marched off.

I had no sooner reached the bottom step outside the Orderly Room than I was whisked off, by another Sergeant, to the main square where I joined several dozen other men who were already assembled there. We were brought to attention when a Police Constable appeared with a young woman of about twenty. Apparently the girl had been sexually assaulted by a soldier two days previously and every man the Sergeant could find who was around five feet nine inches tall with fair hair, blue eyes and of slim build had been paraded for scrutiny by the young lady.

Accompanied by the Sergeant they

“Beer is no painkiller - you need whiskey!”

walked along the three rows of men, stopping every so often for the girl to scrutinize a particular soldier. The trio walked straight past me; not that I would have worried if she had stopped; after all, on the day of the assault I had been with my wife at home, AWOL.

The parade was dismissed and we dispersed to our respective huts. So far as I know, the girl's attacker was never brought to justice.

My fourteen days CB proved to be an absolute doddle. At 1800 hours on the first night I reported, with several other men under punishment, to the Provost Sergeant who detailed me for work in the canteen for the next fourteen days. It was a huge canteen with the usual kitchens at the rear where the Manageress set me to work washing up huge piles of crockery. Those girls spoiled me so much that I was sorry when my "punishment" came to an end.

The next ten days were spent in preparing three hundred of us for a foreign draft. There were the usual medical inspections, inoculations and kit renewals: there were also dozens of films to be seen covering a multitude of subjects. We sat through one particularly gruesome film in which the audience were exhorted to look after their teeth and continued with close-ups of an ATS girl having all her rotten teeth extracted, as a warning to those who didn't. In an effort to curb the spread of VD in the Army we were lectured on the symptoms of gonorrhoea and syphilis, backed up by coloured slides in lurid detail of an affected male sex organ.

On the tenth day we attended a lecture on the subject of "First Aid in the Field" where we had to plunge a hypodermic into an orange in case we were ever required to inject a wounded comrade with morphia. A Captain walked in to find one man fast asleep in the back row. The Offender spent the next two hours as a guinea pig for our clumsy attempts at bandaging, splinting and applying tourniquets.

On the eleventh day we were all sent off on seven days embarkation leave.

Our return to Prestatyn was marked by the sale of oranges in the canteen. As we hadn't tasted oranges for years we would line up time and time again for our allocation of four oranges per man. A pal and myself took twenty each back to the hut and scoffed half of them on the first night.

We were given a lecture regarding the limited amount of information to be imparted in the event of our being taken prisoner, after which we were shown a film on how to purify impotable water with the aid of our individual supply of purifying tablets. The rest was waiting time.

Two days later the Company paraded on the square in full marching order for a short address from the Commanding Officer of the RHU, Lieutenant Colonel Foss VC DSO OBE MC, prior to moving off. I didn't get that far, however, as our Sergeant, at the very last minute, informed me that I had been withdrawn from the draft, along with an old pal, Geordie Collins. I thought I should have been elated at the news of my withdrawal; instead, I felt slightly disappointed: perhaps I wasn't the anti hero I had cracked myself up to be?

Meanwhile, whilst awaiting the next move, my mind pondered on the possible reasons for my withdrawal from the last draft. My paybook – AB64 Part One, had been handed back to me after the usual entries had been made, such as name and address of next of kin, details of the latest inoculations received, etc, I noticed that the entry by Capt Jones RAMC to the effect

that I had received only two weeks military training after entering the Army, had been underlined in red ink. Eureka! The Army had done a little forward thinking I guessed: what if I had been killed in action abroad? The Media would make a news story of the young soldier, sent abroad, with only two weeks military training to prepare him for combat against the Kraut. If my conclusion had been reached as the result of an over fertile imagination, then why had the paybook entry been underlined in red? I still suspect that my supposition was correct.

Little time was left, however, for me to cogitate upon my good fortune, or otherwise, as two days later I joined a draft with three dozen other men sent to reinforce a Company already established in a camp situated just outside the village of North Stoke, near Reading in Berkshire.

It was quite a pleasant spot. The officers, senior NCOs and admin staff were accommodated in a large country house, whilst "Other Ranks" were housed in Nissan huts within the extensive grounds. The food, whilst well enough cooked, could hardly be described as plentiful. I was reminded of a large sign painted on the wall of our dining hall in the RHU which read USE YOUR LOAF, DON'T WASTE IT! Such a sign would have been deemed surplus to requirements in our new camp.

According to the CSM, in his address to us on parade the next day, the purpose of our presence there was to provide a kind of roving work force in the area. We certainly roved, never being employed on one particular job for longer than a couple of days, except that is, for a full fortnight spent carrying out certain maintenance work in an American hospital/POW camp for German officers near Ringwood.

