

the



the newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

Pioneer



October 2010

www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk

REUNION WEEKEND

Pages 4 & 5



Reunion Weekend
Page 4



Afghanistan
Page 9



Vets vs Regs
Page 30



Reunion Weekend
Page 31

PLEASE
SUPPORT THE
CHRISTMAS
DRAW

Full details
on Page 3



■ Everyone appears to be happy at the Reunion Weekend (and the bar is not yet open!)

Picture: Paul Brown



Front Cover

Pte Joof in National Service dress during Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown



Back Cover

Pte Malupiya, LCpl Morgan, Pte Heath, Pte Joof and LCpl Wood displaying uniforms over the years at Reunion Weekend.

Picture: Paul Brown

SINCE the last newsletter was published a long list of former members of the Corps who have sadly passed away is shown on page 65. Some of these were well known figures who served the Corps well i.e. Maj Bob Holmes and Captain Tony Reynolds who on retirement ran the Association for some 12 years. Some fought with the Corps during World War 2 and others served in later years. Our condolences go to the families and friends of all.

After that depressing start it is pleasing to report that membership of the Association is still increasing. At the time of writing some 69 members have joined the Association this year, five of these actually served in World War 2 and fifteen served in the 1950's. A lot of these new members have come to light because of Facebook and through our website (www.royalpioneercorps.co.uk), however, there are many more who served in the Corps but did not join the Association and also many who are members but we do not at present hold a current address. If you come into contact with any ex Corps members ask if they receive the Newsletter, if not please send their address to me.

It is also pleasing to report that many members are now informing the Association when they move address. The last distribution of the Newsletter resulted in only 15 being returned from a distribution of over 2,450 - this must be a record.

Once again the Pioneer Reunion Weekend has been and gone, but certainly not forgotten. What a weekend! We had the largest attendance on record with between 450 and 500 members turning up - 270 of which had requested a bed. Unfortunately we had to accommodate approximately 50 at St George's Barracks. The accommodation staff of 23 Pioneer Regiment are to be congratulated for their hard work in arranging this.

Plans are already underway for next year's Reunion, if you have any suggestions/ideas on how things could be improved we will be glad to hear from you.

This edition again contains many articles from members, we are always requiring new material. If you have anything which you consider interesting to other members please send it in. Do not worry about grammar or spelling we will edit it for you.

With this Newsletter you will, as usual, receive tickets for the Christmas Draw (unless you have already indicated that you are unable to sell them). It would be appreciated if you would give this your fullest support. We know that there are many causes requiring your hard earned money (especially in these difficult times!) but our two Draws per year help to keep the Association going.

Finally may I give a huge thank you to 23 Pnr Regt RLC for their support during the year.

Norman Brown



CONTENTS | OCTOBER 2010

- 3 Editorial**
Editorial and Contents
- 4 News / Past Events / Future Events**
Latest news with details of past and future events, including the reunion weekend
- 16 A Wartime Log**
The wartime diary of Captain Al Hale
- 22 The Erinpura-Basotho Tragedy**
How 633 Basotho soldiers of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps lost their lives
- 24 The National Arboretum**
A living tribute to the wartime generations of the twentieth century
- 25 From Aberdare to Albacete**
Wartime service in the Pioneer Corps after fighting in the Spanish Civil War.
- 28 Photo Gallery**
Mixture of photographs
- 36 A Military Gypsy**
Memoirs of Lt Col CC Davey, written for his family.
- 54 AGM Minutes**
Minutes from the AGM held on 3 July 2010
- 55 Lost Trails**
Can you locate these people
- 56 Blast from the Past**
Can you supply dates and any other information
- 57 Letters to the Editor**
We welcome your letters and views
- 60 Book Reviews**
Three book reviews
- 62 Last Post**
May they rest in peace
- 65 RPC Association Shop**
Please place your Christmas orders now
- 66 And Finally...**
Update on Pte Campbell, a missing mouse and the death of Norman Wisdom



6



11



24



31



8

Registered Charity Number
1024036

Patron
HRH The Duke of Gloucester
KG GCV0

Vice Patrons
General Sir John Stibbon KCB OBE
Major General G W Field CB

President
Brigadier H J Hickman CBE

Chairman
Colonel A Barnes TD JP

Controller / Editor
Norman Brown Esq

Design / Photography
Paul Brown

☎ telephone
01869 360694

✉ fax
01869 360695

✉ email
royalpioneercorps@gmail.com

➔ website
www.royalpioneercorps.co.uk

📘 facebook group
www.tinyurl.com/b82ste

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

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



PAST EVENTS



■ LT COL J Starling, Mr D Bryant and Mr N Brown attended a special event at the Imperial Museum War Museum on 25 April 2010.

Dr Helen Fry was in conversation with Hermi Rothman, the last surviving German-speaking interrogator in the British Army, who was part of the team that found and translated Hitler's political and personal wills in 1945. His book "Hitler's Will" was reviewed in the April 2010 Newsletter.

■ MR I Dewsnap, Mr and Mrs P Tubridy and Mr N Brown attended Founder's Day at the Royal Hospital and watched our one In-Pensioner Micky Hull go through his paces on the Parade - according to ex SSgt Paddy Tubridy he marches better now than when he was serving! It must be the practice he receives daily as he marches round Chelsea Hospital delivering the mail. Colonel Mark Baker was also on parade for his first time as a Captain of Invalids.

The oldest pensioner on parade was a sprightly 93 years old and to watch these old soldiers keeping in step is a wonderful sight.

Following the parade a garden party, with entertainment, is held on the lawns of the hospital.

There are currently 303 In-Pensioners in the Royal Hospital. The oldest In-Pensioner is 98 and the average age is 82 years and 6 months. 164 In-Pensioners fought in the Second World War. There are currently vacancies in the Hospital, details can be found on the Hospital website.

■ MR Paul Whitehead attended the 70th Lancastria Anniversary Pilgrimage to France on 17 June and writes: I attended the 70th Anniversary Pilgrimage in France in June and was able to find my Great Grandfather's (Herbert Clark) grave over there.

