



# The Pioneer

The Newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

APRIL 2009

[www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk)

## PAYING RESPECTS

Pioneers marching proudly at the Cenotaph in London





▲ **Buttons**  
both badges available  
**£1.50 each**  
or **£6 for £8**



▲ **Cufflinks**  
new badge  
**£5**



▲ **Cufflinks**  
bronze  
**£6**



▲ **Tie Pin**  
lovely  
**£2.50**



▲ **Tie Pin**  
lovely  
**£2.00**

◀ **Corps Tie**  
A new tie is now available from HQ RPC Association, although keeping the same pattern the new one contains the Corps Badge on the blade of the tie.  
**£7.50**



▲ **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**



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

# The Pioneer



## Front Cover

Cenotaph Parade, London  
November 2008

Picture: Paul Brown



## Back Cover

Cenotaph Parade, London  
November 2008

Picture: Paul Brown

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## The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

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



This Newsletter contains the final part of the story "Smokey Joes". This has been very well received. Have you a story to tell? We always require articles for future editions, we also require your suggestions for improvement or types of articles required. This edition also contains details from 168 Pnr Regiment, it is pleasing to report that they have been as busy as ever.

Once again preparations are being made for the Reunion Weekend at Bicester on 3/5 July 2009. A booking form for the weekend is enclosed with this Newsletter, accommodation will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

You will note on this form that if you wish to be accommodated with friends you should include your preference on the form. Last year we had problems with people moving from allocated bed spaces, you must stay where allocated or you will be asked to leave the accommodation. It must also be pointed out that only a few ground floor rooms are available.

For those who wish to stay in Bicester the following is a high quality B&B in Bicester which members have been using for the past few years: [www.wattslodge.co.uk](http://www.wattslodge.co.uk) or call 01869 241930

Unfortunately 23 Pioneer Regiment will be deployed on three operational tours so the weekend will be a low key event compared to last year. We do, however, plan to entertain you.

A carvery meal is planned for the Saturday evening followed by a Group and Disco in the Sergeants Mess. Please do not abuse the Mess and follow the dress code i.e. smart casuals (no blue jeans!).

It is pleasing to report that the Association have recruited 59 members since January 2008, some of these actually served in World War 2 and had not heard of the Association. Unfortunately, once again, we have a long list of members who have sadly passed away.

Following the return of the Regiment a Medal Parade for the award of operational medals is planned for Sat 28 November 2009. The Regiment have kindly invited all Association members to spectate at this parade and also for the Parade through Bicester Town during the afternoon.

Finally, as usual, with this Newsletter we are enclosing Derby Draw tickets, please give this your support. If you can sell more tickets please just ring (01869) 360694 or email [royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com) and I will gladly send more.

Finally, once again I must thank my son Paul for producing such a high quality Newsletter. I know how many hours this takes him, especially correcting all my mistakes!  
**Norman Brown**



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## PAST EVENTS

■ 57 OFFICERS attended the 62nd Past and Present Pioneer Officers' Dinner which was held in the Officers' Mess, 23 Pioneer Regt RLC on 17 October 2008.

Attendees included Brig HJ Hickman CBE the President of the RPC Association, Col A Barnes the Chairman of the Association, Brig CB Telfer CBE and Lt Col S Wheelton CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC.

As is the custom speeches were kept to a minimum to allow more time for the ritual of swapping 'War' stories.

■ THE numbers attending the Field of Remembrance this year both at the Royal Pioneer Corps Plot and the Field in general were well down on previous years.

A serving soldier from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, LCpl Mat Ford, and our In Pensioner, Micky Hull, fronted the Plot. Both spoke to HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

Tickets are not required to attend the Field of Remembrance.

If members wish the Association to arrange a cross to be laid on their behalf they should contact the Association before 31 July 2009.

■ IT has become practice to follow the Field of Remembrance with a London Lunch in the Marquis of Westminster Public House in Wilton Street, Victoria. Although only 19 attended this year a pleasant lunch and chat was enjoyed.

Once again two of George Scully's GC daughters, Eileen and Val, joined us for the meal.

It was also pleasing to see five members from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. All promised to return this year if they have returned from their respective deployments.

Following the lunch it was decided that all attending should take our In-Pensioner 'home' and as is the custom we paid a visit to his bar where we were made very welcome.

■ AS is usual the Northampton Branch of the RPC Association held its Christmas Party in January at the Kingsley Park Working Mens Club.

The Branch holds the party in January for two reasons, one it is always cheaper in January and secondly a lot of people are heavily committed in December.

This year 48 attended, it would have been 49 but one Irishman (who shall remain nameless) from Blackpool, fell over on New Years Eve and had to be admitted to hospital. We hope he is now on the mend. It is appreciated that if he had fallen on his head he would have been OK.

It was pleasing to see some new faces at this function namely Capt (Retd) Alan Sharp and his wife Anne (who many will remember as the nurse at Simpson Barracks), Mr & Mrs Joe McFarland and also Mr Gary Manikiza.

Following an excellent 3 course meal which included, of course, crackers and party hats many danced the night away with the disco.

The Branch Chairman, Mr N Brown, presented the Club with a framed print of the Terence Cuneo painting "Pioneers on D Day". This was in recognition of the fact that the club had waived its normal booking fee. This picture is now hanging in the Club.

# Fijian choir sing their hearts out

## At the ladies dinner and generation night



■ The Fijiian Choir. It's not often you can come into the Sgts' Mess dressed like this! Picture: Paul Brown

THE Ladies Dinner Night/Generation Night was held in both the WOs' & Sgts' Mess and the Dining Hall, 23 Pioneer Regt RLC on Saturday 18 October 2008.

129 attended and the reason for the two locations was the high number. Pre-dinner drinks were held in the Mess and then all made their way to the Dining Hall for a wonderful meal.

Staff Sergeants Matravers and Savage had done a fantastic job in converting the Dining Hall into a second Sergeants Mess. It had been decided to make the evening less formal than normal and a magician toured the tables showing his tricks. The TA RLC Corps of Drums then carried out a light display which was appreciated especially by those who had not seen this display before.

Following the meal and the speeches, which were kept very, very short, it was back to the mess for cheese & biscuits, coffee and, of course, post dinner drinks. The Regimental Fijiian choir then gave a performance and this was followed by a lively group which kept the dance floor fully occupied.

The TA Corps of Drums did a second display this time encouraging members and their wives to participate.

All attending enjoyed themselves and the split location caused no inconvenience.

If those who attended this function would like a CD containing all the photographs taken they should contact the Secretary, WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club, c/o RPC Association who will gladly send them a copy.



■ 23 Pioneer Intra-Squadron Boxing Competition

Picture: Norman Brown

# Boxing Competition

The fighters were prepared under the watchful eye of SSgt Ringer

**T**HE course of the past year has given the soldiers of 23 Pioneer Regiment a focus for their physical activities, in the form of the Commanding Officer's Trophy.

Amongst various activities the most keenly anticipated and hyped event was unquestionably on 19 November, in the form of the Intra-Squadron Boxing Competition. Over the preceding 6 weeks, the fighters were prepared under the watchful eye of SSgt Ringer. On the two days preceding the competition the preliminary bouts were contested with the finalists earning the right to box on the night. The evening was a fantastic event with every boxer delivering of his best and every spectator providing a fantastic atmosphere and support for the fighters. It speaks volumes for the efforts of the organisers and for the competitors that the VIP guests could not speak highly enough of their enjoyment of the evening and the impression of professionalism that permeated throughout.

The night's winners, 518 Sqn, went onto win the CO's trophy, despite a late rally by the other task sqns.

WEIGHT	NAME AND SQUADRON WINNER	NAME AND SQUADRON
Featherweight	Pte STEBBINGS 522 Sqn	Pte CORBITT 518 Sqn
Lightweight	LCpl CRAWSHAW 187 Sqn	LCpl GRIEVES 206 Sqn
Light Welter	2Lt SLATTER 522 Sqn	Pte AMOAH 518 Sqn
Welterweight	Pte RICE 518 Sqn	Pte JEFFERY 144 Sqn
Super Heavyweight	Pte KAVA 522 Sqn	Pte VAVE 144 Sqn
Middleweight	Pte BOWEN 518 Sqn	Pte RICE 522 Sqn
Light Heavy	Pte BROWN 144 Sqn	Pte HUNT 522 Sqn
Cruiserweight	LCpl WAQANNANUA (518 Sqn)	LCpl BUCKLEY (187 Sqn)
Heavyweight	Pte FOWLER 518 Sqn	Pte EDEN 206 Sqn
Light Welter	Pte PLAYDON 518 Sqn	Pte CLOWERY 522 Sqn



## FUTURE EVENTS

■ 2009 sees the first Armed Forces Day, a celebration of British Forces, past, present and future.

For the last three years, the nation has come together on 27 June to celebrate Veterans Day, with more and more communities holding events to honour the continuing contribution of those who have served in the UK Armed Forces. To build on this success, and in response to the recommendations of the 2008 report into the National Recognition of the Armed Forces, from 2009 the day will also celebrate the men and the women still serving in our Armed Forces.

The title 'Armed Forces Day' has been chosen to reflect the wider Armed Forces family of serving personnel (both regular and reserve), veterans and the cadet forces. This sense of inclusiveness is reflected in the strapline for the Day: "Celebrating Britain's Armed Forces, past, present and future."

The MOD is already working with the councils, civil officers, and voluntary bodies that have expressed interest in holding events, and it will be engaging with the ex-Service organisations and others over the coming months.

Organisers of events will be encouraged to highlight the sense of inclusivity in all Armed Forces Day events with, for example, veterans and cadets standing alongside serving personnel at badge and medal ceremonies and other civic parades and receptions. Units will be encouraged to become involved wherever and whenever they can: given their current level of operational commitment, however, it will not be possible for serving personnel to support all events around the country, and in some area veterans and cadets will be the mainstay of events.

Last year, Blackpool hosted a very successful National Veterans Day in the presence of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, Henry Allingham (Britain's oldest veteran) and thousands of veterans and members of the public. This year, Chatham has been selected to hold the inaugural Armed Forces Day National Event.

The Historical Dockyard has a proud military heritage and offers an outstanding venue for a range of planned activities including parades, a reception and displays of military equipment and capabilities. Many other towns and cities are also coming forward with interesting and exciting plans for their events, offering the prospect of a day of real national celebration.

■ THE Field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 5 November 2009 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 hrs.

All 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 9am to 5.30pm until Saturday 7 November 2009.

Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held.

# 70th anniversary reunion weekend

This years association reunion is 3-5 July 2009

**A**LTHOUGH this year's event will be much smaller than last because of the deployment of the Regiment a great deal of interest has already been shown and we are expecting a large number of members to attend.

Accommodation will be provided on a first come first allocated basis.

A full programme of events is shown below and a booking form is included with the Newsletter. As can be seen most

events are to be held in the Sergeants Mess by kind permission of the RSM 23 Pnr Regt RLC.

Please do not abuse the messes hospitality and respect the mess rules, although casual dress is accepted it must be pointed out that blue jeans are not allowed in the mess.

This is the 70th Anniversary of the Corps let us all enjoy ourselves and have a good time.

## DRAFT PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Date & Time	Event	Location	Requirements/Remarks
3 Jul 1500 hrs	Reception/Bring a Boss	Corporals Club	Bar open 1430-1830 hrs
3 Jul 1830 hrs	Social Evening	Sergeants Mess	Fish/Chicken and chips to be served at approx 2000-2100 hrs. Dress smart casual (no blue jeans)
4 Jul 0900 hrs	WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club AGM	Sergeants Mess	Members of Reunion Club only Club only
4 Jul 1045 hrs	Form-up for Church Service	Outside Place2Be	Standard Bearer to lead contingent to War Memorial
4 Jul 1100 hrs	Church Service	War Memorial	Wreaths to be laid by member of RPCA and Young Soldier
4 Jul 1120 hrs	March Past	Outside RHQ	Commanding Officer Chairman RPCA to take salute
4 Jul 1130 hrs	Photograph	Officers Mess Steps	
4 Jul 1140 hrs	Tea/Coffee	Officers Mess	Chance for RPCA members to view medal room
4 Jul 1200 hrs	RPCA AGM Lunch	Officers Mess	Sergeants Mess bar to be open 1230 -1500 hrs
4 Jul 1330 hrs	RPCA members v Serving soldiers shoot	DCCT	6 veterans v 6 serving soldiers
4 Jul 1400 hrs	Power-point Presentation	Sergeants Mess	Cpl Hanson to show presentation. (Photo DVDs supplied by Mr N Brown)
4 Jul 1500 hrs	Football Match RPCA v Serving	Football Pitch	Mr K Burrows organising Veterans Team
4 Jul 1400 hrs	Silent auction	Sergeants Mess White Tent	Run by Mr N Brown (profits for RPCA towards cost of weekend). To run until 1700 hrs
4 Jul 1930 hrs	Pioneer Social Night	Unit Restaurant / Sergeants Mess	Carvery meal to be served 1830 hrs, followed by entertainment.

### NOTES...

- All personnel to be charged £4 for a Friday ticket and £8 for a Saturday ticket (£12 for both) (No ticket no entry to Sergeants Mess, no buffet)
- Personnel will be encouraged to bring items for silent auction - at least 20% of proceeds to go to RPCA. Rules are as follows:
  - Items are booked into the auction stating the reserve (if any) and what percentage of selling price will be donated to RPC Association
  - Items may be viewed from 1400 hrs to 1700 hrs.
  - Next to each item will be a sheet stating, percentage to RPCA and reserve price
  - Anyone can enter a bid from 1400 until 1700 hrs
  - The highest bidder at 1700 has "won" the item. They can then pay for the item and take it away.
  - If an item is not sold or does not reach its reserve price it must be collected by the seller by 1800 hrs.



■ Members of the Association, proudly marching past the Cenotaph

Picture: Paul Brown

# Paying their respects

Last year 29 members of the association marched at the cenotaph

**T**HE wreath was carried by Mr Alan Fawcett who is the Standard Bearer of the Northampton Branch of the RPC Association.

This year we have been allocated 30 tickets; these can be obtained on application of the Association on a first come first served basis (it should be noted that 18 tickets have already been requested). Tickets will be distributed in October 2009.

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).

The Armistice that ended the Great War took effect at 11 o'clock on 11th November 1918. Eight months later, a Peace Day march was held in London, for which a temporary cenotaph - or 'empty

tomb' was erected.

Following a suggestion by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick whose son had been killed in France in 1917, King George V made a request to the nation that, "at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, there may be a brief space of two minutes, a complete suspension of all our normal activities." This would allow the nation to honour all those who had died in service.

The two minutes silence was observed the length and breadth of the country, and in London, crowds were drawn to the Cenotaph as if by instinct. In fact, a way had to be cleared for an equerry to lay the King's wreath.

Thus, by the time of the British Legion's formation in 1921, the annual two minutes silence and an Armistice Day service at the Cenotaph had already been

established.

It was clear that British people from every walk of life were united in their determination to remember those who had lost their lives in the Great War.

The British Legion's National Executive Council recognised the need to play a significant role in the development of a national day of remembrance which would not only pay tribute to the dead, but also raise essential funds to help the survivors.

As Tom Lisyter, the British Legion National Chairman noted in August 1921, "I think the Legion will touch the popular imagination in the desire for a National Day Commemoration" and in a meeting in September the Council resolved "That November 11th be the date adopted by the British Legion as Remembrance Day."



## FUTURE EVENTS

■ A London lunch will follow the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 6 November 2009.

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

Bookings can be made to Secretary, Royal Pioneer Corps 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.

■ THE 63rd Past and Present Officers Dinner will be held in the Officers' Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, Bicester on Friday 27 November 2009.

Please not change of date - this was originally planned for 17 October 2009 but has been changed because of the operational deployment of 23 Pnr Regt RLC. It will now be held the night before the Medal Parade and Freedom of Bicester Parade.

Bookings can be made at any time (by 10 Nov 09) to Secretary, Royal Pioneer Corps Association, c/o 23 Pioneer Regt Royal Logistic Corps, St David's Bks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

The cost will remain at £20 per head.

Why not stay overnight and watch the Medal Parade and Freedom of Bicester Parade on Saturday 28 November 2009.

■ 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC is to hold a Medal Parade and Freedom of Bicester Parade on Saturday 28 November 2009.

The Medal Parade is to be held in the morning when members of the Regiment will be presented with their operational medals from their various deployments in 2009. (Iraq, Afghanistan and with the UN in Cyprus).

In the afternoon the Regiment will march through Bicester Town with 'Bands playing and bayonets fixed'.

The Regiment have kindly invited all Association members to watch these events.

To ascertain numbers of spectators at the Medal Parade it would be appreciated if you could inform RPC Association if you intend to attend.

■ WARRANT Officers and SNCO's Ladies Dinner night will once again be held in the WOs' and Sgts' Mess, 23 Pioneer Regt Royal Logistic Corps on Saturday 28 November 2009.

Full details will be circulated to members in the Club's Newsletter.

It is hoped that once again this event will be a joint Ladies and Generation Dinner Night as this proved so popular last year. This gives members the opportunity to bring their parents, grand-parents or children (if they are over the age of 18).

For those who attended last year's event and would like a CD containing photographs of the evening should contact the Club Secretary, c/o RPC Association. This will be provided at no cost.

Why not attend early on the Saturday morning and watch both the Medal Parade and Freedom of Bicester Parade.

# Pioneer medal room now open

## Open for all members to view at the reunion



■ Brigadier CJ Murray CBE ADC MA FCILT opening the new medal room

Picture: Norman Brown

THE Director RLC, Brig CJ Murray CBE ADC MA FCILT visited 23 Pnr Regt RLC on 22 Jan 09. During his visit he opened a new medal room in the Officers' Mess.

Lt Col J Starling, the Royal Pioneer Corps Historian, had very kindly loaned his medal collection to the Regiment.

Capt T Teague had, after a great deal of research, produced the citations and background to each medal and Ex WO2 John Bennett then made the striking frames to mount these medals.

During the Reunion Weekend this room

will be open for all Association members to view the collection. In addition visitors to the Regiment will be encouraged to view it.

Also during his visit the Director presented LS&GC medals to two members of the Association Sgt SJ Venables and Cpl PW Teasdale who joined the RPC on 3 Feb 92 and 9 Mar 87 respectfully. An LS&GC was also presented to Sgt Harrison and 2 Operational Medals (Iraq and Afghanistan) were presented to LCpl Martin, WO2 R Brierton was also presented with his warrant.

# 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 October 2008 Newsletter? It was a very hard one to spot! It was on page 29 in the reflection of the drum.

We only had two correct answers and the first correct entry received was from Mrs Kim Lunn, her prize has already been forwarded to her.

Can you spot the mouse in this issue of the newsletter? (and the one on this page does not count!). We will make it

slightly easier for you this time.

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







■ Lt Col SP Wheelton presents Pte D Gwin with the Friend Memorial Trophy

Picture: Norman Brown

# Best all-round soldier

**Pte D Gwin is presented with the associations friend memorial trophy**

**E**ACH year the Royal Pioneer Corps Association presents the Friend Memorial Trophy to the best all-round soldier in either 23 or 168 Pioneer Regiments.

This year it was presented to Pte D Gwin, 206 Sqn 23 Pnr Regt Royal Logistic Corps on 18 December 2008 by Lt Col SP Wheelton.

This was presented at a Regimental Parade before the Regiment took its Christmas Break. The citation read:

THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION - THE FRIEND MEMORIAL TROPHY 25200137 PRIVATE D GWIN - 206 SQUADRON, 23 PIONEER REGIMENT RLC

Private Gwin joined 23 Pioneer Regiment from Phase 2 Training in July 2005 and since that time he has been employed in 206 Squadron where he has attained the Basic Assault Pioneer qualification and deployed on Operation HERRICK 6 in an unfamiliar role as a member of the Force Protection Troop attached to 4 Logistic Support Regiment RLC.

The end of that demanding tour marked the beginning of another fulfilling and

highly productive year for Private Gwin.

Since returning from Afghanistan Private Gwin has engaged in the full range of Regimental activities and beyond.

He has applied his talent as an Artisan, and most notably as a carpenter, at Thetford training area where he assisted with the construction of a Close Quarter Battle range and section attack range and subsequently at Otterburn where he utilised his assault pioneering skills to construct battle trenches for the Danger Close Observation Post, an urgent operational requirement which has since been used extensively by Forward Air Controllers' courses.

In addition he walked Hadrian's Wall to raise money for the Army Benevolent Fund and deployed to France on a Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Final Exercise as part of the watermanship safety team where he received considerable praise from directing staff for his professional contribution.

An accomplished all-round field soldier. Private Gwin deployed on Exercise COMPLETE PIONEER and played an integral part of the Demonstration Section on the Urban Operations phase,

delivering a first class package with utmost professionalism and control.

He took part in the arduous Section Patrols Competition on Exercise GRIFFIN FOCUS before then completing the Field Firing package; stepping up with ease into the position of section second in command and producing results at a level beyond his current rank.

In amongst these commitments he also produced strong performances on his Class 1 Pioneer and education courses.

Private Gwin is an extremely fit and robust character who has proved throughout to be an enthusiastic and hard working individual who is able to adapt to any task or appointment; producing outstanding results and he has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the Regiment.

Moreover his sound leadership, backed up with natural soldiering abilities, solid core values and an energy and passion for the job have clearly inspired others.

Private Gwin encapsulates just what makes the Pioneer such a sought after commodity and he should be justifiably proud of his achievements this year.

Well done, Pte Gwin !



## NEWS IN BRIEF

■ FROM the Park Free Press, February 2009 edition - Veteran gets hid medal.

Stirling's Provost Fergus Wood presented Royal Pioneer Corps veteran Wilf Luke with his Veteran's Badge.

Wilf (92) from Kinlochard, was based in the Trossachs and served all over Europe during World War II, was unable to attend the recent Veteran's day parade in Stirling. The Provost commented that he was delighted to present the medal to Wilf and that it was important to reward all veterans young and old.

(Wilf served in the Pioneer Corps from 20 Jun 40 – 29 Mar 46)

■ THE Scottish Veterans' Residences has completed a £1M upgrade of their Rosendael residence in Broughty Ferry near Dundee – and are now looking for veterans, or their spouses, to become residents. There are currently five vacancies at Rosendael. Residents can be of any age, the average age is around 70. Vacancies are for any length of time, for many residents Rosendael is their home and they have lived there for many years.

Rosendael was originally a mansion house, kindly gifted to the Scottish Veterans' Residences in 1932, together with an endowment of £5,000, by Miss JC Gibson in memory of her brother, Mr John Normansell Kyd, who lost his son Frank Proctor Kyd on the Somme in 1916. A massive renovation project has taken place in 2007-2008 thanks to the generosity of ex-Service charities and other trusts and foundations. All rooms now have en-suite facilities, a new central heating system has been installed, brand new kitchens fitted and public rooms have been fully refurbished. There is also 24 hour warden cover.

If you know a veteran who would benefit from living at Rosendael call Max or Carole on 01362 477078, email [infor@svronline.org](mailto:infor@svronline.org) or visit [www.scronline.org](http://www.scronline.org) for further information.

■ TO date over 680,000 Veterans Lapel Badges have been issued to veterans across the UK and overseas.

The badge is a survivor's badge, therefore not issued posthumously.

The only exception is for War Widows and Widowers who are in receipt of a War Widows/Widowers Pension paid by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency. This also includes partners of those who have received an award of Survivors Guaranteed Income payment (SGIP) under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, in recognition that their death was due to their military service.

For more information on how to apply for a badge call 0800 169 2277 or visit [www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info)

■ WITH 23 Pioneer Regiment soon deploying on Operations in three theatres around the globe, it is the intention of the Unit Welfare Office to raise funds in order to boost the Operational Welfare Package.

This package consists of funds to support families and soldiers on rear party whilst the majority of the Regiment are away from home on Op tours. If you would like to purchase a wristband @ £1 each (or are able to sell a number!) please send a cheque/PO payable to the RPC Association.

# 168 pioneer regiment news

## Catch up with all the news from 168 regiment



■ CO and members of 34 HQ and 101 Pioneer Squadron at the National Arboretum

Picture: Supplied

THERE have been numerous arrivals and departures recently. Lt Col Stevenson has handed command to Lt Col Steve Caldwell. The wind and rain at Garelochhead, Wathgill and Grantham have all reminded him that he is no longer living in sunny Kuwait. WO1 (RSM) Jon Hutchinson has disappeared to the RMP, 4th time lucky. As a result of this short notice move WO1 (RSM) Billy McKenzie has returned to the Regiment having escaped from HQ RLC TA.

The end of an era came when WO2 (SSM) Malcolm 'Jackie' Cothill retired having reached his 55th birthday. He has spent 40 years in uniform having served 22 years as a regular soldier with The Kings Royal Hussars, followed by TA service with The Queen's Own Yeomanry and latterly with 100 Pnr Sqn. He did not leave without a fight, but WO2 Tony Jackman did finally rest the SSM's pacestick from him.

TA100 was well celebrated. As well as events at Grantham, 168 were seen sipping tea at Buckingham Palace, parading at the Tyne Pageant Bridge and Cpl Ian 'LJ' Jackman visited No. 10. He introduced himself to the Prime Minister as 'Big LJ from the Toon' to make sure he'd be remembered!

In September most of the Regiment deployed to Garelochhead Training Area on ADE. Although it rained continuously for 12 days, Sgt Killen, who lives locally declared his satisfaction in that "at least there were nae midges...." Most were still smiling at the end, testament to a challenging exercise where both artisan

and infantry skills were practised and tested. Other notable events have included 8 personnel going to Gibraltar for Ex MARBLE TOR and 3 lucky individuals spending 2 weeks with the US Nat. Guard – they visited North Dakota & Indiana with armoured vehicles, burgers & milk shake, the returning Americans received rain, a TMP LandRover, square sausage and salty porridge.

Thanks to our artisan skills Middle Wallop Officers Mess has a new brick built facade for its entrance sign, Grantham training area has new defensive bunkers and wire obstacles to train with, as well as a refurbished reception centre and recruiting facade. Bicester Gliding Club has a new perimeter fence and work has started at Headley Court to refurbish their trim trail to name but a few projects.

Medals for both operational deployments & long service have also been awarded in recent months and demonstrate the commitment with which they serve in the TA. We shall soon have more members of the Regiment serving in Afghanistan – mobilisation is currently underway.

Members of 104 Sqn raised £200 recently for 'Help for Heroes'. Led by WO2 (SSM) Headlam, 12 volunteers scaled the North Yorkshire Moors and completed the 22 mile Lyke Wake Walk, ably encouraged by the RSM. The Sqn also helped the Catcote School in Hartlepool. Many of the children have both physical and learning difficulties. The Sqn fed over 200 children and parents, as well as assisting throughout the day. Well done to





■ 168 Pioneer on patrol

Picture: Supplied

WO2 Chandler, and LCpls Cortez and Scorer.

The Regiment was well represented during a wet and windy Remembrance Sunday. The CO accompanied members of 34 HQ and 101 Pnr Sqn to the National Arboretum. Whilst there we picked out the names of numerous friends who have made the ultimate sacrifice. In particular we collectively remembered Tpr Matty Hull RHG/D, a former pioneer. Further north 100 Pnr Sqn paraded at Berwick and 104 Sqn paraded at Middlesbrough. Sadly we had to say farewell to WO2 Roy Flanagan who retired after 22 years regular service. He has hung up his tool bag for a short time but we are expecting his return as a TA recruiting warrant in the near future. We are delighted to welcome WO2 'Jim' Reeves as his successor in Cramlington.

The Regiment formed up for the first time in 2009 at Wathgill Training Camp in North Yorkshire. It was also the first parade for Maj Jane Cattermull, the new Second in Command, who has recently returned from the sunshine of Ghana.

On the Saturday morning all ranks zeroed rifles in preparation for the March and Shoot. The junior ranks, under the direction of the PSI's from across the Regiment, then undertook a lesson in cordon and search operations which culminated at the end of the day in an exercise that confirmed all that they had been taught. The officers and senior ranks had remained in the relative warmth of the camp where the Trg Maj put them through their paces in a CPX which

practised both CP procedures and basic logistic support planning tasks in preparation for Ex Winter Beaver, the 2 Log Sp Gp exercise. A photograph was taken for the RSM, before the massed ranks enjoyed an excellent smoker organised by 100 Pnr Sqn. Well done to all, but a special thanks to the NRPS as their horse racing event which generated a further £150 for Help for Heroes.

Sunday morning found snow on the ground but the air crisp and clear, perfect conditions to hold the Inter Sqn March and Shoot. Sub unit teams set off at 10 minute intervals over a combination of snow covered fields and tarmac range roads. Whilst some may not be as fit as others there was no lack of determination and team spirit as the march was completed and teams immediately undertook an ETR shoot that ranged between 100 to 300m. The best shots from each team then shot against each other with a further 12 rounds. It was a close contest but the eventual champions were Team A, 104 Pnr Sqn. Many congratulations to them. In summary it was a great training weekend where we were able to learn new skills whilst both working hard and playing hard ... and finally we proved that by taking the Padre with us the sun really does shine on the righteous.

The Regiment competed at the RLC Ski Championships at Ruhpolding in Germany. We did not win anything ... other than the best dressed Mexicans on the ski slope... but good fun was had by all and we shall return next year. A big

thank you to 23 Pnr Regt for lending us some ski equipment. WO2 Chandler swears that the catsuits must have shrunk!

Other news of note is that under the leadership of SSgt Anthony, the Regiment have become the 2009 RLC TA Major Unit Cross Country Champions.

WO2 Chris Swift has departed to become SSM 60 Sqn with 4 LSR. We wish him well and we welcome his successor as the Trg WO, WO2 Tats Faulkner from 23 Pnr Regt. The following are warmly congratulated on their recent selection for promotion to WO2: SSgt Downer, SSgt Forrester, SSgt Guest, SSgt Mayers. The following are congratulated on their confirmed promotions: Sgt Scott, Cpl Hamilton, Cpl Wheelton, LCpls Bond, Buck, Chambers, Hester and Short. Congratulations to Officer Cadet Keith Cahill who has successfully passed the Army Officer Selection Board at Westbury and to Pte Stewart who completed recruit training and went to Deepcut where he qualified as a Class 3 Pioneer.

Arrivals: Lt Col Caldwell, Maj Cattermull, Lt Fairbotham, WO1 (RSM) McKenzie, WO2 Faulkner, WO2 Reeves. Departures: WO1 (RSM) Hutchinson, WO2 (SSM) Cothill, WO2 Flanagan, WO2 Swift.

Although we are a national regiment, in that the RHQ, 101 Pnr and 34 HQ Sqn are nationally recruited, we also have 2 regionally recruited squadrons, 100 and 104 Pnr Sqn, based in NE England. If there are any soldiers about to leave 23 Pnr and are interested in joining the TA, please consider us. You are guaranteed a friendly welcome.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

■ WITH funding by the MOD Veterans Challenge Fund, the Regular Forces Employment Association has introduced an outreach system that could provide support for around 7,000 Early Service Leavers each year.

For further information and referral to the new system call Kevin Hartley on 01457 831140, email kevin@regularforcesemployment.co.uk or visit [www.rfea.org.uk](http://www.rfea.org.uk) and follow the instructions to register for the ESL Service of Care.

■ SO far, around 2,000 veterans have benefited from Transport for London's Veterans Concessionary Travel Scheme.

The scheme is expected to save veterans living in and around London around £200 in travel costs each year.

Since November 2008 all war veterans in receipt of an ongoing payment under the War Pensions Scheme or the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Guaranteed Income Payment, including war widows and widowers and eligible dependents, have been able to get an Oyster photocard to travel free on Transport for London bus, tube, tram, Docklands Light Railway and London Overground services. Their card will also let them travel free on train services within Greater London after 9:30am on weekdays and all day at weekends see [www.tfl.gov.uk/veterans](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/veterans) for more information on where the cards can be used.

Once issued the Oyster photocard will be valid until May 2012, subject to the holder remaining eligible for the concession. Call tfl on 0845 331 9872 to get an application pack. It will be of most benefit to war pensioners, under 60, living in London and not eligible for a Freedom Pass. Those who live just outside London and visitors from further afield can in certain circumstances make great savings.

■ MORE news from the Pioneer Regiments.

On the green side of life, the Regt has continued with PDT, ranging from Artisan and construction training for the Op TELIC deployment to Heavy Weapon Cadres and MASTIFF training for the Op HERRICK deployment. November also brought a multiple-sized deployment for SSgt Cheung and Charlie Troop R1 Section on Ex JOINT VENTURE, in support of the Joint Task Force Headquarters, based in Akrotiri, Cyprus. After setting up the field defences and securing the site the Troop were then tasked to force protect the site for the duration of the two week exercise. Morale was kept high throughout, helped in no small part by the fantastic job done by the Master Chef of 30 Signal Regiment and his team of RLC Ghurka chefs. It became a challenge for most to have the famous 'Gurkha Curries' every night and the napalm 'Nazi Goreng' for lunch, although the introduction of 'Hill Boy' chilli to breakfast was for most, a chilli to far!