The camp itself was no different to any other establishment of that kind, except that within its fenced and well guarded perimeter there was an underground hospital complete with operating theatres. Not that we had free rein to wander round the camp at will. The hospital was out of bound to us and we were not allowed to carry out any work within the prisoners living compound without an American armed escort. Perhaps they considered that we could have been taken hostage by some fanatical Nazi officer best on vouchsaying an early return to the Fatherland: if so, then someone, somewhere, had considerably overated the negotiating value of a clutch of Chunkies!

There were only fourteen of us sent to the POW camp, plus a supervising Sergeant who spent the bulk of his time relating the most fantastic stories in which he always assumed the hero's role. His fictitious exploits were to be brought to an abrupt end however.

It happened on the seventh day, just after the saga of the air raid, which ended in a blaze of glory with the Sergeant holding up the roof of the shelter whilst a surgeon amputated the injured man's leg. Just as our storyteller came to the part where he dragged the rescued man to safety an American Sergeant approached us to ask for the use of three men to clean out the incinerator. I was one of the chosen three and, along with the two Sergeants; we made our way there and set to work.

Whether the sequel to this story was a put up job I don't know, but, as we finished our task, an American medic popped his head around an adjacent door and asked

our Sergeant to look at something inside. The Sergeant, no doubt feeling superior at being the only one to be asked, responded immediately to the request. Thirty seconds later, with his face as white as a sheet, he emerged from the doorway, lurched past us and round to the rear of the incinerator where he retched. The medic appeared, smiling, "Anyone else want to see an amputated foot?" he asked.

We heard no more stories from the

Sergeant, which was a pity in a way: after all, all the time we were listening, we weren't working!

What we all liked the most about that American camp was the food. Fed since joining the Army on powdered egg, bully beef, spam, tinned fat bacon and soya

sausages, and that was on the better days, we looked forward to twelve noon when we would enter their dining hall, pick up a bakelite sectional tray and line up for the big lash up: chicken, mashed potatoes, peas, corn on the cob, all covered in rich gravy and followed by tinned fruit and cream. The menu varied, but there was never less than a feast in front of us every lunchtime. Returning to our own camp every day at 1800 hrs, I would look at our pathetic teatime menu and echo the sentiments of the least sophisticated member of our detachment when he declared "Effing Yanks, they don't even know there's a war on!" There's gratitude for you.

One minor incident occurred which, whilst not spoiling our short stay with the Yanks, did engender a slightly bitter feeling within our ranks. I sat eating my lunch one day; sitting next to me was an Irish American soldier whose resentment of us I sensed almost immediately. English girls were the subject of his initial gripe. "Effing Limey broads are all the same, they only want us for our effing money," he announced to nobody in particular, then, finding he was getting no response to that particular declaration, he sounded off about the British race in general and, for good measure, he followed up with a stirring defence of the IRA and an indictment of the English Black and Tans.

Such an incident, had it occurred in a work of fiction, would no doubt have resulted in a general furore ending with the Irish American receiving his come uppance from an irate bunch of stout hearted patriotic Englishmen. Stout hearts may have been a little thin on the ground, but we were all Englishmen: our patriotism however was a definite non starter when measured against the finest nosh we had eaten in years. If the incident had occurred on our last day in the camp w the real world we were living in, not some fictitious, airy fairy land; consequently, not one of us disputed the Yank's wild rantings. Pride provides scant nourishment to the hungry belly!

Ruminating on the subject much later, I came to the conclusion, or I should say, I formed the opinion, that only the Irish Americans blamed the English people as a whole for Northern Ireland remaining in British hands. I had mixed closely with literally hundreds of Southern Irishmen both in the Army and in civilian life and never by word or deed, did I gain the impression that the Irish blamed us, the public, for Ireland's political plight; successive British Government's yes, but never the public. ■

Part II will be in April 2009 Newsletter...

AGM Minutes

60th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

Chairman: Col A Barnes JP TD
Secretary: Mr N Brown
Members Present: 85

THE Secretary opened the 60th Annual General Meeting, held in the WOs' and Sgts' Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester on Saturday 5th July 2008 by introducing the new Chairman of the Association to members present.

After welcoming members present and receiving apologies from Brig HJ Hickman, Brig CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald, Col PJ O'Connell, Lt Col JGO Lowe, Lt Col WH Copeland, Capt M East, Mr R Fox, Mr E Houston, Mr GW Cooke 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 59TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 59th Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2 REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

2. Lt Col SP Wheelton, CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, informed the meeting that yesterday had been the first anniversary of his appointment. The Regiment were proud of their heritage, traditions and links with the RPC Association. This weekend was an important weekend for both the Regiment and the Association and he hoped everyone attending would find it special, he also thanked Capt R Teague and Mr N Brown for their work in organising the Weekend.