He was in the Pioneer Corps - 73 Company - you had already sent me some details and recommended books to read, from these I was able to find out where he was buried and able to arrange this trip. I was taken out on a boat laid on by the French to the wreck-site of the Lancastria.

Thanks also for Jimmy Atkins details - I was able to speak to him before I left.

I have enclosed some pictures of the memorial and marker buoy.

■ LT COL J Starling and Mr N Brown attended the book Launch of the book "Special Operations - From Music to Morse" at the Royal Commonwealth Club, London on 17 June 2010.

A review of this book is shown on page 61.

■ MEMBERS of RPC Association (Northampton Branch) visited Simpson Grange (former site of Simpson Barracks) Northampton on 19 June 2010.

This brought back many happy memories to both ex members of the Corps and civilian staff who worked at the Barracks. They then walked the short distance to the Queen Eleanor for a meal, a drink and a chat about old times.

This will now probably become an annual event in the Branch's calendar, details will be published in the Branch Newsletter.

Reunion weekend

Over 100 cases of mangers cider were drunk!



■ Sgt Lesley and Mr George Pringle share a joke

Picture: Paul Brown

ONCE AGAIN we were very lucky with the weather which over the weekend can only be described as perfect. Not only very sunny but also thankfully very warm. Ex Pioneers started to arrive in the early hours of Fri 2 July (the first one, who had travelled from Scotland, arrived at 0200 hrs) and by lunchtime over 100 had already turned up surprising the Chefs in the Dining Room, who still managed to feed all quickly and efficiently.

The first event in the programme was the usual "Bring a Boss" held in the Corporals Club. By the time this commenced a further 150 ex Pioneers had arrived and the Club was therefore packed. Luckily with the weather being so good the lawns and even the car park were used as over-spill. Here members met friends and acquaintances some of whom they had not seen for many years. Those attending for the first time were

quickly made to feel at ease and quite a few commented, even at this early stage in the weekend, that they wished they had attended in previous years!

270 ex Pioneers had requested a bed for the weekend which must be a record. The QM's accommodation staff worked extremely hard to ensure that everyone was accommodated. Unfortunately about 50 had to move to St George's Barracks, which as those who know the Bicester area is some six miles away. However, two mini-buses were provided for them during the weekend, this saved any problems with drink driving and tiredness.

At approx 1800 hrs personnel started to move down the hill to the Sergeants' Mess where a Fish and Chip Supper was held. The bar proved extremely popular and kept the staff busy. Here most personnel sat and chatted on the mess lawns. It is estimated that about 40 ex Pioneers attended for the first time (or the first time



■ Members pay their respects at the Church Service during Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown

since the old Northampton days). Here they met old comrades and were soon reminiscing about old times. Many were still reminiscing at 0430 hrs!

Saturday morning gave everyone a chance to have a lie-in as the form up for the Church Service was not until 1030 hrs. Outside the dining room, the form-up point, more 'war' stories were exchanged.

Once the march-on commenced ex-Drill Sergeant Ian Dewsnap did his best to control the largest contingent ever for the march to the War Memorial. Many spectators later in the day commented on how smart they looked and how well they kept in step. The contingent was led by Alan Fawcett and Ginge Hurdman both carrying Association Standards.

During the service it was obvious that the unit Padre had prepared his sermon well as he showed a remarkable knowledge of the Corps' history. This was well received by all the veterans. Wreaths were laid, as usual, by a member of the Association and a young soldier from 23 Pioneer Regiment.

Following the Church Service the "Old Comrades" marched past the Regimental Headquarters where the COs' of 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments together with the acting Chairman of the RPC Association, Lt Col J Starling, received a very smart 'eyes left'. Again the standard of drill was very high.

The usual group photograph was then held on the steps of the Officers' Mess (the only location on camp where this can be achieved). A slow walk to the dining room followed where the Association Annual General Meeting was held the Minutes of which are shown on page 54). Our Chairman, Col A Barnes, was unable to attend the Weekend as his TA duties kept him fully occupied. Lt Col John Starling took the chair.

Following lunch everyone made their way to the sports field for the afternoons activities. This consisted of a range of displays, exhibitions and games provided by each Squadron in the Regiment and the second Veterans v Regiment Football Match was held. Unfortunately the Regiment again won, although this time by a much smaller margin (3-1). Thanks go to the Veterans Team Captain, Keith Burrows in arranging and organising this event. The Veterans are already planning revenge next year.

At 1730 hrs the music started and with two live groups and a disco this continued until 0230 hrs. During the evening a BBQ was held and the Regimental Chefs once again did a marvellous job in feeding over 450 personnel.

The two bars on the sports field did a brisk trade selling between them over 100 cases of Magners cider (1,200 bottles!). I can assure all those Greens out there that

every bottle went for recycling! At the end of the evening the field looked like a disaster zone but by 1100 hours the following day it had been cleared. A special thanks must go to WO2 Colin Bell (SSM 144 Sqn) who stood in at the last minute and volunteered to plan and manage the lay-out of the field.

Unfortunately only two of our World War 2 veterans could attend this year as one took ill just before the event, we wish him a speedy recovery. It was nice to see Micky Hull, our In-Pensioner, in his scarlet jacket once again chatting up the Ladies!

Some personnel had travelled many miles to attend the Reunion; especially Mr Tony Simm from Denmark and Mr Frank Lyle from Ireland. Many came down from Scotland and the north of England. I have received many emails and letters from personnel stating how much they enjoyed the weekend and who are already looking forward to next year. Some of these are shown on page 59.

We are always looking at ways to improve the Reunion Weekend and suggestions are always welcome. We as an Association are very lucky in having 23 Pioneer Regiment to host the event. Many Associations now have to use hotels and these can be very expensive and most hotels could not manage the high numbers which now attend.

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE FIELD of Remembrance** will open on Thursday 11 November 2010 at 1100 hours, when a short service will be held.

Members attending the planting of crosses at the Corps Plot (Plot 171 - please note new plot number and also a possible change of location) are asked to arrive before 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 daily from 9am to 5.30pm Saturday 13 Nov 2010.