As per usual the Regt has also had a number of farewells over the last few months with the longest serving members of the Officers' Mess, Lt Shenton, finally moving on to the Food Service Officers' Course.

# Sailing on the startrekker

By Cpl Phillip Mabbitt 168 Pnr Rgt RLC (V)



■ Aboard the Startrekker

Picture: Cpl Phillip Mabbitt

Towards the end of 2007 an email was sent around 168 Pnr Regt asking if anyone was interested in helping to sail the RLC Corps yacht STARTREKKER from Palma Majorca to Marchwood Military Port in 2008.

Having never sailed, let-alone stepped onto a yacht I jumped at the chance (after some discussions with the wife). In the New Year I was given notice that I had been selected and along with two of my colleagues would need to attend a five day RYA Competent Crew course at the Joint Service Sailing School in Gosport. This course gave us invaluable experience so that by the end of the five day course we could as the course name suggested competently handle being an effective crew member (most of the time).

On 3rd October Pte Phillip Clewer, Lt Col Rob Blake and I, Cpl Phillip Mabbitt, flew out to Malaga to meet the rest of the team, Maj Martin Collinson and Rebecca Cains. They had already picked up STARTREKKER further up the coast but had not made it as far as Malaga so had stopped in Cartagena. This is where for us all the fun kicked off.

On 4th October after stocking up with food and other essentials we slipped our

moorings and went to find some fuel. This gave Rebecca (skipper) the first chance to see how much we knew. We managed to work as a team and not crash the boat into the wall for which we were grateful. Once out in the Bay, health and safety information was reiterated by Rebecca so that we were all singing off the same song sheet. This culminated with a man over board practice so that we all knew what to do if it occurred. This also allowed us to start working as a crew and relax. As you can see we had quite a mixed crew with all levels of rank and experience.

The plan after leaving Cartagena was to head straight for Gibraltar to try and make some time back. All was going well until the wind changed and after our first 24 hours at sea we decided that we would put into Puerto Banuse for the night. This is where our custom for the in port end of night Irish coffee started. In the morning we checked the weather and decided to try again for Gibraltar. There was a good wind to start with but as the day went on it changed so we started to tack. This was good fun to start with as every one had a go on the helm and started to get a feel for the boat as she healed over under the wind. As the day went on we all became





■ Aboard the Startrekker

Picture: Cpl Phillip Mabbitt

much more confident in our own abilities. Again it was decided that we would not make Gibraltar so we headed for Estepona. This is when the wind really decided to pick up and I happened to be on the helm. At this point the wind really caught the sails and the yacht heeled over sharply at which point I decided that I was in territory I wasn't comfortable with, and quickly handed over the wheel to Rebecca. She loved it and was whooping with delight as STARTREKKER began to really pick up speed and show us what she could do in the right winds.

At last the next day we did make it in to Gibraltar but then found that we nearly had no where to berth as the marina was under redevelopment. Luckily they said we could moor up next to a pub on the proviso that we eat there. After much discussion (.5 sec) it was decided.

As we were still behind schedule it was decided the first thing to do was to have a beer then check the weather for the morning. The result was the beer was very good and the weather forecast was very bad to the point that it looked as if we might be in Gibraltar next to the pub for the next few days. Being adaptable Brits we saw it as an inconvenience being tied up outside a pub but we thought we could just about manage. As it was we decided to go with the afternoon tide and head out in to the Gulf of Cadiz with the aim of missing the storm. No such luck and just as Phil and I were finishing our watch the winds were beginning to rise. Rebecca then came on deck and set about directing us to get the sails reefed and all

loose items stowed away. Phil and I then went down to get some rest. This resulted in my first bout of sea sickness and I wasn't much use until lunch time when the worst of the storm was over and I took over the helm again. To make it worse for the others they were using the water proofs provided on board which were not much good, where as Phil and I had purchased some top of the range kit from Gill. The lesson I learnt from that night was not to retreat into yourself in these situations because you just feel worse and you just become a passenger not a team player and had the weather become any worse the team might have needed our help.

On the 11th October we made Vilamoura where we said good bye to Lt Col Rob Blake. This would leave just the four of us to complete the trip up the coast of Portugal and on to the UK. On leaving port we did not realize even then what a long slog the next two legs would be. For the next five days we, in the main, were under motor and in the fog which is no fun at the best of times even worse with no radar. During this leg both Phil and I suffered with sea sickness again but we coped much better this time and just got on with it. In fact after feeding the fish I felt much better and had no problems going below to plot the chart for the rest of the watch. We did have some highlights. All through our trip we had seen dolphins but during this leg they were welcome distraction to us especially at night when the phosphorous bounced off them under the water giving them an

almost ghost like quality. After a third long night spirits were partially low on board. We were about twenty miles off the coast, the sea was flat and there was no wind. Just before lunch a pod of four or five dolphins appeared and started their usual inspection of the boat. We decided as no one had been for a swim yet and to be honest we all felt a bit crusty we would join them. The dolphins on the other hand did not seem to be that pleased that we had stopped and some noisy Brits had decided to join them for a swim and so swam off. Phil then decided to impress us with a series of back flips. After ten minutes we all decided it was too cold and resumed our journey.

On the 17th October we finally reached Le Caruna. By this point we were all very tired and looking forward to a hot shower and some dry land. We all sort of knew this would be the end of the trip as we were so far behind schedule. The following day we all sat down and had a discussion with all the facts regarding time and weather there was only one decision and that was to unfortunately end the trip at Le Caruna.

I and all the crew on the whole had a fantastic time, we learnt a lot about ocean sailing and ourselves. I am looking forward to completing an RYA Day Skipper Course in the future.

Finally I would like to thank Maj Martin Collinson for all his hard work in organizing this trip and Rebecca Cains for agreeing to be the skipper. Without these two there would have been no expedition.





# Aynho Research

## Can you help Nicola research what the pioneer corps did at aynho?

Report: Nicola Reeve  
Picture: Norman Brown

**W**ONDER if you can help or advice me please? I am currently researching my family tree and recently in looking at my maternal grandmothers papers found her account of childhood during WW2 when the army took over the parkland at Aynho and she found herself having to have an ID card to get into her own cottage... I wonder if this account rings any bells with any of your members and if they could explain a little of the circumstances of the army appearing in Aynho, where the men all went off to and the dates or reasons for the base being established in the beautiful parkland.

My grans words (Anita Reeve) - 'It was September 3rd 1939 and I was 7 years old living on the border of Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire in the lodge house belonging to the 'Big house' - my father was a gamekeeper for Cartwrights estate, Aynho. I remember whispered conversations between my parents. War against Germany had been announced that day, but to a 7 year old that fact didn't impact. The fact my parents were worried affected us as children. My brother Milson was nine years old and quite excited and proceeded to explain to me what war was in all the gory details but as usual I thought he was teasing me. It wasn't until my father had to go for his medical that I realised my world would change.

As a gamekeeper Dad had a gun. He was a 'crack' shot; that had been part of his job, so when he failed his medical because of a slightly deformed right hand (the doctors had said he wouldn't be able to fire a rifle) we were all very surprised. My mother was delighted and relieved that he wouldn't be accepted for the Army, but he would have to work at the munitions factory in Banbury. That wasn't too bad I thought, I would still be able to go bird nesting with him, watch over the young pheasants being reared. The only thing that bugged me then was that I had to carry this awkward box thing around everywhere - the dreaded gas mask - how I hated that thing! When we had to practice wearing it at school for a whole lesson, I thought I would die and it got in the way when you wanted to climb a tree.

Then came shattering news along in the village; rumours were being passed around that the village and parkland was being taken over by the Army. Little did we think how this was to change our lives. My brother and I, along with the village children, were quite excited with the thought of almost taking part in the war, we were going to live right alongside the Army, in fact my brother and I were very cocky as we were going to be living inside of the camp perimeter, indeed the main gate to

the camp was just outside our front door.

For the first few months the soldiers that were camped there were under canvas. 'The Pioneer Corps' were there to build the camp, gradually our lovely park was being transformed; the sandy walkways replaced by concrete roads, yet whilst all this was going on it rained, incessantly. Everyone of those poor soldiers was in mud up to their knees, soaking wet and always very, very tired. The guards tent was situated just outside the lodge; there was one corporal in particular that took great delight in calling out the guard in the middle of the night. Not only did he wake the guards but he shouted so loud he woke us up too. The guards would come blundering out, still half asleep, falling over the ropes into the mud. Needless to say I didn't like that corporal very much.

As soon as the roads had been completed Nissan huts began to spring up all around us, wooden huts replaced the tents, it all began to look like a small town. Our once peaceful parkland and woods was now a hive of activity; it was to be a petrol storage depot. More soldiers soon arrived of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, REME for short, as the building was almost complete so members of the Pioneers had a little more time for leisure. One little fellow, who was known as 'Mutton' would come to the house and borrow my bike. I was nearly nine years old now, so you can imagine how small he was, but he did enjoy his ride out most Sunday afternoons.

Most of the men knew us by now and when we came home from school the barrier was raised with no questions asked. One night after going to bed the continual 'thump, thump' outside kept me awake, so I got up and looked out of the window; the sentry box was turned round and there was a target drawn on the back. The guards were throwing their bayonets into the box; this happened quite a lot of summer nights. It was amazing what I learnt to sleep through; lorries laden with petrol cans passed our front door day and night, millions of gallons of petrol were stored and shipped out from there, it didn't dawn on me that we could easily have been a target for the enemy to bomb. The CO, a Major Reid, came to see my parents many times suggesting that we should be moved from this 'military establishment' - but there was no where to move to. Most of the officers were billeted in the 'Big House' and every cottage or rooms spare in the village had been taken over by the Army personnel and their families.

Naturally, we got to know a lot of the soldiers. My mother was kept very busy sewing on stripes and flashes on to uniforms and the men that were on guard duty often asked her to cook something for their supper. The cook house was down the

road at the 'Big house' kitchens and meals were brought to them by lorry, so often it was cold when they got it. I remember one evening I heard someone call 'Hey missus, come and look at this!' There was a large aluminium bowl full of tomato soup with a whole loaf of bread stuck in the middle. A similar round tin full of cocoa with a bluish purple film floating on top was often to be seen - it was disgusting. The soldiers shared our supper those nights, but they always tried to pay us back somehow, a tin of corned beef, a few tins of spam, margarine - all things that were by then rationed, pinched from the cookhouse no doubt would turn up in our cupboard as a thank you.

My parents had a pass to come in through the main gate. It wasn't often it had to be shown, but one evening I came home later than usual as I'd been to my friends house for her birthday. There was a new batch of men who had arrived; some of them were on duty that night and as I walked up to the gate... 'Halt. Who goes there?' I was absolutely paralysed with fear of this strangers stern voice. 'Its only me' I said in a squeaky voice. 'Who the hell's "me"?' came a voice from behind the bright light of the torch now shining in my face. I had to explain that I lived in the cottage and who I was - it was a long time before I lived that down. I was called 'only me' for ages after.

Then came the news that nearly all the personnel were going abroad. Where? No one was allowed to say. For a whole week Mum was very busy again sewing on new flashes onto uniforms. There was some sad goodbyes and only a skeleton staff remained. I found myself longing for the time when everyone had gone. Would our favourite places still be there; the swing Dad had fixed up for us on the tree just beyond our garden, the sweet chestnut trees out in the park? I wondered if the herd of deer was still there and the badgers. I couldn't wait to find out.

Eventually the day came. All the family and quite a few of the villagers walked around the 'camp'. It was hardly recognizable. It was just a maze of concrete; a lot of woodland was left but everywhere it was possible to build on had been, all that was left were concrete foundations. Sad to say it has never been restored to its former beauty. The deer herd had dispersed, only the odd one or two were to be seen after the war and most of the wildlife had found themselves quieter new habitats.

At about this time Mr Cartwright and his only son were tragically killed in a car accident, so the estate was gradually sold off. My father didn't come back to being a gamekeeper and my childhood, my very happy childhood, was gone amidst the madness of a world at war.' ■



# Blanco, Brasso & Bull

## George Pringle's story about the pioneers going to war, part 2

Report: George Pringle  
Pictures: George Pringle

**T**O make us soldiers look fine and neat further training was carried out in a quiet street. Passers by would often stop and stare. But we carried on as if they weren't there.

As I have mentioned earlier about the evacuation of our soldiers at Dunkirk and their armoury being left behind it was obvious that there were too few guns remaining in Britain to arm the country's soldiers. So as new recruits we were issued with broomsticks. These items when attached to a brush head may be useful for sweeping floors, but, as a weapon of war against rifles and bayonets, tanks etc we felt that they were a poor substitute.

However, with some imagination we managed to learn all the drills that one must know when we would finally have the real weapon. Some of the drills are as follows – "Standing to attention" the rifle is held with the right hand holding the swivel ring and the butt in on the floor and parallel to the right leg.

"Standing at ease", the rifle still held by the right hand is pushed forward about 12 inches with the butt still on the ground but touching your right toe, "attention" means bringing the rifle back to its original position. "Slope arms" is when from the position of attention you move the rifle up your right side while your left hand grasps the rifle by the swivel ring and your right hand grasps the hilt. You then transfer the rifle across the front of your body and rest it on your left shoulder while you transfer the left hand to the butt of the rifle as your right hand clutches the barrel swivel sling. Your left hand should move forward until your left elbow is adjacent to your waist, and your rifle is not resting on your left shoulder at an angle of 45 degrees. You then release the rifle with your right hand and return it to your right side in the "attention" position. You also learn how to "Present Arms", "Trail Arms", "Change Arms" and "Fix Bayonets". You are now adept

with the movement of the rifle drill except the one you would like to do, but it would be painful to your NCO Instructor! All these movements are carried out with dexterity and to ensure you do not drop your rifle which will clatter to the ground and a deep silence would ensure from your Company. If you drip your rifle you do not move and do not display a silly grin on your face. Your instructor will "politely" request you to pick up your rifle and return to the position of attention. The exact words differ on occasions, but generally it would be like this – "You xxxx xxxx pick up your xxxxxxx rifle, and xxxxxxx xxxx report to me after your have been xxxxxxx xxxx dismissed". All these delightful

movements are given to ensure all ranks on receiving an order move as one man, and you obey all orders without questioning.

So everyone is turned into a useless, brainless, non thinking moron. In 6 weeks you are now one of 300 privates (a Company) ready to fight the German – by presenting and sloping your broomsticks and frightening them to death by your dexterity.

We were told that we had to be in a permanent state of readiness so rifles had to be kept clean at all times. Snap inspections were carried out at all times of the day or night. The punishment for an NCO finding

forgotten!

Reveille was at 0530 hours and when in a barracks, this tune was sounded by a bugler who stood on the barrack square. The bugle call was supposed to waken up everyone, but our NCO ensured we were awake by ripping off the blankets or tipping up the bed. Everyone knew whatever the weather we had to report outside for 30 minutes physical training (PT) exercise. Clad in a vest and shorts we attempted to enjoy it knowing it was really doing us good, but longing for another hours sleep. We were then dismissed and made our way to the ablutions where we showered in

cold water as coal was scarce to heat the boiler for hot water. So clean and shaved we returned to the barrack room to change into our battle dress, polish the cap badge, ensure your boots and rifle were clean. After collecting your mess tins and enamel mug and cutlery you proceeded to the Nissen dining room. Breakfast was always porridge with bread-sausage or bacon and hot-tea, after eating this luscious meal you washed your utensils in a drum filled with hot water to remove the grease. With 300 men using the same water the last few men had to part the grease at the top of the water before cleaning their utensils. We then returned to the barrack room to collect our rifles and fall in on parade on the square. The area is only used for parades otherwise no soldier or NCO could march on or across it as it was holy ground. You were then given your movement orders of the day, dismissed and returned to your room. Here you changed your clothing in respect of what your movements orders of the day were to be. Usually it was full pack for a 15 mile route march. We were lucky in one respect as we had a Sergeant Chalmers who's age of 42 years made him a very senior soldier and his experience in WW1 came in very handy. He showed us how to pack the various necessary items into your full pack so as it was evenly balanced and the softer items were against your back and no sharp edges to dig into your muscles. He also told us that on any rest period do not take off your pack unless ordered but find a convenient wall or stone and rest your pack on it. Also whenever you rested at full stretch raise your legs higher than your body to help the blood flow. We were very thankful for these hints which proved very useful in the next few months.

As the whole of Great Britain was in a state of alert the priority was to build and erect our defences in case of a German invasion. The spear head of our defence was in the South East counties of Suffolk, Essex and Kent. My Company, 175 Coy, were split up as different sections in the Lancaster area, in Colne and even as far down as Tytherington in Cheshire. In these areas we worked with the Infantry and



■ George Pringle

a tiny speck of dirt up the barrel was too terrifying to contemplate. The order "for inspection port arms" meant you released the bolt in the breech and pointing the rifle towards the NCO with your thumb nail in the breech as a reflector and the NCO gazed down the barrel. After firing the rifle on a rifle range you poured boiling hot water down the barrel to remove any gunge and then your rifle was cleaned ready for inspection. Each rifle had a number stamped on the butt and also on the bolt so as we could match one with the other if required. However, you also made a mental note of the number which would remain with you for your length of service. My rifle number was ..er..was..er sorry I've

Artillery and erected the defences under their instructions. The defences comprised of barbed and Darnet (coiled) wire and then gun pits were dug and sand bagged for the heavy guns of the Royal Artillery. Trenches were dug for the Infantry and land mines laid and marked by white tapelines. This was to form the 17th line of defence, a distance of 300 miles away from Dover. I felt safe here.

We then moved to Fleetwood to erect barbed wire obstruction under and amid the piers and harbour landing stages to ensure enemy forces could not use the harbour and jetties in case of invasion. Eventually this defence operation was completed and we returned to our HQ at Fulwood Barracks in Preston. Our training was resumed to ensure we were or would be well trained fighting men. Again this consisted of route marches, bayonet practice using dummies filled with straw into which you plunged the blade, gave it a vicious twist and pulled it out all accompanied by a blood curdling yell and army swear words. Most of us imagined the dummy was our Company Sergeant Major (CSM). So we enjoyed this exercise with gusto. Manoeuvres, schemes and assault courses were held in all kinds of weather which gave our CSM and NCOs a chance to get their own back. As the airfields in France were in the hands of the Germans and our RAF on their flying patrols had reported numerous barges were assembling in the ports of France, Belgium and Holland so we were warned an invasion under the code name of "Operation Sea-Lion" was imminent.

#### The Blitz

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

We toiled until we fell  
 We were all so tired and weary and our  
 bodies ached like HELL.

The RAF fought the Battle of Britain against the German Luftwaffe during the months of August and September 1940. The German object was to eliminate the RAF so as it would be incapable of putting up any opposition to the invading troops which formed the spearhead of "Operation Sea-Lion", scheduled for 15th September. The Luftwaffe had about 2,500 planes against the 600 in operation by the RAF. The targets were the airfields in South-East England and to put them out of action. After many days and weeks the Luftwaffe had failed in their object thanks to the heroes of the RAF pilots and ground crews. Just when it seemed that Hitler may succeed a German bomber dropped its load of bombs on London causing some damage. Winston Churchill was outraged and in retaliation ordered the RAF bomber squadron to bomb Berlin. Hitler was now furious and ordered Field Marshall Goering to annihilate London and demoralise the people who he hoped would cry for "peace". On the ground the conditions for the residents were appalling and soon other cities suffered. Three hundred tons of bombs were being dropped in one hour. Fires raging like beacons, but, instead of weeping and wailing there was a new camaraderie amongst the people, Meanwhile the RAF were bombing the ports where the German invasion fleet was based and very soon the Germans called off the invasion, it never ever took place, so England was saved from extinction and slavery to the German race.

Winston Churchill spoke to the nation on the radio, "Let us brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts a thousand years men will say, 'This was their finest hour' and a tribute to the RAF, 'Never

in the field of conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'"

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

### 'All the windows had been blown out'

London Council knew the importance of keeping roads clear, so as the traffic could circulate and flow freely and this was of paramount importance. They also knew the clearing of the debris from the bombed buildings and the search for living people in the ruins was their priority No 1. The collection of dead bodies was now only a secondary consideration. Winston Churchill was now aware of the fact the CD and Air Raid Personnel (ARP) could not cope on their own and it required the skills of the Army to assist in every way. As there was no fighting taking place in England by the Army apart from manning the coastal defences and the Ack-Ack guns and as the threat of invasion was no longer a practability there was no shortage of men who could be utilised in London. So Winston Churchill asked for the most intelligent, adaptable and hard working men to be sent to London. So I with the rest of 175 Company (350 men) were seconded to the "London Battalion" which in the end comprised of 53 Pioneer Companies totalling 18,500 men. We were transported by train from Preston to Euston station and climbed aboard Army Lorries driven by the RASC to where we were to be billeted. As our Company was to cover a district in West Ham we made the Isolation Hospital in Roman Road our HQ. The building was empty as the patients had been moved to a safe place in the country as it was considered too dangerous to keep





it open as a hospital. The East wing of the building had been bombed so we occupied the West Wing. All the windows had been blown out in the recent air raids so we were unable to have lights as they would be shown to any German plane overhead and of course a black out was in force. The Blackout was a law that no lights should be visible between the hours of sunset and sunrise so as not to assist the enemy pilots during the air raids, but more to not show the location of a town. Roman Road was a straight road of about 880 yards and was a nightly target for the bombing. It took six bombs falling from a plane to cover the length of the road and your return from an evening out in the NAAFI you took any available cover on the fall of the first bomb and then dashed back to your HQ to report for night duty. The NAAFI was where volunteers worked to provide the Forces with a place to meet members of the Forces and enjoy a cup of tea (char) and a wad (cake) or write your letters home. If it was your turn for night duty you immediately had a hot meal then changed into your denims (army working uniform) went to the QM store and obtained a shovel and a pick and climbed aboard your transport. Your NCO had been informed where you were to go and so we set off. On arrival at the site the officer in charge detailed our squad to where the roads were blocked and had to be cleared. The council provided the wheel barrows and the tippers. So we commenced to do our duty. Despite the bombing during an air raid we continued our work until a blast on the officer's whistle informed us the bombs were dropping nearer and so we took cover. This alternating system of working and taking shelter continued until the sounding of the All Clear by the siren and then we could continue our job in peace after a roll call. This was the time when our cooks from the HQ came up and delivered Dixie's (pails) of hot tea and thick sandwiches of corned-beef. When our section area of the roads had been cleared and traffic was able to move with caution we returned to our HQ and paraded for a roll call. There was never a night when we did not have casualties. After returning our tools (cleaned) to the QM stores we washed, shaved and went to sleep. On alternative weeks we would be on day time working with the same procedure, but not many day air raids. At certain times as the air raids took their toll on the citizens of West and East Ham we were called out to assist in clearing debris from bombed houses and search for victims of the air-raid who maybe, and we always hoped, were alive. We were also told if we heard a ticking noise like a clock we had to evacuate immediately as it might be an unexploded bomb. However, I remember on one occasion we were within reach of 2 babies with their mother when the mother told us she had heard ticking and we had to laugh as we told her the alarm clock wasn't broken. We could not leave them even knowing it was actually a delayed bomb as we knew we could save them given 5 minutes more. We called our Sergeant and he asked for volunteers and several lads came forward to help us. We were successful and then the Army bomb disposal squad came and carefully dug for the bomb and defused it. Did we get a hero's welcome, not we got a bollocking off the CO at HQ for disobeying his orders. Still c'est la guerre. We were not interested in bomb victims belongs as the ARP and police would search and recover them in due course. People discovered alive were carefully removed and passed to the Medical Corps or ARP. The bodies of dead

people were left until the air raid had finished and we had a chance to remove them and lay them out in rows to be identified later.

I remember entering one badly damaged house where 3 or 4 of our lads were already looking for any members of the family who lived there who may be still alive. We told the ARP warden that there was no one in the debris and he said "There was a doctor lived there, but, he has been killed in his surgery, another bomb victim". Our lads came our carrying about 4 or 5 books which I assumed were medical records of information. They guarded them as articles of great value until we arrived back at our HQ when we threatened them with all kinds of torture if they did not reveal to us what kind of books they were. Eventually the whole Company, except the NCOs, learned of the presence of the books as the owners decided to make some money by charging 6p (21/2d) if you wanted to be put on the reading list. The order of receiving the books to read was arranged by using the last 3 numbers of your Army number, my number was 13056452. Everyone waited for their turn day after day, week after week. What was the subject of the books? Everyone even those who read them would not reveal the answer, it was a close secret.

Thousands of people were made homeless by these air raids as London was attacked for 76 nights in succession and all raids did not cease until May 1941. So from August 1940 until May 1941, 44,000 civilians died and 103,000 were injured. I do not have the number of Pioneer casualties who served in London but I know that our Company had 11 dead and 22 wounded. Finally in mid January 1941 it was decided to release our Company who had served a four month tour of duty in London. We all deserved the respite though it meant returning to active service duties in Preston. I never had the chance of reading the famous but mysterious books as before the final inspection of our kit and billets the books had disappeared. I was not worried as apparently they were all about sex and the bromide put in our tea prevented any excitement. Our Officer Commanding (OC) Major Ostle MC received the following letter from the Lord Mayor of London on behalf of the Mayors of the surrounding towns:

"Relations with the local authorities and the civil population were very good as night after night and day after day for a period of 120 days which comprised a period of 76 successive bombing air-raids the Pioneers shared the dangers with them and helped tremendously in their hours of need." Our OC received many letters of praise and gratitude from civic leaders, Councils and individual citizens for the work our Company carried out in West and East Ham. It was said the Pioneers deserved the right to march through London with fixed bayonets, colour standard flying and drums beating, but this honour although deserved was not conferred to the Pioneers and so we could not enjoy that privilege so worthily earned.

#### Learning the Language

Then in January 1941 they thought we had done enough  
Time to return as soldiers as now we were very tough  
Up the mountains, across the fields and on the beaches too  
We were training with Commandos and

were told just what to do  
The next 10 months were boring as we did the same thing everyday  
Drilling, route marches, assault courses all for Two Shillings a day  
Then in December came the news no more did we have to grieve  
For we were all going home on Embarkation leave

On the 24th January 1941 we settled down in our new surroundings in Ashton near Preston. This was an old school, but it was the first time we had been together as a Company as we had usually been split up into different areas of North West England as the various areas needed our expertise. After London the change in our environment was bewildering as Preston was peaceful there had been no siren warning or air raids. In the school yard was erected an Ack-Ack gun on a platform to give it a clear view. The only time it was fired was in an exercise and one shot in every 3 months. The gunners at the Royal Artillery had the cushiest job in Britain. The only work they did was polishing their weapon of destruction.

On the 27th January our OC Major Ostle was struck off strength (SOS) and was promoted to be second-in-command of a Group – no doubt in recognition of our good work in London. Our new OC was a Major JA Gravett so we could expect changes. Our Sections No 9 and 10 (65 men and NCOs) were sent to Fleetwood on guard duties. The remainder of the Company resumed their training on the "barrack square" (the school yard) watched by the grinning and lazy gunners. Route marches, schemes etc were recommended and lots of other nasty things our new OC could think of to make our lives a misery.

For 2 to 3 weeks we were training the LDV (Home Guard) and teaching them the basics of defence in case the German parachutists came down to land in the area. I will remember one occasion when during an evening session we were showing them the use of the hand grenades or Mills bomb. The grenade was a hand held bomb about the size of a cricket ball it was fragmented so as on landing it burst in to many pieces of iron shrapnel which

### 'Bodies were left until the air raid had finished'

scattered in full force over a 20 yard area. They could be used by aiming in a lob wise manner to disperse or kill a gun replacement squad or killing men inside a concrete pill-box by pushing it through the firing slits. It could also be used in open ground to disperse and wound or even kill the enemy as they advanced in an attack on your defence position. We were however, in an open field near Quernmore not far from Lancaster using deep folds (2 to 3 feet deep) as cover after throwing the bomb. We would stand up and throw the 'dummy' grenade into a deep hold 35 to 40 yards away. After several practical demonstrations it was time to let the members of the Home Guard throw the 'live' grenade. While held in the hand the grenade is safe, but to action the missile you pull out the ring or pin and keep tight hold of the missile – yes it is still safe – place yourself in the safety position, take aim and throw or lob at the target. The grenade explodes on impact by the action of a time fuse in 7 second from the time of release from the hand. Everyone was always warned to take cover during this 7 seconds period and NEVER EVER approach the grenade if it fails to explode. One Home Guard chap threw his bomb, but slipped as he was in the act of throwing

and the bomb only travelled a few yards instead of the usual distance. Our Sergeant yelled, "Everyone take cover" but, the chap who threw the bomb thought he would be a hero and dashed forward to collect the bomb and throw it further away to safeguard our lives. The explosion blew his arm off and another lesson was learnt the hard way.

We were seconded to different Infantry Regiments though out our period in NW England and changes were being made to the staff of officers. On the 30th June 1941 our OC was Major Gravett, our second in command was Captain Collins and our Lieutenants were Coates, McLachlan and Pretious, while our Second Lieutenants were Norris and Gallagher. We were now under canvas in Quernmore Park training on the laying and removal of land mines and personnel mines and this continued for several weeks. Land or teller mines were circular and set just beneath the surface of the ground to be activated by the weight of a vehicle or tank. A personnel mine is set just beneath the surface with 3 prongs showing just about the surface and designed to rise a few feet in the air just before exploding its charge of shrapnel and fragments when walked on by any person. On removing the mines to make a clear way for vehicles or infantry or troops the sides of the path or lane were marked on each side with white tape and the adjoining land marked MINES –KEEP OFF. Unfortunately we had 3 soldiers killed and 4 wounded during the learning exercise.

The next week was spent on the firing range and we were actually given live ammunition to fire. The Lee-Enfield rifles was used, .303 cartridges and we were all issued with 10. These we had to load into the cartridge case of the rifle and after target practice we had to keep the empty shells and present them to the CSM to show we had fired all 10. We then had to parade for a roll call and carry out the movement of "Presenting arms for inspection". We then poured boiling water down our rifle barrels to clean any gunge. At the end of the week I was made our Section Bren gun No 1 – a rapid shooting machine gun first used in WW1. There were 32 cartridges in each case and was loaded from the top into the breech it could fire single shots or bursts of 5. People may think it was an honour to be a Bren gun No 1 but it weighed 12 lbs and the person was usually the first target for enemy snipers.

Our Sergeant Aylesbury offered me the chance of becoming a Lance Corporal (LCpl) a one striper as he had recommended me to our OC as an ideal person for that position. Before I accepted I asked my Sergeant what I would be required to carry out as regarding the duties. He said that I would be attached to the HQ Staff, sorting out the mail and ensuring the right person received the right letter or parcel. In addition I would be in charge of the laundry service ensuring each man (300) made out a list of the articles he required washing and ensuring they received back the correct articles of clothing that he had submitted. The local laundry van called once a week and the firm was paid by the government when they submitted the laundry list signed by me. I would not believe that there was such a boring job and to expect me to do it was beyond all my comprehension. My Sergeant was not at all pleased when I refused my first chance of promotion and said I would never be recommended by him again while he was in charge of No 3

Section. Four or five weeks later he was promoted to CSM and posted to another Company. I had turned down an extra 6d a day (two and a half pence) but I have never regretted this action as I remained with my mates and enjoyed their company in No 3 Section for many years.

On 1st October 1941 we moved to Mid Wales for schemes on mountain warfare and how to be support troops to the Infantry. This was an exceedingly tough programme and we lost 2 men through hypothermia and injuries. While doing this training I thought I could have been in a cosy warm billet in a barracks with our HQ and not slogging it out amidst the cold river streams, ice and snow of the the Brecon Beacons. But I still did not regret the refusal of promotion. In another 14 days we moved back to NW England to a peaceful holiday camp near Heysham called Middleton Towers. Here we were trained for Beach and land invasions and never queried the reason for this action. All the comforts of the peacetime holiday camp had been removed and we slept on straw palliasses on the concrete floor. The water was always cold as all heating systems had been removed as the fuel shortage was acute. For your info, palliasses were large Hessian sacks approx 6ftx2ft" stitched all around except for a slit down one side 2 ft long with cotton strips to act as tie-ups. Whenever you moved to a new billet you were given an empty palliasse and were led to a store hut where straw was stacked in bales. From these bales you stuffed your bag until it was like a balloon. As we filled our bags the air was full of straw dust and much play acting, sneezing and coughing ensued. The last soldiers in the room were often unlucky if they was any straw left, but when we lay on our sacks for a day or two it was only 3" in depth so the action of filling it like a balloon was obvious. We veterans knew what the rookies had to learn in the hard way.