3. On his appointment the Regiment were employed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Bosnia where they were employed on both Pioneer and Infantry tasks and he was happy to inform the meeting that all had returned safe and sound. He was proud of the many outstanding reports of their work that had been received.

4. This year, at very short notice. 110 soldiers from 23 Regt together with 170 Pnr Sqn had been tasked for Public Duties at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle and had performed their duties in an exemplary manner.

5. The remainder of the year was to be spent on consolidation; training, course and leave in readiness for operations next year, when all fit personnel would be deployed: 1 Squadron to be deployed to Kabul, 1 Squadron to Baghdad and 2 Squadrons to Cyprus on peace-keeping duties.

6. The Regiment had continued to excel on the sporting front. The rugby team had reached the Army Rugby Final and had narrowly lost in a thrilling game to the Royal Welsh Regiment.

7. He had tasked the Regiment to raise the sum of £23,000 for the Army Benevolent Fund. The Regiment had walked the full distance of 84 miles of Hadrian's Wall raising £14,000 in

sponsorship, the total to date is £17,000 and he hoped that this would be increased over this weekend.

8. He concluded by saying that the reputation of the Pioneers was being maintained.

ITEM 3. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

9. I must thank Colonel Simon for that interesting and useful report on his unit's activities over the past year. As usual the Regiment has had a very hard time and I am, once again, in awe of the enormous contribution that the Pioneers have made to the Nations defence this year. I must also thank Colonel Simon for allowing the Association to hold its Annual General Meeting and Reunion Weekend in his barracks and for allowing over 170 Association members to stay here over the weekend. This generosity is always enormously appreciated by we (forgive me); "Old Pioneers". I must also thank the RSM, WO1 Will Ross, for allowing us to hold our AGM within his luxurious mess. It is quite clear from our surroundings here that this is very clearly, the "Home" of the Pioneers.

10. I have learnt a hard lesson over the years that it is never wise to focus thanks on specific individuals in what is clearly a team. But I must also thank my predecessor, Brigadier Charles Telfer, for the work that he had done in the past 6 years as Chairman of the Association. This has been a very busy period where our affairs and assets have been integrated into The RLC Trust Fund. Brigadier Charles has borne the brunt of managing the Association's transition through a difficult and potentially very sensitive period of change as the RLC too has developed. Few people are aware of just how much skilled diplomacy and thoughtful managerial influence he has exerted. His style, as well as his expertise, have been enormously valuable. We and I believe the RLC owe him our profound thanks. I am very pleased to report that, without any doubt, our marriage with the RLC has been happy, Armonious and successful and looks to be set fair for the future thanks to his sterling work.

11. I must also say a thank you to Col Pat O'Connell who has recently resigned from the Executive Council after 15 years. His dedication has been notable and his valuable input has always been appreciated. He will be sorely missed and his eye for detail a loss to the Committee. My thanks also to the remainder of the Committee for their work during the past year and although again, I hesitate to highlight individuals, thanks especially to Lt Col John Starling for his continued dedication to the historical work of the Corps, including collating some 400,000 records, and to Capt Mat East, our representative on the RLC Benevolent Fund.

12. I must – and I hope that everyone in this room agrees; thank particularly Norman Brown for his dedication and commitment to the Association. His

contribution this year, once again has been profound and you will not have failed to note the fantastic product that is the Pioneer magazine – an incredible and outstanding publication and historical record.

13. It is wonderful to see so many people attending this year's Reunion, some travelling great distances; Frank Lyle from Dublin, Paddy Ennis from Belfast and many from Scotland, the North-East and the South-West. It is exceptionally pleasing to see our Second World War veterans again and our "one" In-Pensioner Micky Hulls. I hope all of you have a wonderful afternoon on the Sports Field and a marvellous evening in the Garrison Theatre – I am confident that you will. Could I ask you all please to support the Regiment in their efforts to raise the ambitious sum of £23,000 for the Army Benevolent Fund during the year. The ABF has as you know, always play a large part in providing Benevolence to ex, and serving, Pioneers.

14. Finally, it gives me great pleasure to present this collection of medals of Colonel McAdam to the CO of 23 Regiment to display in their Officers' Mess. The OBE was bequeathed to the Association in the will of the widow of Col McAdam and John Starling had donated the other medals to complete his entitlement. Col McAdam enlisted as a Private at the age of 22, he was commissioned one year later from the rank of Sergeant. By the age of 26 he was a Substantive Lieutenant Colonel and 2 years later, at the age of 28, a full Colonel in command of over 400,000 civilians. This must be a record in the army and is certainly an enormous achievement - befitting a Pioneer soldier and officer.