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

■ A LONDON lunch will follow the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 11 November 2010.

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

Attendance at this Lunch has increased steadily in the last few years, and new faces are always welcome.

After Lunch we normally accompany our In-Pensioner Micky Hull back to Chelsea not only to make sure he gets home safely but as an excuse to have a drink in his bar with other In-Pensioners who always have some enjoyable yarns to spill!

Booking can be made to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Bus, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

■ **ONCE AGAIN** the RPC Association has been allocated 30 tickets for the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall on Sunday 14 November 2010.

Attendees should be on parade (on Horseguards) by 1010 hrs ready to march onto Whitehall.

Twenty two of these tickets have already been allocated but any Member who wishes to attend should apply to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Bus, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF. The tickets are allocated on a first come first served basis.

Following the march it has become the custom for a large number to have lunch and then a leisurely chat (with one or two beers) during the afternoon in the nearby Civil Service Club in Old Scotland Yard.

This year we are going to put a large L and R on Paddy McPhillips' shoes, this might help him to keep in step as marchers who have attended in the last few years are convinced that he does not know which is his Left and which is his Right.

■ **THE NORTHAMPTON** Branch of the Association will once again be holding a Christmas Function.

No date or location has yet been arranged but it will probably be in January 2011 when bookings are much cheaper!

Details will be circulated to Branch members in a Newsletter. If you live in the Northampton area and are not on the distribution list for these please contact Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Bus, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

Operation Dynamo

70th anniversary commemorations in dunkirk



■ 206 Squadron (top), On the Beach (left), Massacre Barn (right)

Picture: Norman Brown

ON Thursday 27 May 2010 a party from 206 Sqn, 23 Pnr Regt RLC (with Mr N Brown as a passenger) left Bicester in the early hours to travel to Dover to join other military units, military vehicles (new and vintage) and military re-enactors to join a Norfolk Line ferry at Calais and travelled to Dunkirk to participate in the 70th Anniversary of Operation Dynamo.

During the next few days the party attended many memorial services, the first on Friday 28th May was at the British Memorial in Dunkirk. The memorial was designed by Philip Hepworth, the War Graves Commission's principal architect for France after the Second World War. The names of the dead are engraved on a series of rectangular columns on either side of a broad avenue which leads to a shrine containing the memorial registers. At the back of the shrine, facing the entrance, a window of engraved glass designed by John Hutton shows scenes from the evacuation. The memorial was unveiled by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother on 29 June 1957 and contains the names of over 400 Pioneers who lost their lives during the period of Operation Dynamo. In the Dunkirk War Cemetery there are also ten Pioneer Graves.

The party also visited "La plaine au

Bois" at Esquelbecq the site of the massacre of 80 British and 1 French soldiers by the SS.

Dunkirk and the Fall of France 1940

The war was already eight months old when the Germans finally launched the western offensive that would see Holland, Belgium and France subdued in little more than six weeks, and thousands of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) snatched dramatically from the beaches of Dunkirk only hours ahead of the German advance.

The French and British had used the months of 'phony war' to prepare for the assault that was sure to come. Defences stretched from the Maginot Line to the sea and most of the ten division BEF under the command of General Lord Gore had been on the Franco-Belgium border since October 1939. The Dutch and Belgians, though retaining their neutrality, had also mobilised their armies and were prepared. But the Allied defensive plans, which looked back to the last German invasion in 1914 and relied heavily on assumptions about pace and movement, would prove woefully inadequate in the face of the New German Blitzkrieg, or 'lightning war' tactics, with their innovative use of tanks and mechanised and airborne troops.

The blow finally fell on 10 May 1940, the day Winston Churchill became Prime



■ WO2 Hussain taking parade (top left), German Emplacements (top left), Dunkirk Beaches (main)

Picture: Norman Brown

Minister in Britain, when the Germans launched a series of daring and ingenious attacks on targets in Holland and Belgium. The French and British armies were drawn forward from the border to meet them, but it was further south, where the defences were at their weakest, that the breakthrough would come. In the first tank battle of the war, German armoured panzer divisions surged through the Ardennes to break through the French line between Dinant and Sedan on 13 May, splitting the Allied armies in two. In the following days, events escalated with alarming and devastating speed.

Dismayed by the momentum of the German thrust for the coast, the Allies missed crucial opportunities to counter-attack and close the breach in their line. Lines of communications were in disarray and the rear areas were in chaos, choked with fleeing refugees.

The Dutch, overwhelmed in the north, had surrendered on 15 May, and the French and British, now joined by the Belgians, were falling back to new defensive positions. When the Germans reached the Channel coast at the mouth of the Somme on 20 May, this northern Allied Force was left cut off and in danger of encirclement.

The Germans were themselves surprised at the speed of their advance and were beginning to sense the dangers of over extension when General Gort launched an unexpected counter-attack on the German flank near Arras on 21 May. Though not successful, the attack made the Germans cautious and

influenced their decision to halt the advance of their panzers between 24 and 27 May. This was to prove of crucial importance in the evacuation to come.

On 25 May, with the ring closing around the Allied force in the north and with the Belgian army to the north-east close to collapse, General Gort decided that the time had come to withdraw the BEF to the Channel ports to be taken off by sea. The garrisons at Boulogne and Calais, through resisting grimly, would soon be overwhelmed and so, fighting desperate rearguard actions, the main body of the BEF fell back on Dunkirk.

On the other side of the English Channel preparations for the evacuation, known as Operation Dynamo, were in the hands of Vice-Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey, Flag Officer Commanding Dover. It began on the evening of 26 May, but it soon became clear that the few destroyers and other naval vessels at his disposal would not be enough to clear the thousands of British and French soldiers already waiting on the beaches and harbour at Dunkirk, and the thousands more still making their way there. In the following days these vessels were joined by a huge, makeshift fleet of trawlers, passenger ferries, pleasure steamers, yachts and countless other privately owned craft – the ‘little ships’ – which plied back and forth across the Channel. By the early hours of 3 June 338,226 men, more than 140,000 of them French and Allied, were got away. By 4 June Dunkirk was in German hands. About 200 vessels had been sunk and RAF Fighter

Command, which supported the operation, had lost more than 100 aircraft.