On 7th December 1941 came the news we all feared, Japan was at War with the USA and Britain. Several hours earlier 360 Japanese planes had made a massive surprise attack on the US Pacific Fleet in its home base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. They also attacked USA bases in the Philippines, Guam and Wake Island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Without a declaration of war the Japanese caught the US Navy unaware of any danger and in two hours had sunk or destroyed five battleships, 14 smaller ships and over 200 aircraft, and over 2,400 people. On 8th December Britain also declared war on Finland, Rumania and Hungary. On the 10th December the Japanese invaded Malaya and our Royal Navy battleships the Repulse and the Prince of Wales were sent from Singapore without any air cover (due to fog the planes could not take off). Word had reached Singapore that an invasion force of Japanese ships had been seen of the coast near Kuantan and our two battleships were trying to intercept and sink them. The Japanese Air Force came and with the help of the Kamikazee pilots sunk both our battleships after a tremendous battle.

Our No 1 and 2 Sections (60 men and NCOs and one officer) were immediately given embarkation leave and told to report to No 4 Group HQ. We did not see them again but that is another story. These two Sections were our advance party and their object was to land in Singapore and prepare and set up our base and HQ and we, the rest of 175 Company would follow

in due course.

### Pioneers Go To War

The news was really expected as our Sections 1 and 2 had gone  
The news was bad from the Far East as Singapore was nearly done  
Our Navy was decimated, our Army casualties were mounting galore  
And the General of the Army was wanting help more and more  
The news concerning Singapore soon spread about Preston town  
But our Officer Commanding told us we were standing down  
No more reinforcements from England would have to be sent  
And then we realised that we were safe that's all to us the order meant.  
This meant we stayed in England up in the North West  
We continued with our training and were classed amongst the best  
But I still kept in touch with my family  
Because I loved them and they were dear to me  
But with all the training we have to do  
It may suddenly come home to you  
Because you're in the Army to fight some bloody foe  
So there must come a day when overseas you must go

However, it was at this time I received the very sad news that two of our Royal Navy battleships had been sunk by the Japanese, one was the Repulse and the other the Prince of Wales. The latter was my brother's ship and he had been reported missing. It was the 10th December 1941 and I was given a 24 hour leave pass to go home and comfort my Mum and Dad. It was to be a long day of sadness, but of course I had to return to my Section which was then based in Fleetwood. My mates did their best to cheer me up and I tried to put on a brave face, but he was my brother Ted and a good mate as well and I loved him. He could not die our there! How could he die so young, 18 years and 5 weeks?

The next day I had a telephone call from my sister Louie who had been in touch with my HQ at Preston who had given her my telephone number at our base in Fleetwood. It was good news as Ted had been picked up after swimming in the sea for several hours and he was safe. He was now ashore and was with an Army Regiment who were going to pass him on to an RASC transport depot en route to Singapore. My delight was joined by my mates and we celebrated the good news later, I was allowed one telephone call to my Mum and Dad, but cannot remember what was said as we were full of happiness. By now I know we were going to Singapore to join 1 and 2 Sections and made myself a promise to kill as many Japanese as possible and a hope I may meet Ted in Singapore.

On the 14th December 1941 we were sent home on Embarkation leave and to report back to our HQ at Preston at 2359 hrs on 31st December (New Years Eve). Strange as it may seem all ranks reported back on time and all were sober. Dropping out kit we awaited our inoculations and receive our issue of tropical kit, KDs and waited around for our orders. Our personal and Army kit was already packed in our kit-bags which were securely locked with a brass locking pin threaded through the eyelets and padlocked, but our immediate requirement were in our packs which we would carry as we made our way to the railway station. Our kit bags were going by



transport and would be loaded into the hold on board ship, not to be seen until our destination at Singapore. Twenty four hours went by and we were all in a subdued quietness and curious as to the delay. The following morning we received orders that our embarkation had been cancelled as Singapore was in danger of being overrun by the Japanese and if we landed in 14 to 21 days time we would be taken prisoners of war. What a comfortable feeling, but what a relief! Then what was going to happen to our advance party of 1 and 2 Sections, where were they? Also if Singapore had been captured where was my brother Ted? We were stood down now and awaited fresh orders.

On 26th January 1942 I received word that Ted was safe. Arriving by Army transport in Singapore the rescued crew of the battleship Prince of Wales were ordered to muster on parade and all those under 18 years of age to step forward and form new ranks. All these lads were given a rifle and ammunition and told to join the troops who were defending Singapore. The rest of the crew boarded a ship bound for England. My brother Ted was lucky his date of birth was 9 November 1923 so he was 18 years and 7 weeks. It may seem cruel, but seamen of the Royal Navy were classed as Able seamen on the 18th birthday and were qualified trained seamen. However on his way to England he contracted malaria and was put ashore into a Military hospital in Colombo in Ceylon (now named Sri Lanka). When he was better he did not return to England, but was appointed coxswain of a Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) in the Mediterranean. He served there until the end of the war and his boat was successful in sinking many German and Italian ships. We do not know the story, but he was awarded the DSO in 1943 for heroic actions in the battle of the "Med".

It was about this time we learnt that 1 and 2 Sections who had been our advance party to Singapore had been taken prisoner by the Japanese. Was I lucky in being in 3

Section and also our embarkation leave had been OK but our embarkation to Singapore had been cancelled.

My stay in this country for the next few months consisted of the usual Guard Duties, manoeuvres, Beach Invasion Landings which on some exercises were carried out under live ammunition fire by the local Infantry Regiments. I think these "Tommys" though it was grouse shooting day at times though they were very accurate in their aiming. We did not suffer any casualties as we soon learnt to crawl on our bellies and run like hell when required from one point to another. I thank goodness I had been a member at the Liverpool Pembroke Athletic Club until 1939. One day we had to enter a gas chamber. With our respirators covering our faces we calmly entered through the sealed air tight doors. All the training and information we had received before hand flashed through our minds. The order came through the PA system to "Test for Gas", this operation comprises of inserting a finger into the rubber part of your respirator and pulling it an inch or two away from your face and finally removing the entire mask from your face. As the room was filled with mustard or chloride gas it instantly caused your eyes to smart and the tears flowed. If you stayed too long in the chamber your lungs felt like they were burning and you started coughing so you banged on the door and got out very quickly into the fresh air, what a relief!

While in Preston we enjoyed our time off duties by going to the dog track and I still remember backing a winning greyhound called "Roman Warrior". I was the only one to win that night. Other nights we went to see wrestling bouts and our favourite was a man called George Bradfield nicknamed the "Farmers Boy". Sometimes we were lucky by having transport and going to Morecambe where there was also boxing and wrestling bouts.

During March 1942 we were training in the Pennines and during our final exercise the Infantry were again using live ammunition, but on this occasion we suffered three wounded casualties. On the 24th April 1942 I heard that my youngest sister Grace (we called her Dot) had joined the Army Territorial Service (ATS) and had been posted for her training to Towyn in Wales with the Royal Artillery. Her battery was training on Bofor Ack-Ack guns. I asked for my 7 days leave to be brought forward so I could go and visit her. I was lucky because as we were only training my presence wasn't that vital. I went home first to see my Mum and Dad and family then the next day caught a tram car to Liverpool. I then travelled by train to Chester, then to Bangor and then by bus to Barmouth and then finally Towyn after 5 hours. Grace was very pleased to see me and I arranged to stay in a hotel. We spent time in the mess at the Army barracks and because she had a veteran soldier as a brother all drinks were free from all her new friends. We chatted

about how things had been at home and how Mum and Dad were really coping. She assured me that were doing fine and also my other two sisters Lou and Anne. As she was on duty next morning we said our Good Byes, hugged and kissed as I had to also

leave to go back home by bus and trains. I did not see her again until 1945.

It was about this time that I learnt that my brother Bill (born 1911) had taken part in the invasion of Norway. This campaign lasted about 6 weeks amid snow and ice in the region of Tronjheim and Bergen. Our troops were not equipped for the Arctic regions and soon the Germans occupied the south part of Norway. Heavy snow fell in the northern region and this delayed the landing of British reinforcements. There was also a shortage of Air Support. It was also the time when President Roosevelt condemned the invasion of Norway. Our troops fought bravely and recaptured the

**'My brother Bill took part in the invasion of Norway'**



port of Narvik, but arrangements were being made to evacuate our forces before they became encircled. King Haakon and his cabinet were taken aboard the British Cruiser Glasgow and finally brought to England. They had inflicted a massive loss on the Germans, but the larger enemy forces had prevailed in the end. Our Navy had sunk several German ships of war and also merchant ships. Finally Bill escaped on a destroyer and was landed in Newcastle. He was still serving in the Royal Medical Corps, but was stationed in the South of England with 75 Military General Hospital. I was still in Preston on 23rd July 1942 and still carrying out Beach landing at St Anne's and running up and down the Pennine Mountains in battle gear (15lbs pack) and guards duties anywhere and everywhere. We were receiving visits from VIPs and so spit and polish became the priority on those days. Rumours from the cook-house, where all Army rumours start, indicated we would soon be going overseas. Apparently because the Quarter Master or Sergeant Cook had to indent for food rations relative to numbers and length of period time required from the area stores. It became clear as to the reason for this training and visits from VIPs, it was to ensure our standard was up to the mark. Up to their mark, well I think we must have been the fittest in the Country.

On 30th September 1942 we were all again given a medical examination and TAB and TT inoculations and did we wonder why? No, it was quite obvious, but secrecy was quite paramount, both for our safety and also not to reveal any information to any spies who were maybe in the area. We had lectures everyday regarding the care of our bodies and personal hygiene and it was important that clean underwear was worn when going into battle in case you were wounded. I had to smile because I remember my Mum always saying "Have you got clean underpants on in case you get knocked down?" I myself thought that it was in case the neighbours or nurses may see your dirty underwear if you had them on at the time of the accident and the shame your Mum would feel. So you see Mothers are always right. During the first week in October came the first large scale exercise I had ever taken part in and we knew then we were definitely going overseas. Somewhere but we did not know anything about that.

Our OC called us all on parade, every man, general office clerks, cooks, storemen etc, it was the first occasion we had everyone together and I mean everyone on parade at the one time. We were in battle dress only so we knew we were going to get a pep talk. I cannot recall all what he said but it was to inform us some very important persons were coming up from London and we were to take part in a war realistic exercise with other Pioneers and Infantry Regiments and if we let him down he would have 'Our guts for garters'. The CSM and officers gave us the gist of the exercise, but it was up to the Section Sergeant to inform and detail his own Section. It was to be held on the moors on our favourite place, The Pennines. I think I knew it blind folded by now. The next day we were transported to our battle area. The noise was terrific with the Royal Artillery batteries firing off their 5.5 guns and the armoured divisions were3 cruising around in their clanking tanks. Everywhere we looked there were soldiers, guns, mortars, tanks, anti tank guns and air support. It was not going to be a picnic. At night the sky

was permanently lit with flares and the weather was lousy.

Our officers were our OC Major Gavett, Captain Collins, Lieutenants Coates, Chapman, Gardener and our Second Lieutenants were called White, Hope and Robinson. Regimental Sergeant Major Langdon and Company Sergeant Major Maskell were in their element. We were paraded, counted and then given another pep talk stating that 175 Company must put up a good show and not let the name of the Pioneers down at all costs. The idea was to make us all feel proud and ready to die for our country. However, it was a load of bollocks as it did nothing at all to raise our spirits as we were soaked, hungry and miserable. The officers received their orders from the General in charge and they in turn passed them to our Warrant Officers who then passed them on to the NCOs who finally thought they had better tell us what we had to do. I hope I am not boring you, dear reader, but the next sequence of events

## 'Goodbye to England'

are as follows. The Second Lieutenant who is a Platoon or Section Commander, deploys his three Platoons or Sections in preparation for the attack. Each Platoon is now commanded by a Corporal and each Platoon has a two man Bren gun team. The latter comprising a gun layer and firer and an ammunition carrier and feeder. The Bren gun team having the basic skills to fire the gun is usually under the command of a Lance Corporal or a very trusted Private soldier (Me!). According to the topography two sections or Platoons are deployed either to the right or left of the third section which retains the service of the 2Lt. The two Platoons then dig in and select their firing positions. The Section Sergeant remains in overall command of the firing squad. Section No 3 then sets off in the direction of the enemy, usually employing the "Leopard Crawl". When the Platoon Commanders Section gets within a short sprint of the enemy the Sergeant orders the other two Sections to open up rapid fire, preferably onto the enemy. As the hail of fire pours into the enemy position, the Platoon Commander breaks cover and brandishing his pistol and shouting words of encouragement like, "Let's go and .... The b.....ds", he leads his Platoon, who now have fixed bayonets, in a furious attack on the enemy. At this point the firing squads (1 and 2) were supposed to maintain the level of fire to keep the maximum pressure on the enemy, but the arc of fire should move slightly to the left and right, according to the directions of the Platoon Commander's charge, so as to avoid shooting your own men. The enemy is now wiped out, casualties counted, all is over

Needless to say it does not always happen like that so that is why we have to practice exercise after exercise until it is perfect.

Our Sections 8, 9 and 10 were later being trained as 'snatch parties' to go out on a patrol and pluck an individual out of the enemy positions and bring him back through the lines to be interrogated. This job was dangerous and skillful and was usually the job of a Platoon Commander. His picked men, usually six in number, would then blacken their faces etc with boot polish and on a moonless and starless night would carry out this exercise. The rest of the Sections 8, 9 and 10 would play the part of the enemy. At a pre-arranged time the rest of the Company would create a diversion by generally creating an unholy din to distract the enemy.

## Goodbye To England

We never had a chance to say a fond "Farewell"

To the families we all had left behind  
For our embarkation was a secret and we weren't allowed to tell  
Not even to those we loved who were always in our mind  
As we left Scotland the rays of the sun were sinking  
Across the waves as we were on our way  
We were thinking of the lads who were with us  
And how many would live to return home one day.

The 28th October 1942 was a day for us all to remember. This was the day we marched out of our Preston barracks in full kit, rifles with bayonets fixed and at the slope position. The pavements were crowded with people and every step of the way to Preston Station we were cheered and we felt like heroes. Of course the people of Preston had seen it all before so the cheers were more of sympathy. As we marched on to the Station we noticed an exceptional number of Military Police (Redcaps) and the windows of the carriages of the train were blacked out. What on earth was going on? There had been no embarkation leave given and now all this secrecy. The train left the station and soon the blacked out window had been scratched out in places and some of the local lads with their eyes pressed up to the clear 2" square space were calling out places they recognised as all station nameplates had been removed at the beginning of the war. The train started slowing down and someone cried, "We're at Wigan". Slowly the train picked up speed and soon places nearing Liverpool were called out. There was much clanging of wheels as the train crossed and re-crossed the railway lines and soon shouts of "We're nearly at the Pier Head". We must be going overseas and the b.....s didn't tell us. Very soon stubs of pencil and bits of paper or empty cigarette packets were produced and loving notes written on them. Name and addresses and messages like 'we are going overseas soon' were ready to hand to the 'friendly' dockers with a half crown to bribe them to deliver the message to our Mums and Dads, wives and family and sweethearts. Gone had all thoughts of security as we trust the missiles into the hands of 'friendly' dockers. Postage was a penny the rest a bribe., The Red Caps saw what we were doing and closed in immediately and as far as I know no family got one message at all. We were marched down the Pier Head towards the waiting troop-ship, the Duchess of Richmond, I wonder whatever happened to her. We boarded the ship using all the gang planks for speed and ensuring no one would take French leave (AWOL). Still not a hint as to where we were going.

We set sail up the Mersey waving our fondest farewells and what could be our last view of the Liver Birds. Down below we were allocated a deck just above the engine room and prepared to sling our hammocks. This operation caused many a laugh until some of the ships crew now free from duty came down to show us. Getting into a hammock is a work of art, but once in position they are comfortable as you sway from side to side with every movement of the ship. Having stored our kit in what we thought were appropriate places and leaving passage ways clear to enable us to make a quick exit if required, we mustered on the upper deck (3 decks



above) and paraded. Numbered off in Sections, we were told nothing! The sky was blue and by checking the sun we worked out we were going North to Scotland? Definitely not Scotland as we would have going by train, perhaps Iceland? Well possibly, we hope not too cold. Oh well, we will have to just wait and see.

There was ice-cream and soft drinks and one can of beer for sale daily to each man. As I was a teetotaler my mates Jimmy Addison from Leeds, Frank Bennett from Birmingham, Jack Alexander from Possill Park Glasgow and George "Chunky" Hayward from Tufnell Park London had the benefit of my dislike to beer. I was, however, also able to obtain more cans or bottles of beer for my mates by trading my ice-cream for beer at the canteen shop.

At Greenock as the month of October 1942 drew to its close Pioneer Group HQ and Regiments and Companies from all parts of Britain were transported to the River Clyde. The number of soldiers going overseas was quietly building up as they embarked on the various ships. Very soon the convoy moved slowly out of the river and the ships took up their allocated positions. We could see destroyers, cruisers, fighters and an aircraft carrier so it appeared the Government were determined to ensure we would arrive safely to our unknown destination. We were soon to realise that we were not on a cruise as orders came to parade for life boat drill. The ship, I believe, was carrying 2,500 to 3,000 men and as we practiced the drill we observed there appeared to be enough life boats for everyone. To keep fit we had Physical Training (PT) classes, tug-of-war, games etc as well as gun drill exercises. Lying down in my hammock my head was about 2 feet from the still sides of the ship and I often thought if I would see a torpedo head appear before the explosion. I followed the setting sun everyday and gauged we were heading westwards towards Canada. As the direction did not change it could only be Canada or USA, but on the 4th day we turned southwards and were told that we had been travelling westwards to avoid the German U Boats. However, we learnt next day that we (the convoy) had been attacked by U boats on 2 occasions, but our escort of destroyers had dealt with them efficiently (good old Royal Navy!). On the 4th November we were all called to parade on the top deck and told very informally that the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and the American President, Mr Roosevelt, had reached an agreement with the Russian leader Stalin,

that the British and American soldiers would cause a diversion and land on various beaches in North Africa. This operation was coded "Operation Torch". On the assumption that the French would offer less resistance to the Americans than to the British the initial landings were to be carried out by the American ground forces at Oran and Casablanca and by a combined US/British force at Algiers. Members of the CIA and MI6 had been in North Africa for several days sounding out the French leaders as to whether they were more friendly to Americans in Morocco or Algeria. On the basis of their information the British troops landed in Algeria. The reason for this was because on 3rd July 1940 the Royal Navy removed the threat of the French Fleet falling into German hands by destroying a large part of it at anchor in

Algeria – killing a thousand French sailors in the process. Both the Prime Minister and Admiral Sir James Somerville, who led the raid, deeply regretted the loss of life and were concerned at its effect on Anglo-French relations. The raid was also seen as a confidence booster after the battering at Dunkirk.

The attack began after a six-hour ultimatum to the French commander to surrender his ships and sail to Britain or America, but after much debating the time ran out. Force H, consisting of the battle-cruiser Hood (the biggest battle ship in the world), two warships, an aircraft carrier and support craft moved in for the onslaught. First of all flying boats closed off the exit of the port of Mers-el-kebir near Oran, and then a 10 minute aerial and naval bombardment destroyed the vessels without any damage to the British Fleet.

At the same time more than 200 French vessels had been seized in British ports with only one incident, when an officer on the submarine Sureout was shot as he tried to prevent the take over of his ship. Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean Sea, a French battleship, cruisers and smaller vessels moored with the British Fleet at Alexandria had been told they would not be allowed to leave port.

The action taken by the British Navy was generally accepted by the War Cabinet and also President Roosevelt as the French ships could not be allowed to be taken by Germans and used against us. It may seem an injustice to our allies, but it was a necessary action.

On 7th November 1942 we sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar in pitch darkness. Gibraltar itself was entirely blacked out while 21 miles away the Moroccan town of Tangiers was brilliantly lit. On the 8th November our part of the convoy anchored ten miles of Algiers while we prepared to climb down the rope ladders and settle in our landing craft infantry (LCI). A blast on the OC's whistle and amid cheers of good luck from the Royal Navy we set off for the beach. We approached with caution as we had been warned that the French troops would resist our landings. No guns were fired upon us from the shore, no aircraft attacks over head, it was a doddle. We however, had landed in the wrong place and made our way up the beach very warily as we expected some attacks sometime. Suddenly figures could be seen approaching the beach from the town of Algiers. We held our fire and suddenly noticed that they were young persons trying to sell us

oranges and melons. Were they the real fruit or booby traps? No, they were real. Algiers was captured by 0700 hrs and the unimpeded landing was a mystery. We were then ordered inland to capture the airfield Maison Blanche and marched inland in the twilight and arrived

there next morning. By now the French soldiers had realised the British Army were a big invasion force and so they surrendered. After more talks between Generals of each side the French realised we had come to attack the German Army who were fighting our 8th Army in Tripoli area and they transferred their allegiance to our side. They were a great help as most of them had been in the French Foreign Legion, a force of good fighting men.

The airfield was now in our hands and so our planes could land there from Gibraltar and so build up a creditable amount of aircraft. We were then divided as a

Company and Sections 1 to 5 were entrained to a destination called Bougie while 6 to 10 Sections were retained in Algiers to work on the docks unloading ships of food, ammunition etc. When we arrived at Bougie we learned that 152 Company of Pioneers had sailed from Gibraltar to land at the Bay of Bougie the previous day. As they approached they were attacked by waves of Italian bombers and fighters and 5 of the vessels had been sunk amongst them was the Cathay and Karangna carrying the Company of Pioneers. They managed to get ashore and found the vessels that had been sunk contained tanks, lorries and equipment for the Infantry. They were lucky and only suffered 1 Sergeant and 2 Corporals killed and a dozen or so other ranks wounded. Again our luck held out as we had landed at Algiers. We worked with them to unload the other vessels and mounted guard as the Arabs would steal anything and we had orders to fire first and ask questions afterwards.

By this time the landings at Algiers and Bougie were firmly established and the Americans had separated from the British and were an independent force in a more inland part of Algeria. The first Army now comprised of the 5th Corps and the 9th Corps plus the 78th Division and 46th Division that we were attached to and the 1st Division and 6th Armoured Division and the 4th mixed Division. The First Army Badge or insignia was the Red Cross of St George on a white shield with an unsheathed Christian Crusaders sword superimposed on the upright of the cross. Our motto was "the sword shall not be sheathed until our task be thoroughly done."

We were now the First Army – the Great Little Army.

Lt General Anderson GOC took over the command from the American General. The allied armies advanced rapidly from Algeria into Tunisia meeting little opposition. As the forces advanced we were left at Bougie to tidy up any solitary German troops and leave the area as we had to catch up with our attacking infantry. We handed over the area to 152 Company who had suffered so badly in the landings. Our Company was then entrained at Bougie to make our way to Tunisia. The journey was uneventful as far as bombing was concerned because we had the RAF as cover which was quite adequate and made us feel safe.

The train from Algiers was due at Bougie at 0930 hrs, we were there at 0830 hrs, but we were then told it would not arrive until mid-day. So we were prepared to wait and so commenced preparing our meal from the 'compo packs, so ably devised by the powers that be. Suddenly we were told to pack everything up as the train was due in 30 minutes. What we called the so called organisers was nobodys business. We continued to eat until we heard the whistle of the train and knew we would be ready. The Arabs were hanging about waiting for us to give them any uneaten food, but no chance, let the train wait. We gazed at the train as it pulled into the station, it was comprised of numerous cattle trucks and 2 carriages. Marked on the trucks were 8 chevaux (horses) and 37 hommes (men). Some of the trucks were filled with guardsmen making their way up to the front. We sorted ourselves out noting the officers had entered the carriages and prepared for our journey of 2 to 3 days. As the train slowly travelled along we were soon covered in dust as there were no windows to close. The Arab engine driver always likes to give a long blast on his

**'We handed over to 152 Coy who had suffered so badly in the landings.'**

whistle as he is nearing or leaving a station. We noted this and at the next blast of the whistle as the train was crawling along we jumped out and carrying a Dixies (large pail) we hurried toward the engine and filled the Dixie up with the boiling water from a tap on the side of the engine. Scurrying back to our "luxurious" truck we brewed tea from our rations.

The guardsmen were sitting to attention as drilled and disciplined soldiers until the next stop when it was a free for all between them and us. Now and again when the train was going very slow up an incline we jumped out of the train and collected water melons growing in the nearby field and threw them into our truck.

The guardsmen were looking at us with envy so we threw about 30 melons into their trucks and they were very grateful and that started a friendship which was to materialise later. Any vines containing grapes were soon taken charge of by ourselves, but the guardsmen soon had the advantage because of their height. We finally arrived at our destination at 0200 hrs a dirty and dishevelled lot and also very tired of the train, but we had seen a lot of North Africa.

We were last off the train to find the guardsmen already marching to their new camp which bore the name of a well known Army Barracks namely Aldershot. I bet they wished they were there, but first there was a job to be done.

The allied armies advanced rapidly into Tunisia meeting little opposition until the end of November 1942 by which time an AXIS Force of 15,000 fighting troops had been diverted from Europe in haste to Tunisia and offered a stubborn resistance to our advance. By 28th November we were within 12 miles of Tunis, but a strong German counter attack frustrated our capture of the City. The rainy season was long and more abundant than any of the natives could remember in Algeria and Tunisia. We were drenched for days and nights with no chance of getting warm. We had to remain in position occupying the land we had taken for fear of counter attacks by the Germans. There was no fuel for making a hidden fire amongst the rocks as trees were very scarce in our area. Tents were pitched in soft mud, but the torrential rain could not be kept out and just flooded in on all sides. Night after night still in our wet clothes we wrapped our rubber sheets around us and shivered. Movements on both sides were still static just more of patrols probing to check the strength of the opposition. Later on the American front there was some action as the "Yankees" fought their way to the German main force. The 2nd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards attacked the Germans and took over the Kasserine pass as the Germans retreated under attacks by the British Forces. As the Guards advanced they "asked" the Yankees to hold their position in the pass while they passed through for 2 or 3 days hard earned rest. However, the Germans with reinforcements attacked and knocked the "Yankees" out of their position. As this pass was vital to any advance by road transport the 2nd Coldstreams returned and had to retake the pass but retained their position telling the Yankees where they could go to, eventually it was banded back again to the Yanks.

Our Company amongst other Pioneer Companies received a record of praise from the DCE, "The efforts of the Pioneer

Companies have been very good in this appalling weather and all tasks have been carried out with unflinching humour. They have a real sense of discipline and responsibility and have always more than met demands for extra effort in an emergency." I was informed that on several occasions when the infantry were hard pressed they occupied their positions from daybreak until midnight without asking for help and even refusing to be relieved for a short rest. We must have been stupid at times, that's all I can think.

Our thoughts were now turning towards Christmas and what chances of having a real turkey dinner. As we had been in action since 8th November we began to feel nobody loved us, but next day we were told to report back to HQ as we were going to Algiers for a well earned rest. The train journey back was uneventful as we had an USA engine to pull the trucks so our speed was quite fast. On arrival in Algiers we reported in and were billeted in a school not far from the main centre. Amongst the mail was a letter from my brother Arthur who was near to Tripoli with the RAF in the 8th Army Section. I got in touch with Arthur immediately by the Army express mail that is wagons going from one HQ to another HQ and as he was in the RAF asked him to try and fly to Blanche Maison airfield and I would meet him at the main door of the Main Post Office in Algiers. The time arranged was 1200 hrs until 1500 hrs. After we had been in Algiers for 48 hours we looked forward to the next day which was Christmas day. A real meal as the Army always arranged for the HQ staff to organise this. The Officers at Christmas always served the dinner to the ranks and we took advantage of this system and many remarks were made. For the sake of the children who may read this account of my experiences I will not print the actual words said to each other.

One learned from experience in the Forces to never take things for granted and at this time the eventful happened. Behind the scenes in Algiers on 24th December Admiral Jean Francois Darlan was shot by an assassin belonging to a party who regarded Darlan as a traitor to the cause of Marshall Petain. Darlan had been made Commissar for French North Africa. Previously he had been a supporter of the Vichy area in France and collaborated with the Germans. He changed sides after the Allied landings in North Africa. Apparently the Allies had to have someone to run the Government in North Africa and Darlan was the only choice as he was the only one with Government experience in Africa at that time. I hope you understand this because I do not as all I know is that between them they messed up our Christmas!

All we knew was as riots were expected in Algiers and mobs of both sides were expected to clash we were given orders to stand by to help the infantry to quell any trouble that may have arisen. For 36 hours we stalked the streets and eventually peace reigned in the area, but we had to suffice on corned-beef sandwiches instead of being waited on by our Officers at the luxurious Christmas Dinner. (They did promise us a Christmas dinner at a later date but I am still waiting for mine!).

The next day we returned to the Tunis area to find the rainy season was in full swing, our improvised airfields had become quagmires, vehicles could only move with difficulty along the muddy roads and

General Eisenhower the Allied Commander in Chief (CinC) decided to halt operations, reorganise and build up his strength in manpower and wait until the weather improved and campaigning could begin again.

Returning to my arranged meeting with my brother Arthur, this had been arranged at a lovely white but very large building namely the Post Office. Arthur made his way to Algiers from the airfield and duly found the Post Office and also the main entrance. I arranged with my Sergeant that our patrol would cover and include the Post Office and I walked around the building from time to time between the ours of 1200 to 1500. Arthur also walked around the building from time to time but finally gave up and returned to the airport en route to Tripoli. As I said it was a large building that housed several businesses and shops and we had both been walking around behind one another for at least one hour. So we did not meet. Arthur later served with the Air Force in Sicily and Italy, I regret to say no rendezvous was arranged in the future.

Nothing exciting happened during the next few weeks, patrols, guard duties and generally getting soaked to the skin. Don't go to Tunisia in December or January for your holidays.

With the weather beginning to ease up from the atrocious conditions of the previous weeks, our patrols reported the Germans were building up their forces in strength. The German attack on the Allied front in the Atlas mountain region opened up on 14th February 1943, (not a very nice St Valentines present), with an assault on the southern extremity of the line held by US Army 2nd Corps and on the 17th the Germans had once again driven the American Force out of the Kasserine and Sheila passes and the area. Once again units of the British Guards Brigade were sent to attack the German positions and after severe fighting the Germans withdrew in good order on the 22nd and by the 28th both passes and the area were re-occupied by us and our original line established.

A second enemy attack against the British V Corps including Companies of Pioneers of the 46th Division developed on the 26th February. With the 6th Armoured division were two Pioneer Companies while we were with two other Pioneer Companies, 6 and 132, holding a section of the front line until we were relieved by units of the Guards Brigade when we were then moved into reserved positions. We were very pleased to see the Guards Brigade as things were getting rather sticky and I don't think we could have held out much longer. The coincidence was the members of the Guards were those who we had supplied with melons while we were travelling by trains. So they re-paid our generous act in more ways than one. You never know when a good turn would be reciprocated.

A few days later we were called upon to strengthen our position and the junction between our 46th Division and the 78th Infantry Division South East of Beja which we had to hold until the 23rd March.

On the 5th April detachments of our Company relieved men of the North Hampshire Regiment and the Lancashire Fusiliers in the front line North-West of Medjez and supplied men to night patrols with the Grenadier Guards. Casualties were light only two men receiving fatal wounds in our Company.

Our OC, Major Dickie was struck off strength to command 296 Company and Major LC Watters assumed command of the

## **'Our thoughts were of Christmas and a real turkey dinner'**



Company.

British and American troops captured Tunis and Bizerta on 7th May 1943 and German Divisions (approx 248,000) who were trapped between the Allied forces surrendered on the 9th. The conquest for the Tunisian tip of North Africa was completed. Casualties to our Company since 8th November were as follows:

Sections 6 to 10 who were left behind in Algiers: 7 men killed, 5 wounded (by air raids)

Sections 1 to 5 while guarding Maison Blanche Airport, 4 killed and 8 wounded.

175 Company after moving to Bone to support the Infantry were "accidentally" bombed by the USA Air Force, total killed 40 to 50 but only 4 from our Company

175 Company supporting Infantry in the Tunis and Bizerta final campaign, 15 killed

and 30 wounded.

Total 175 Company 30 killed and 43 wounded in the North African Campaign

The battle for Tunisia had cost the Germans 340,000 men.

On 13th May 43, General Alexander sent the following telegram to No 10 Downing Street:

"Prime Minister, Sir,

It is my duty to report that the Tunisian campaign is over. All enemy resistance has ceased. We are masters of the North African shores. Tunis, the last battle of the war in Africa will stand as a classic example of a complete achievement."

On 9th May 1943, HRH King George VI sent the following message to General Eisenhower:

"Under your leadership, forces diverse in nationality and race have been knit into

one united and successful whole. Their task has not been easy, and the persistence of the enemy has been determined and desperate. But now, with the capture of Tunis and Bizerta, your campaign is almost concluded, the last enemy forces in Africa have been captured or destroyed, and the debt of Dunkirk repaid."