ITEM 4. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

15. In February of this year I together with other members of the Association were proud to watch as 450 members of the Regiment were awarded operational medals and the following day they smartly marched through Bicester town. In recognition of this event I commissioned a painting of the CO leading his men past The Olde Pioneer public house, although being poorly paid I could only afford a small painting! I would now like to present this to the CO so that in the future he may look at it with fond memories. I must also thank my son David for painting it.

16. The Christmas Draw made £4,200 profit and the Derby Draw £2,550 profit for which I must thank all members for their support. The profits go towards the work of the Association.

17. Once again I must remind members to notify me of change of address, the distribution of the last Newsletter resulted in 30 being returned. (1 marked deceased 15 years ago and another marked has not lived here for 17 years!).

18. The 39/93 Club have 2 meets each year in March and October at the Red Lion Hotel, Fareham where they have obtained discounted rates for accommodation. Further information can be obtained from Mr Les Rowley.

19. The Association is still enlarging its digital photographic library, if you have any photographs of your time in the Corps especially named group photographs please lend them to us, we will return them within 7 days.

20. I would like to record a note of appreciation for the work the Regiment has done in accommodating 173 members and in arranging the Weekend. In the last 6 weeks they have walked Hadrian's Wall followed by a two week exercise and had to plan this weekend. I think when you see the work they have put into the events and stalls on the sports field you will be very impressed.

21. I wish also to place on record my appreciation of the work carried out by my son Paul. Without this work the Newsletter would not be of the high quality that it is.

ITEM 5. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

21. 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, Maj GF Crook, Capt A Mycroft and Mr N Brown.

22. The meeting also elected Col RM

Baker and Mr I Easingwood who had been nominated by the Council for the two vacancies caused by the resignations of Col PJ O'Connell and Lt Col PA Jones.

ITEM 6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

23. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting would be 3 - 5 July 2009.

ITEM 9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

24. Mr P Ennis, on behalf of the Nostalgia Group, asked why the old Pioneer Badge (rifle, pick and shovel) was not displayed outside what was Simpson Barracks. The Secretary informed the meeting that the plaques outside what is now Simpson Manor had been arranged by Mr Tom Appleyard at no cost to the Association. This required raising the sum of £12,000 and liaison with the 4 building firms involved in the redevelopment of the site, the Northampton Regiment and Royal Anglian Regiment Associations and Northampton Borough Council. Now, fifteen years later, to change or add to the plaques would involve not only raising the necessary amount but obtaining permission from the builders, Local Council, Associations and local residents. This

would involve a great deal of work and time, as the Secretary is only paid for one and a half days per week he would be unable to take on this task himself.

25. Mr P Thomas, a resident of Northampton, stated that the plaques were on a slate base and looked impressive. He himself was a great believer in the "old" badge but considered that no change should be made and this was also the view of Mr Appleyard.

It was decided that if the Nostalgia Group wished to carry out the necessary work they should carry out the necessary negotiations and fund raising effort themselves. If they wished the Association to contribute towards the cost they should apply in writing to the Executive Council where the matter would be debated and a formal decision made.

26. It was agreed that congratulations be recorded to WO2 S Hussain (SSM 206 Sqn) for the award of the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List and also to Andy Parry and Graham McLane on their selection for Lieutenant Colonel.

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

N BROWN
Secretary

Forgotten Benefits

Veterans who did not qualify for a pension may now be entitled to one

IN the current climate of credit crunches and the rising costs of living, are ex-Service personnel getting all they are entitled to?

Veterans who have served in the Armed Forces since 1975 and did not qualify for an immediate pension may now be entitled to a Preserved Pension. Prior to 6 April 1975 there was no provision for a preservation of pension benefits and Service personnel who left the Armed Forces had to have completed 16 years from age 21 (Officers) or 22 years from age 18 (Other Ranks) to be eligible for a pension. Those who left before that date, without completing the above criteria, had no pension entitlement unless they were medically retired.

The rules changed on 6 April 1975 for pensions to be preserved for payment at age 60 for all those discharged over the age of 26 with a minimum of 5 years service. On 6 April 1988 the qualifying period was reduced from 5 to 2 years and the age criterion was dropped in 1978. Preserved pensions have to be claimed at age 60 or at age 65 if service began after 5 April 2006.

Preserved Pensions may be paid early, subject to consideration by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA), if a Veteran has become permanently unable to work full-time, in any capacity, through ill-health, and this condition will continue until preserved pension age.