To the south of the German ‘wedge’ the three British divisions remaining in France fought on, but soon they too were forced to fall back for evacuation from points ever further west and south as the relentless German advance took out port after port: St Valery, Le Havre, Cherbourg, Brest, St Nazzaire, Nantes. On 25 June, the day hostilities in France ended, the last British troops sailed from Bayonne and St Jean de Luz, in the south of the French Atlantic seaboard.

All the BEF’s tanks, large guns, vehicles and equipment were left behind in France, but in all 368,491 British troops were successfully evacuated. Losses were more than 68,000 killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

One of the most accurate judgements on the miracle of Dunkirk was made by Winston Churchill during his speech to Parliament on 4 June. The tone of the speech was generally upbeat, and concentrated on Churchill’s confidence that any Nazi invasion of Britain would be defeated, but Churchill did strike one note of caution – “We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations”. Operation Dynamo saved the experienced professional core of the British army from total destruction, but it did nothing to prevent the fall of France. Only in the context of a much longer war than was expected in Paris or Berlin by the end of June 1940 did the evacuation from Dunkirk take on its true significance.

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE UK State Pension** changed on 6 April 2010.

People over 55 or who have recently retired may need to take action now to make sure they don't miss out on money for their future.

For more information on how the State Pension is changing visit the Direct.Gov website
www.direct.gov.uk/pensions

State Pension can be claimed if a person lives outside the UK. However, they'll only receive any index-linked increases if they live in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland or in a country with which the UK has a social security agreement that includes increasing state pensions.

The spouses and civil partners of Service personnel who are accompanying the partner on an overseas posting can now claim National Insurance credits to help protect their future State Pension entitlement, but they must remember to take action when the accompanied posting ends. These credits are only available for time spent overseas since April 2010.

■ **SECOND WORLD War** veterans can still benefit from a Lottery-funded scheme, enabling them to revisit the places where they served their country.

The Big Lottery Fund pledged to fund World War 2 veterans resident in the UK and Republic of Ireland to make commemorative trips to mark anniversaries throughout 2009 and 2010.

Funding is also available for a carer or spouse and widows and widowers of veterans can also apply. Grants have been provided through the Heroes Return 2 programme to nearly five thousand veterans.

The Heroes Return 2 programme will fund trips to Second World War theatres of war around the globe, such as Arnhem, Burma, Libya and the Far East. Funding is not means-tested and applicants can apply for a fixed amount grant of between £150 and £5,500 depending on the number of people partaking and the chosen destination.

Veterans must have travelled by 31 December 2010, although claims can be made retrospectively until 31 January 2011.

For more information contact: Heroes Return 2 Helpline on 0845 0000 121 or visit
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn

■ **NEW FORCES news website goes live.** A brand new hub for Forces news, the British Forces News website, went live in August.

British Forces News is on the hour on British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) Radio, and has a flagship half-hour news magazine on BFBS TV every weeknight. But now you can access the stories at any time on the British Forces News website.

News stories will be posted throughout the day so you can go to the website at any time to get up-to-date Forces news.

Visit the website to find out more
www.bfbs.com/news

■ **THE MOD Medal Office** has moved. Their new address is: MOD Medal Office G36, Innsworth House, Imjin Barracks, Gloucester. GL3 1HW.

Advanced search

Latest news from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC



■ Squadron Mural at Forward Operating Base Musal Quala DC

Picture: Supplied

WITH THE escalating use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by insurgents in AFGHANISTAN the Army has been pressurised into increasing the number of troops trained in the finding and disposal of them.

Whilst of course all troops are now being educated in the dangers of IEDs and how to find them, there is a requirement for specifically trained "Advanced Searchers." Advanced Search is required for situations where a high threat is present (e.g. known presence of IEDs) or high assurance (e.g. visit of VIP) is necessary.

Traditionally Advanced Search fell to the Royal Engineers (RE); a throw back to WW2 where their knowledge of construction and buildings made them suited to finding unexploded devices following air raids, as they were able to assess how to sure a building prior to

search (often working alongside members of the RPC). When the troubles in Northern Ireland began this ability to Search was adapted to look for the Hides and Caches where weapons and explosives were being hidden. As the terrorists moved to using IEDs the requirement for search increased, the Royal Engineers (supporting RAOC) became entrapped in a Cat and Mouse game as search techniques and equipment tried to keep up with the constantly evolving threat.

The Royal Engineers established the National Search Centre (NSC) in CHATHAM, Kent; where all Advanced Searchers and Search Advisors are trained, Search Advisors (Sgt – Capt) completing a five week course and their Search Team (Team Comd, Team Scribe and four Searchers) completing a four week course. Whilst technology and equipment will always continue to develop, the



■ 206 Sqn (background), Mine Clearance (top left), Blow up Mastiff (top right), IED (b.left), 2000lb Bomb (bcentre), Detonating IED (b.right)

Pictures: Supplied

techniques, processes and mindset required for search remains largely the same. Search Advisors are taught to examine the factors affecting the threat and summarise them for their Search Team, providing them with a systematic and intelligence driven way to search an area.

23 Pnr Regt has been tasked with providing four Search Advisors and Teams for Operation HERRICK every six months for the immediate future; these 28 men will be detached to the Counter IED Task Force (C-IED TF) for the duration of their build up training and operational tour.

Following training at the NSC every soldier is required to complete Pre-Deployment Training (PDT); consisting of a series of courses, exercises and ranges, most of these are not Search focused but instead concentrate on the soldiering skills required to survive and operate in AFGHANISTAN. By the time deployment comes everyone will have completed the mandatory briefs and range packages (recently updated to be more operationally relevant) and the C-IED TF Mission Rehearsal Exercise; many will also be required to become trained Drivers on equipment such as MASTIFF and the new QUAD BIKE. PDT will be anything but boring!