Maybe praise indeed from the highest, but the cost of casualties is as follows:

British 1st Army Killed 4,439 Wounded 23,545 Missing 6,531

USA 11 Corps Killed 2,715 Wounded 18,221 Missing 6,528

French Army Killed 1,100 Wounded 16,180 Missing 7,000

TOTAL:

Killed, wounded and missing – 86,259

It had to be a just war to balance the number and cost of the above casualties. ■

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# Frank Nichol Remembers

Happy times with 8 regiment in munster with the cream of the corps

Report: Frank Nichol  
Picture: Frank Nichol

**F**RANK Nichol Remembers...It only seems like yesterday that a task force was sent to the Falkland Islands to liberate the people who lived there from the Argentinean invasion...it was over 25 years ago.

As a child of about 5 or 6 I can remember seeing Vulcan bombers flying overhead, either starting their North Atlantic patrols or on their way back. This was only 20 odd years after the Second World War. When I asked what they were doing, my father would reply, "On their way to the Cold War". I had no idea that I would one day be involved in the Cold War. 'Cold War' is the term used to describe the state of conflict, tension and competition that existed between the United States in the West and the Soviet Union (USSR) in the East, and their respective allies, from the mid-1940s to the early 1990s.

Throughout this period, rivalry between the two superpowers was expressed through military coalitions, propaganda, espionage, weapons development, industrial advances, and competitive technological development, such as the space race. Both superpowers engaged in costly defence spending and a massive conventional and nuclear arms race.

While serving in 8 Regiment, I remember travelling by minibus to Berlin with Lt Pierce ACC. We would check in with the RMP at a place called Helmstedt (checkpoint Alpha) on the East West German border, then with the East Germans and Russians.

We were given a time bracket within which we had to arrive at Berlin (checkpoint Bravo). Being late, meant a

charge of espionage; too early, a charge of speeding. Needless to say, the next time we went, we chose the train, but even the Berlin Military Train was a propaganda tool.

The Cold War drew to a close in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the coming to power of US President Ronald Reagan, the US increased their diplomatic, military and economic pressure on the Soviet Union.

In the second half of the 1980s, newly appointed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced Perestroika and Glasnost. "Perestroika" (restructuring) and "Glasnost" (openness) were Mikhail Gorbachev's watchwords for the renovation of the Soviet political and social structure, which he pursued as General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1985 until 1991.

In 1981, 8 Regiment was expanded to incorporate ten Platoons, comprising of Royal Corps of Transport (RCT) and Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) soldiers in an infantry role. Six of the Platoons were founded by the RPC, the remaining four by the RCT.

In 1986, further reorganisation saw the disbandment of the RCT close support troops and the reorganisation of the remaining RPC manpower into four defence platoons.

The original Pioneer Soldiers who formed 144 Coy and 70 Coy undertook a training package at Bulford. Do not underestimate these troops; they were real soldiers who endured months of arduous training on Salisbury Plain, often in extreme weather conditions.

The remainder of the troops being groomed were a handful of Junior Pioneer Soldiers from the Junior Soldiers Battalion at Taunton. Not much was said about the reasons for going to 144 Coy or 70 Coy Weapons Support Group (WSG). It was not until we got there that the picture became

much clearer.

Recently my wife and I visited Munster, to see how much (if anything) had changed. We went to many of the places that had been off-duty haunts and even went as far as Munster Nord.

Portsmouth Barracks was close to a part of Munster called Coerde. Many married soldiers from the Regiment had a married quarter in this part of Munster. Hoher Heckenweg, is where the families NAAFI used to be. The Families NAAFI is no longer there, in its place is a new building offering transport to local businesses.

The Officers' Mess was also on Hoher Heckenweg. It has had a new coat of paint and is now a government building. We saw high-ranking German Police Officials driving through the gate. The Officers' Mess was only 150 metres from the back gate to Portsmouth Barracks.

For me 8 Regiment was very much an extended family. Of course there was the friendly banter that goes on in any regiment. But practically all of us were friends.

It was very sports-orientated unit, that did incredibly well in most of the sporting fixtures, including orienteering, boxing, rugby, football and of course, athletics, cross country running and the 3rd Armoured Division BAOR Half Marathon League.

Portsmouth Barracks has changed quite a lot. The roads through the camp are now block paved and tarmac instead of the cobbles that used to be there. Most of the building have been turned into flats or apartments. There are gardens, and several playgrounds provide children who live there with somewhere safe to play.

The whole area of the camp was very quiet. We stopped to talk to a gentleman who explained that the camp had, at one



time, housed a Panzer Unit of the Wehrmacht during the Second World War.

He could remember several German Army soldiers being shot by the SS on the parade square for opposing Hitler's war. There is nothing there to remember them. Quite a lot of the Germans we met were still embarrassed about what happened in the war and I had to remind them that there were many soldiers from all ranks who were, in the eyes of the Germans and the British, total heroes.

The WO's' and Sgts' Mess and RHQ were inside the camp perimeter. They were part of the same building. In-between there were the RQMS department, clothing store and various administration offices.

The perimeter fence, back gate and guard box have gone. Just outside RHQ there was a car parking area where, from time to time, the CO's Land Rover and a 4-ton truck from 604 Signal Troop would be parked, just outside the RSM's office. This normally meant that Crash Out was due (I will explain the Crash Out or Active Edge procedures later).

From time to time, we would volunteer to be waiters in the Officers' and Sergeants' Messes. It provided us with some extra cash or a day off, not to mention a crate or 2 of Grolsch beer each. Both buildings have now been turned into flats. The dental centre is now a Doctor's surgery.

70 Coy occupied the same building as the dental centre. I can remember Gus Patton being carried out of the dental centre having a tooth extracted; Gus. And the lads escorting him, got as far as 70 Coy's bar. They had 2 or 3 German Marks each in their pockets. Needless to say they got quite merry. Beer in all the bars on camp was about 1DM (at the time, about 25 pence).

The Gymnasium is now the school gym for Norbert School. There is a large playing field in front of it which was once the Parade Square. To the rear of the gym they have put in a long jump pit. As well as being a place for physical training, it was also a centre of sporting and social activity. Many soldiers from the regiment their wives and children would use the gym. It was one of the busiest places on the camp and at the time if had a state of the art multi-gym and free weights and a sauna. It also had a swimming pool. The pool was next to the NAAFI, there is now a building in its place.

The cookhouse was also a very busy part of the camp. The old cookhouse had to be pulled down. The ACC chefs worked in harsh conditions in the old cookhouse, so I think they would be glad to be working in a brand new one.

We were relieved when the duty of DRO (Dining Room Orderly) came to a sudden end. It is now the school canteen providing school breakfast, dinners and evening meals to children who now live on the site of Portsmouth Barracks. The whole area seemed very quiet with just a handful of people going about their day to day life.

As we walked through the camp, past the NAAFI towards 144 Coy block, I heard music coming from where the NAAFI shop used to be. The song was "99 Luftballons". It was a Cold War-era protest song by the German singer, Nena. Originally sung in German, it was later re-recorded in English as "99 Red Balloons", entering the charts in late 1983. As we reached 144 Coy block it reminded me of the reason why we had all been posted there.

"99 Decision Street  
99 ministers meet  
To worry, worry, super-scurry  
Call the troops out in a hurry"

I do not know what WO1 Tom Appleyard threw out of his office window but it's grown into something nice. At the time the CQMS was Brian Hope. The CQMS had his stores in the attic. The Platoon offices were on the ground floor and their stores were in the cellar.

Looking back down the main road towards the pedestrian gate and looking towards the main gate the Provo will be disappointed, the guardroom is no more.

The weapons we guarded were so 'sensitive' that many organisations had a keen interest in our mission. These included the Red Army Faction or RAF (German Rote Armee Fraktion), known, in its early days as the Baader-Meinhof Group or Gang, one of post-war West Germany's most active and prominent militant left-wing terrorist groups. It described itself as a communist "urban guerrilla" group engaged in armed resistance. Soxmis (Soviet Military Mission in Western Europe) also had a keen interest in the nature of our work. It was therefore deemed necessary to provide an infantry battalion to provide protection for the ordnance we guarded.

We were not Battalion strength, not even with the RCT troops. We were just 2 Companies of Pioneers and 4 Troops of RCT. The RPC took the place of a regular British infantry battalion in the early 1980s to relieve pressure on the infantry and thereby releasing Battalions of infantry to Operation Banner in Northern Ireland. The RPC were perfect for the job, as they were trained to guard static installations, for example Headquarters, railway sidings and munitions dumps.

At the time 8 Regiment was a major unit made up of the following sub units:

604 Signal Troop Royal Signals  
5 Sqn RCT  
144 Coy RPC  
70 Coy RPC  
13 Sqn RCT  
27 Sqn RCT

Plus elements from the RAMC, REME, WRAC, ACC, RAPC and RADC

Every once in a while the Telephone Orderly would wake us up at unearthly hours of the morning and say the dreaded words, "Active Edge" (crash out). To explain, we had a certain amount of time to get combat kit on and draw our weapons from the armoury.

We would then have to parade on the parade square with all our equipment and vehicles, and wait to deploy. On several occasions we were issued live ammunition. We discovered later that the Russians and East Germans were on exercise close to the inner German border.

Dorbaum was a training area only a few miles North East of Portsmouth Barracks. We would quite often deploy there in our Land Rovers and trailers for a period of time and set up a defensive position. If our vehicles were off the road for what ever reason, we would still have to deploy, on foot, with all platoon weapons so it was always important to make sure the vehicles were in good condition.

Munster Nord in the Schirlheide was another place that we could deploy to at anytime, to do Site Guard. This was where sensitive ordnance may have been stored. It was a place we would all visit several times a year.

During our tours of duty we would from time to time encounter anti-war protesters and other groups protesting against nuclear weapons (CND). Protestors would also gather in crowds close to a place we all knew as 'The School'. It was a place we would go to for some rest after a day or night at the site. Whilst on the site we were

divided into small teams. One team would man the towers, another team would be the SAT (Security Alert Team). The SAT would have to wear full kit, including webbing, and be ready to deploy to any part of the site.

Exercises were frequent and could last up to a month. WSG was a unit that would build character in anyone; the work was very hard and demanding for everyone, from the CO to the Squadron and Company Officers, SNCOs down to the soldiers on the ground. They worked in arduous conditions all year round. They worked hard, but they also played hard. We did get time off and were able to go into Munster and other Garrison towns.

Coerde was where many Pioneers would visit while off duty. Perhaps the most famous bar there was The Jug. This little bar was next door to the Sparkasse bank, which made it convenient for the troops. They could make a withdrawal on a Friday afternoon and then pop next door to the Jug until the early hours of Saturday morning.

If you wanted to find someone they could normally be found in the Jug. Sadly, the Jug is no more. It is now part of the bank. The shopping precinct is still there offering another bar, 2 supermarkets, an ice-cream parlour and a taxi rank.

Munster was founded in 793 AD by Fridian Ludger. It is a city in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Munster is located in the northern part of the state and is considered to be the cultural centre of the Westphalia region.

Munster is most famous for the Anabaptist rebellion during the Protestant Reformation. The Treaty of Westphalia was signed ending a Thirty Year War in 1648. The leaders of the rebellion were tortured and executed. Their corpses were exhibited in cages, which can still be seen hanging in the steeple of St Lambert's Church. Their bones have since been removed. Munster is also the bicycle capital of Germany.

Just over the road from St Lambert's church are cafes and various shops. The pillars are a reminder to us all about what happened in WW2.

During bombing raids on Munster, the Allies did a lot of damage and you can still see the pock holes left on some of the buildings.

There was a place called the Tenne Bar where a lot of soldiers from Munster would go when off duty.

The bar is now a very nice restaurant. Charloets Schnell Imbiss (take away or quick snack) is now offices for the rail network. Perhaps the place was Pinkus Muler. It was basically a whole street full of bars. It was pedestrianised, which made it much safer when going from one bar to the next. Its brewery produces outstanding beer, some of which is good for you....within moderation of course.

Another bar was the Munster Man, it is supposedly the most haunted place in Munster. There are many more places of interest in Munster.

Our recent visit revealed a very clean, prosperous, welcoming and friendly city. It is worth going to visit and has many hotels that offer excellent facilities and rates.

The Regiment's unique task of special weapons movement came to a conclusion on 15 March 1988. It was marked by a Regimental parade which not only commemorated the re-rolling of the Regiment from its special weapons task, but also marked the disbandment of 604 Signals Troop and the removal from the Regimental ORBAT of the RPC close support platoons. ■

Report: Mr N Brown  
Picture: D-Day archive

**E**ARLY in May 1944, 67 Pioneer Company (21 Group) left its home station in Scotland for the South of England to take part in the invasion of the Continent.

The Company was earmarked for duties with 8 Corps, providing labour for the Corps FMA (Forward Maintenance Area), later re-named FMC (Forward Maintenance Centre).

After taking part in a token scheme "SPARK" in the setting up of an FMA, the Company moved to the Marshalling Area and was accommodated in a sealed camp.

For the crossing of the Channel, the Company was formed into three parties:

a. Lt NW Fearnside, drivers, and loaded transport, consisting of 1 Austin Utility, 1 x 15 cwt, 1 x 3 tonner and 1 motor cycle.

b. Maj PA Leslie (OC), Capt TK Scott (2IC), Lt GA Weir, and the CSM, with approximately two-thirds of the Company.

c. Lt WEG Simmonds, Lt J Montgomery with the remainder.

Parties b. and c. landed on "NAN" beach, Courseulles-sur-Mer, at 0800 hrs on Sunday 18 June 1944, D + 12, after a quiet crossing in LCIs.

The landing was wet and was accomplished in spirits which varied directly in proportion to each man's height. The only casualty was one steel helmet, which floated away whilst salvage operations for the owner were in progress.

There was no enemy activity over the beaches and the Company formed up and marched inland to a marshalling area, and later to a disused stone quarry near Colombiers-sur-Seulles, where the Company established and dug in.

This camp was referred to throughout the campaign as "The Gully", but was always known to a certain portion of the Company as "Dead Man's Gulch", owing to the inadvertent disinterment of some very dead bodies, believed to be victims of the Germans, whilst digging operations for the

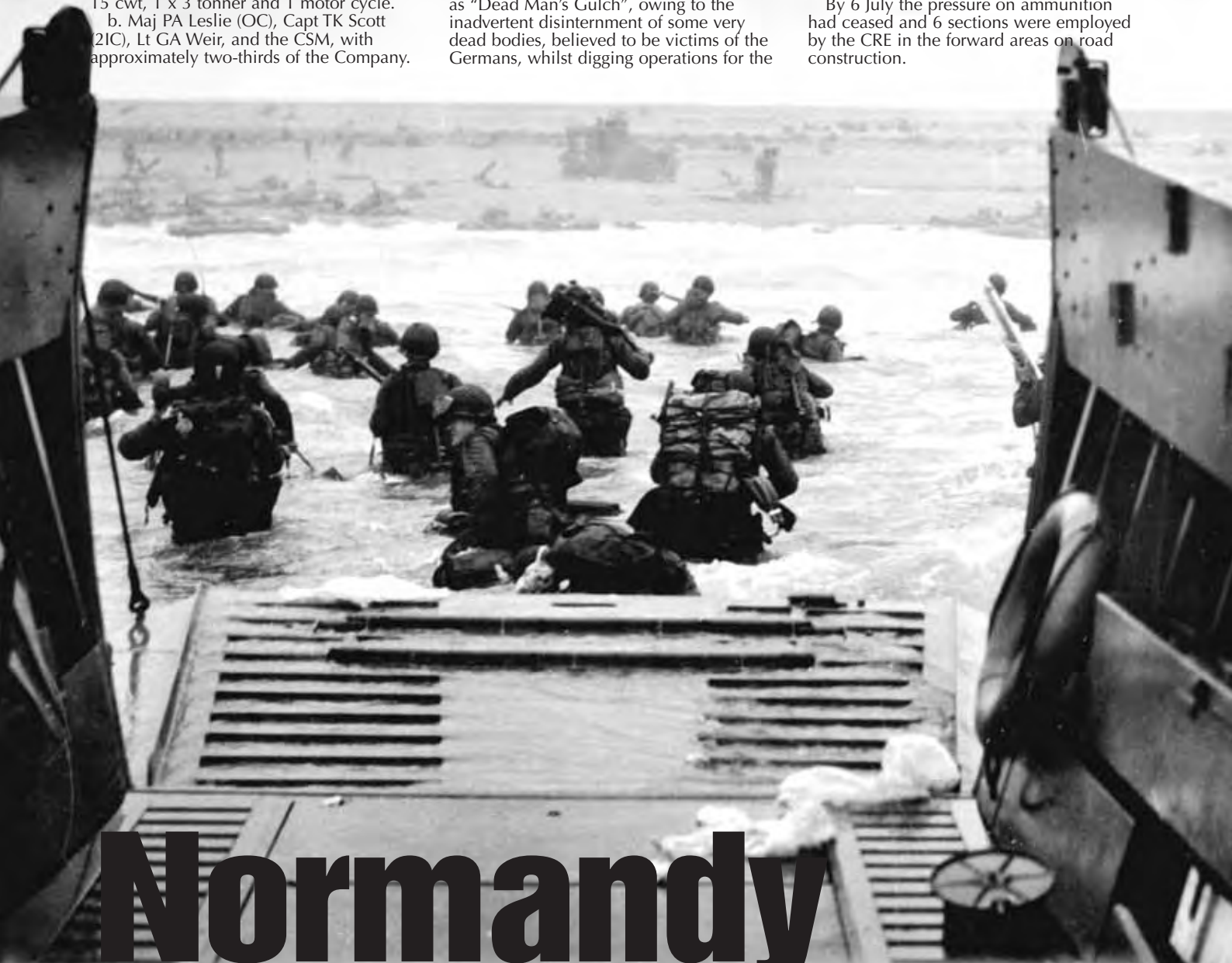
establishment of a cookhouse were in progress. The cookhouse was NOT established at that particular spot, nor was anything else!

Party a., proceeding separately by a longer sea route, were storm bound off the beaches, and after an uncomfortable time through weather and enemy action, joined the main body of the Company in "The Gully" on 24 June.

The Company was first committed to the preparations of camp sites for Second Army Headquarters, but as operational needs became more urgent, this work gradually diminished and in a few days the whole Company was employed on Ammunition (50 FMC – CREULLY), working in shifts of four sections around the clock.

About this time, the Company left 21 Group and became administered by 41 Group.

By 6 July the pressure on ammunition had ceased and 6 sections were employed by the CRE in the forward areas on road construction.



# Normandy to Neumunster

May 1944 – June 1945 with 67 company pioneer corps, 21 group



On 7 July this party, working in the CHEUX-COLVILLE area, came under direct enemy mortar and shell fire, but were fortunate in escaping with one case of shock.

Accompanying RASC personnel (drivers) suffered most, having two killed and one seriously wounded and two 3-ton vehicles put out of action.

During the rest of the month, the Company was variously employed on POL, Ammunition, Supplies, and helping with the construction of a Rest Camp at St AUBIN-SUR-MER.

HQ moved to NEUF-MER on 27 July, to the proposed site of 51 FMC. The installation, however, was not set up, and on 30 July the Company moved from its various locations to BALLEROY – 52 FMC – and was wholly employed on the installations.

As a sideline, HQ staff doused fire-bombs in the woods at night!

2 August found an advance party of five sections moving forward to LA RECULEY, near LE BENT BOCAGE, where it was found that the ground had not been thoroughly consolidated and the setting up of an FMC impossible.

During the course of the day the detachments manned a defence line and sent out recce patrols before being relived by the Infantry and withdrawing to St MARTIN DES BEACES to put down a “cushion” dump.

Four days later, on 6 August, 53 FMC was established in LA RECULEY with a detachment of five sections and advanced HQ.

For several days the area was under enemy shell fire from mobile guns, especially at night, the DID site having the worst of it, though there were no Pioneer casualties.

By 17 August the whole Company was deployed in several detachments over 53 FMC and work became steady while the Falaise trap was being set and sprung.

The Company was twice called on during this period to provide search parties for loose Jerries in the woods.

On 3 September, 67 Company took part in the chase when five sections moved off to an unknown destination, finally established as HAUTEVILLE, near ARRAS, France, to handle POL. On 9 September, HQ and the remainder moved up to QUATREMARE, on the River Seine, to 54 FMC, where, for the first time since landing, there was no digging in.

21 September found the main body of the Company again on the move, and after spending two nights on the road, fetching up at ZOLDER (Dutch-Belgium border) with 55 FMC, where a fairly quiet two weeks were spent, the only incidents being several heavy explosions in the vicinity. These, unexplainable at the time, were later confirmed as V-2s.

Advance parties for the Ammunition and POL dumps were moved up to 56 FMC at BEEK-EN-DONK, Holland, on 27 September, and winter quarters were found in houses, schools, halls, etc. HQ and the remainder followed on 4 October.

Work on the depots was steady, the Company being deployed in two main detachments – Ammunition at BOERDONK and POL at KOKS, outside GEMERT, a small reserve of labour being maintained at HQ in DONK.

The period up to Christmas was, in the main, uneventful, the only items of interest being the passing of the Company from 41 Group to 60 Group, the departure of one section to Vught Concentration Camp to act as guards over enemy personnel, an

occasional burial job, and the rotation of sections, NCOs and Officers to the Second Army Pioneer Training School at MEERHOUT.

Slight enemy air activity was experienced during the attack towards Leisel, but it was not maintained.

Shortly before Christmas, it became necessary to change locations once more, and on 20 December five sections moved to 57 FMC in the Zincworks, WEERT, to be joined there on 26 December by HQ and the remainder of the Company. Here, 67 Company was mainly concerned with the Corps Railhead at

HAMONT, just over the border in Belgium, where there was a detachment of three sections handling supplies and POL, and the maintenance of roads within the FMC circuit; severe frost at this time played havoc with lines of communication.

The Company was steadily employed on these duties for the following ten weeks, the exceptions being one section to the forward supply point at SEVENUM, established to supply 1 Commando Brigade, on 17 February, one section of DE HEIBLEON MONASTRY for a clearing-up job on 26 February, two sections to BLERICH, near VENLO, on 28 February to unload material for the bridging of the River Maas, and two sections to ISSUM on 2 March to prepare accommodation for Corps HQ.

In preparation for the crossing of the Rhine, the main body of the Company moved to MAASBREE on 20 March and to ISSUM on 23 March, and to a final assembly point in the same area on 24 March.

At 1400 hrs on 26 March, HQ and five sections moved north-east and were phased over the river with 17 Medium Regt RA, crossing at approximately 1930 hrs.

It was just getting dark at the time, and the usual evening visit from the Luftwaffe was almost due; the fact that the light anti aircraft guns defending the bridge were stripping of their covers in readiness did not materially contribute towards the general peace of mind. However, the convoy crossed without incident.

All personnel travelled on loaded ammunition lorries, and passing through WESEL – still burning – dumped their loads in 58 FMC at WACKENBRUCH.

No one got very much sleep that night as, in addition to fresh convoys arriving, our artillery was in full blast all around the area, and there was also a certain amount of ground-strafting and anti-personnel bombing from enemy aircraft, but once again the Company escaped without a casualty.

On 27 March, the remainder of the Company came up, to be employed on POL.

With the collapse of resistance on the Rhine, the Company was involved in a series of sudden, rapid moves – 59 FMC at Borken on 30 March, 60 FMC at Velen 31 March, 61 FMC at LOOSE, near OSNABRUCK, on 2 April, OSNABRUCK falling the next day, 3 April.

Advance parties were again moving on the 6th to 62 FMC at Tonnenheide, where on arrival and during the setting up of camp, bullets were whistling by uncomfortably close.

Shortly afterwards news was received that the commander of the convoy which had brought them up – a Captain in the RASC – had been killed by snipers, and a patrol of one officer, one sergeant and eight

men went out in search of them. They were not successful in their hunt for snipers, but brought back three young Luftwaffe lads, who were turned into the POW cage.

63 FMC was opened at MARIENSEE on 9 Apr, 64 FMC at CELLE on 14 April and 54 FMC at LUNEBURG on 20 April.

On the night of 1/2nd May, an advance party of one section crossed the ELBE in the face of considerable dive bombing and reached LUBECK on 2 May, where they were joined the next day by the remainder of the Company and HQ.

Here 66 FMC was established, the last installation of this type on which the Company was employed; guard duties and the supervision of civilian labour being undertaken, in addition to the handling of supplies. Shortly afterwards, two sections went to KIEL on supply point duties and one section went to EUTIN, handling supplies for the Wehrmacht.

In the course of setting up 8 Corps District, the Company was moved to NEUMINSTEWR on 15 June and at the date of closing this narrative, is settling down in barracks, to what all concerned hope will be a period of static conditions – although many members of the Company admit that, for all the discomfort and a certain element of danger, the rush through Germany was not without its compensations. No one, however, is willing to state just exactly what these compensations were!

During the whole campaign, the Company was rarely all together in one place. Indeed, with the exception of the short period in “The Gully”, detachments of varying sizes were the order of the day, some of them being out of touch with HQ for days, and often weeks, at a time. Particularly was this so in the case of sections attached to DIDs.

Having regard, also, to the conditions which existed on the chase up to and over the Seine and after the crossing of the Rhine, it has been found well-nigh impossible to compile a report by sections.

At one stage, the Company was deployed over several hundred miles and, in the final weeks, a continual “leapfrogging” progress did not help matters.

It is obvious that we have had our share of flitting, and it is worth recording that ALL of it was accomplished on loaded transport, with the added incentive (?) that, at the end of the long trail, there was a spot of unloading to be done before billets could be found or a meal prepared.

From the beach-head in NORMANDY to the Base in NEUMUNSTER, the Company was always employed in the forward areas and never failed to win commendation from the employing services.

Despite the dangers of war and the discomforts of a fast-moving campaign, the morale of the Company was always high, and never was the motto of the Pioneer Corps, “LABOR OMNIA VINCIT,” more convincingly justified.

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

**Mentioned in Despatches**  
Major PA Leslie (242119)  
1624410 Pte Coates AH

**Commander-in-Chief's Certificates For Gallantry**  
13018783 Sgt Ferguson N

**For Good Service**  
13030196 Sgt Cass O  
4868678 Sgt Raffle A ■

**‘Bullets were whistling by uncomfortably close’**





■ Cenotaph Parade, Nov 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Corps plot, field of remembrance 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Northampton branch Christmas party

Picture: Supplied



■ Northampton branch Christmas party

Picture: Supplied



■ Sgt Venables receives his LS & GC Medal

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Reunion club dinner Oct 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Reunion club dinner Oct 2008

Picture: Norman Brown



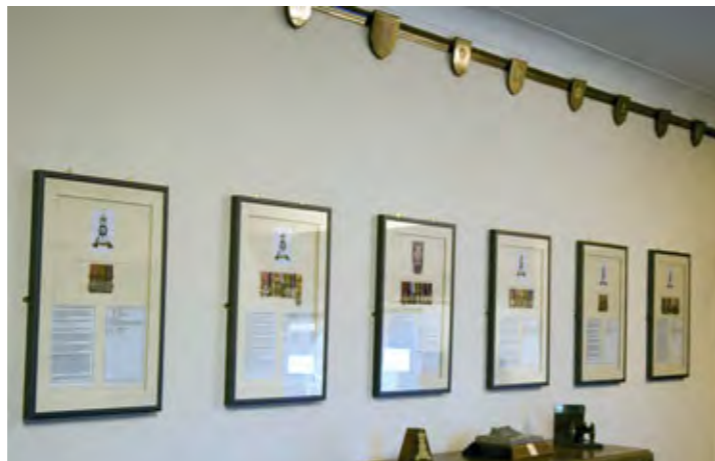
■ WO2 Roy Flanagan with his farewell gift

Picture: Supplied



■ LCpl Mat Ford and in pensioner Micky Hall talk to Duke of Edinburgh

Picture: Supplied



■ Medal room, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Just good friends, Andy Tibbs & Will Ross

Picture: Paul Brown



■ 63rd past and present Officers dinner Oct 2008

Picture: Poser Photography





■ SSgt and Mrs Brian Wright at Reunion club dinner

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Reunion club dinner

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Lined up ready to receive awards

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Mr Wilf Luke receives his veterans badge from stirlings provost

Picture: Supplied



■ Part of medal collection

Picture: Norman Brown



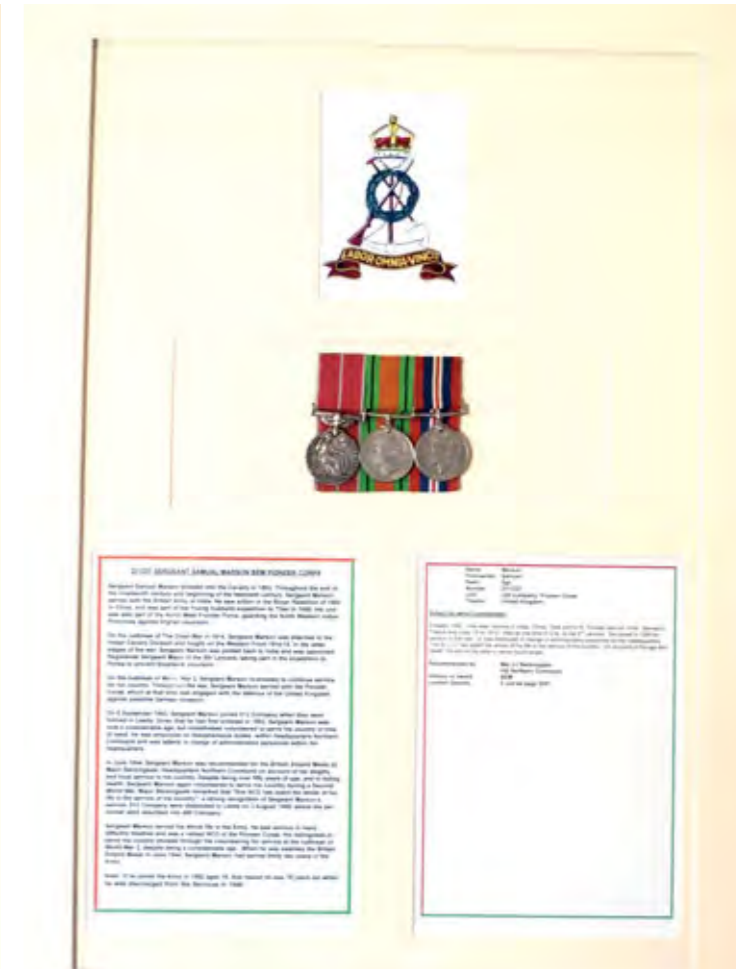
■ Part of medal collection

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Part of medal collection

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Part of medal collection

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Mr Bill Goode presents D-Day picture to manager, Red Lion

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Cpl P W Teasdale receives his LS & GC medal

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Fijian choir perform at reunion club dinner

Picture: Paul Brown



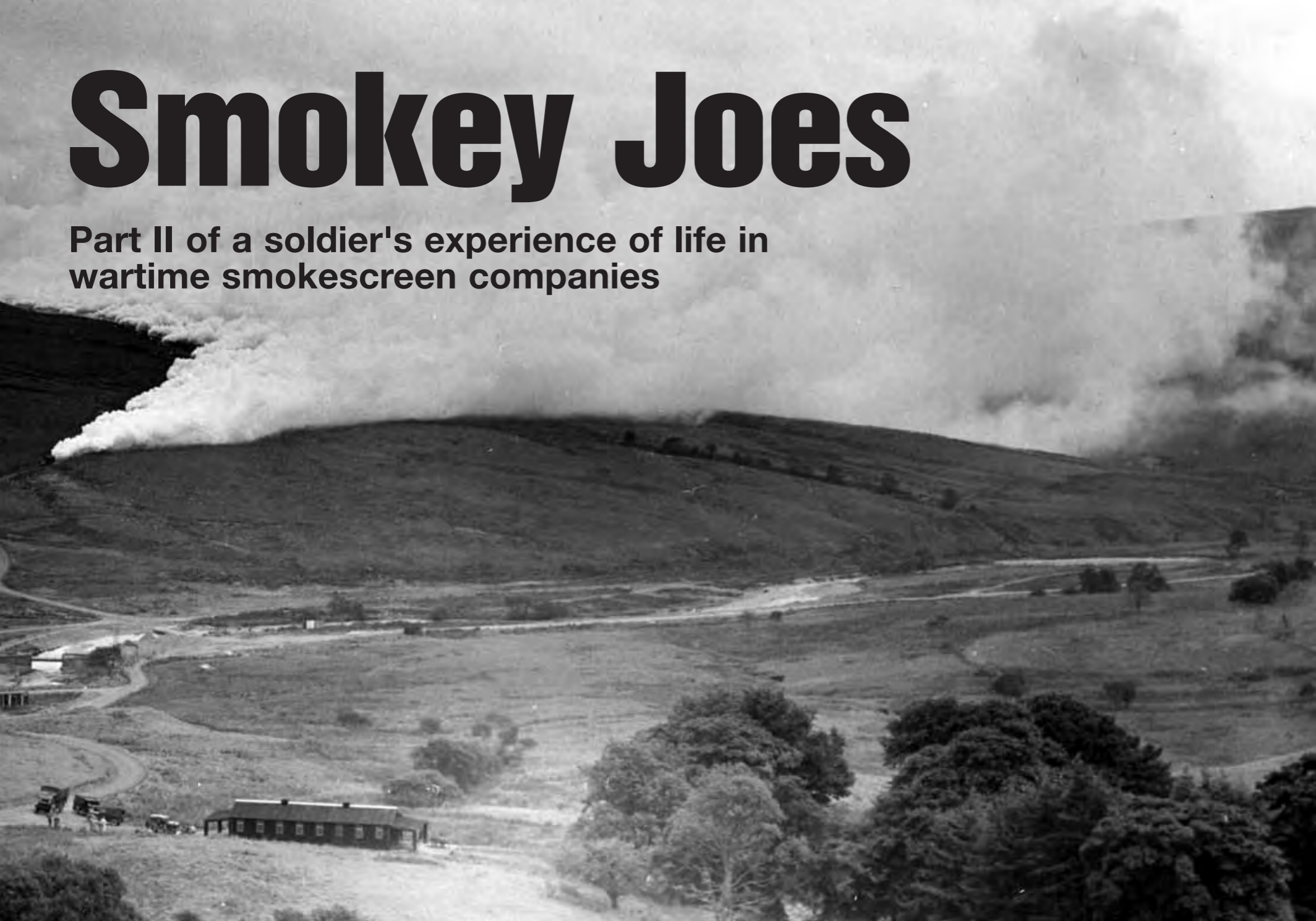
■ Reunion club dinner

Picture: Norman Brown



# Smokey Joes

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



Report: EK Bradley  
Picture: RPC Archive

ON holiday with my wife in America in 1980 I encountered some initial resentment from a young Irish American sitting opposite us in the train traveling from New York to Chicago.