For more information on preserved pensions visit www.veterans-uk.info and to find out if you are entitled to a pension, you should call the JPAC Enquiry Service on 0141 224 3600 or email JPAC@spva.mod.uk

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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.
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▲ **Tie Pin**
lovely
£2.50



▲ **Tie Pin**
lovely
£2.00



▲ **Wall Shields**
hand painted
£20



▲ **Wall Shields**
85-93 badge
£20



▲ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
£7



▲ **Fob Watch**
with the old badge, lovely
£25



▲ **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**



▲ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
£6



▲ **"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"**
by Major Bill Elliott

The Post-War History of the Corps was written by 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**



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Forgotten British Empire

Hitler went to war with the 500 million people of the British Empire

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IN 1939 Hitler went to war not just with Great Britain; he also went to war with the 500 million people of the British Empire scattered across every continent and ocean of the world.

Because in the years since 1945 that Empire has disappeared, the crucial fact that the British Empire fought as a whole during the war has been forgotten. All the parts of the Empire joined in the struggle from the beginning, undergoing huge changes and sometimes suffering greatly as a result. The war in the desert, the battle of the Atlantic and the Malaya campaign, and

the contribution of the Empire as a whole in terms of supplies, communications and troops, all reflect the strategic importance of Britain's imperial status. Men and women not only from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and India but also from Africa, Burma, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Polynesia all played their part. The British Empire and the Second World War seeks to place the British Empire at the centre of our understanding of the Second World War.

The book contains many references to the Pioneer Corps and the tasks they undertook. An example of this is the "Pioneer Army" of 100,000 that was keeping the Middle East and Mediterranean

theatres active in 1941. The colonial soldiers of the RPC salvaged aircraft from the desert, dug tank traps, provided smokescreens for infantry landings in Italy, built the Haifi - Tripoli military railway, manned fire equipment, operated ports, guarded supply dumps, patrolled troubled civilian areas, guarded prisoners, worked on army farms, constructed blast pens for aircraft in Malta, bridged the River Po in Italy, built telegraph lines across Italy and manned heavy anti-aircraft batteries defending Cairo.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR
By Ashley Jackson
ISBN 1852 854 170

Jews who escaped Hitler

Seven Jews served with the pioneer corps and describe their service

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IN March 1938, Hitler's troops invaded Austria, wildly cheered by thousands of spectators. Following the consequent annexation, a Greater Germany plebiscite recorded a 99 per cent support for Austro-German unification under Hitler.

By 1942, however, Allied leaders at Yalta had declared the annexed country "the first victim of Nazi aggression," laying the

groundwork for the suppression of Austria's collaboration in the Holocaust and establishing a grossly deficient "culture of memory." Among the forgotten were the 130,000 Austrian Jews who escaped the work camps and gas chambers only to find themselves in unfamiliar lands among unsympathetic people.

This book, rising out of Austria's "Year of Recollection" in 1988, contains the narratives of 27 ex-Austrian Jews who were forced into exile following the Anschluss.

Translated from the German by poet Ewald Osers, the book includes accounts of anti-Semitism before Hitler, the annexation, flight from the homeland, and life in exile.

Of the 27 narratives 7 served in the Pioneer Corps and describe their service.

STRANGERS AT HOME AND ABROAD
Recollections of Austrian Jews Who Escaped Hitler
Edited by: Adi Wimmer
ISBN 0 7864 0668 2

Ten Commando 1942-1945

A worthy tribute to an incredibly brave group of clandestine soldiers

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IT is indeed remarkable, since the archives of the Second World War must have been pillaged, ransacked, burrowed into, and turned over almost as thoroughly as Monte Cassino itself, that no book has been written about one of the strangest units created during that or any other conflict.

The unit was called Ten Commando - and the shroud of secrecy that enveloped it at the time has scarcely been unwrapped

by the passage of the years.

Ten Commando was composed entirely of men who came from Germany and from Nazi occupied countries such as Holland, Poland and France.

Secrecy was vital, for if an Axis agent were infiltrated into Ten Commando he could do untold harm.

If a member of Ten Commando were captured and his unit identified, the rules of the Geneva Convention were unlikely to worry the captors.

This overwhelming need for absolute secrecy was so well instilled in the men of

Ten Commando that, until now, little was known about their daring exploits behind enemy lines, including coordination of resistance fighters and sabotage.

Many members of Ten Commando had originally served in the Pioneer Corps.

The result of Ian Dear's painstaking research is a remarkable book indeed and a worthy tribute to an incredibly brave group of clandestine soldiers who belong near the top of the WW2 Roll of Honour.

TEN COMMANDO 1942 - 1945
by Ian Dear
ISBN: 0 312 03438 5

Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

IN the May Newsletter we published the death of Maj Robert (Bob) Colville, unfortunately the following letter from Brigadier JB Ryall was not received until the Newsletter was at the printers...