Currently there are two Search Teams deployed and 518 Pnr Sqn are nearing the end of their PDT and will soon deploy to relieve them. 522 Pnr Sqn are beginning the PDT cycle and will deploy in the Spring to be relieved by 187 Pnr Sqn late in 2011.

Whilst this new role for the Regiment clearly has its dangers, those chosen so far have remained completely professional demonstrating yet again that the Pioneer Soldier is flexible and employable in many different roles.

206 Pioneer Squadron, 19 Brigade Mastiff Group, Op HERRICK 10, Mar-Oct 2009

Lt R Wotherspoon, 6 Troop Comd

On 9 March 2009, 110 men from 206 Pioneer Squadron arrived at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Ahead of them lay a 6 month deployment as 19 Light Brigade's Mastiff Group, a largely unfamiliar role and one that had never before fallen to a Royal Logistic Corps unit. The Squadron was to be split between two locations; 5 troop, under 2Lt Wilson and Sgt Dacey, were tasked to Battlegroup South (BG(S)) at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Delhi in Garmser, whilst Squadron Headquarters (SHQ), 6, 7 and 8 Troops were to be utilised by Battle Group (North West) (BG(NW)) in Musa Qa'lah.

After a hectic but thorough in-theatre training package and a brief period of battle prep, the troops departed Camp Bastion, somewhat tentatively, for their respective destinations. Both journeys passed without major incident and both parts of the Squadron began to settle into their new surroundings. In both cases, area familiarisation and getting into routine was the order of the day; with the previous Mastiff Group having returned to Bastion some 4 weeks earlier, the outlying

FOBs and Patrol Bases (PBs) were in urgent need of resupply. In BG(NW), three additional and unexpected tasks were also handed to the Squadron; BG Quick Reaction Force (QRF), consisting of a Troop on 15 minutes notice to move at all times, the manning of the outlying HIMAL Observation Post (OP), another Troop task, and FOB Edinburgh force protection duties, which occupied another 3 mastiffs – an already busy tour had just become even more challenging!

April saw 5 Troop take part in their first large scale deliberate operation, supporting the 1 Rifles BG on a strike operation into a known Taliban stronghold. Mastiff once again proved itself to be a valuable asset in providing firepower and protected mobility to dismounted troops and 5 Troop proved themselves to be highly capable operators, gaining the confidence and respect of their infantry counterparts. In Musa Qa'lah, it was proving to be a testing month. The rain had arrived with a vengeance, making mobility increasingly difficult and the 6 feet deep flood waters rendered the Wadi, which had to be crossed to get to most outlying PBs, impassable for much of the time. April 1st ended up being no laughing matter as the QRF (which at the time was 6 Troop) had their first major incident to deal with. Shortly after nightfall, a soldier from 2 Royal Gurkha Rifles BG at PB Woqab suffered serious leg injuries as a result of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast and required immediate evacuation. What might have been a

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE MOD** has improved the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).

The period in which anyone injured in service can claim compensation was extended in August 2010 from five to seven years from point of diagnosis as part of a series of changes to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

The change, which came into effect on 3 August, is one of several to be introduced following the recommendations from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Review, carried out by former Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral the Lord Boyce last year.

The Review, which was assisted by an independent scrutiny group which included Service charities, medical experts, serving personnel and veterans, announced its recommendations for improvements in February this year.

Further information is available through a number of AFCS communications products. These can be downloaded via the SPVA website www.veterans-uk.info

■ **A NEW** service, part funded by the MOD, to help bereaved Armed Forces families through the inquest process was launched in July by The Royal British Legion.

Independent Inquest Advice provides free, independent and expert legal advice and assistance from professionally qualified lawyers to support bereaved Service families through what can be a confusing and frustrating process at an already difficult and painful time.

For further information email ila@britishlegion.org.uk or call 020 3207 2144 or 020 3207 2137

■ **THE ROYAL Hospital Chelsea** is not owned by the Government and has to use its own resources to maintain and refurbish and modernise the Chelsea Pensioners' accommodation and facilities.

The Chelsea Pensioners' Appeal charity was established to enable the Royal Hospital to raise funds for this vital modernisation process that will enable it to make the RHC a fitting home for Chelsea Pensioners in the 21st century and beyond.

Phase 1 has been completed on time and on budget and has delivered the splendid Margaret Thatcher Infirmary which was officially opened by the Appeal's Patron, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, in the presence of Baroness Thatcher, in March 2009.

Phase 2 has just been completed and has given 34 Chelsea Pensioners a new home in the new style en-suite berths of Long Wards 23/24 which was officially opened on 10 Jun 10 by the Duke of Gloucester.

Phase 3 has started and seeks to modernise the remaining berths in the main East and West Wings.

With a total projected cost of £30M this financial challenge is nearly as great as the one they have just completed.

Many supporters have already started to rally round and make gifts to the Appeal fund, but they have a long way to go.

To find out how you can help the Appeal or to receive more information about the plans or make a donation please contact: davidhellens@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk



■ **Pte Wild** (with pipe), **Pte Wookey** (middle), **Lt Ryan Byrne** (standing)

Picture: Supplied

relatively straight forward operation was made all the worse by the terrain, in particular the flooded Whadi, and it proved to be a very long and testing night for all involved. LCpl Sharp's efforts as a Team Medic, in particular, are worthy of note as he was later cited by the Senior Medical Officer as having directly contributed to the survival of the casualty and was awarded a Brigade Commanders Commendation for his actions on that night. On 8 April, the Squadron suffered its first IED strike, with Call Sign (C/S) Titanium 20 (T20) commanded by Lt Wotherspoon being contacted by a device whilst returning from a routine search operation. All of the crew were unhurt, if a little shaken, but this incident was to set the tone for things to come in the BG(NW) area.