Admittedly he wasn't as insulting as the American soldier had been thirty six years previously nevertheless, he did start the conversation by saying that he really shouldn't be talking to us at all because we were English and he was third generation Irish. I pointed out to him that if ever he visited England he would hardly need to remain silent during his stay as at least fifteen percent of England's population had some Irish blood flowing through their veins and, furthermore, that my own surname of Bradley had Irish connotations. However, as an ordinary British citizen, I continued, I was hardly in a position to influence the Cabinet to the extent that they would return the six Counties to their original owners.

Two hours, six cans of Budweisser and twelve Irish songs later, our rather more enlightened rebel disembarked with us in Chicago. I hoped that travel had broadened his mind.

Quite suddenly we were on a foreign draft again, No perspicacious Orderly Room Sergeant this time to point out the fact of my inadequate initial military training; or was the war expected to end before I could join it?

We were sent on embarkation leave, fourteen days this time. I hardly dared face my father in law who, on seeing me, ran his hands down my arms saying he was looking for my Home Guard armet. Nevertheless, two weeks later, in the middle of March, we boarded a troopship at Harwich and sailed for Ostend; so I hadn't missed the war completely.

Belgium's premier fishing port was still in something of a mess when we arrived. Many of the fine canal bridges had been destroyed by the Germans before they were driven out, whilst signs of our own bombing, carried out before the invasion,

were still in evidence. The docks, however, were bustling with activity, in spite of the blockships which had been deliberately sunk in the harbour and which our divers were in the process of clearing.

Once ashore we were marched off to a large barracks in the suburbs of the town where we bedded down for the night. The following day, after tea, a pal and I walked into Ostend proper for a look around. The place had both the look and atmosphere of a town that had been occupied, fought over, and occupied again, which indeed it had.

The estaminets were tawdry little places smelling of cheap cigars, onion beer and earth closets, whilst their clientele consisted mainly of young, and not so young, females whose dresses were so thickly adorned with regimental signs and badges as to make their original colours almost invisible. One wit suggested that each item of military insignia represented a sexual conquest: I could only assume that the Army Prophylactic Station on the corner must have been pretty busy and, if not, then the VD clinic must surely have been.

bar of unwrapped Palmolive or Lifebuoy toilet soap would change hands for twelve shillings (60p).

Of course we became greedy, to the extent that we stopped smoking our own cigarettes in order to sell more and smoked the very cheap Belgian substitute, a twenty five pack of which could be purchased for about a shilling (5p). To say that those cigarettes were obnoxious would be to pay the manufacturers an ill deserved compliment. Today, as a keen amateur organic gardener, I claim, without fear of contradiction, that the contents of my compost heap could provide a sweeter, more wholesome substitute for that vile tobacco, just a few puffs of which could transform a normally healthy young man into a hacking, choking, foul smelling heap of humanity. I hardly wondered at the natives paying ten times over the odds to remain healthy.

It was in Bruges that I first became interested in the study of phonetics. I was with a couple of pals having a quiet drink in an almost empty estaminet near the barracks when a potential customer lurched up to the bar and asked for a drink: the barman, recognizing the man's inebriated condition, said something to him in Flemish which, in spite of my ignorance of that language, I knew to mean that the man was being refused a drink because he was "druffen", or drunk.

My mind went back to the first time I had heard that word – druffen. I was eighteen years old and working in a barbed wire manufacturing factory in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire. The landlady of my digs and her husband both spoke with a broad West Riding accent and on my first Saturday night in their house the landlady's husband, who had been to the working men's club, returned home slightly the worse for wear. His wife looked at him as he entered the room and, with a twinkle in her eyes, said "Ee lad, thars bin up club and thars come back druffen". It hardly needed a Professor Doolittle to work out that druffen meant drunk, and there I was, in Belgium four years later, learning that the word meant the same in Flemish as it did in the dialect spoken in certain parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Attached to our Unit was a Sergeant of the Army Education Corps whose duty it was to look after our educational needs, so, I lost no time in acquainting our erudite teacher with the facts of my story and requested a possible reason for a Flemish word being used in an English regional dialect.

To say that the Sergeant was pleased with my inquiry would be an understatement; he was delighted: it seemed that the study of phonetics was one of his pet interests, so, it was apparent I had chosen the right man.

Belgium, explained the Sergeant, is a country of two peoples; the Flemish in the West and North (Flanders) who speak a language allied to Dutch, called Flemish, and the Walloons in the South who speak French, and Walloon dialects of French. The weaving of cloth from English wool was a flourishing industry during the middle ages in towns such as Bruges and Ypres. Religion persecution, however, drove many of the Flemish weavers to England where they were welcomed for their skills by the textile manufacturers of West Yorkshire, and that explained why my old landlady told her spouse every Saturday night, when he rolled home from the club, that he was "druffen".

A few days later the war in Europe was declared at an end. That night in Bruges the square was crammed with Belgians and

British soldiers drinking, dancing and carousing. A Company of British Commandos had arrived in Bruges the previous day so the local girls were not short of dancing partners. Victory however took second place in my mind to the thought of my wife nearing the birth of our first child and I was back in barracks by 2300 hrs. Two days later I was on a lorry bound for Germany.

I remember our lorry traveling through Belgium, then across Holland, where we put up for the night near Nijmegen. The following morning we crossed the Dutch/German border and dropped off ten of our number at a Labour Company near Cleve: the remainder of us carried on to a Company already established under canvas in the ground of a monastery situated between Goch and Kevelaer.

Our tents were of the ridge type each accommodating eight men. We slept on straw filled palliasses, each palliasse being placed on long metal boxes normally containing aircraft rockets. After finding a bed and stowing my gear I decided to have a look around.

Built as it was on a high plateau the monastery, in its original state, must have dominated all its approaches from the West to such an extent as to make it a prime target for Allied planes and artillery; indeed, only two walls, part of the bell tower and a huge undamaged crucifix remained standing as evidence of that fact. Our tents were pitched in rows along the edge of a field about twenty yards from the North wall of the monastery; to the East were more fields and a wood; white tapes had been slung around the encampment to show where the Sappers had cleared the immediate area of German landmines; anywhere outside that area was to be regarded as highly suspect.

The reason for the Company's presence in that particular area had been to load Dakotas with Jerry cans of petrol for the use of our advancing Army; now that the war was over however our job was to clear the fuel dump before moving on to pastures new.

The weather during the late Spring and early Summer of that year was beautiful. Every morning at 0800 hrs we would march off to our labours down a long country lane to the grass airfield, it was a pleasant journey with only a few rough wooden crosses along the way and a wrecked fighter bomber to remind us that only a few weeks previously the Canadians and a couple of Scottish Battalions had fought hard to overcome that particular section of the Siegfried Line.

At the end of the lane, and just a couple of hundred yards before reaching the airfield, there stood a small house at the edge of a wood. I could only assume that it had once been a gamekeeper's cottage which had emerged unscathed from the fighting around it. That littler cottage attracted my imagination like a magnet; the fact that it was beyond the white tapes and probably, as a consequence, surrounded by mines, made it even more attractive, like something from a tale by the brothers Grimm. The place had an attraction for another member of our Company; in his case it was to prove a fatal one.

We heard the bang as we were sitting in out tents one early evening after tea; everyone dashed out and ran towards the sound of the explosion. We stood on the safe side of the white tapes and saw a khaki clad figure lying prostrate near the entrance to the cottage about twenty yards away. An old wooden ladder had been found and our Medical Corporal, with



commendable courage, crawled over it to attend the victim whose left foot had been blown off. The unconscious man was dragged across the ladder to safe ground and, after further medical treatment; he was transferred by plane to a Belgian hospital where the poor chap died without regaining consciousness. We collected forty one pounds for his widow.

The nearest habitation of any size was Kevelaer, about four miles away, and an urge to see some new faces, even those of the Kraut variety, took a pal and myself there one evening. It was hardly worth the trip.

I have always been of the opinion that should the world every suffer a universal catastrophe the first sign of human life to emerge out of the holocaust would be the innkeepers intent on setting up shop before the ashes were cold in order to quench the thirsts of the survivors with some hastily brewed concoction and to make fortunes for themselves in the process. So it was in Kevelaer.

It was a small town that had been made even smaller by the extensive bombing and shelling it had received, but, true to form, some astute Teutonic trader had established a pub of sorts in a cellar below the ruins of a large house calling it, in all truth, the Bier Keller.

There were only four other customers, two Corporals and two drivers from the Service Corps: one of the Corporals advised us to stick with the beer as the "Schnapps" probably contained anti freeze: after tasting the beer I wondered if we had made the right choice; it was even worse than the onion beer we had left behind in Belgium. Half an hour and two beers later we were joined by a Corporal from the Royal Engineers who produced two flat bottles of brandy from his battledress blouse and, after informing us that he had brought the cognac from Brussels, he invited us to join him. Two hours, two bottles and an inebriated singsong later we bade a fond and grateful farewell to our benefactor from the Sappers and wended our merry way along what we thought to be the road back to camp.

Whether little Geordie's sense of direction was as bad as mine or whether he was unaware of my shortcomings in that particular field and, in his inebriated state was relying on me to get him back to camp, was pure hypothesis; the fact was that within half an hour of leaving Kevelaer we were hopelessly lost.

Darkness had fallen by then; no moon, just the odd star or two twinkling between the scudding clouds. If this had been a work of fiction I would have remembered my Boy Scout training and steered a course home by the stars; it was real life however, I had never been in the Boy Scouts because my parents were unable to pay for the uniform so astral navigation meant no more to me than a pair of words which, when strung together sounded faintly obscene.

We took what Geordie considered would be a short cut across a large open field. How could it be a short cut, I argued, if he didn't know in which direction the camp lay in the first place? Nevertheless, we trudged across the field until we came upon what appeared in the darkness to be the edge of a wood. I stumbled over a long hard obstacle which, after closer scrutiny, proved to be a broken sign: we struck three matches to reveal the words ACHTUNG MINEN and that was when the cold fear set in.

We sat down with our back to the thick trunk of a tree, reasoning that the roots would have prevented the laying of

landmines in such a spot, and we discussed our predicament. Closer examination of the sign showed that it had been taken out the ground complete with its two supporting legs. Which way had the sign been pointing? Towards the wood as a warning that the field was mined? Or vice versa? If the former, we reasoned, then we had already walked over the field to no ill effect, which meant of course that we must venture no further into the wood. On the other hand, could both the field and the wood have been cleared by the Sappers and the sign uprooted for that reason? Bearing in mind our latest casualty we decided to stay put until daylight.

We dozed off, but not for long. I awoke to the feel of rain running down my face and the back of my neck. Geordie's illuminated watch told us it was 0300 hrs, I couldn't read mine. The rain was coming down in torrents, although the trees did provide some protection; the effects of the cognac had worn off and we were cold, wet and hungry with another two hours to go before daylight.

The moment I saw the sun rising rather wet and weak in the East, I knew roughly where we were – on the opposite side of the wood to the gamekeepers cottage; we needed only to cross the field, get onto the road and walk in a westerly direction until we came to the turn off leading to the camp. An hour later we dripped, unspotted by authority, into our tent where we changed into denims then went to breakfast; that lumpy porridge, tinned fat bacon and beans, followed by a mug of powdered tea, went down like a royal rapast.

Kevelaer was a one off trip, most of us preferring to make our own recreation in the camp. We played quoits using a horseshoe which we threw at a peg driven into the ground. Sometimes we would light a fire around which we would gather listening to the Taffys' singing in beautiful harmony of the land of their sires, the Paddies, musically and mawkishly extolling the beauty of the Mourne mountains and the Claymore Clashers endeavoring to convince the rest of us of their Glaswegian roots: as for the phlegmatic English, well, we did have Land of Hope and Glory!

A couple of our more adventurous spirits had ventured over the fields to remove the hood from our ubiquitous crashed plane and chunks of the thick Perspex had been distributed around the Company. Several of the men, using only hacksaw blades and emery paper, spent their time producing small crucifixes which were either sold around the camp for cigarettes or sent home to their womenfolk. Being the impractical type who would have needed a fully equipped workshop in order to fashion such minor works of art I stuck to my painting and sketching.

I always carried in my kitbag several small bottles of coloured inks, a couple of sable brushes, a few pencils and a sketchpad. For forty duty free cigarettes I would sketch a man's face from his photograph and suitably embellish the picture with an enlarged facsimile of the regimental badge. Even though portraiture was not my forte my customers must have been satisfied as they all paid up.

Another of my recreations, albeit a shared one, provided some amusement at the time for all the occupants of our tent, all, that is to say, with the exception of Lofty. As the name implies, Lofty was very tall, he was also very thin and he was scared stiff of creepy crawlies and mice.

Most young men are children at heart, especially when thrown together as we were, so what better game for us adult juveniles to play then cashing in on Lofty's weakness?

At one side of our proposed victim's bed was an upended ammunition box on top of which stood, amongst other small items, a candle. Every night before turning in Lofty would grope his way to the side of his bed, light the candle and get undressed; Once undressed he would draw back the top half of the blankets with one hand and, with lighted candle in the other, he would examine his bed for creepy crawlies: only after a thorough scrutiny would he jump into bed, draw the blankets around him, and with a sigh of satisfaction, extinguish his candle.

I made a dragonfly: the body, fully three inches long, from a piece of thin dowel painted in three bright colours; the wings, suitably stiffened with varnish, were fashioned out of cellophane from a cigarette packet. Little Geordie, who slept in the next bed to Lofty, threaded a long length of cotton through the "insect's" body then, making a small hole in the roof of the tent above Lofty's bed, he ran the cotton through the hole from the inside of the tent, went outside to pull the "insect" up to the ridge and anchored it temporarily until such time as Lofty returned from the camp fire singsong at dusk.

Came nightfall and Lofty, true to form, returned to the tent and, after the usual nightly ritual, jumped into bed. A loud "snore" from another bed was the prearranged signal for Geordie to lower the "dragonfly" by its thread from outside the tent at the same time as the "snorer" emitted a low buzzing sound. The flickering candlelight glinting on the cellophane wings, coupled with the buzzing, was enough to send Lofty almost berserk: leaping out of his bed he ran yelling out of the tent and hared in circles around the camp.

Our hilarity quickly faded; suddenly it was no longer funny and, within second we were all out of our beds and joining in a mad race to catch up with the victim of what we now saw as a joke in very poor taste. We caught up with him as he was about to enter the next field, which was extremely fortunate for all concerned, as later events were to prove. We were additionally fortunate in that there were no officers or senior NCOs present that night to witness the sight of seven men, dressed only in Khaki shirts, chasing one man wearing only underpants.

The adjoining field, already referred to, had, supposedly, been cleared of landmines; the German farmer, to whom the field belonged, must have thought likewise because for two days he had been ploughing it.

On the third day, after tea we heard a loud explosion: the farmer's horse had trod on a mine and the resulting blast had torn open the horse's belly and blown its owner into an adjacent hedge. I can still conjure up a mental image of that horse lying on its back, legs in the air and its stomach gaping wide, whilst the farmer crouched in the hedgerow clutching his left ear which was hanging by a thread of skin. Once again our Medical Corporal was on the scene almost immediately to render what aid he could. Unfortunately, the farmer died in hospital the next day.

I cringed when I thought of the possible consequences had we not caught up with Lofty before he ran into that field three

**'The farmer's horse had trod on a mine'**

nights previously.

When the war finished Field Marshall Montgomery made a promise that every man in the BLA (British Land Army) would spend three days in either Paris or Brussels. Every week in our Company twenty names were drawn from the hat and, at the end of June, my name emerged as one of the lucky winners.

Arriving in the Belgian capital, after a long journey in the back of a three ton lorry, we were booked into a medium sized hotel near the city centre where comfort was the order of the day: a soft bed with clean sheets, a nine o'clock breakfast of cornflakes, bacon, egg, sausage and stacks of toast and coffee; such a welcome change from the sludge eaten alfresco back at camp.

During the day we saw all the sights and toured the shops: Au Bon Marche, the big store, had luxury goods for sale that we hadn't seen in England since before the war, most of them bearing the sign "Made in the UK"; just a little knowledge of basic economics could have curbed our annoyance: the British government were exporting our luxury goods at the expense of the home market in order to attract foreign currency; nevertheless, it hardly altered the fact that the British, who had won the war, were emerging as the losers!

In the evenings we toured the bars, all of which were doing a roaring trade with the soldiery of several nations. On our last night three of us ended up in a large, well furnished drinking establishment, so well furnished in fact that it was difficult to imagine that such places had recently emerged from nearly six war weary years: I thought of the pubs in Pompey which had not received even a coat of paint in that time.

The three of us were sitting around a table drinking cognac and bemoaning the fact that all good things had to end when we were joined by a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps; and what a fine figure of British manhood he was too: five feet four inches tall, pathetically thin with decidedly flat feet, he couldn't have weighted any more than eight stone wet through, in fact, he made all ten stones of me feel like Mister Universe. It became apparent, after only a couple of minutes conversation, that the main aim of this talkative young man was to recruit the services of as many British soldiers as he could in order, as he put it, "To teach these effing Yanks here where to get off." Glancing past his puny frame I could hardly help noticing a couple of hefty heavyweight Yankee Sergeants propping up the bar, whilst a further quick visual census told me that the place held about thirty Americans, as against fifteen or so British soldiers. In no uncertain terms and, as one man, we told him where to go. On our way back to the hotel an hour later we saw him being led along the road by two of our Redcaps; needless to say, we didn't stop to determine the reason for his arrest.

I sometimes wonder why so many British servicemen disliked the Americans; after all, they had left their homeland to fight a common enemy. Perhaps it was the uniform which, let's face it, were the epitome of sartorial elegance in comparison to our rough battledress: or maybe it was the fact that our colonial cousins received three times the pay. If that were so, then why didn't the British servicemen vent his spleen on the Canadians whose uniforms were from a far superior cloth to ours and who, being the highest paid servicemen of the war, received four times our pay. Could their

reputation as off duty fighters, beating up Aldershot one weekend for instance, or the courage they displayed on the beaches of Dieppe, have had something to do with the reluctance of our troops to "mix it" with the wild Canadians?

Personally, I considered that the five million or so Americans stationed in this country during the war deserve a certain amount of credit for the way they integrated with the British people: indeed, I can only assume that any envy or jealousy from our own troops was directly due to the fact that the Yanks integrated too well, especially with the families.

The following evening we were back with the Company and packing our gear in readiness for a move the following day to Aachen.

Aachen is a large German frontier town on the Belgian border and is situated some forty five miles West of Cologne. It could hardly be described as a town when we arrived, consisting as it did of huge piles of rubble interspersed with buildings, most of which were damaged. As the main gateway from Belgium and Holland into Germany. Aachen had not only suffered considerable bombing over a long period from the Allied Air Forces but had also received much additional damage during the struggle by the American First Army to take the town.

The main reason for our presence there was to keep a close watch on the millions of DPs (Displaced Persons) traveling by rail from all points East into Belgium, Holland and France. These were mainly people who, by the million, had been forced into working for the Germans during the war both in factories and the infamous Todt Organisation. They were not all ex slave labourers however; some of them were from the Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia, people who, having had no time for Russian Communism, had worked, quite voluntarily, for the Nazi war effort or had joined the German armed forces from which they had now deserted. A small proportion of the travellers were of French, Belgian and Dutch origin who had, through their misguided beliefs, joined the Waffen SS and now, having emerged on the losing side, were endeavouring to desert the "Thousand Year Reich" and return to their homeland. It was also pointed out to us that it would not be beyond the bounds of possibility to suppose that hiding within those vast hordes of escaping humanity were not a few Nazi war criminals intent on evading their come uppance at Nuremberg.

Company Headquarters was established in the Landesbad Hotel. A large stone built structure which, as the name implies, had been built over underground mineral springs; the hotel had dispensed spa water drinking and bathing facilities before the war to those wealthy self indulgent Krauts who believed that a gallon or so of mineral water taken internally and a daily wallow in the same externally would reduce their worst inspired obesity. Strange, how such a useless edifice should emerge unscathed from the holocaust which had left thousands of workers houses in ruins. Not that I saw very much of the Landesbad Hotel as our Platoon was sent on detachment almost immediately to oversee the ingress of DPs through Aachen Bahnhof (Railway Station) as already mentioned.

Across the road from the railway station there had once stood a large substantial block of buildings housing, at one end, the Kapitoll Kino (Capital Cinema) which had

received a direct hit during one of the numerous air raids and was now no more than an extremely unsafe looking shell, whilst at the other end of the block there had been a row of shops on the ground floor with offices above. An open entrance revealed a concrete stairway leading to half a dozen medium sized rooms on the third floor was the only habitable space left in the block and our Platoon made that our home for the next four months.

Our task in the railway station proved to be a pleasant one. Six men per shift of eight hours duration were housed during that time in a guards van, or caboose as we called it, which had been shunted into a siding. Beds were provided for the use of those men who were off watch whilst those on watch occupied a small hut erected

in the middle of the main platform, or bahnsteig. The hut had windows all round, a table, chairs and a large coal fed stove on which stood an iron cauldron that we used to good effect for the making of "Gypsy stews".

Warning of an approaching DP train would be given a couple of minutes in advance by the German Bahnwater, or Signalman, and gave us enough time to don our battledress blouses then, with Sten gun slung over the shoulder, we would be ready on the platform to await the mass exodus.

The word train, in this instance, is a misnomer as it could conjure up a totally false image of a succession of first and second class carriages with its passengers casually removing their cases from the luggage racks as they approached their destination. In fact, the majority of our trains consisted of several dozen horse boxes crammed with hundreds of ill clad, unkempt and hungry displaced persons who scrambled out of what had been their mobile prisons for the past couple of days intent only on catching the next train over the border into their homeland.

On the shorter runs from Gelsenkirchen and the Ruhr people seemed quite content to be packed like sardines into open coal wagons and they, of course, arrived looking even more bedraggled than their long distance counterparts.

On the same siding as ours was a second "Caboose" accommodating a duty Sergeant of the Field Security Police: there were in fact three of them each speaking fluent German, two of them also spoke French and the third Flemish. Our only official contact with the hordes of DPs was to select perhaps one from every couple of dozen to ask for his, or her, Ausweis or identity card which, if not forthcoming, would result in that person being taken before the duty FS Sergeant for questioning.

I always felt that the Field Security Police were under-rated, or perhaps I should say "Under-ranked". Here was a Force of intelligent men, all of them fluent in at least two languages who, by virtue of their extra knowledge, were required to spend much of their service immediately behind, and sometimes in, the frontline; yet, in most cases, they were given only the not so exalted rank of Sergeant. I had known drill Sergeants whose only qualifications were a big chest and a mouth to match; indeed, I suspected that the majority of our own senior NCOs would have been incapable of passing an intelligence test set for eleven year olds.

I remember once a Corporal expounding the theory that it would not have been politically expedient to grant commissions

## 'Our 'Flemish' friend was a member of the SS'

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to all Field Security interpreters as the majority of them were Jewish refugees from Nazism whose first language was German, consequently their presence within the officer class could have upset the "old school tie" system. As I never ever encountered a Jewish Field Security Sergeant I can only await a more sensible explanation.

The vast majority of Displaced Persons "apprehended" by us and taken for questioning to the Sergeant's caboose were proven, within a very short time, to be entirely innocent of any Nazi background, although a few remained highly suspect and were removed to the "Interpreters Pool" in Aachen for further questioning.

One particular case stands out in my memory. Scouse and I were standing on the main platform watching the hordes of DPs disgorging from the latest train of horse boxes and cattle trucks. Scouse spotted him first: of medium height with powerful sloping shoulders, thick neck and beady eyes set in a bullet shaped head, he personified the typical Nazi thug. He was struggling with two large and obviously well laden suitcases which he put down as we approached, at the same time giving us what he considered to be a welcoming smile, which actually came over as something approaching a leer. I asked him for his Ausweiss and he produced a card printed in a language which, because the letter K was so prevalent, I could only guess was Flemish. I conjured up enough German to ask him, albeit very haltingly, to open his suitcases and, after going through the motions of looking for the keys, he declared that they must have been lost on the journey. Scouse and I picked up a suitcase each and told him to come with us, whereupon his whole attitude changed from cringing politeness to blustering fear. We led our suspect, still protesting in German, to the Field Security Sergeant in his caboose and left him there.

An hour later we asked the Sergeant what had happened. Not usually very forthcoming with such information, in this case he did tell us that from the tattoo under his arm our "Flemish" friend had been identified as a member of the SS whose cases had been found to be full of

loot and that he had been removed by the Military Police to more secure quarters for further questioning. Whether he had been an ordinary rank and file member of the Schutzstaffel or a high ranking Obergruppenfuhrer we never discovered: nobody told us lowly Chunkies anything.

Our off duty hours were spent mainly dealing in the black market or listening to music. Two normally respectable middle aged Germans, one an ex bank manager reduced to wearing an old shooting jacket and "Fedlgrau" army trousers with rubber overboots, the other, an ex professional musician clad in a tattered jerkin and plus fours, had been forced by postwar circumstances into trading their musical talent for scraps of food. They had moved an old upright piano into our "Dining Room" and twice a day at noon and 5 p.m. the ex bank manager, accompanied by his friend on the violin, would give us a rendering of the classics that would have done justice to any concert hall programme. Lieberstraum by Liszt, Strauss An der schoeners blauen Dona and excerpts from Die Feldermaus created an atmosphere that made our mess tins of dehydrated vegetables and bullybeef seem almost edible. In appreciation of our Maestros' musical efforts we would allow them to clear our table after meals and off they would go following each tuneful interlude both clutching a paper bag crammed full of cold potatoes, bits of bread and sad little pieces of hard currant duff. Such was the level to which those two members of the once mighty Third Reich had fallen; and they were the rule rather than the exception. It seemed a poor reward for the enthusiastic support given by the German people as a whole to Adolph Hitler and his band of thugs.

I saw no evidence of resentment by the British towards the defeated Germans, or any desire for revenge: perhaps the capacity of the vanquished Herrenvolk for licking their victor's boots had something to do with it. I saw very little sign of compassion either. Could be that the British soldier, like me, considered what might

have happened had the boot or, in this case the jackboot, been on the other foot!

We were well used to American troops passing through Aachen station en route to that area of Germany designated the American Zone. Sometimes in small groups, but more often in pairs, they

would travel up from their base in the Belgian city of Liege by "Pot Luck" transport in order to take a look at war torn Germany, or indulge their passion for acquiring Luger pistols and suchlike military memorabilia in exchange for

cigarettes, soap and chocolate which they were able to purchase in enormous quantities from their PX. Such a glut of goodies, when introduced into the thriving German black market increased the value of the goods offered by the shrewd Teutonic traders. Before the Yanks put in their appearance an Agfa box camera for instance, in good condition, could be had for one hundred cigarettes and a bar of soap: the advent of our colonial cousins inflated that price threefold. That destruction of the British soldier's illicit economy created in us a kind of love/hate feeling towards the Americans: on the one hand we hated them because they had created economic inflation, on the other we had to admit their generosity towards us, although, to be truthful, that benevolence did sometimes make us feel that we were accepting charity.

An incident concerning a little Cockney Corporal in the Platoon was a typical example of our falling buying power on the black market. Leafy, so called because he bore the surname Lane, was in love. The object of his amor was a very attractive fraulein who managed a small café set amongst the ruins dispensing watery soup and ersatz coffee to the hungry Hun. Every day Leafy would forage around the cookhouse for spare food and scraps which he would then cram into a paper bag, the whole mess would be topped by a two ounce bar of dark chocolate, the latter item having been issued with his tea in lieu of a cheese ration.

Five minutes before closing time every day Leafy would appear in the café and sit

**‘Left, right, left - I picked up my duff and left!’**



down, his eyes following every move his fraulein made until she shut up shop. Once the door was locked Leafy would proffer his bag of "goodies" and she would sit down and scoff the lot, following which they ascended the stairs into her tiny bedroom where Leafy leapt into action whilst she declared her undying love for "Kliene Tommee". All this we learned from Leafy's own lips. The torrid affair however was to be short lived.

Our carnal Corporal turned up one day, twenty minutes early, with his little bag of cold duff, slices of curled bread and bar of black chocolate, but the place was empty, no customers, and no sign of his fancy fraulein. Leafy sat down for a minute thinking that she had gone to spend a quick pfennig. He spotted the carton of cigarettes, the box of candies and the bar of soap on a shelf behind the counter just a split second before hearing the sound of footsteps on the stairs: his luscious Hildegard emerged on the arm of quote – "The biggest effing Master Sergeant I'd ever seen in all my natch!" "What did you do then Leafy?" we asked, almost spellbound; "I picked up my effing duff and I left", he replied. That phrase went the rounds of the Company for weeks afterwards, even an officer was reported to have used it in the Mess and once, when Leafy was marching a Section of men from the station to HQ and shouting the usual "Left, right, left", his squad followed up with – yes, you've guessed "I picked up my duff and I left!"

There was very little to do in our spare time: there were no pubs, clubs, shops or cinemas worth talking about and one pile of bombed rubble looked very much like another, so a pal and I decided one day to cross the German/Belgian border in one of the goods trains that ran spasmodically between Aachen and Eupon.

The outward journey, sitting swinging our legs in the open doorway of an empty cattle truck was quite uneventful and we spent a reasonably pleasant day bartering our cigarettes, soap and chocolate for apples, plums, eggs, bunches of black grapes and a half bottle of Cognac each which we crammed into our valises. Getting back to Aachen however proved to be a quite different kettle of fish.

Many of the trains were operated by Army drivers, some of them by Royal Engineers, others by Americans, but the majority were driven by Engineers from the Canadian Army, most of whom were mad and even when they were sober; our driver was drunk. We saw him in the cab ranting and raving at his fireman, who appeared to be just as inebriated. If there had been a later train we would have waited for it, but this was the last one of the day scheduled to stop at Aachen, so we very reluctantly boarded an empty goods van and were joined almost immediately by two tall young American soldiers.

The journey back was an absolute nightmare. After a shuddering start that sent us scurrying into the back of the goods van it became apparent that the crazy Canadian driver was intent in getting as much power as he could from the huge German locomotive and by now our initial apprehension had turned into near terror as the train tore down the tracks at top speed, its whistle blowing full blast and our goods van swaying, lurching and vibrating, especially on the curves, in a seemingly insane effort to defy centrifugal force.

We were just short of Aachen and traveling at something like ninety miles an hour before the mad Canut applied his brakes: he overshot the station by about a quarter of a mile and had to reverse back

into what he obviously thought was the main Bahnhof, but it wasn't, it was Aachen West station. We were all so shaken by this time that we were only pleased to alight anywhere so long as it was in one piece. I swear that if we had stopped at Moenchen Gladback, or even Hanover we would have disembarked from that train.

There had been little time for conversation with the two Yankee soldiers during our terrifying journey; a few short, whispered prayers and a lot of Anglo Saxon expletives directed at the driver twenty wagons away had seemed more appropriate at the time: once out of the station however, en route to our billet, they opened up and the fact emerged that they were deserters on the run from the American Army.