Dear Mr Brown,

I was on a world cruise from the beginning of Jan 08 to the 22nd Apr 08 and it was only on my return that I heard of the sad loss of my colleague and sincere friend, Major Robert (Bob) Colville who died suddenly on the 28th Feb 08.

Bob joined me at 4 PCLU Monchengladback some 45 years ago and quickly came to grips with the Units for which he was responsible for and quickly sorted out the problems faced; he was not a "bumph" man, but his personality and quick brain got to the heart of the matter.

While he did not suffer fools gladly he was exceptionally patient with those who did not have his keen brain and was well respected by all from privates to Generals and civilian staff.

Bob's wife, Eileen, joined him in Monchengladback and my late wife, Joyce and Eileen got on famously from the first time they met - indeed all four of us became very firm friends. We did not serve again together after those days but kept in close touch and frequently met.

In short Bob was a real soldier and a real Pioneer.

I have lost a great friend and to Eileen and his children, Murray and Cheryl I send my sincere condolences.

Bob; Requiescat in peace.

Yours sincerely,

JB Ryall

JACKAMAN SAMUAL

24 Sep 06 Crewe Aged 88)
Landed in Africa and Normandy

HAYBALL EDWARD LAMBERT

29 Apr 08 Hinckley (Aged 97)

Lieutenant Edward Lambert (Ted) Hayball was originally in the Royal Gloucestershire Regiment, as his father had been.

After service in India he was recalled in 1939, and was wounded in France in the retreat of 1940. He was then transferred to the Pioneer Corps to undertake non-combatant duties, but he managed to get himself upgraded and was eventually commissioned.

He landed on Juno Beach on D Day with the Pioneers entrusted with making roadways on the beach, and later saw service in the operation in the mouth of the River Scheld, which prevented the Germans from seizing the port of Antwerp.

He was demobilised as Lt Hayball in 1945 and after training as a teacher and serving in schools in Buckingham, London and Leicestershire retired in 1975.

He enjoyed more than thirty years of happy retirement, pursuing his hobbies of art (mainly humorous), short story writing, travelling and membership of the Labour Party.

Together with his wife Constance he attended the fortieth anniversary celebration of D Day in Normandy, and he laid the wreath on behalf of the Pioneer Corps in the British Army Cemetery in Normandy.

He received a citation and a medal from the Mayor of Lower Normandy, which read: "...en reconnaissance de la part qu'il a prise a la liberation de la Region, de la France, et de l'Europe".

Ted loved the Army, but hated war, with good reason, as his father was killed in 1916. He resigned from The Labour Party at the time of the Iraq War for that reason.

REES RT

Ex Cpl (13059008)

103 Coy - enlisted 25 Jul 40, Normandy veteran with 103 Coy

CROUCH WD

Mar 08 Downham Market Capt (Retd). Joined Association 6 Sep 47. Served Dec 40 - May 46

SHERRIFF J

Ex Sgt (13060818)

Leicester. Served 1 Aug 40 - 14 Jun 46.

SMITH JC

Ex Pte (23177245)

Whitby Aged 72

GIBBON GH

Ex Sgt (1556753)

Sutton in Ashfield, joined 252 Coy on 17 Jul 43.

COLLINS G

Ex Cpl (13101404)

11 Oct 07 Salisbury (Aged 86). Served 7 Aug 41 - Jun 46 101 & 128 Salvage Units

BARKS STG

Ex Cpl (23893783)

10 Jun 06 Burton on Trent

DYSON S

Ex LCpl (24763197)

23 Jun 08 Brownhills, West Midlands (Aged 39)

HUDSON NIGEL CHARLES

Ex Pte (24763200)

14 May 08 Winsford, Cheshire (Aged 39). Served 7 Jan 86 - 9 Aug 89

CHECKETTS ROBERT LOXLEY (BOB)

Ex LCPL (13110436)

9 Aug 08 Stow-on-the-Wold (aged 88). Served 5 Feb 42 - 7 Oct 46 in 175 Coy

BLACK TERENCE WILLIAM

Ex Pte 23685729

26 Jul 08 Scarborough (aged 68)

RICHMOND SAM

20 Aug 08 Kirkintilloch

JEPSON TREVOR WALTON THOMAS

Ex LCpl (22952441)

26 May 08 (Aged 72). Served in Aden with 518 Coy

SMITH J

Ex Cpl (24091558)

(Aged 59) Carlton in Lindreck. Served 1967-79

JEWELL EDWARD CARROLL

(Ex Pte 23758803)

28 Jun 08 Truro Aged 70



Death of Ilfracombe pioneer

Death of Ilfracombe Pioneer Corps man was translator at Nuremburg trials

Article: North Devon Times
Date: August 2008

ONE of the few surviving members of a Second World War "refugee corps", which had bases in North Devon, has died in the USA.