The start of May brought with it the end of the poppy harvesting season and the resultant escalation in Taliban activity. In addition to the routine resupply and patrol

tasks, both elements of the Squadron were involved in notable deliberate operations. In BG(S), 5 Troop provided much needed support to a large Operational Mentoring & Liaison Team (OMLET) strike operation onto a Taliban stronghold close to the notorious Lakari Bazaar. Even at this early stage of the tour, BG(S) was proving to have the lion's share of the kinetic activity within Helmand Province. BG(NW) on the other hand, had by far and away the greatest IED threat and another of the Squadron's vehicles succumbed to a strike. C/S T0D, commanded by Captain Fletcher (Squadron Administration Officer), was contacted by a device during the early stages of Operation MAR LEWE, a BG level operation designed to push the southern Forward Line of Enemy Troops (FLET) back beyond the village of Yatimchay and allow 2 new PBs to be constructed. The Squadron played a major role in the success of the operation, providing protected mobility and fire



■ Troops arriving at FOB Edinburgh

Picture: Supplied

support for the dismounted troops and acting as force protection for the Logistic convoys and Engineer construction teams.

With the new Mk 2 Mastiff's having arrived at Bastion in early June, both elements of the Squadron made the long trip back to swap their trusted but weary Mk 1 vehicles over. This week-long equipment care period also allowed for some much needed and well earned downtime, with the novelty of cold drinks and warm showers being greatly appreciated by all concerned. 5 Troop returned to FOB Delhi to support a Light Dragoons BG operation in Bashram that saw 10 days of intense close quarter fighting. The troop once again acquitted themselves admirably, not only operating from their vehicles but also occupying and defending compounds against a determined Taliban force. The balance of the Squadron returned to Musa Qa'lah and, thanks to Cpl Fisher's route selection, set a new record time for the journey, knocking 9 hours off their original time.

July saw things become a little hotter, in all respects. As the mercury soared past the 50°C mark, the Brigade's main effort, Operation Panther's Claw, was launched. With the handover of BG(S) to the US Marines complete, 5 Troop relocated to FOB Price and became intimately involved in the operation, carrying out resupply and casevac duties for the dismounted troops. It was during one such task that they suffered their first IED strike, with C/S T11, commanded by LCpl Gordon, being contacted in the Loymanda Wadi. Once again, the crew

emerged unhurt but the incident signalled a shift in the enemy tactics in their Area of Operations (AO). In BG(NW) resources were becoming increasingly scarce as Op Panther's Claw grew in scale. As a result, the squadron was tasked to bolster the force protection for the Op LAVA 23 resupply convoy as they headed north towards Musa Qa'lah; it proved to be an eventful journey. On the way down to the rendezvous (RV) with the convoy, C/S T22, commanded by Cpl Fisher, struck a large IED, causing significant damage to the Mastiff. In the 48 hours that followed, a further 7 IEDs were found, 6 of them by Pte Joof, whose efforts in this role throughout the entire tour were rewarded by a well deserved Joint Commanders Commendation. At FOB Edinburgh, Sgt Well's force protection troop were having a great deal of success in locating IEDs on route Green; unfortunately, on 7 July they suffered their first strike with T80C, commanded by LCpl Volavola, hitting an Anti-Tank mine. With the armoured infantry company from 2 Royal Welsh being relocated to Op Panther's Claw, the task of providing protected mobility at Patrol Bases Minden and Zulu fell to the Squadron. 6 and 8 Troop were dispatched to the southern FLET to support the newly arrived B Company, 2 Princess of Wales Royal Regiment and acquitted themselves admirably under a heavy workload and the most basic of living conditions. July also heralded the end of Major Jim Mowle's tenure as OC 206 Squadron. Taking up a new job in the Equipment Division at HQ Land Forces, he was

replaced by Major Nathan Smith, arriving from Headquarters Theatre Troop, the parent Divisional HQ of 23 Pioneer Regiment.

August was to be the busiest month of the Tour, which would see the biggest BG operation of the tour and 6 IED strikes on the Mastiffs. In the South, 5 Troop continued their involvement in Operation Panther's Claw and as part of this they participated in a significant strike operation with the Brigade Recce Force (BRF) to clear a number of Taliban outposts. During this task both C/S T10A and T10B suffered IED strikes, again, thankfully, resulting in no casualties. As the "clear" element of the operation drew to an end and the "hold" element began, 5 Troop were increasingly tasked with running resupply operations from FOB Price to the newly established Patrol Bases around Babaji, involving some of the most dangerous and heavily IED'd routes in theatre. In BG(NW), it was proving to be the busiest month yet. Operation MAR LEWE 2 saw all elements of the Squadron deployed in a variety of roles, ranging from route proving to protected mobility to fire support. This was to be the biggest operation to be undertaken by the 2 Royal Regiment of Fusiliers BG. A large area of the peninsula to the south-west of Musa Qa'lah was cleared of enemy forces, allowing a new PB to be established. During this operation, C/S T0D, now commanded by the new AO, Capt Steve McNeill, proved its resilience by surviving its second IED strike. Once again, the fact that all 7 crew members emerged unhurt,

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THANKS TO** all members who supported the derby draw.

The following are the winners. May I thank all who participated in the draw, the profits (£1,950) help to finance the work of the Association.

1st Prize £1,000 - HN Perks
Ticket No 47345
Daventry

2nd Prize £500 - Clive Heywood
Ticket No 22849
Bognor Regis

3rd Prize £200 - R Cheshire
Ticket No 15158
St Helens

4th Prize £100 - George Burgon
Ticket No 11972
Hartlepool

5th Prize £50 - Maurice Grange
Ticket No 18371
Weymouth

■ **HUNDREDS OF** families of war veterans could be missing out on large inheritance tax savings, because they're not aware of a little-used exemption.

Philip Reed, partner with Stephen Scown's private client team in St Austell, recently used the 'death in active service' exemption in the estate of an 85 year old former soldier who sustained injuries in Burma in 1944 and died in 2006. The man's family saved more than £250,000. The firm used the same exemption in 2007 saving over £1 million for another Cornish estate.

Philip said: "WW2 veterans are not the only possible claimants. The rules apply to anyone who dies from wounds, accident or disease contracted while on active service with the armed forces.

"There will be dozens of families throughout the South West with relatives who have served in other conflicts such as Korea, the Falklands, Northern Ireland, Iraq or Afghanistan who could be eligible for the complete exemption from inheritance tax."