We stopped outside the entrance to a massive concrete air raid bunker where my pal and I each dug out a half bottle of cognac from our valises, still surprisingly intact after that journey, and we sat just inside the doorway, the four of us, and partook of the distilled grape. Talking in his cups my pal suggested that as we were on duty that night, in fact in one hour from then, we could accommodate the two Yanks in our caboose; as my cup had been equally as full as his, I agreed, on condition that it should be for one night only, then off, before they were spotted by the Field Security Sergeant. A week later they were still there.

Where our itinerant pair spent their time during the hours of daylight we never discussed, but when darkness descended they reappeared as large as life. Food presented no problem, they just stole it. One night an American goods train was shunted into a siding for minor repairs to be effected overnight: cheeses and Red Cross POW parcels formed part of the cargo: the cheeses were destined for Liege in Belgium, whilst the Red Cross parcels, being obviously surplus to requirements in Europe, were being returned to America via Marseilles. I happened to be on duty that particular night with five others and we saw nothing untoward throughout our eight hour vigil on the station, yet, just before six a.m., our unwanted "guests" turned up outside the caboose with two huge cheeses, each cheese weighing about twenty eight pounds, and a large box containing forty eight individual Red Cross cartons. We told them they had ten minutes to "lose" their loot before the next shift took over and the Field Security Sergeant put in an appearance; then we left the caboose, trembling slightly.

The following day we were informed by the Field Security Sergeant that a Sergeant of the American Military Police had been making enquiries regarding two Army deserters; he asked us to keep an eye open for them as apparently they were – quote, "A Couple of wrong uns". That same night the two Yanks got the message and disappeared for good. Thankfully our deserters had deserted us. That, however, was not the end of the story.

Little Geordie was the first to notice the "bedside stand" tucked into a corner of our caboose next to one of the beds. Covered in an Army blanket, each shift had assumed that the additional item of furniture had been acquired by one of their opposite number on another shift: it wasn't until we started to investigate a strange but not unpleasant smell emanating from the corner occupied by the bedside stand that Geordie, after lifting up the blanket

discovered that the item in question, was, in fact, a hexagonal shaped wooden crate containing two of the huge cheeses described previously. It hardly needed a Hercule Poirot to determine that our two erstwhile American guests had purloined them and, in the panic to escape a likely inquisition, had camouflaged them well enough to fool us all, at least for a few days. Further investigation revealed a total of twenty eight unopened Red Cross cartons stacked neatly under the beds: it was a sad reflection on our tidiness that the boxes had not made themselves apparent much earlier.

Returning the stolen goods to their rightful owners, e.g. the American Army, was out of the question: who would have believed that six men, guarding a station and its contents, failed to notice two soldiers breaking into a goods van and stealing an appreciable quantity of provisions? Furthermore, for us to deny all knowledge of the two deserters would surely have begged the question regarding the presence of the stolen goods in our caboose. We were all of the same mind – to get rid of the stuff as quickly as possible.

Each Red Cross carton contained a tin of jam, peanut butter, coffee, powdered milk, sugar, soup powder, etc, even a few cigarettes and a small quantity of toilet paper were included. What we failed to consume ourselves we gave, surreptitiously, to a few of the more deserving cases amongst the DPs arriving that day, mostly the ones with children. The cheeses posed less of a problem; we merely chopped them into pieces, each man receiving about three pounds. I swapped my share that same day for a topaz ring and a bracelet with the German bank manager/pianist. One whiff of the cheese had been sufficient to send him scurrying for his tatty little case of black market baubles to negotiate a quick exchange. Twenty four hours later not a sign or a sniff remained to connect us with the two runaways, neither of whom we saw again.

We continued to scrutinize the whole gamut of humanity passing through Aachen hauptbahnhof. One day a DP train arrived when it was raining heavily. The station itself provided no protection from the

downpour as every pane of glass had been blown out of its vast semicircular arches during the frequent wartime air raids. We were dry enough in our little cabin on the main platform until the train arrived and we had to go out and spot check for

identity cards. On that particular day we noticed half a dozen mothers with babies so we invited them into the cabin and gave them a tin mug of the gypsy stew simmering in our cauldron on the stove before directing them to the shelter of the wartersaal (waiting room) below. The train, after surrendering its human cargo, steamed off into a siding to be fed and watered, leaving the platform wet and deserted. Taffy and I remained in the cabin, he was busy refilling our, by now, empty cauldron with filched vegetables and a tin of bully beef, whilst I replenished our every hungry stove with the lozenge shaped coal briquettes which tended to "fall" in quantity from the numerous wagons passing through Aachen on their journey from the Ruhr to Belgium, Holland and France.

I casually noticed a solitary figure passing one of the cabin windows and a few seconds later the door inched slowly open to reveal a tall, thin, shabbily dressed

**'She asked in pure Cockney if she could shelter from the rain'**



and saturated female. She sniffed the stew scented air like one of the pre war Bisto kids and asked, in pure Cockney English, if she could shelter from the rain for a while. We invited her in and took her sodden well worn coat; the new pot of stew was not ready so we made her a cup of strong tea and a bully beef sandwich. I asked her, in so many words, what a Cockney woman was doing in war devastated Germany: after eagerly drinking her tea and scoffing the sandwich she told us her story, and quite an interesting tale it was.

It seemed that in 1936, in her native East End, she had fallen in love with a young German working in a dockside importing and exporting business. Three months later, and against all the advice of her parents and relations, she married her young German. Nazism, Conservatism and Communism meant nothing to her, whilst the possibility of war between her own county and Germany was not, in her romantic state, worth considering. In 1938 her husband was recalled to Germany taking his young wife with him. They settled in Nazi Germany, in Aachen in fact and she became a naturalised citizen of the Third Reich. One month before Britain declared war on Germany her Karl was called up into the Wehrmacht and by April 1940 he was a fully fledged infantryman preparing to join the blitzkrieg into France and the Low Countries from which debacle he emerged unscathed.

She told us her name was Sarah but she had changed it to Heide as Sarah had become the derogatory name attached to Jewesses. The next twelve months, Heidi informed us, was the best: no air raids worth talking about, plenty of food from the occupied countries and, with her Teutonic warrior stationed in the Rhineland from where he could get home at weekends, her life was complete; her euphoria however was not to last.

The story of Germany after the summer of 1941 was Heidi's story. Karl, who had by now been promoted to Wachmeister, or Sergeant, was part of the vast military machine that invaded Russia. The first few months went well enough and Heidi heard regularly from her husband; then the air raids on German cities increased in intensity and towards the end of 1943 Karl's parents and one of his two sisters were killed in an especially heavy attack by Allied bombers on Aachen. Not long afterwards the mighty German war machine came to a grinding halt in the middle of a vicious Russian winter and was soon to be gradually pushed by a vengeful Red Army. Around the end of 1944, with the Allies poised at the approaches to the Siegfried Line and the Russian hordes girding their loins prior to a final massive attack on the Eastern Front, all correspondence from Karl ceased.

He could, of course, have been taken prisoner: the rules of the Geneva Convention, normally observed by the Germans so far as the Western Allies were concerned, and vice versa, were not followed by either side on the Eastern Front, there was too much hate between them, when the Russians took prisoners they were used in the same way as the Germans treated their 'Ruski' prisoners of war, as overworked and underfed slave labourers to be released from captivity only when it suited their vengeful task masters.

In the meanwhile Heide, to avoid the bombing, had gone to live with her husband's sister in a rural part of Westphalia: Karl's brother had been killed in Normandy so that his sister was now his only surviving relative. A few weeks after

the war finished Heidi decided to take pot luck in Aachen where she could maintain a closer contact with the Red Cross from whom she hoped to gain some news of her husband; and that was how she came to be on Aachen station, still living in hope.

I recall a spate of thieving from the station around that time, petrol being the thieves' biggest target. Rail tankers loaded with synthetic gasoline would stop overnight on the journey to Belgium, Holland and France from those plants in Germany still able, after the intense bombing they had received, to produce that liquid gold. We were informed that an apparently well armed gang was involved.

I must admit that the possibility of being in the immediate vicinity of a petrol tanker train amidst a hail of bullets adversely affected our guardianship of the station, or that part of it; we all in fact kept a very low profile during the hours of darkness: after all we had been fortunate to emerge unscathed from the war, so why tempt fate on behalf of a few faceless but wealthy oil moguls? (Readers still looking for either heroes or idiots within these pages would be well advised to cease their reading now).

There was a small signalman's house attached to the station (the house was small, not the signalman) and every day we would see the signalman's wife leaving the house, shipping bag in hand, with never a smile or a "Guten tag", her dislike of us apparent in her dull eyes as she passed. One day a train drew into the station for a brief stop, its carriages full of Belgian soldiers en route to their homeland, all of them as drunk as coots.

Scouse and I were patrolling the platform, Sten guns slung over our shoulders, and smiling at their good natured banter in broken English, when our unfriendly frau came running towards us, her arms waving, and screaming words at twenty to the dozen in Rhineland dialect. Our attempts to calm her down were hardly helped by the constant jeers and blasting of trumpets from our inebriated allies, but eventually, after frequent requests from us to speak slower, she informed us that one of the Belgian soldiers had walked into her home and stolen, with other small items, her precious radio. She followed up that information with a demand that we board the train and apprehend "Der dieb".

My mind conjured up a mental image of Scouse and I boarding the train to question a Battalion of boozed up Belgians in an effort to pinpoint the offender and I winced as I also thought of the two piles of blood-stained Khaki rags that would inevitably be thrown out onto the platform following such a foolhardy act. It only remained for me therefore to inform our irate frau with all the German at my command, all ninety six words of it, that had she been younger and much more attractive, perhaps the radio would not have been the only asset lost to her (or words to that effect). I was no linguist, but I'm sure, as the train steamed away in one direction and she steamed off in the other, that my message had been received and understood.

The number of DPs and returnees was beginning to decrease until, towards the end of August, there were only a few dozen of them alighting daily from the passenger coaches which had by now largely replaced the cattle-wagons; this meant of course that we were becoming surplus to

requirements and by the middle of September we were transferred, lock, stock and barrel, to Bielefeld in Westphalia.

We were accommodated in the Langmark Kasernen, a large modern barracks situated on the outskirts of Bielfeld. We were there to supervise German prisoners of war in the chopping down of trees to answer the urgent demand for timber from the German building industry which had risen from the ashes and, with typical Teutonic zeal, was preparing to carry out the biggest rebuilding programme ever. I was not destined however to make a contribution towards the reconstruction of war ravaged Deutschland.

Efforts were being made to select and train new NCOs and office workers to replace those men destined for demobilization in the not too distant future under a recently introduced system whereby every serviceman was given a group number, determined by age and length of service, so that, generally speaking, it would be a case of first in, first out.

On the first morning parade in our new barracks the Sergeant Major called out six names, one of which was mine. After the parade the Sergeant Major, a kindly erudite man quite unlike the square bashing loud mouthed WO2s of my experience, invited all six into his office to inform us that we had been selected for promotion to Lance Corporal and that after passing a four week course in advanced drill and weapon training we would be promoted to full Corporal as vacancies arose. My lack of enthusiasm for a military vocation came to the fore and I turned the offer down. That afternoon I was given the job of Company telephonist and three weeks later we moved to another barracks in Buren, a small rural town twenty miles away.

We had moved to be nearer the source of our timber supply, but I still never saw a tree. A small hall in Buren was being converted into an English style pub, to be called appropriately, The Woodcutters Arms, and I was asked, together with the official Company signwriter, to paint a few murals on the walls and to generally make the place look like a public house. At the risk of appearing immodest, I think we did a reasonable job: the beer, apparently brewed in Belgium for the British Army, wasn't too bad either.

My artistic chores completed, I was inveigled into the Company office for training as an orderly room clerk and quite an interesting job it proved to be; I distinctly remember wishing I had made the move earlier.

I transferred my kit into a room reserved for staff next to the Company office and spent a pleasant ten hours every day learning to type

Company orders, making out charges on Army Form B252, filling out leave passes and generally involving myself in the work carried out in a busy Company office.

Paddy was our Company cobbler and he slept in the next bed to mine. What struck me as peculiar about him, considering my previous experience with Irishmen, was the fact that he was teetotal. One night however, after I had been in my new job for about six weeks, Paddy received a telegram informing that he had become the father of twins and he asked me out that evening to help him celebrate: I had to refuse the invitation as I was duty clerk that

**‘Where Paddy obtained the bottle of Steinhager schnapps was never determined.’**

night and, so far as I remember, he went out alone.

Where Paddy obtained the bottle of "Steinhager" schnapps was never determined; what we did find out was that he drank half the contents of a bottle labeled Steinhager but containing a deadly concoction made from anti-freeze. Poor old Paddy died in an Army truck on his way to hospital in Minden.

After three months training under Cyril, our very efficient orderly room Corporal, I was considered well enough experienced to be awarded the extra shilling a day that went with the "rank" or orderly room clerk and I began to feel that I was fast becoming established as part of a team.

Life, however, was not all a bed of roses. The war had been over for five months now and some of the men in the higher release groups were becoming increasingly restless. There was very little in the way of entertainment to occupy their off duty hours. All the cities and larger towns in Germany had been well hammered by the British and American "Terror Flieger", as the RAF and USAAF had been dubbed, so that very few shops, theatres or cinemas remained standing, whilst the few pubs that were still open sold only a watery type of lager that did nothing to promote, even for a short time, that feeling of well being induced by a decent drink.

One night, during a stint as duty orderly room clerk, I was typing the next day's Company Orders when I heard a terrific commotion at the bottom of the stairs leading to the office: voices were raised in anger as though several men were attempting to prevent someone from climbing the stairs. I heard one voice above the others shouting "Keep back you bastards or I'll shoot," then, after a loud stamping noise, the office door burst open and I was confronted by a bulging eyed soldier wielding a rifle.

"Get that effing paper work moving and make me out a leave pass or I'll blow your effing head off" he almost screamed at me. With all my black market loot stowed away in my kitbag there was no room left for a posthumous Military Medal so I reached for the book of leave passes in the top drawer of my desk. I began asking his particulars whilst at the same time trying to control my shaking hand. Suddenly a thought struck me: the Company hadn't fired their weapons for months where would this nut case get his hands on even one round of .303 ammunition? On the other hand if the rifle wasn't loaded wouldn't he have had the sense to fix his bayonet? I carried on writing, still petrified, but hoping against hope that I was having a cheese induced nightmare.

"What's your home address?" I asked tremulously. "You must think I'm an effing head case" he shouted. "I tell you my address and they'll send the Redcaps round, just put London, and make it effing quick." Now I knew he was bonkers.

Not a sound could be heard from downstairs; I felt lonely, afraid and let down; where were the others? The new Sergeant Major with his puffed out chest, and the Sergeant so capably loud mouthed on the square? They obviously weren't interested in a posthumous medal either. All those questions, and more passed through my mind as I handed that homesick lunatic his pass, albeit, not stamped.

Standing in front of me at my desk he put his rifle between his legs and inspected the pass. He opened his mouth to say something just as the orderly Sergeant and two Corporals burst through the door and

grabbed him: he put up no resistance, he just cried. I picked up the rifle and pulled back the bolt; the magazine was empty, and there was no bullet up the spout.

Quite gently, they took the would be leave taker away; he'd be no trouble, all his adrenalin had been sapped; come to think of it, so had mine: I never saw him again.

### Chapter 3

As stated previously, we had a new Sergeant Major: our erudite gentleman of that rank, who had made the running of our Company look like child's play, had sailed through a War Office Selection Board and had left us for an Officers' Training Establishment. His replacement was as different from his predecessor as chalk from cheese: I silently summed him up in three words – Big, Bulky and Brainless. Of course, he knew his job as a soldier, being very efficient as square bashing and weapon training and, to be fair, he had just enough nous to be aware that he didn't have much nous and, as a consequence, he used other peoples brains to make up for his deficiency in that direction.

Every day at 0800 hrs he would march into the orderly room and, with chest out, stomach in and chin up, he would tap the office blackboard with his stick and enquire loudly "Is this state of the establishment up to date?" He loved that word establishment, it was one of the very few long words he had mastered. Invariably, one of us would answer "Yes, Sergeant Major"; then, following this display of academic know-how, he would approach either my desk, or that of Paddy my opposite number and, using first names, he would place his notebook on the relevant desk and say "Hello Paddy" or "Hello Ken, just another couple of 252s to type up for Company Orders at 0900 hours", and away he would strut.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, a 252 is an army form used to record the particulars of an offence alleged to have been committed by a soldier against army regulations. Either Paddy or I would open the CSM's notebook at the relevant page and endeavour to translate into understandable English the semi-literate description of the charge entered by him in his spidery scrawl. Once the gist of the charge had been established it remained only for the alleged offence to be typed onto Form 252, headed by the name, rank and serial number of the accused.

This paraphrasing of the Sergeant Major's writings, whilst not considered within our terms of reference, did establish a state of rather very friendship between us, wary that is, so far as Paddy and I were concerned; after all, what lowly clerk in his right mind would want to get on the wrong side of a WO2? It wasn't by chance that Paddy did just that.

It happened the morning after the Sergeant Major had attended a particularly merry party in the Sergeants' Mess; I've forgotten the actual reason for the celebration, it was probably something close to the Sergeant Major's heart, like Hitler's birthday: the end result however was a morning after hangover to beat them all.

Apparently, on early parade that morning, practically every NCO and other rank had been ordered to get a shave, a haircut or his boots polished, hardly a man remained uncensored, following which tirade the CSM stamped upstairs and stormed into the orderly room. "Get your

hair cut McCabe" he bawled at Paddy. My feet were under the desk and so hidden from his view, but that fact didn't prevent him from ordering me to get my boots cleaned. He was completely irrational; if we had kept a Company mascot I'm sure he would have kicked it to death. After further venting his spleen, this time on the orderly room Corporal, he turned, threw his notebook on Paddy's desk and bawled, "Three 252s to type out McCabe" before banging out of the office.

Paddy was fuming, he was a nice enough chap but he could be very vindictive when crossed. "I'll get that bullying bastard, I don't know how, but I will" snarled Paddy. Little did he realize just how soon his

vengeance would be wrought! Paddy picked up the notebook, his hands still trembling with rage: suddenly, he looked up, crossed over the office to my desk and, pointing to an entry in the Sergeant Major's notebook, he whispered "What do you make of that Ken?" I carefully scrutinized the page in question: "Private Sanders" I managed to make out from the babylike scrawl, "Number 1385612 was guilty of leaving his lorry unattended and immobilized outside the NAFI canteen in Beelafelt – quote revelant section of KRRs."

Actually, it was a BAOR standing order which stated that all army vehicles should be left either attended or immobilized once a vehicle had been parked and vacated by the driver. The CSM had exceeded the bounds of his limited knowledge of the English language and Paddy decided to tidy up and correct the wording except to quote verbatim the word "Immobilized".

Paddy knew the offending driver, who he promptly contacted to put him in the picture.

Came Company Orders at 0900 hours and Private Sanders was marched in front of the Major and the charge was read out from the neatly typed Form 252:- 1381652 Private Sanders did, on 8th November 1945, in contravention of BAOR standing order No ... leave his vehicle unattended and immobilized outside the NAAFI club in Bielefeld.

"How do you please?" asked our normally sagacious OC who had failed to cotton on, perhaps, like the Sergeant Major, he too was suffering from the after effects of a night before bender.

"Guilty Sir, of conforming to standing orders" replied the accused. Only then did the penny drop. "Case dismissed, march this man away Sergeant Major and report back to me immediately afterwards" ordered the Major, his voice charged with anger.

We never found out what was said in that office, but I do recall the Sergeant Major storming into the orderly room with fire in his eyes, looking not unlike an enraged bull. Addressing Paddy in his best drill square voice he shouted "I'll see you later McCabe", and he stormed out again.

In the face of that barely concealed threat of retribution Paddy remained unmoved. "Sod him" he said, quite calmly, "I'm going on leave tomorrow anyway". I had no intention of voicing my thoughts, nothing I could say would alter the situation, so I kept my own counsel; so far as I could see the event was only a preliminary skirmish in what could be the beginning of a long drawn out and one sided war.

The OC sent for Paddy, who was ordered to explain the wrongly worded text of the charge. "I'm sorry Sir, but I only

**'I'll see you later McCabe'**



paraphrased the words in the Sergeant Major's notebook" answered Paddy, and, as a postscript, he added "It won't happen again Sir". "I'm sure it won't" said the Major. "Sort of threatening like he sounded" said Paddy to me later.

The outcome was a very fortunate one for our vindictive Kelt. The Sergeant Major was posted back to England on a course the day before Paddy returned from leave and we never saw the CSM again. Not being a vindictive man myself I consider that revenge is not half as sweet as it is cracked up to be, and certainly not worth the resultant hassle.

Life carried on much as usual after that little contretemps; with reasonable grub and not too overworked, I appreciated the fact that I could have been a lot worse off – felling trees for instance!

I became quite friendly with our Education Officer, a Lieutenant in the Army Education Corps. A pre war teacher in a well known public school, he looked after the academic welfare of the Company and was just as much at home teaching an illiterate soldier to read and write as he was in helping people such as I to increase their basic knowledge of the arts and sciences. He asked me to consider attending a pre-vocational teacher training course, to be held in Bad Godesberg, the Rhineland town, incidentally, where Adolf Hitler had signed that pre-war bogus agreement with Neville Chamberlain. The course would be a useful preliminary to becoming a teacher when I left the army, he told me.

I recall taking a short written test in English, German and arithmetic. I remember the first line of a simple German poem I had to translate: - "Der wind ist Frisch, der morgen gut" it went. In retrospect, I think I must have only taken the test for the sake of interest as I never saw myself in the role of a teacher for the remainder of my working life.

#### Chapter IV

Maj IV Ashworth could hardly have been described as a kindly, gentle type of officer, nevertheless, in spite of his stern and demanding appearance, he was a very fair man whose main consideration was for the men under his command. I once heard a young subaltern questioning the proposed location of the Officers' Mess immediately prior to the Company transferring to a new camp. "Forget the Officers' Mess for the time being young man" he advised. "Just concentrate on getting the men housed and fed on arrival, and always let that be your main consideration" he added. That, and several other humane pronouncements, gained him my everlasting respect.

I stood in front of the OC and reminded him that he wanted to see me. "Ah yes" he said and promptly began to inform me, at some length, that efficient orderly room clerical staff were at a premium. Group HQ were apparently poaching clerks from Companies within command to replace those older experienced men who were due for release from the army in the very near future.

"So far as I see your situation" said the Major "you have three choices. Firstly, you could stay in this Company, where you would be more than welcome; promotion, however, will be relatively slow as most of the orderly room staff are around the same release group as yourself. Secondly" he continued, "you can transfer to Group HQ where your guess, so far as advancement is concerned, is as good as mine. However, if it's promotion you're after (I wasn't) you have a third option."

He then went on to inform me that the

Corps was asking for volunteers to train for a new branch of the BAOR designed to administer to the needs of a newly formed set up called Dienst Gruppen (Service Groups). The object was to release those prisoners of war willing to volunteer for work in quarries, brickyards, tree felling, rubble clearance, etc, all in a general bid to hasten the clearance of the appalling mess that was immediate post war Germany.

Those volunteers would be formed into Companies, housed in camps near their respective work sites; they would be given three meals a day, a tobacco allowance, be paid a small wage in Alliertes Geld, as opposed to the existing pretty worthless German currency, and be given home leave every few months. Each Company would be supervised by British Army personnel, to wit, a Captain to command the Company, a Quarter-Master Sergeant to feed and clothe the men, an interpreter, and, finally, an orderly room Corporal to take care of the paperwork.

The training course would be of three weeks duration and was to start shortly in one of those Companies already established and, after passing the course, I would be posted to a new Company with the rank of orderly room Corporal, plus an additional local, unpaid stripe enabling me to avail myself of all the privileges of the nearest Sergeants Mess: furthermore, early promotion to Quartermaster Sergeant was, as the Major put it "in the bag". Armed with that information, I volunteered.

The course was fourteen strong and held in a camp near Düsseldorf which, rumour had it was once a small concentration camp. We were billeted in two adjoining houses in a small village about a mile from the camp: it wasn't the Savoy, but at least we had a mattress on the floor and three blankets each; it was warm and we were getting all our rations.

As an orderly room clerk I was already acquainted with some of the paperwork involved in the course, also, I could type, albeit with two fingers, and I could get through most situations with the German personnel in halting German, plenty of words, but very little grammar. I had read and digested a small German primer, price sixpence (2 and a half pence) entitled "Wie Heistes auf Deutsch?" (What is it called in German?) and those four hundred odd words helped me out of, and got me into, not a few awkward situations.

So far as entertainment was concerned, there wasn't any. I had palled up with a German Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany named Max; his actual surname eludes me, although I remember he had changed it to Baker.

On our first Saturday at the camp we decided to visit nearby Düsseldorf. As we left the main gate a German fraulein approached to ask us in fractured English if a certain member of the course was ready. The soldier in question was something of a ladies man who we had already dubbed Clark Gable. Max had been born and reared in Hamburg so he obviously spoke native German and he answered her in that language. The girl, realizing that usually only German Jews spoke her language without an accent, answered him rather insolently and he responded by slapping her quite hard around the face; as he raised his hand to slap her again I grabbed his arm and led him away whilst she was still

screaming abuse at him in rapid German, so fast in fact, that I only recognized a few of the words such as Jude, schweinhund and dreck. Max walked back and it took all my strength in the ensuing struggle to prevent him from going for the girl again: I finally convinced him that she wasn't worth the hassle and we continued on our way.

Düsseldorf was a mess, yet it was not the devastated ruin I expected to see. Quite a few shops were in business among the ruins selling second hand clothing and furniture of extremely shoddy quality.

Whilst barter shops were quite a beehive of activity with dozens of ill clad, but tidy, civilians exchanging all kinds of unwanted decrepit items for other equally decrepit looking goods.

Tucked away between some bombed buildings was a photographers shop where we had our photographs taken for twenty Gold Flake each, payable only when the prints were to be collected a week later. The going rate of one

English cigarette in Germany at that time was two shillings (10p) so that a packet of twenty fags was worth two pounds. I estimate that the cost of living has increased twenty fold since then: it appears therefore, that we paid the present day equivalent to forty pounds each for three postcard size prints.

I was rather perturbed, following our next visit, which was to a quite respectable looking gentleman's hairdressers. Max had the whole continental style works – shave, haircut, with pomade, and a manicure. I stuck to the traditional British Army short back and sides, during which operation the barber whispered in my ear in German "Your friend is a Jewish Marxist, yes?" I was rather taken aback by the remark, which could only be interpreted as derogatory. If I had raised my voice in reply then Max would become involved and Der Barbier would have regretted asking such a question. When he had finished cutting my hair I paid him, without a tip, and told Max that I would see him outside when he was ready. I sat on the broad window sill of the shop, ruminating. He wasn't the first German I had heard express his hatred of the Jews, either by implication, or outright, and he wouldn't be the last. How could people who had come off worst in the bloodiest war ever, people who had contributed to their own downfall by believing the lying propaganda of Hitler, Goebbels and the rest of that gang of thugs, still believe, after murdering six million Jews, that Jewry still represented a menace to Germany?

Nearly forty years later, by courtesy of our daughter and her husband, we paid a visit to Australia for three months. During that time we spent a long weekend on a caravan site near Gooloogong, N.S.W.. The site owner was a German who had settled in Australia in 1960. He appeared, on the surface, to be a normal, decent enough man, until the Jewish question cropped up. "You English never understood our problem with the Jews" he declared in a guttural accent. "Ach, so a few good ones got through the net" he continued, "as for the rest," and a cruel, sadistic look appeared in his eyes "Bloody good rittens to bat bloody rubbish I say". Forty years after the war and he still hated the Jews! Oh, what the power of propaganda has to answer for, I hoped that his opinion was not representative of the German race in general!

There were no bathing facilities in the

**‘How could Germans, after murdering six million Jews, still believe they were a menace to Germany.’**

camp, so halfway through the course we were taken by lorry to Essen for a bath. Max couldn't come; he had received an order to report to the Interpreters Pool in Hamburg and, if he knew of any reason for the call he had no intention of telling us.

We had our bath, a shower actually, in a pithead bath just outside Essen. Afterwards we walked into what was once "The Heart of the Ruhr". Stretching, for what appeared to be miles, were vast heaps of rubble, in the middle of which was a huge sign erected by the Allies ironically quoting a passage from Hitler's Mein Kampf:- "GIVE ME UNTIL 1940 AND I PROMISE THAT YOU, THE GERMAN PEOPLE, WILL NOT RECOGNISE THE FACE OF GERMANY". I nearly shouted "Wir wollen unseren Fuhrer fesehen."

Max arrived back in the billet a few days later, I was performing my ablutions, whilst the rest of the lads had gone to see a picture show being screened by an army mobile cinema. When I arrived back in the bedroom Max was lying prostate on his mattress, sobbing his heart out. Not wishing to embarrass him, I quietly closed the door, went downstairs and started chatting to Ricard and his wife who owned the house. Half an hour later I returned upstairs. Max was sitting on a chair looking at some snapshots. "Are you alright Max?" I asked. He pointed to the other chair and it all came out.

For years he had been trying to discover the whereabouts of the family he had left behind in Nazi Germany when he was allowed into England in 1938.

Not until the war ended in May 1945 was the door opened to a full investigation into the fate of millions of Jews and for over a year Max had been in constant postal contact with the Red Cross and a Jewish investigating authority. In spite of the many heart rending stories heard from other German Jews regarding the ultimate fate of their families, he still never gave up hope, working on the premise that no news is good news.

Max was well aware that the Interpreters Pool in Hamburg dealt with enquiries regarding missing Jews so that when he received notice to report there for information he hoped against hope that, even at such a late stage, he would hear some good news; after all, his family could have been incarcerated in that part of Germany occupied by the Russians, and we were all well aware of the tardiness in disclosing information to the Allies.

Within five minutes of his arrival in Hamburg Max knew there was no hope. Apparently, they had irrefutable evidence that his parents, grandparents, brother, sisters, nieces and nephews had all died of "Unnatural causes" in concentration camps. Not one member of his family remained alive, and that is why he was crying. I felt so sorry for him, I could have cried too.

We finished the course and I returned to my Company to await the result where, three days later, I was informed by Major Ashworth that I had passed "Top of the class" which was hardly surprising considering that at least half of the course members had only volunteered to escape boring guard duties and fatigues in their own Companies; so I consider it a case of "In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is King".

A few days later it was requested that I be transferred to the same Company where I had attended the course in order to

relieve their orderly room Sergeant who was due for demob. I promptly had the temporary tailor sew the stripes on my uniform prior to my transfer the following day.

That full little chap called Fate, however, decided to interfere in the form of a communication to the OC from Group HQ giving a list of names of men eligible for demobilization under the Class B release system whereby any man who had experience in the building industry, prior to his induction into the Services, could be prematurely demobbed on condition that he was willing to be channelled into construction following his release.

The fact was that I had been employed as a bricklayer's mate for five weeks immediately prior to my induction into the Army. It had been a stopgap job, filling in the time between leaving my previous job in another town and being called up.

The wheels of government however grind exceeding small and long before the advent of computers they had their memory banks. I had only been married two years and the exigencies of the Service had prevented me from seeing much of my wife during that time, so I jumped at the offer of release, six months before it was due.

The OC was not at all happy; in retrospect, I can't blame him: here was a good officer, seeing potential in a young soldier and trying to steer him along the right course, only to have the lot thrown in his face, but one can't put an old head on young shoulders. He told me that I could find myself mixing plaster for men who could hardly write their own betting slips. He never knew the truth of his statement as he was killed by terrorists a few months later in Palestine.

Five days later I was in a camp in Cheshire awaiting demob; one week after that I stood on Chester station clutching all my worldly possessions in the shape of two cardboard boxes containing a demob suit and all the accoutrements.

In my considered opinion Class B release was something of a swindle. Normally, a man released under Class A, i.e. when his release group number came up, was granted with weeks leave on full pay and ration allowance, plus one day's leave for every month spent abroad. Class B release men, however, were granted only three weeks pay and allowances before reporting to the Labour Exchange for orders; but I knew the score and I presented myself forthwith at said government establishment at the appropriate time.

### Chapter V

In China the peasants went to work in their traditional denim jackets and cloth caps. In 1946 the demobbed British soldier reported on the building site wearing his battledress and army boots (clothing coupons hardly stretched to a new working outfit).

The Chinese peasants' reward for a day's work, however, was a bowl of rice; I suppose that when the Communists took charge he received two bowls of rice, which, theoretically anyway, made him twice as well off; whilst I fared much better. My hourly rate was 1 shilling 11 and three quarters pence (just under 10p) and we worked 47 and a half hours per week (the five day week had not yet been introduced) so I was taking home about £4.10.0 a week (£4.50) after stoppages; not exactly a princely sum, but prices had not yet hit the

roof so we seemed to manage reasonably well.