An obituary has appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer for Roger Bryan, 87, a German-born translator for the prosecution at the Nuremberg war-crime trials who moved to the USA after the war.

Born Roger Britzmann in 1921 in Berlin, the son of a doctor, he studied photography. Weeks before war broke out he fled to England where he was interned as a prisoner-of-war.

In 1940 he and 2,500 other Jews and refugees were shipped to Australia on the floating concentration camp, the Dunera. He was in a prisoner-of-war camp for several months before being returned to

England.

Mr Bryan wrote in a memoir that the British Army allowed him to volunteer in 1941 for the Pioneer Corps in Ilfracombe. The Pioneer Corps was made up mostly of refugees and former prisoners on the Dunera. He was then stationed in Glasgow, where he met Lore Konigshofer and they married in 1943.

In 1946, Mr Bryan was sent to the former concentration camp at Neuengamme, near Hamburg, to interrogate and document Nazi officials and soldiers. Later that year, he worked as a translator at the Nuremberg trials.

He wrote in his memoir: "I translated German terms and phrases for British prosecutors in the courtroom.

To see the whole rogues' gallery of defendants, not more than 20 feet in front of me, was overwhelming. Goering, with a derisive grin most of the time, Streicher,

Rudolf Hess and other Nazi criminals. Hess was either a great actor or mentally disturbed."

A few months later, Mr Bryan supervised the British Film and Documentation Unit, run by the RAF.

He said: "We had samples of tattooed human skin that had been made into lamp shades and gloves.

Even more devastating was the collection of photographs taken by German soldiers. The most haunting one showed a trench the prisoners had dug before being shot at the edge of it. One of the victims looked like my mother. I had trouble sleeping for nights."

In 1954, the family moved to Philadelphia, where Mr Bryan worked as a salesman and founded a sewing thread firm.

He is survived by his wife, daughter and three grandchildren.

Britain and its fallen heroes

People fail to respect the tremendous sacrifices made by service personnel

Article: This is London
Date: April 2008

THE following is a link to an article regarding the way Britain treats its fallen heroes: <http://tinyurl.com/6m6yol>

They serve the same Queen, fight the same foe and lay down their lives with equal valour and sacrifice. But when the fallen heroes of Canada and Britain come home, the welcome is very different. At airbases in both countries there is only sombre respect. The Mail on Sunday publishes extraordinary pictures that contrast the final road journeys: in Canada, there is a police escort and crowds line the route; in Britain, the hearses are denied outriders and go unremarked.

The following comment was made by Major (Retd) Chris Belgum now living in

Ontario, Canada:

I served a total of 23 years in the British Army and was proud of every minute and every person who served with me. I always thought we 'did it right' and that the respect we held for our Armed Forces Personnel was second to none. This story, sadly does not shock me, however it saddens me terribly.

I moved to Canada in 2002 with my family and joined the Canadian Army. At that time soldiers from my old Regiment (23 Pioneer Regiment) were serving in Basra - you cannot imagine the pain and worry I felt knowing that my colleagues were in harm's way and that I had no way to support them. I took some solace in the thought that the British Public have always given their support to the troops and that the Country would not let them down.

Since then I have heard tell of wounded personnel in NHS beds being asked to remove military items and such in case it offended someone, now I see these pictures here.

What have we sacrificed? Our pride? Our national identity? Perhaps it is just that we can't be bothered with this respect thing - too much effort. Tell that to the children, partners and friends of the Fallen.

I was moved to tears by the pictures of the Canadian soldiers as they returned and the spontaneous (yes spontaneous) support from the public.

Canada still honours the old traditions of service and I am so proud to be a part of this Army and this Country. It is not much to ask, but many people fail to respect the tremendous sacrifices made by Service personnel and their families.

Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...

RHINE SECTION - OCT 77

GREEN MA (Service no 24592697 or 24692697) ex Kineton, a friend from America is trying to contact. Contact vgaaron2003@yahoo.com

McDOWELL IAN

from Littlehampton, VINCENT Paul (Vinnie) from South Wales, VARDNELL Mickey from Portsmouth and DON Jimmy from Durham.

Contact Dave Kerr on DKerr251@aol.com

BRANIGAN PAUL

Served in Defence Company in Germany and in 187 Company Bicester.

Contact Andrew Barratt c/o RPC Association.