Executors of the will had previously tried and failed in their initial claim for exemption and sought advice from Stephens Scown for a second opinion, as the death certificate made no mention of injuries sustained.

Commenting on this case, Philip explained: "We were able to change the cause of death recorded to include the severe ulceration of the veteran's legs, which he'd suffered almost continuously since leaving the armed forces. We obtained medical evidence to show how those injuries had affected his daily life for years."

The amendment to the death certificate was confirmed and a fresh application made to the Veterans Agency, which agreed the cause of death was linked to those injuries and full exemption was granted by the MOD.

He said: "I'm sure that many families are not aware of it. In this case, a lifetime of pain was overlooked when death was certified. It's really important for veterans to record how they sustained injuries by talking to their solicitor when making their will. If we have the information in advance, we can present a much better case to the MoD."

Contact: www.stephens-scown.co.uk



■ **Recovery of stuck Mastiff**

Picture: Supplied

if a little shaken, bears testament to the quality of the Mastiff vehicles. In the aftermath of the operation, the squadron was tasked to once again escort the Combat Logistic Patrol (CLP) resupply convoy, Op LAVA 24. This turned out to be a far from simple task.

August 20th was the date for Afghanistan's national elections and it proved to be a tumultuous day to say the least. With the squadron providing intimate security to the polling stations around Musa Qa'lah, the Taliban did their utmost to disrupt proceedings and prevent vital votes from being cast. As it emerged, Musa Qa'lah enjoyed one of the highest voter turnouts in Helmand Province, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Squadron and the visible presence provided by 30 tonnes of Mastiff armoured vehicle.

September promised to be just as busy as the previous month for both elements of the Squadron, but for a completely different, and much more welcome reason; it was time to handover to their replacements! In BG(NW), the fleet underwent a lengthy maintenance and refit period before being handed over to the Household Cavalry BG. The squadron provided an in-depth training package for their successors and assisted them on their first few resupply runs to the various PB's before being returned to Camp Bastion to begin the long journey home, via 36 hours of decompression in Cyprus. 5 Troop continued to operate for a few weeks longer as their replacements, the Grenadier Guards, were delayed; this proved to be an unfortunate turn of

events. On what was all but the final resupply operation, the troop suffered their 4th IED strike of the tour, the blast being large enough to tip the Mastiff onto its side. A number of the passengers sustained minor injuries but the vehicle's gunner, Pte Josh Campbell, was seriously hurt and airlifted to Kandahar medical facility. Following medical attention he was in the process of being evacuated by air to the UK, but as his condition worsened, the aircraft carrying him was diverted back to Kandahar for more emergency treatment. After an operation to stabilise his condition, he was eventually flown was back to Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham where, tragically, doctors were forced to amputate both of his legs.

(The latest news on Pte Campbell is shown on page 66).

This was a very sad end to what was otherwise a highly successful tour. Both elements of the Squadron emerged with glowing reputations, having earned the respect and admiration of their respective BGs. Every member of the Squadron gained something from the tour, whether it be operational experience, unforgettable memories or merely a suntan and a few scars. During the Tour the Squadron had suffered 14 IED strikes on the Mastiffs, suffered 5 casualties, found 40 confirmed IEDs and 17 unconfirmed IED and killed 7 enemy insurgents. At time the Tour had proved testing, but all in the Squadron had acquitted themselves well and added another chapter in the Squadron's proud history.

187 (Tancred) Squadron

It has become the norm to state that this has been an extremely busy period for 187 (Tancred) Sqn, but again this is the case! The first significant thing of note is that 187 Sqn has now officially been recognised by the Army Honours and Decorations Committee as 187 (Tancred) Pioneer Sqn RLC. This makes it the only sub-unit within the British Army to be named after a Private soldier; Private John Tancred for actions at MONTE CAMINO.

The Sqn has welcomed a new Admin Officer in Capt Kevin Braddell, a new Troop Commander in 2Lt Leigh Rickards and will shortly be saying goodbye and a huge thank you to WO2 (SSM) Gaz Howe, the current Squadron Sergeant Major, and welcoming WO2(SSM) Rob Berton as his replacement.

The Sqn started this busy period running a JNCO development cadre for the Regiment; this was spearheaded by Capt Hill. It was held down on DARTMOOR and aimed to put JNCOs through an arduous 36 hours testing; leadership, military knowledge and some good old fashioned mental grit! The cadre was a series of command task stands separated by considerable distances over the tough going of DARTMOOR, with a forced speed march to finish. The JNCO's covered a distance of over 30km between stands!

One of the stands was survival, where the soldiers were given a live chicken to prepare and eat. At one stage though there was a bit of a "flap" about where live chickens could be purchased from! SSgt Wilkinson though donned his farmer overalls and flat cap and went and found the local farmers market and purchased said soon to be eaten chickens!

The Sqn then deployed on EX CORE PIONEER. It started with a three day round robin teaching the core capabilities of the Pioneers. 187 Tancred Sqn taught mortuary affairs, with Sgt Shillito leading, and operational hygiene, lead by Cpl Durnell. The exercise then consisted of an artisan period, where a FOB was enhanced, and a period where the squadron ran the Theatre Reception centre.

Operationally the Sqn has continued to send Pioneers on Op HERRICK. Supporting the Command Support Troop, HERRICK Search Teams and Mortuary Affairs. Mortuary Affairs is a traditional role for the Pioneers but has only just been taken on in theatre. An extremely difficult job and one that's importance cannot be underestimated, done admirably by LCpl Kirlew, LCpl Prasad and Pte Koroi. All soldiers deployed continue to do an absolutely sterling job, much appreciated by those here in 187 (Tancred) Pioneer Sqn.

Extramurally the Sqn took part in and won the Regimental athletics competition! Ably captained by Sgt Leslie. The Sqn has been a keen participant on Regimental Adventure Training in north Wales, which consisted of mountain biking and hill walking.