I had been sent to work for a local builder and my boss assigned me to Happy, a reincarnated character from a Dickens novel. Happy was a darned good plasterer; he was as strange as the proverbial horse, spoke with a really broad Portsea accent and could talk himself out of and into any situation; I am convinced he could have sold a scuttle of coal to a collier.

Nearly half of Happy's time at work was spent in taking bets for a local bookie and selling wet fish to anyone fortunate enough to be offered such a rare commodity. The boss was quite satisfied with his performance because, when he did actually start work, he more than made up for the lost time, in fact, during one of his really industrious sessions, it was all I could manage to mix up enough plaster for him.

I distinctly remember us calling at a particular house where Happy was required to plaster one of the bedroom ceilings. We had only been there a few minutes when the lady of the house told us she was slipping out for a couple of hours.

Happy really got the horse power working and had the ceiling plastered in next to no time, after which he walked into the next bedroom, spread his newspaper on the bed covers and promptly went to sleep, leaving me to tidy up.

I never heard a sound from downstairs until some time later when I saw the houseowner walking up the stairs. I promptly dashed into the bedroom and slapped Happy's face a few times. "I think he's fainted" I informed the woman, "he wasn't too well a few minutes ago and I suggested he should lay on the bed." By that time, of course Happy was awake and his quick mind rose to the occasion. "Sorry about this missus" he said, holding his head between his hands for a few seconds, then looking up, with a distressed look in his eyes, he continued "The wife keeps telling me I'm overdoing it."

The poor woman was obviously unable to answer such an ambiguous statement, so she brought a glass of water and a couple of aspirins. Happy raised himself from the bed, took the aspirins with the water and limped downstairs and out of the house still wearing that martyred expression; I followed with the tools, the good lady's parting words, "You ought to see a Doctor" echoing in our ears.

Six months passed and, although I was quite happy in my work, I certainly had no intention of remaining a plasterer's mate for the rest of my working life. I knew I was stuck, however, within the building industry until Ernest Bevan's Control of Engagements Order had been repealed, but I needn't have worried because my old mate, Fate, came to my assistance again, this time in the shape of an advertisement in the Portsmouth Evening News which read:- "Join the Naval Canteen Service and look after the boys in blue" or words to that effect, and I thought "This is it."

I could hardly say that I felt my role in life was to "Look after the boys in blue", but if Servitor Servientium could get me out of the building trade, then "Serving Those Who Serve" would be my motto from now on; so I joined the Naval Canteen Service, which is, of course, a branch of NAAFI.

Four months later, after hard training in a shore base, I walked up the gangway of the flagship of the Home Fleet, the battleship HMS Duke of York, as assistant manager, and my nautical life began; but that, as much better writers than I have said, is another story: (Written in the hope, I suppose, that you will buy it). ■

## 'Join the Naval Canteen Service and look after the boys in blue.'



# Blast from the Past

Do you recognise anyone from these old photographs from the past?



# The Tunnel

If there had been a channel tunnel, would it have told in Germany's favour?

Report: Harold Owen

**T**HERE are many "ifs" in the Great War, with many more to come, and they will be subjects of endless debate and historical speculation long after we who lived through it are ashes and dust.

There is "If the Germans had never marched through Belgium, but had invaded France on the eastern frontier." There is "If Belgium had allowed Germany a passage under protest, and had not held up the grey horde at Liege for that critical fortnight." There is "If Germany had flung three parts of her weight against Russia to begin with, and knocked her out before she could have moved, whilst holding up the French army round Metz". There are all the "ifs" that arise from the battle of the Marne, and perhaps the greatest of all the "ifs" to us, is "If the Germans had left Paris alone, and had marched straight through Belgium to Calais," from which arises another "if" – "If the Channel Tunnel had been built before the war broke out!"

The other day some wise and learned gentlemen were discussing in mutual agreement that fascinating "if." They assumed, as a matter of course, that it "would have made all the difference," as I believe it would, through the opposite "difference" from that in their minds.

## Advocates of the Tunnel

They had at their finger-ends the time, money, tonnage, and men that would have been saved if only trains had dived under the sea at Dover and emerged somewhere near Wissant, and then rushed off men and munitions, without a change, straight to the front. And they seemed to have an accurate idea of the immense relief it would have been to the Navy, which for three years had been guarding night and day, and with immense anxiety and resource, those vital twenty miles of water - that perilous, vulnerable, and almost solitary link which unites us to our Allies. And the discussion came to an amiable conclusion with this pronouncement from one of the circle: "The fact is, if the question of the tunnel had been a party question, all I can say is that the party that had opposed it would never have come into power again for a hundred years." And that, of course, settled it. The whole question had been focused down to the politician's final test of political action – party advantage.

As I came away I pondered a little over what I had heard. For experience has led me to this unflattering opinion: that the confidence to be reposed by all rational men in the conclusions of politicians is in a directly inverse ratio to their own. It did not take me long to agree with them that if the Channel Tunnel had been completed when the war broke out, it would indeed have made all the difference – the difference that we should probably have lost the war.

Let us suppose the great work had been completed five or six years before the war broke out. What would have happened? Our politicians would have declared that it was one of the triumphs of science dedicated to the ideal of peace. They would have enlarged upon its completion as the final proof that the era of international strife has passed, and the era of international unity had begun; and as

giving the coup de grace, by this voluntary surrender of our insularity, to the old "unworthy suspicions" concerning our Continental neighbours, and especially as the last pledge of our amity with France, which, of course, would not have been the point at all.

## Prime Military Objective

And if there was one thing they would have insisted upon it would have been that to the opening ceremony we invited the representatives of "the great German people." At all costs, they would have said, we must avoid giving any offence to that cousinly and cultured Power; above and beyond everything we must make it clear to them that though the tunnel directly connected England and France that fact did not in the least indicate that it had any strategic possibility, or that it was anything more than a geographical accident. Indeed, we should probably have gone out of our way to assure our dear Teutonic cousins that the great merit of the tunnel was that it would enable them to visit us even more frequently without having to embark at Ostend or Flushing; and at the opening ceremony on our side of the tunnel (for the construction of which a German firm would probably have had the contract) the German Ambassador would have been in great form, replying with his tongue in his cheek to our assurances that the tunnel was dedicated to peace and international fraternity, and that we were chiefly pleased to be linked up by dry land with the Continent because Germany also would be brought a few hours nearer.

And, after the little ceremonial farce was over, we should have lapsed into our old somnolence. At Dover, of course, we should have had a military guard, and at Wissant the French would have had the same. But as France would not have feared invasion from us, she would still have based her military preparation and policy on the security of her eastern frontier. And Germany would have based her whole strategy upon a swift descent upon Belgium, and a fortnight's time-table to take her to the French end of the tunnel. For the tunnel would then have become a prime military objective. Germany would have directed her whole plans and policy to the one end of getting there, and she would have got there.

## What Would Have Happened?

For, with or without a Channel Tunnel, it was of first-rate importance to us that Germany should not get to Calais. But what provision had we made to stop her? Germany could have got to Calais as easily as she got to Antwerp if, instead of her armies turning south from Brussels, to drive "the contemptible little Army" before them on their road to Paris, she had simply left the road to Paris untrod for a week or so and turned towards Calais. Why she did not do so may have been that she was so sure of Paris that she believed Calais and the north French coast would follow at her leisure. But in any case, we could not have stopped her in her first onward march, and she could have taken Calais in her stride.

Nor knowing what our governmental and national attitude to Germany was, can it be believed that the existence of the Channel

Tunnel would have led us to make any adequate preparations for its security against the contingency of its seizure by Germany. In fact had that been proposed, I can hear our politicians declaring: "Gentlemen, this is Jingoism run mad! For years this wonderful achievement of science in the interests of international amity has been delayed through panic fears of invasion by France. The Entente has at last laid that boggy, but now our implacable and insatiable Jingoism have created another boggy! And this time they say that we must guard the tunnel against being seized – by Germany! Gentlemen, was ever such wicked nonsense ---? I ask you, where is this mischievous mistrust to end? How long shall we tolerate these panic-stricken Jingoism in our midst, who poison international relations?" . . . etc. (Loud cheers). It is certain that Germany would never have planned a campaign by which she marched on to Paris through Belgium and left her right flank and her rear menaced by the Channel Tunnel.

## What Might Have Been

So the German Army would have gone there first. And France would not have been thinking of us and the Channel Tunnel, but very properly of her eastern frontier and her own capital. So France would not have stopped them either. And, as for ourselves, our politicians would never have had the courage to point out to our people that the Channel Tunnel so greatly modified the military situation that we should have to have an army ready which would be adequate to defend it, not at Dover, but in France; for a howl would then have gone up about our military intervention on the Continent (twelve months before Armageddon began a London paper, that had much to do with expressing the policy of the Government, roundly declared that "it could not conceive" of any circumstances which would justify or entail our sending an Army to the Continent), and somebody would have said that the tunnel, after all, was not a "work of peace" at all, but was only "a dodge of our militarists to embroil us on the Continent, to trap us into mad gambles and militarist adventures, and to fasten the yoke of conscription round our necks." And as things were then – especially our politicians – that sort of talk, which largely governed our policy, would have been fatal to anything like an adequate provision for the defence of the Channel Tunnel. That this fascinating "if" – "If only the Channel Tunnel had been going before the war" – really resolves itself into that other tremendous if: "if the Germans had got to Calais in the first months of the war!" And the consequences of that "if" having been realised are more obvious than fascinating.

*This article by Harold Owen was not written during or after World War Two but during World War One. It appeared in the War Illustrated on 21st July 1917. This was some 70 years before the agreement to build the Channel Tunnel was made by Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterrand by signing the Treaty of Canterbury. The Tunnel was officially opened on 6 May 1994 by Queen Elizabeth and French President Francois Mitterrand. ■*





# Pioneer Corps Training Centres

## A short background on the various pioneer corps training centres

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: RPCA Photo Archive

IN France the British Expeditionary Force HQ estimated in December 1939 that a labour force of at least 220,000 men would be required by the end of 1940.

Such numbers could not be raised from British manpower and although the question of raising and employing Colonial subjects i.e. Cypriots and West Indians etc was being investigated by the Colonial Office it would have been some months before such labour was available. There seemed little chance of obtaining French labour as the French Army's needs, too, were great. In these circumstances the French Government agreed to allow the British Authorities to employ foreigners domiciled in France, and political refugees from Germany, Austria and Spain. These men had to be obtained under the same conditions as the French Government applied to aliens who had sought refuge in France and who, under French law, were liable to be called up and enrolled for non-military duty.

A Training Centre was set up for these men at le Mans, and it was hoped to produce two Labour Companies weekly. Actually numbers obtained were small and the only Company that needs notice is one formed of about 300 Spanish ex-Republican soldiers who had taken refuge in France. These were enlisted as an Alien Company of the AMPC, they got back to

England after the evacuation and did good work, both in England and eventually with 21 Army Group.

### Training Centres

Five Training Centres were originally formed in 1939 and arrangements were made for a further seven Centres to be established during 1940. No 7 Centre was formed in France at le Mans for foreign labour, Numbers 8, 9 and 10 Centres however were never formed.

Training Centres were organised into Centre HQ, 1 HQ Company and 2 Training Company and were originally designed to produce four AMPC Companies per month. An increment for producing a doubled output was included. The output of Companies from Training Centres was variable dependant on intake and FFC requirements. Recruits were received direct from civilian life. They were documented, medically examined and kitted out by the Quartermaster's Stores on the day of arrival. Their training commenced on the second day. During 1939 and the early part of 1940 their period of Military Training was three weeks. This was extended to four weeks in 1940 and later to six weeks. NCC and Alien personnel were received at certain Centres. Besides forming complete Companies the Training Centres provided re-inforcements and drafts both for home and overseas.

As circumstances changed it became possible to reduce the number of Training

Centres and by the Autumn of 1943 only two – Nos 6 and 12 remained.

A Reception and Discharge Depot had also been formed where men from hospital, 'T' list, detention, overseas, and general transfers from other units were received. This Depot constantly became a bottle neck as men arrived without their documents which were often considerably delayed in following them. It was therefore incorporated with No 12 Training Centre.

After the formation of the General Service Corps in February 1942, Centres received men partially trained from the Primary Training Centre instead of direct from Civil life.

In June 1944 new War Establishments were issued for Nos 6 and 12 Training Centres. Their title was changed to Pioneer Corps Holding and Training Unit. No 6 was designed to hold and train 1,800 Pioneers including Aliens and conscientious objectors (NCC), to hold a minimum of 200 Officers and to form drafts and mobilise units. No 12 was designed to hold and train 3,000 Pioneers (armed and unarmed) and to form drafts and mobilise units.

Formation dates and subsequent moves of the Training Units in the UK were as follows:

### No 1 Centre

Originally AMPC and RE (Stevadore) Centre, Felixstowe. Split from RE, moved to Westcliffe Feb 1940. Moved to Pwllheli, Wales July 1940. Disbanded 15 Oct 1940.

### No 2 Centre

Formed at Caister 1939. Moved to Glasgow July 1940. Disbanded October 1940.

### No 3 Centre

Formed at Richborough 1939 to become the Centre for Alien Personnel. Moved to Westward Ho! In May 1940. Moved to Ilfracombe October 1940. Disbanded January 1942.

### No 4 Centre

Originally a refuge camp at Clacton-on-Sea, formed as AMPC Training Centre October 1939. Closed for AMPC training December 1939 and loaned for formation of RE units. Re-opened for AMPC February 1940. Disbanded July 1941.

### No 5 Centre

Formed Huyton, Liverpool 1939. Moved to Denbigh July 1942. Disbanded October 1942.

### No 6 Centre

Formed at Skegness 1939 by Lieutenant Colonel G H Keighley Bell MC. The staff nucleus being provided by No 4 Training Centre. The Centre operated on the basis of a Reception Company and 4 Training Cadres and was designed to produce 6 officers and 548 trained men weekly.

Volunteers between the ages of 35 and 40 (many, of course, were much older) were accepted, clothed, equipped, given one month's training and then formed into Companies or dispatched as reinforcements to existing Companies. The first Company

to leave the Centre went to Scottish Command. At the Miners Home the Officers Messes were good as also was the men's cookhouse with up to date steam cooking apparatus and hot plates. The small wooden 'holiday' huts with the conjugal couch in each compartment, with a board down the middle, were not altogether ideal for 2 soldiers. Centre HQ and 2 Cadres were at the Miners Home and a third Cadre nearby in a tented camp. Reception Company, QM Stores and 1 Cadre in Skegness Town.

The supply of volunteers dried up gradually and on 18th April 1940 the first Army Class intake of 500 arrived. These intakes 5-600 strong, thereafter continued weekly, were given their month's training and dispatched. During May and June 1940 the Centre also provided a number of Officers and Other Ranks to assist in the formation of the No 12 Centre.

Moved to Buxton July 1943. Disbanded July 1945.

### No 11 Centre

Formed at Liverpool June 1940. Moved to Oldham June 1940. Disbanded October 1941.

### No 12 Centre

Formed at Liverpool June 1940. Moved to Pheasey Farm, Birmingham July 1941. Moved to Oldham March 1942. Moved to Prestatyn July 1943. This Centre between 5th June 1940 and 15th May 1945 formed 65 complete Companies and 11 Group and Company HQ. Its total intake was 120,163 and 5,754 officers passed through the unit. These figures give some idea of the standard of organisation required for the successful function of each unit. Throughout the whole period No 12 Holding and Training Unit was commanded by Lt Col H Greenwood VC DSO OBE MC

### MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

In June 1941 a Pioneer Corps Depot was established in the Middle East at Quassasin. It started with 1,000 Palestians and 1,000 Cypriot Pioneers, and was planned to take up to 16,000 Native Pioneer Companies being recruited in Africa, India and other parts of the Empire. It was to be a Mobilization Centre for Pioneer Units and a Reinforcement and Training Centre.

The target was to raise between 100,000 and 150,000 native Pioneers and they were to spend a month in the Depot.

By the middle of 1943 the Depot was housing 43,000 men. Personnel passing through the Depot included Basutos, Bechuanas, Swazis, East and West Africans, Mauritians, Rodriguez, Seychellous, Palestians, Syrian-Lebanese, Indians, Cypriots, Ceylonese and Saudi Arabians. Repatriation of these troops in 1945, 46 and 47 was also effected from the Depot.

In February 1948 the Depot moved to Kibrit and finally closed in December 1955.

When in June 1953 it was decided to recruit a further 10,000 East African Pioneers for service with the East Africa Pioneer Corps in the Canal Zone to replace those due for discharge after their two year engagement, the East African Pioneer Depot was established at Mackinson Road, Kenya.

The original target was 400 recruits weekly but by the end of September 1953 this was reduced to 200 weekly, and by the

end of March 1954 the final target had been achieved and the Depot was closed.

### POST WAR TRAINING CENTRE

No 12 Centre, the last to be formed in the UK was probably the largest of its kind. Up to October 1945 the Centre had received, documented, kitted out, medically examined, vaccinated and inoculated, and sent out into the field no fewer than 124,000 recruits. It controlled a large school for potential NCO's and operated its own catering establishment for training and providing cooks for Pioneer Units at home and overseas. In addition during the heavy air-raids on Liverpool the Centre gave continuous help in rescue and demolition work, in which operations nearly 50 Pioneers lost their lives. The average strength on the staff of the Centre during that period was 350.

In February 1946 the Centre moved from Prestatyn to Cuddington, near Northwich, Cheshire and became the Corps Depot. Its strength at that time was 6937 and it was administered by an establishment intended for a ceiling of 2,700 all ranks.

In 1947 the Depot moved to Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire and in December of that year the training wing, some 1200 strong, separated from the Depot and moved to Blackmore Camp, Malvern to become the Training Centre. The strength of the Training Centre fluctuated from 1500 to 500 and in October 1948 was 1,000 strong. In 1948 the Training Centre moved to Saighton Camp, Chester. About 1,800 recruits were under training at this time.

In November the Depot moved from Stourport to Wrexham. On 31 July 1950 the Training Centre at Saighton Camp closed and was integrated with the Depot at Wrexham which became the RPC Depot and Training Centre. The Centre received intakes of up to 200 each fortnight. There were four Training Companies and a Holding Company plus the HQ. In addition the HQ Supplementary Reserve (later AER, was accommodated in the same camp and all discharges and transfers to SR/AER from the Corps were effected there.

To meet the training and accommodation requirements a site at Horsley Hall, Gresford was taken over (additional to Hermitage Camp Wrexham). The Centre also ran a MT and Driving School.

The title of the Unit was changed to the Depot RPC in December 1959 and on 12 September 1960 the Depot moved to Quebec Barracks, Northampton. In June 1961 the Barracks was renamed after a previous Colonel Commandant, General Sir Frank Simpson CBE KCB DSO. With the amalgamation of HQ AER the name of the Depot was changed in 1963 to Depot and HQ AER. In June 1967 to Depot and CVHQ and in 1968 finally to Royal Pioneer Corps Training Centre.

The Pioneer School was also located at Simpson Barracks where courses in modern personal management techniques and industrial relations were held for RPC Officers and NCOs and for Officers of all arms.

The Corps provided Army specialists in materials handling and was responsible for skilled military labour support for all Arms and Services within the UK and overseas. It also provided Defence and Employment Platoons for various Brigade Headquarters. Officers and NCOs were fully trained in modern personnel management techniques and industrial relations to enable them to meet the requirements of administering civilian labour support in any part of the World. ■



# Principles for staff officers

These notes make amusing reading but they contain some sound advice

Report: Brigadier HJ Hickman, DAPL  
April 1987

THESE papers emerged recently from Corps Archives for a periodic airing. They are a stunning demonstration of how a simple military principle, in this case about staff-work. The notes were written over 40 years ago, particularly for the benefit of staff officers, but the principles embraced can be applied today by any officer responding to questions on the use of Pioneer or Labour support.

I attribute the notes to the late Lieutenant Colonel LW Vedrenne who it is known served in Central Mediterranean Forces (CMF) during the period in question and was well known then and after for his gifted penmanship. In his retirement years he was to keep up a flow of lively correspondence with Corps Headquarters and the Editor of the Royal Pioneer. His love of his Corps is exemplified by his bequest to the Corps of a magnificent cane for the use of the Commandant of the Training Centre on special occasions which we received when he died in 1966.

These notes make amusing reading but they contain some sound advice and are highly instructive. That they remain relevant in a much changed Army is testimony to their professional excellence. I commend them to all officers; we shall do well to continue to follow this example.

## PRINCIPLES FOR GRADE 2 AND 3 STAFF OFFICERS LABOUR BRANCH, No 1 DISTRICT, CMF

### THE IDEAL

1. Our ideal is to create, out of ourselves and our people in this District, an administrative machine which will run itself. This is a much higher ideal than merely "keeping the show going". Of course we shall never quite achieve it, ADAL, Gp Comds and all other Pnrs, whether Offrs or OR, PC, IPC or APC, including ourselves, being human. But it is our business to try, because the conditions of modern war demand more than human qualities. We must get above ourselves. We must become A Thing; and we must try to become A Damned Efficient Thing.
2. The condition at any time of our administrative machine is easy to test. If it gives to the casual observer the impression that nothing is happening at all, then it is probably running well. The appearance of nothing happening nearly always means that nothing untoward is happening. That is to say, that each event as it occurs has been foreseen and is dealt with automatically. An Administrative machine the running of which involves imperative telephones, busy Staff Officers, raspberries buzzers, harassed Clerks and exhausted DRs may perhaps be a very busy machine; but the chances are that it is also a very inefficient one.
3. So when you get a new situation

requiring action, remember that it is not enough to deal with it. You must also consider adjusting our administrative machine in such a way that that situation, next time it occurs, will be dealt with automatically.

4. You are part of the DDL's show, work the following in intellectual wool. "Efficiency, like Charity, begins at Home".

### ON REPLACEABILITY

5. This is part of the principle of our automatic administrative machine.
6. The man who makes himself irreplaceable in a civilian business is a Good Business Man. The man who does the same thing in the Pioneer Corps is a Saboteur.
7. There are given forms of absence from normal place of duty. (i) Duty elsewhere, (ii) Leave, (iii) Sickness, (iv) Wounds, (v) Death, incl Sudden by enemy action. Never forget that any of these may happen to you at any moment; and arrange your bit of the machine accordingly. If a man's function pauses one beat in its rhythm because he himself is absent, then he is guilty of the major crime of allowing himself to become irreplaceable.
8. Your memory may be magnificent; but it is of no use at all to anyone else when you are away. So keep a thing like the BLACK BOOK, and leave it to represent you in your absence. (It will also hasten your hand-over to your successor when you go on PYTHON – or to BURMA).
9. The Staff Officer's Altar is his IN tray. So when you have a message for someone who is away, do not try to remember it. Put a chit in his IN tray.
10. In war-time there is no such thing as a PENDING tray. The enemy never pends.

### "DIFFICILIA STATION ..."

11. "Difficilia stratim", says our Office motto, "gravius empossibilia facimus". "The difficult we do immediately, the impossible requires a bit of a shove."
12. This is part of our traditions. It was created, not by Staff Officers but by Pioneers, in the old BEF, in the near-invasion of 1940-41, and in BNAF, MEF and CMF. It was created by men who were too stupid to realise that certain things cannot be done, and so went and did them.
13. This is not an invitation to you to do A Branch's work, or Q's or anyone else's then your own. (Paras 18 to 21 below deal with CO-OPERATION). It is a threat, of the conscience from which you will suffer as a Staff Officer if you fail to sustain the tradition which Pioneers have created for you.

14. Take a concrete example. An applicant comes to you and asks you to do a job. Whatever it is, accept it; if it is rightly someone else's, pass the applicant on to the someone else concerned. If you have time, take him yourself to the someone else concerned. If it is rightly ours and easy, do it. If it is difficult in any degree up to impossible, still do it. But if it is impossible even for Pioneers do not tell him so. Talk to him, guiding his thoughts, until he discovers and points it out to you. But never repeat never say NO.

### GETTING CRACKING

15. We do not get cracking, ever. We know by bitter experience the true meaning of that expression. It means Action – instant Action with the maximum possible bustle and bovine night-soil: and leaving someone else to clear up the mess afterwards. It eliminates, in one masterly stroke, all possibility of thinking.
16. Your business is to think. You are paid part of an extra 5/- a day for that purpose. So remember that when action is required, you must first think of who is to act, how, when, and what with; of who will be needed to help him; and of who will want to know about the business although they will be taking no action themselves.
17. If you do all these things, there will be no mess for anyone to clear up afterwards; except perhaps for the enemy, if the job has involved the passage forward of our ammunition.

### CO-OPERATION

18. We do not run our own show. We have no show to run entirely of our own. We are part of a show which includes the King, President Roosevelt, and Field Marshals Stalin and Chiang Kai Shek. Nearer home, so to speak, it includes G, A, Q, CE, Sigs, Chaplains, ST, Med, Ord, REME, Pro, Postal, Salvage, Fire, EFl, Welfare, Education, JAG, CAMO, MMIA, Areas and Sub-Areas and all; without whom we can do nothing, any more than they can do much without us.
19. Almost any action you take will involve one of these people; so before you finally take it, tie it up with the Branch, Service or Fmn concerned. Example follows.
20. Even Pioneers would be absurd without trousers, and trousers are Ord.
21. Labour, by the way, is a Q Service. We are their technical advisers on Labour; so do not let them do anything at all about Labour without consulting us. Also they are our friends; so do not do anything touching Q without informing them.



## DELEGATION

22. The DDL is responsible for everything to do with Labour in this District, from the proper handling of a million tons of M & V Ration to the state of Pioneer SMITH's AB 64 Part II. Worse than that, he is responsible to two people: our General at District and our Brigadier at AFHQ. Nevertheless he cannot possibly do it all on his own. He does not even try to. He delegates.
23. Your job, then, mainly consists of telling other people to do jobs, providing them with the means and then trusting them. (Any prayers that you may add are your own affair.) If they fail, report the matter to the DDL who will do all that is necessary. If they succeed, trust them even more, if they succeed again and again in difficult circumstances, mention them to the DDI next time a chit comes round from "A" about Honours and Awards. In any case, delegate and trust. Illustration follows.
24. What would be more ridiculous than a cricket player who bowls, runs down the pitch and snatches the bat, plays his own ball, and then gallops off into the field to catch himself out? Staff Officers have tried it; but it still cannot be done.

## ON IMPERSONALITY

25. People are sensitive. This is often specially true of 'tough' people who, were they not so sensitive, would not need to spend all that time and effort on being 'tough'; and it is one of the fundamental conditions which dictate the form of all military communications.
26. On the telephone you can overcome sensitiveness by 'charm' (for which also you are paid part of that 5/- a day); but 'charm' in military correspondence takes up too much space, besides looking frightfully silly. The only solution is to be impersonal.
27. This is particularly important under active service conditions. A man who is merely sensitive in a back-area becomes, when tired, wet, cold, dirty, overworked and frightened out of his life, morbidly touchy; and a touchy man is an inefficient man.
28. So when you compose a Memorandum, do the following wherever possible. (i) Avoid personal pronouns, (Avoid particularly 'our' referring to someone or something to do with this Office, because we do not want our Memoranda to look like letters from Harrods.) (ii) Be wary of 'man', 'would' and 'should', because a touchy man gets hazed by indefiniteness or ambiguity. (iii) Try to put the word 'please' once into every Memorandum. It is polite; and properly sited at the end of a paragraph it can be the height of impersonality. (iv) Use 'will be responsible for' only when it is essential. Willy-nilly, it does imply a threat; and while we all know all about Army Form B194E, we do not want it pushed down our throats.
29. It is harder to feel hurt with an institution than with a person.

## ONE VOICE ONLY

30. This District speaks with one voice only. Be careful, then, that you do not tell our people one thing when they have just heard another from another Branch or Service.
31. At times this Office speaks for our Director at AFHQ; the same sort of care is required, lest our Director through you should appear polymorphous.
32. All of which leads to Oppenheimism.

## OPPENHEIMISM

33. Phillips Oppenheim, as you may remember, wrote books which revealed to a workaday world the dark plots and darker counter-plots of Ministers, Ambassadors, Diplomats, Agents and – of course- Beautiful Spies. He had a considerable and very proper success. What is not so proper is that the idea has slightly infected Staff correspondence. You may occasionally read paragraphs from higher to lower fmns, of which the following is a travesty (but not much).
34. "In consultation with the Assist, Fiscal Adviser, Q and Med in conjunction have decided to apply to the Director of Dehydration, AFHQ, for facilities to set up, subject to the concurrence of DDST 15 Army Gp and the general approval of the Office of the Master Dietician, PBS ..."
35. Read it, by all means; but do not do it yourself.
36. For one thing, it is unnecessary. For another it looks – and is – pompous. And finally, it confuses the ultimate recipient, who only wants to be told what he is supposed to do.

## YOU-KNOW-WHAT-I-MEAN-OLD,-AM

37. Another point about correspondence. Be clear. This is obvious, of course, to any eager young Officer making his war-time career on the Staff. But it is not so obvious to a war-worn, not-so-young Officer who is enduring the Staff because someone has got to. His particular temptation occurs when he is reading over his own Memorandum fresh-typed from the Chief Clerk's Office. He perceives that some point is by a hair's breadth ambiguous or even meaningless; he feels the weight of five years of war; and then he tries by sheer effort of will to force that paper the implicit "You-know-what-I-mean-old-man."

38. Do not do it, all the same. It is a Sin.

## THE "IB" TEST

39. Rather as the result of our experiences which occasioned paras 37 and 38 above, we have in this Office a thing known as the "IDIOT BOY" or "IB" Test. All Officers and the Chief Clerk know all about it and can be used to carry it out. It works as follows.
40. You have drafted a Memorandum which contains so much tricky detail that you fear your own familiarity with it may have bred blindness. So you put it up for the "IB" Test. The Officer or the Chief Clerk first empties his mind of everything but an idiot boy's ability to

convert the most obvious action words exactly as read. Then he reads your draft. Then he tells you what action he would have taken on it. If his findings represent exactly the action which you require, then you can sign your Memorandum. If not, have a cup of tea, light your pipe, and draft it all again.

41. In effect, if you send out a Memorandum and any one of its addressees either rings you to check a point, or does not ring you up and does the wrong thing, then yours was a rotten Memorandum, and you have allowed the telephone to become irreplaceable.
42. All misinterpreted instructions are rotten instructions, and your fault.

## SIGNATURES

43. Make no mistake on this subject, because it is a soil upon which raspberries grow lush. The DDL signs all expressions of opinion, to anyone. This includes rockets. He also signs everything to higher fmns, except on purely routine matters. You sign all the rest "for Colonel DDL". There is one important general exception. If something which ought to be signed by the DDL has got to be despatched at once, and the DDL is not available, you can sign for him; but under "for Colonel DDL" you must add "(Absent on duty)" or the heavens will fall upon you – rightly.

## EMP UNITS IN DISTRESS

44. You will receive complaints. Always take them seriously; particularly when they ring a trifle hollow.
45. There are two sorts. The first is genuine, and the result of some fault of ours. Apologise at once; correct; and adjust our machine to preclude recurrence.
46. The second is not genuine. Nearly always it is originated by some moron who, challenged by his superior to explain some failure, makes use of the old, old story, "Oo – I hadn't got any Labour, Sir". Collect with loving patience all the true facts; arrange them with vindictive artistry; and present them to the complainant (copy to everyone in the world) neatly typed on a clean sheet of paper in all their nauseating nakedness.
47. No Pioneer, of course, should ever do this. But there are limits, and the Old, Old Story is one of them.

## CONCLUSION

48. We have another motto. It is "NO LABOUR – NO BATTLE". Use it, as spitefully as you can against anyone who tries to disdain The Corps.
49. But remember the implication of its truth. We have got to supply Labour at any cost. If there is a job to be done, and in extreme conditions no one else left to allot to it, allot yourself. If you are too weak to move, allot to DDL: he will agree. The Labour must be supplied because the Battle must be won. It is the Battle of Freedom against Tyranny, of Right against Wrong, of eternal Good against eternal Evil.
50. Besides, we all want to get home. ■

# Can't find the mouse!

TODAY arrived the latest "The Pioneer" and I visited the website for the first time.

My congratulations on the fine quality of both publications.

Although the only names familiar to me now, are Brigadiers Hickman and Telfer, having retired from the Corps in 1961, I very much enjoy the continued link via your continuity. Despite some contrary thinking apparently, my confidence remains intact and total.

Must get some new spectacles, can't find the mouse!

**Rob Gittins. 046.**

# Mono mouse from Bierly

THE latest Newsletter arrived on Saturday and that stopped work for a while whilst I looked through its pages.

As usual it was extremely well produced and the quality of the photographs impeccably printed. I had to put off reading through the articles which I know from past issues will be very interesting.

Unfortunately I have Macular (Age Related) Degeneration which makes it difficult for me to read small print. I have bought a Mono Mouse which fits into the Scart Socket on the back of the television and enlarges the print considerably. I was loaned one first by the local Association for the Blind; I was able to buy one from a firm called Bierly who sent a form to complete which exempted the sale from VAT. I write this in case other older members might find it useful.