62, 157 & 195 COMPANIES

Mr Ron Cooper (now living in Australia) is trying to make contact with anyone who served with his father HL Cooper in the above Companies. Contact R Cooper c/o RPC Association

NORTHERN IRELAND

My name is Ken Wharton and I am the author of 'A Long Long War; Voices from The British Army In Northern Ireland, 1969-98 (please see www.helion.co.uk for blurb & reviews) This book is very pro-British Army. I am in the process of preparing my second book, unfortunately I have had no contributions from the Royal Pioneer Corps for either book and yet I know that you had plenty there. An RCT mate

reckons the ones he had with him on bodyguard duty were excellent shots.

Can you ask amongst your comrades please and see if any want to write up their experiences for me. email: ken-wharton@hotmail.com

JOE EDWARDS, FITZ MORGAN, GINGE HURDMAN, PETER BAILEY, IAN HOOGY.

Dave Minor is trying to find the above contact: MinMan5@aol.com



And finally...

A little bit of humour and a vote of no confidence to end the newsletter

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: 2 officers on a mission

HERE are some extracts from peoples confidential reports (Ed note: not mine!).

- His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of curiosity.
- I would not breed from this Officer.
- This Warrant Officer is really not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won't-be.
- When she opens her mouth, it seems that this is only to change whichever foot was previously in there.
- He has carried out each and every one of his duties to his entire satisfaction.
- He would be out of his depth in a car park puddle.
- Technically sound, but socially impossible.
- This Sergeant reminds me very much of a gyroscope- always spinning around at a frantic pace, but not really going anywhere.
- This young lady has delusions of adequacy.
- When he joined my unit, this Officer was something of a granny; since then he has aged considerably.
- This Transport Officer has used my vehicles to carry his genitals from place to place, and my officers to carry him from bar to bar.
- Since my last report he has reached rock bottom, and has started to dig.
- She sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.
- He has the wisdom of youth, and the energy of old age.
- This Officer should go far - and the sooner he starts, the better.
- This man is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot.
- Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap.
- His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of curiosity.

ON 7 July members of the Nostalgia Group posted on both their website and the RPC website a Vote of No Confidence in me as Controller of the RPC Association. It is pleasing to report that this vote was not carried, in fact only 4 members supported it - not surprisingly all members of the Nostalgia Group.

I must thank all those, both those still

-serving and those retired, who sent me messages of support either on the website or to me personally, it is nice to be appreciated. I have been asked, however, to clarify that not all members of the Nostalgia Group supported this motion.

The following is one of the replies which I received:

"I would like to add my thanks for the great work that you and your son do for all Pioneers.

It saddened me to read the continuing attacks by some members of the Nostalgia group. Having served with and known Trevor Leach since leaving the army, I just can't see that he would ever have allowed this to happen, the two individuals at the heart of it all are a disgrace to the cap badge, just a jumped up pair of idiots.

You truly do have the patience of a saint. I have posted on your forum as Chippgonemad, probably just adding fuel to the fire, for that I apologise, I'm so angry that these people could cause this trouble.

Thank you for your hard work, if I can help in any way, then please don't

hesitate to call me."

After leaving the thread to run for approximately two months we closed it down. It is worthy of note that the thread received over 2,500 'hits' and 50 replies. One of the instigators published the following: "we were quite within our rights as life members of the assc to put forward a vote of no confidence and after it was posted and the post was seen it should have then gone to the AGM to be discussed."

All members have the right for a topic to be placed on the agenda for the AGM. They should, however, follow the rules of the Association and put their case in writing to the Executive Council of the Association in the first instance. It should also be noted that the Vote of No Confidence was published two days after the AGM, it could therefore not have been discussed.

Full details of the Vote of No Confidence and replies can be seen on the Forum Section of the website www.royalpioneerco.uk under the Nostalgia Group section. ■



"Don't worry, old man Cpl Brimacombe assured me he'd fix us up with a job"

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Smokey Joes Story Part II
- Your stories
- Viewpoint
- News from 23 & 168 Pioneer Regiments
- Another unpublished complete story
- Letters



■ Nostalgia Group at Redcar 2008

Picture: Supplied by Nostalgia Group



■ Nostalgia Group presenting awards

Picture: Supplied by Nostalgia Group



■ Mat East's presentation by Nostalgia Group

Picture: Supplied by Nostalgia Group



■ John Barlow presentation by Nostalgia Group

Picture: Supplied by Nostalgia Group



■ Neil Taylor's presentation by Nostalgia Group

Picture: Supplied by Nostalgia Group



■ Op Banner service at St Paul's Cathedral

Picture: Supplied



■ Les thanks Bill with a kiss

Picture: Supplied by 39/93 Club



■ Regt Col with Capt & Mrs Teague at St Pauls

Picture: Supplied by Capt Teague



D. COSBY