**Bill Ford**

# I still hope to surprise a few...

THANKS for the latest RPC Association Newsletter and Xmas Draw tickets.

I was seriously thinking about coming to the RPC Officers Dinner in October but I collapsed at home in early September and was rushed off to Wrexham hospital, then transferred to Broad Green (Heart Hospital) in Liverpool. Finished up having a impeccable Carchoveater/Defibrillator fitted, something a bit larger than a pace-maker.

Thankfully, everything is fine now and I still hope to surprise a few by coming down Bicester way next year.

Give my regards to everybody that knows me, although I expect they must be thin on the ground now. All the best.

**George Lineham**

# R.I.P mick we will miss you mate

LATE on the evening of the 8 Nov 08 myself and Tony Tuplin set off for London to take part in the veterans march past at the Cenotaph.

Travelling down it was raining heavily but after a few hours we arrived at the services at Junction 2 of the M1 where we met up with John Barlow and had a sandwich and a welcoming cup of coffee after which we continued our journey into London,

We were lucky that we had a sat-nav which took us as close as possible to Horse Guards. As we had not booked accommodation we had to find a car park to enable us to sleep in the cars, so at about three in the morning we finally settled down for a few hours rest before the big day

This of course was not helped by the chimes of Big Ben every hour and half hour, so at about half five in the morning we awakened and started to get ourselves ready .

As we were getting ready basher said that we looked like used car salesmen, this raised a laugh or two.

When we had parked up, the car park attendant looked us over and must have thought who are these three scruffy individuals, as we were a bit dishevelled. The next morning, however, he was very surprised when three ex Pioneers walked past in their best kit to honour the fallen of the country.

We made our way to Horse Guards and formed up with the growing ranks of ex Pioneers who had also made their way to London for the same reason. Old friends shook hands and made conversation, it was as if the years had gone away and we were all still in the mob.

We then moved forward across Horse Guards through the arch and formed up in Whitehall ready to march off when our turn came.

While we stood waiting on that cold morning in the capital I must admit that my thoughts drifted and I thought of the Pioneers we had lost over the last couple of years, many of them good friends and all of them brothers in arms. We then stood quietly for the two minutes silence as did

the rest of the country to honour our dead.

The Parade then slowly started to move off for the march past, the band were playing and loud applause could be heard from the crowds that had gathered in the capital to watch these old soldiers proudly march.

As if by magic young Dusty in his now familiar camel coat could be seen conducting the band from where we were all stood and I dare say that had he been given a chance he would have done us proud.

Then we stepped of led by Peter Thomas calling out the time, and proudly we made our way towards the Cenotaph and a smart eyes left and eyes front and then it was all over. We made our way to the end of Whitehall and turned right and marched back towards Horse Guards once again

Ahead of us at this time was H.M. The Queen's car returning to pick her up. It stopped to let us march past and Basher spoke up and said, "Look at this boys even the Queen's car has to stop for the lads of the RPC".

This raised a laugh from us all as we marched back toward the dias where Prince Edward was taking the salute.

After a smart eyes right we were back on Horse Guards, Peter Thomas brought us smartly to a halt after the RMP veterans had moved out of the way to enable the lads from the RPC to march through.

On a sad note, may I just add that not long after the parade in London we sadly lost one of our party.

Mick Bickerdyke sadly passed away, he had put off an operation to march with the lads from the Royal Pioneer Corps just one more time. Mick was in front of Tony, Basher and myself and we knew that he was in immense pain but he would not give in, and fall out, but finished the march past proudly and with head held high

"R.I.P Mick we will miss you mate".

For anyone who has not had the honour to take part in this parade, dig out your gongs, get you best kit pressed up and put a shine on your shoes, and join us this year in London and march proudly again with the lads of the "Royal Pioneer Corps".

**Neil Taylor**

# A bit of a character and most certainly a fine artist

MANY thanks for sending me the most recent Newsletter and tickets for the "Christmas Draw".

I now return here with the draw counterfoils and a cheque for the sum of £25 to cover the ticket money plus postage for the Newsletter.

I notice that the name of the late Mr Cuneo features again in the latest issue, it triggers a small anecdote of an incident many years ago.

I had a friend who worked in a Bank and I remember him telling me that before the war he was the officer junior in a branch in

a Thames suburb (no precise names no pack drill). One day he was called to the front door of the office by a customer dressed in riding breeches.

He asked the junior if he would kindly hold his horse by the bridle whilst he came in to conduct his banking.

The customer was Mr Cuneo. It does seem that he was a bit of a character and most certainly a fine artist.

I think he must have been commissioned to paint the War pictures. Where are they? - in the Imperial War Museum perhaps.

**GH Greaves (Ex 231 Coy PC)**



# Younger Days



■ Colonel Cooper, front row, second from left

Picture: RPCA Archive

I VERY much enjoyed the Oct 08 edition of 'The Pioneer'. The publication goes from strength to strength thanks to you and your son's efforts

My congratulations and sincere thanks for all you do on behalf of all serving and ex-Pioneers.

**Gary Cooper**

*(Ed Note: Photographs of this era are always welcome and we are always on the look out for group photographs with a full list of names. Please send them in! We now have over 6000 photographs in the RPCA Archive, which is growing all the time and CD's can be purchased via the RPCA shop.)*

## Professionalism

JUST a few lines to say that I am sorry but I will not be able to attend the Reunion Weekend this year in July as my wife and I will be on holiday celebrating our Ruby wedding anniversary.

It would be appreciated if you could find space to publish the following article of my time serving with the Pioneers in Northern Ireland during the troubles (20 Jun 74 - 15 Jun 76).

"I was posted to Northern Ireland together with my family (wife Sheila, son Christopher and daughter Caroline). My destination was 39 Inf Bde HQ & Sig Regt in Lisburn. My duty was to drive the Brigade Major.

I arrived there not knowing what might greet me and my family with all the unrest in the Province at that time. It was made a lot easier though with my "shot-guns" to

look after me, these being the lads of the Royal Pioneer Corps. They led me through the two years with no problems. They were very professional at all times even when things were not so good. The names that come to mind are Sgt Jim Peters, Cpl Mick Scoggins, Cpl John King, Cpl John Poole, LCpl Dave Hazle, Pte Jock Innis and Pte Steve Earnshaw. These were but a few that got me through what was a very worrying time for my family and I. However, with the expertise of these Pioneers my time in the unit was very good even though we were on call all the time.

We had a few scares but luckily with your professionalism we came through and for this I will always be in your debt. I hope to see some of you again in 2010, good luck to you all."

**Ex Cpl AF Goode Royal Signals 1965-1980**

## Old-time corporal

PLEASE find enclosed my WINNING (M=maybe...?) penance to the Association!

Apologies for missing the reunion this year, things occurred beyond my control. However, next year is pencilled into my schedule.

I was sorry to hear of the passing of Bill

"Taff" Thomas, I worked under him for several years in the Guardroom at Kineton. He was a typical "Old-time" Corporal whom I learnt a lot from as a young prog! My belated condolences to his family.

Regards to all.

**Ross Harrison (Illinois, USA)**

## The Pioneer



■ I'VE relocated the cuneo mouse and now find him on the right hand side drum on the centre page 29 above the badge to the left.

**Mrs Kim R Lunn  
Wife of Ex-Pte  
Mr Tony Lunn**  
*(Ed Note:: Well done, this was particularly hard to find !*

■ I ENCLOSE a cheque for the Raffle tickets sent me with my copy of the Pioneer. I thought this October copy was excellent and congratulate all concerned. With best wishes for Christmas. Yours sincerely,  
**General Sir John Stibbon**  
Vice Patron

■ THANKYOU very much for the tickets for the Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph, I would just like to say that we all had a great day and I think we did the Corps proud. Could I also please request tickets for next year I will of course pass on the names of the personnel that would like to attend and maybe we could have a beer next year and talk over old times in the Corps Kindest regards  
**Neil Taylor**

■ THANKYOU very much for printing 'my story' on page 12 in The Pioneer, October 2008. Very much appreciated. I also found the John Burrows "Prisoner of War" story amazing and rivetting. It could be the basis for a wonderful book! All together, a super issue, thank you.  
**Peter Sinclair**

■ DEAR Norman and all at 23 Regt, Great Reunion. Every year my hangover gets worse! Love it?  
**Jim Huxtable**

■ THANKS for the very quick reply and excellent information. My friend David knew bits of his father's service but this chronology of events really puts things into perspective. We'll send a donation in due course. Thanks very much once again and may I commend you on a great website. I wish I'd forebears in the Regiment!  
**Sheila Cooper**

■ MANY thanks for the latest edition of the RPCA Newsletter which I found interesting. I'm sure everyone appreciates your efforts and hard work that you and Paul put into compiling the Newsletter. Please keep up the good work, and ignore those people who have nothing better to do but complain. Best wishes,  
**Maurice Grange**

come on, send us a mail...

## 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@gmail.com

# Not laughed as much for a very long time

I received the Pioneer Newsletter some time ago, and I have now read Part 1 of Mr Bradley's story "Smokey Joes", and I have not laughed as much for a very long time.

I am looking forward to reading Part 2!

I served in 229 Coy in 1940, transferring to 93 Coy in the beginning of 1941 - I am one of those "Enemy Aliens".

It may interest you that there is a monthly get-together of former "Enemy Aliens" in Golders Green, usually 7 or 8 elderly gents, and we take great pride that we were British soldiers!

All good wishes

**FH Edwards**

(Nearly 87 years of age, British Army Oct 40 to Sep 46. Service numbers 13804175 and 13117570)

# Once again George a very big thankyou

PLEASE find enclosed the draw stubs also we would like to say thanks for the open day on the field.

The wife's favourite is the Tombola tent, I stopped counting when she got to a tenner. Lets hope there can be another one in 2009.

I served from May 73 to May 76, I only intended to do 3 years in the army.

However, I did all kinds of jobs, 'Company Runner' at 522 Coy was a good one.

I ended up at 518 Coy in the Boxing Team. I say team, there was two of us, then one 'me' when Paddy Burke was diagnosed with a hernia.

I won the Light Heavyweight bout in the "Theatre of Dreams" (ha,ha) sorry Garrison Theatre. I would like to say a very big thank you to a Cpl George Turnbull of 522 Coy admin office later to become Captain Turnbull.

It was while I was at CAD Bramley I had to hand in my 18 months notice of leaving the army and the admin office at Bramley was not a nice place for us 'chunks' as the Cannonballs called us.

I was determined to hand it in though no matter what was said to me. But what a relief as I entered that office to see George sat there. I was in and out in less than fifteen minutes with my notice papers signed, once again George a very big thank you.

I would like to end on a note of sadness I don't live too far away from the Nostalgia Group leader. I have probably emptied his bin at some time as I am a refuse collector for Wakefield Council.

I have read the Pioneer websites on many occasions but Allan get real will you.

I once emailed you and I am still waiting for a reply, but I will save you the trouble 'don't bother!'

Yours sincerely

**S Waltong**

# T force story

I WOULD like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your son in editing and compiling the country's finest magazine.

The last issue was exceptional and the account of the 'Smokey Joes' was superb.

The last time I saw them was on the final battle in March 1945 at the crossing of the River Rhine and they did a great job there.

Did you also know that this was the final operation as Smoke Companies No 803, 805, 806, 810, 845 and 846 as they were then deployed in T Force operations in which they fared well and played their part in T (Target) Forces Specialised Branch. I would recommend to anyone interested in these activities that they should purchase

the T Force Story in North West Europe 1944-45. This book can be obtained from the 5th Kings/No 2 T Force Old Comrades Association at the following address: T Wilkinson, 5 Kings/2 T Force OCA, 27 Ferriers Row, Stevenage, Herts SG2 ONW Price £5.99 incl pp

Though at times we as a Company operated on lots of occasions when under fire from the enemy we may have believed it would be easier to be a POW, but after reading the article Prisoner of War I think we were better off being stonked etc.

Well, Norman I will close now but once again wishing you others success in the future. Yours in comradeship

**George Pringle**

# Ammo box pyramid

I WAS reading the Oct Newsletter and thought I should comment on the article "Ammo Box Pyramid" by J. McDonough.

John's description of the event certainly re-enacted what happened and to put John's mind at rest, I was that Junior soldier who stood on the top of the pyramid. I was only 16 at the time serving with the Junior Tradesmen Regt Rhyl so I cannot remember the guys that took part in the display but I'm sure there must be more still alive today, even though it was over 42 years ago. I spent about four weeks at the time "attached" to 206 Coy going through rehearsals at Long Marston and I cannot remember falling of the pyramid, even though I came close a couple of times but

the grand finale was the actual event at the Royal Albert Hall and as we had replaced the usual 25 Pounder race over the obstacles for some reason, the commentator at the time turned our performance into another race to encourage the audience.

I recently mentioned this event to an old lady (she is 89) that I do some gardening for and she could remember the event and she was surprised as I was that "I had managed to stand on all those boxes without falling off", to quote her words.

I recently came across my medal which was presented to the participants after the Festival. Best Regards

**Dave Liptrot MBE MSM**

# Empty ammo boxes

HI, reading through the latest newsletter I noticed an article written by Cpl J RC McDonough, ref AmmoBox Pyramid that they completed at the Royal Albert Hall in 1966.

I would like to comment on the Pioneers again displaying their talents at the same glorious venue but a year later 1967. Under the constant gaze of Captain Estop, two teams of pioneers (old soldiers against young soldiers) were trained to collect a variety of stores, that had been dropped in no man's land, and they had to be retrieved over a river and a wall (a vaulting horse covered in brick patterned wallpaper) safely back to our own lines.

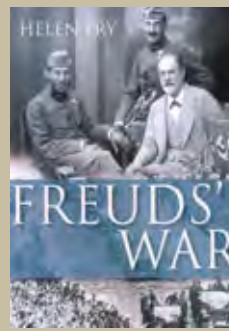
We were practicing/training at CAD Kineton for about two months with the necessary equipment:- ammo boxes, jerry cans, sacks and a 50 gallon water drum all of course as heavy as they should be in real life, so the task was quite difficult especially as we only had a certain time to complete the task in. We were due to stay in London Woolwich Bks for the week, we duly arrived at the Royal Albert Hall, checked and sorted our stores out, on being asked where we could get the water to fill our drums and jerry cans Mr Ralph Reader nearly had a fit, he informed us that under

no circumstances were we to attempt to fill the drums or cans as it was a wooden floor and they did not want it damaged. When you realize that the Royal Albert Hall is a big round affair nearly as deep under the floor as it is high to the ceiling, it would be like doing the display on your bedroom floor. We had to spend a very hectic couple of days practicing with the lighter kit and trying to make it look as hard as it should be if they were indeed full. In the end in true Pioneer spirit we achieved our goal and everybody was satisfied...

Having spent a week completely dry, we managed a pub stop on the way home, and the landlord closed the front door on closing time and allowed us to hold a private party, which was enjoyed by all concerned. Getting onto the coach (driven by a SSgt RAOC) we made a start up the A40 towards CAD Kineton, about half way home it was unanimously decided that a toilet stop was needed, the bus pulls into a shallow layby, we all piled out and standing tightly side by side we all started to get some relief against the side of the bus, when the bus stated to move forward, we were all exposed to the oncoming traffic not being able to turn either way.

**Bob Setterfield**





# Predecessors of the pioneers

Did you know the labour corps consisted of over 500,000 British soldiers

Foreword: Professor Richard Holmes  
Picture: J A Starling

**A** history of the formation and activities of the Labour Corps, the predecessors of the RPC, from their formation and covering their subsequent operations in UK, France, Belgium, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Salonika.

The book covers the provision of labour prior to 1917, the organisation and operations of the Labour Corps and the eventual disbandment on 1921.

The corps consisted of over 500,000 British soldiers and included personnel from China, South Africa, Egypt, India, the West Indies and Fiji.

It includes a section on Honours and Awards as well as advice on how to identify an ancestor's service as well as a number of anecdotes and memoirs.

## Introduction

The twelve months from January 1917 was to be a watershed in the history of military labour in France.

With the creation of the Labour Directorate unskilled labour was brought under one administrative regime. The Directorate was not without problems, as it had to deal with a huge increase in manpower.

During the year the number of British labour from 82,000 to 150,000, PoWs from

20,000 to 70,000 and some 179,000 coloured labourers were to arrive.

The Directorate also had to cope with Officers and men often unfit for the task in hand, also with employing services that saw labour as their personal troops and at the same time meet the demands for support for three major offensives during that year, at Arras in April, Flanders from July to November and Cambrai in November.

**NO LABOUR NO BATTLE: THE LABOUR CORPS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR**  
By J A Starling and Ivor Lee  
Issue date 17 October 2009  
Price £30 (hardback)  
ISBN 10 0752 449753

# Self strength and dedication

Joined the pioneer corps before serving with the graves restoration unit

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**T**HE author: Harry Rossney One of craftsmen who re-built Kitchener Camp; Headquarters of Pioneer Corps in Ilfracombe; then served with 249 and 93 companies; then as a sign-writer to 32 Graves Registration Unit in Normandy.

Harry Rossney, now 87, was born Helmut Rosettenstein in Koenigsberg. Partly brought up in Berlin before coming to England in March 1939. Joined Pioneer

Corps before serving with the Graves Restoration Unit in post D-Day Normandy. "I was not a hero," he said. "I would rather see this in the wider context as a history lesson for the younger generation."

Over the decades, Harry Rossney composed an extraordinary collection of poems which form the basis of a new book "Grey Dawns" written by Harry Rossney and edited by Helen Fry with a forward by the Imperial War Museum. Harry used his creative talent to record for posterity his own experiences of a horific period of

European history, responses and experiences which future generations of historians will be unable to reconstruct from official documentation. With the passing of his generation, the urgency to record such eye-witness accounts becomes ever more pressing. Harry's book is a tribute to his self-strength, and dedication to preserving the memory for the sake of humanity.

**GREY DAWNS**  
By Harry Rossney, Edited by Dr Helen Fry  
ISBN

# Unique insight into Freud's life

Walter initially joined the pioneer corps before joining special operations

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**D**ESPITE his worldwide reputation as the father of modern psychology, Siegmund Freud's security in his native Vienna changed overnight when Hitler's forces annexed Austria on 12 March 1938.

His children had already been burned across Germany, and now he and his family were at immediate risk.

The Nazis carried out regular raids on Jewish families' homes, and the Freuds were no exception.

They suffered a period of house arrest and town months of uncertainty before finally securing papers for emigration to England and making a dramatic, last-minute escape.

Following their escape from Austria, both Siegmund's son Martin and his grandson Walter enlisted in the British Forces, both initially into the Pioneer Corps. Walter later

joined Special Operations Executive and went on to fight for Britain behind enemy lines in Austria.

Using previously unpublished family archives and photographs, including correspondence and Siegmund Freud's diary, the author offers a unique insight into the Freuds' family life, both in pre-War Vienna and during the Second World War.

**FREUDS' WAR**  
By Helen Fry  
ISBN 978-0-7509-5112-8

# Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

## **BICKERDYKE MICK (24137441)**

**Ex Cpl Leeds 28 Nov 09**

Mr N Taylor writes:

Last month Mick was with us as we paid homage to our fallen comrades from conflicts around the globe at the Remembrance Parade in London, he had travelled down to the capital whilst he was very ill and he had put off major surgery to attend. He marched with other members from the corps in immense pain but with pride. This man had so much pride that even though whilst marching with us would not give in to the illness that very soon would take him from us, and so in his own way pay his respects to our nations war dead.

His funeral service and interment took place in his home town of Leeds on the 12th of December 2008 and at the request of his wife his casket was draped with the flag of the RPC Nostalgia Group for his final journey, the service was attended by his loving wife and family and friends from the corps.

Both the RPC Association and the Nostalgia Group websites had published details of his passing and both sites received many messages of condolences and sympathy. These were passed to his wife Wendy by Mr A Sutcliffe. Mick's family had requested family flowers only but donations on Mick's behalf be made to the Royal British Legion.

This was a man with a big heart and a personality that will never be forgotten by us, his friends, and all who had the pleasure of meeting him.

Rest in peace Mick,  
Stand easy

## **McNAMARA FREDERICK GEORGE MAJOR (RETD)** **Ex Sgt (13060818)**

20 Jul 08 (Aged 69)

His wife Sara wrote:

"On leaving the army he worked for Essex County Council and luckily was able to retire at 60.

He managed to fulfil one of his ambitions to travel round New Zealand and Australia in a camper van!"

Fred was RSM in the Int Corps and was commissioned into the RPC in 1975.

He was born on 5 October 1939 and enlisted into the Army on 4 March 1959.

He received a SSC 20th March 1975, SRC 12th December 1980. Was promoted Major on the 30th March 1982.

## **BROWNE GH** **(13109748) Ex Cpl**

Mill Hill 24 Dec 08 (Aged 86)  
served 5 Mar 42 - 14 Feb 47.

Mr Glyn Cooke writes:

I first met George in 1988 at the Duke of Yorks HQ at an Association London Lunch, after that we would meet twice a year. George was called up in 1940 to served his country and was released in 1945. He worked all his working life as a London Postman and retired at the age of 60 - good old George, 26 years retired!

## **ALEXANDER LESLIE WILLIAM** **Ex Pte**

(Aged 78) Newcastle Upon Tyne 1 Oct 08.  
Served 5 Nov 48 - 26 May 50

## **MONTGOMERY MICHAEL** **(13803047) Ex Pte**

Poole 7 Jan 09 (Aged 91) served 14 Sep 40 - 14 Mar 46.

He joined the British Army after leaving the French Foreign Legion.

His name when he enlisted into the Pioneer Corps was Miguel Bon.

On completion of training he served in 1 (Spanish) Company for all his service. On release he married Eileen Montgomery and changed his name to Michael Montgomery. His date of birth on enlistment was shown as 13 Jan 17 which he believed was the correct date.

He found out in the 1970's when he applied for a Spanish Passport that his correct date of birth was actually 24 Jan 17.

## **CLARKE, WALTER** **LT COL (RETD) (235113)**

3 Feb 09 (Aged 89) Norwich. He joined the RPC Association on 21 Mar 59 - nearly 50 years.

Max Homewood writes, "I knew him but never served with him. A most likeable man."

Col (Retd) RF McDonald writes:

I knew Walter Clarke for fifty years having met him for the first time in 1959 when he was the OC 521 Company at Didcot. Then an experienced officer with pre-war service in the RE TA in 1939, war service in Europe, being commissioned into the Pioneer Corps in 1942. Post war appointments took him to North Africa, the Far East and BAOR. He was an impressive man always very approachable, firm, a wise and astute councillor, generous and kind.

For as long as he was able he played a most competitive game of squash and tennis and I was often at the wrong end of a thrashing at squash. He loved cricket, always ensuring his unit team was afforded the extra little bit of time to be successful. Our paths crossed in late years at 13 Group in BAOR and at the Training Centre, Northampton where he was appointed Commandant.

Walter retired in 1974 and for many years worked for Barclays Bank in Northampton. He also worked with SSAFA as a caseworker and Divisional Secretary being well respected in Northampton for his tireless efforts. His passion for rugby and support for Northampton Saints heavily involved him in the administration of the club before the professional era.

He and Kath moved to Holt in Norfolk - his home territory, both joined the USA and were extremely busy with that and their travels to many parts of the world. Even at that distance Walter would drive, until recent years, to Northampton to watch the Saints at home.

Never lost for a word, Walter had an astonishing, almost uncanny capacity of recall, in the greatest of detail, when relating stories of events and characters. It was a facing certainty, if you had the nerve to suggest that you may have heard the story before - that you were going to hear it again.

I was privileged to know Walter for so long and counted him as a great friend. A wonderful family man in every regard. Our deepest sympathy and thoughts go to Kath and the family.

## **RUSSEL LOU** **(232864687) Ex W02 CSM 518 Coy**

Chesterfield 6 Nov 08 (Served 61 - 83)

## **EVANS MC (MEL)**

**(23092828) Ex W01 (RSM) 23 Group RPC**

Wrexham 30 Nov 08 (Served 54 - 79)

## **CHADWICK M SERGEANT** **(24757549) 25 Jan 09 (Aged 36)**

Blackpool. Sgt Chadwick left 23 Pnr Regt RLC last June and was serving at 9 Supply Regt RLC, Wilts

## **NICHOLLES JOHN STANLEY** **Ex Pte (13058686) 31 Jan 09 (Aged 90)**

Tooting. Pte Nicholles served with 173 Coy and landed with the first serials on D-Day. This Coy also helped to build the first 30 Corps bridge across the Rhine in Mar 45.

## **HADDOCK DAVID** **Ex Pte (24175059)**

18 Feb 09 (Aged 58) Worcester

## **KENNY HENRY** **Ex Pte (23297329)**

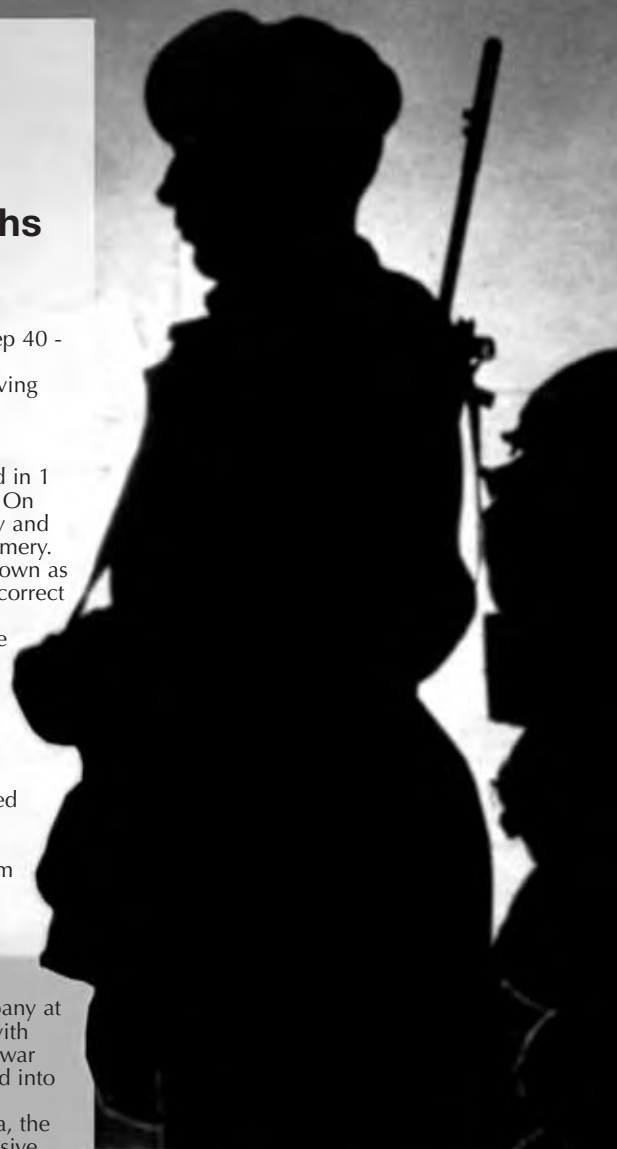
8 Nov 08 (Aged 72) Annan

## **BANKS GARY STEVEN** **Ex Pte (24348692)**

3 Mar 09 (aged 52)  
Served in 9 Sig Regt Cyprus 1974-77

## **MCMULLEN JOHN** **Ex CPL (24031811)**

1 Mar 09 (Aged 62).  
Ex Trg Cpl with Rhine Section





# Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...



**PHOTO 1**  
with the Von Runsteadt offensive we had 5 Pioneers at my parents home: January 1945 Nederbrakel - Belgium  
A local photographer made this picture in his studio. I am in search for relatives . I thank you for your attention and help to identify. see <http://www.blommaert1.be/veterans.html>

**PHOTO 2 - MARK IMPEY**  
Mark Impey (24440613) joined the RPC in 1978, a copy of his Pass Out Photo shows him in the middle row second from left.  
Unfortunately he cannot remember his training section name, i.e. Anzio, Kabrit or Rhine. Can you help? He would also like to contact

people with whom he served.  
Contact:  
pikeymark@yahoo.co.uk

**JOHN JOSEPH MCNEILL**  
Hello, I am looking for information of my late father that served his national service with the Pioneers.  
His name is John Joseph McNeill, 23427413, he was posted at Wrexham from the 24 October 1957 and finished 22 October 1959 and served at Lancaster for some of the time from where he probably finished his service. He originated from Stockton on Tees .His discharge book has a stamp in it from South Littleton near Evesham,Worcs,196 company. I would appreciate any information from old friends of his or any where else

i could find out more of my Dad. Thank You Chris McNeill

**RICKY MCGRATH**  
Dave Kerr is trying to locate LCpl Ricky McGrath from the Bristol area and Scouse Kwantrang. Please contact DKerr251@aol.com

**VETERANS WANTED**  
David Caldwell-Evans is writing an article about the kind of learning disabilities and conditions which, though disqualifying men for service in other branches of the armed forces or in the armed sections of the Pioneer Corps, enabled them to be retained for service in the Unarmed Sections (or B Sections) during World War Two.  
He recently discovered that

epileptics were among those recruited for these Sections. He is hoping to discover more about the experiences of such men and if possible track down Pioneer Corps veterans who either served in Unarmed Sections or in Armed Sections working alongside them. If you could provide any information which may help him please contact the RPC Association.

**ROBERT JAMES DELABERTOUCHE**  
Beverly Cuthbert is trying to locate 2443841 Robert James DeLaBertouche.  
He was in 518 coy in 1978 and 3 Armd Div HQ and Signal Reg BFPO 106 in 1979, it is understood that he was discharged in the mid-eighties and moved to Wales. Please contact RPC Association

# Pioneer Humour

Send in your war stories, and they might end up here!

**THE LIZZARD MAN**  
By Pte DL Gavin (24471407)

Whilst serving in Belze with 518 Coy in June 1978 one of our first tasks was erecting a fence around the Officers' Quarters. We had nearly finished work when I saw a large lizzard and caught it.  
I put a lead on him and hid it in one of the boxes on the side of our lorry.  
At the end of the day I retrieved it and walked the lizzard to our billet to show the guys, they cracked up as I walked down to the NAAFI. I was stopped by a Lance Corporal from the Guardroom. He ordered me to put the lizzard back from where I had got it from, so I did back in the lorry.  
The next day I again got the lizzard from the lorry unfortunately the same Lance Corporal saw me and put me on a charge.  
On the day of my orders I explained that he had told me to put it back were I had got the lizzard from which I had done - the truck. He had not said to put it back around the Officers' Quarters where I had originally got it from.  
It was laughed out of Court. Sgt Searchfield could not believe I had been put on orders for some lizzard. The Lance

Corporal must have felt about 2 feet tall. We certainly had a good laugh that day.

**NEWFOUNDLAND JUDGE**  
In Newfoundland there used to be a judge who made frequent references to his own military service and how it would benefit many of the young accused.

A Lawyer who often appeared before him had an old man up for the first time, but for a serious offence for which there was no real mitigation.  
Counsel: Perhaps your honour could consider my client's war record. He fought in the North Africa campaign and was wounded in Normandy on D-Day itself, in an action for which he won a medal for his bravery.  
Judge: Well, it is a serious offence, but it's your first, and we old soldiers must stick together. Conditional discharge.  
Defendant: Danke! Danke schoen.

**CONVICT IN A HOLE**  
If it takes a man a day to dig a hole how long does it take the convict shown to dig half a hole? Answer: if it is Billy digging it will take forever!





# And finally...

Ending on a lighter note, some extracts from case workers reports

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: QM Stores 27 Coy RPC

**I**n the last Newsletter we published some extracts from Confidential Reports, this edition we are publishing extracts received from the case-workers report when requesting benevolence:

- She is incontinent and is due a new set of dentures.
- Client would also benefit from a urinal bottle and a vegetable peeler.
- Since her fall last year she has been unable to get out of her bath.
- He has a very bad weight problem and is under the doctor, it could be a hormonal problem.
- She had to resort to porn, using her jewellery, to raise enough money to pay the bill.
- This is a difficult case and when I eventually finished my visit, my head was spinning. A lot of the financial information was so difficult to sort out, I did my best! I must add here, there were two large dogs roaming around and a budgie that could talk for England. It was not easy to extract all the needed information.
- The bungalow is beginning to show signs of tiredness and it - and he (85 year old applicant) - would benefit from a paint job.
- I write to ask for your assistance in providing Mr Smith with rent arrears.
- Both hips have been replaced with diabetes and angina.

**R**EMEMBER 23 Pioneer wristbands are only a £1 each and are available from Royal Pioneer Corps Association. All profits go to the Welfare Fund 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC to support families whilst troops are deployed on their operational tours. Support our troops, buy and then wear a wristband with pride. ■



## Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Viewpoint
- Photo Gallery
- Reviews
- News from 23 & 168 Pioneer Regiments
- Another unpublished complete story
- Letters





Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown



Picture: Norman Brown