522 Squadron QN Artisan Task: National Trust, Dartmoor 05-09 July 2010

Despite 522 Sqn being split to the four winds in BATUS and Herrick Search Team courses, SSgt Avant and a small team travelled to Dartmoor to assist the



Water crossing on JNCO Cadre

Picture: Supplied



Fortifying Forward Operating Base at Longmoor

Picture: Supplied



CO presents Sgt Leslie with winners trophy at the Regt athletics competition

Picture: Supplied



522 Squadron, Artisan Task: National Trust, Dartmoor

Picture: Supplied



522 Squadron, Artisan Task: National Trust, Dartmoor

Picture: Supplied

National Trust in the reconstruction and development of an abandoned farmhouse. The task gave the team an ideal opportunity to get out of camp, away from the pressures of exercises and impending operations. The carpenters and bricklayers amongst them also had an opportunity to fine tune their trade skills, and the Regiment could provide the much needed labour support to the local community of the South Dartmoor National Park.

The first task for the team was to clear away debris from in and around the buildings. This involved the cutting back of bushes (as well as more than just a few brambles!) and cutting the grass to make the site safer to use. It also included a general clear out of the buildings themselves. In traditional Pioneer fashion, they quickly went to work tearing their way through the kitchen and bathrooms, removing all the old furnishings to make way for the installation of new ones.

Once this task was complete, the team

found itself getting to grips with the de-turfing of a huge area that would be turned into a track, enabling access to the site. This seemingly endless job complete, the team set about building and then gravelling the track, as well as a parking area.

The team then split, the bricklayers concentrating on the construction of a large BBQ and external seating area, and the carpenters went about fabricating and installing three large doors for the old pig barn, which when complete, will become the bunk house.

Once the clear up was complete, all involved celebrated by 'testing' the new cooking facility with a well deserved BBQ.

The work provided by the Pioneers was top quality, and they were praised by both the professionals they worked alongside, and the local community.

The building, once finished, will be used as a hostel for youth groups when on expeditions in South Dartmoor National Park.



■ THE ROYAL College of General Practitioners (RCGP), The Royal British Legion and Combat Stress have launched a guidance to support GPs in identifying and meeting the healthcare needs of veterans more effectively - including accessing the priority treatment to which all veterans are entitled for Service-related conditions.

The jointly-produced guidance for GPs looks at how best to care for veterans' physical and mental health after they have left the Forces and rejoined civilian life. It provides useful advice on medical records and accessing priority treatment, along with dedicated sections including mental health needs, health behaviours, the provision of prostheses and hospital waiting lists.

In 2008, as a result of pressure to improve healthcare under the Legion's "Honour the Covenant" campaign, War Pensioners' entitlement to priority treatment in the NHS was extended - entitling all veterans (whether in receipt of a war pension or not) who have health problems that may be related to their military Service to be given priority non-emergency treatment on the NHS.

An Ipsos-Mori poll carried out on behalf of The Royal British Legion last year found that some GPs were reluctant to raise the subject of whether their patients were veterans and others expressed confusion about how best to navigate the health system on behalf of their veteran patients.

The new guidance aims to address these issues. It demonstrates how GPs can identify veterans on their lists and encourages best practice when referring veterans for further care. This includes provision of a written statement confirming that the patient is a veteran and whether or not their health problem could be related to their military service. The guidance for GPs parallels guidance already produced by the Legion for veterans themselves, in partnership with the NHS.

RCGP Chairman Professor Steve Field said: "A large number of our patients in general practice are veterans or families of veterans from wars gone by or the recent or current conflicts in Iraq, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. It is vital that as GPs, we are properly prepared and resourced to provide them with the care and services they so need and deserve."

■ THERE'S HARDLY a town, village or city in the UK that doesn't have some sort of physical reminder of the huge sacrifices made during the World Wars.

But it is much rarer to find tributes to the thousands of Service personnel who have died since 1945 - a fact that British Legion Members in Northampton had not failed to notice.

Guy Voice (son of David Voice who served in the Pioneer Corps 1954-1956) and fellow British Legion Branch member Kevin Lamberth have created a roll of honour that would not only give names and date of those lost within Northamptonshire but also tell each person's story and, where possible, include pictures of them.

The national Armed Forces Memorial provided the initial 22 names, this has now grown to 116 and they have only researched up to 1984. Guy states, "Although we're past the Falklands now in the research, there are still both Gulf Wars, Bosnia and Northern Ireland to cover".

Mixed bag of news

Latest news from 168 Pioneer Regiment RLC



■ Pte Donnelly, Pain or Pleasure?

Picture: Supplied

THE 168 Pioneer Regiment has a mixture of both regional and national Squadrons. The two regional pioneer squadrons are based in Middlesbrough and Cramlington with outstations in Hartlepool, Washington, Berwick and Hexham. The HQ and third national squadron are based in Grantham, Lincs; this provides the Regiment with the ability to recruit UK wide.

Dinner Night

Earlier in the year 168 Pnr Regt held a joint Officers and Seniors Regt dinner in the PWOG Offrs Mess, Grantham. The guests were Maj Gen T Cross CBE, the Honorary Colonel, and Col MS Limb OBE TD, Comd 2 LSG. During the evening we bid farewell to Maj Collinson, who is still busy flying balloons in Sri Lanka, two of the permanent staff WO2 Christie and SSgt Anthony both retiring and WO1 (RSM) Billy McKenzie.

The Sgts' Mess presented him with the first of the newly commissioned crossed axe and sword presentation piece as he retires from the TA, he will be missed. In addition WO2 (SSM) Michael Headlam 104 Pnr Sqn was presented with his warrant by the Honorary Colonel, Maj Gen Tim Cross CBE.

Ex Northern Pioneer

168 Pnr Regt Mil Skills competition was held at Albermarle Bus, in Northumberland. The competition consisted of ten stands around a six mile circuit, AFV recognition, vehicle recovery and artisan power tools stands being just three. The end result was very close however Grantham based 101 Pnr Sqn narrowly beat 100 Pnr Sqn into first place. The winner's trophy was presented to the team captain 2Lt Mark Henderson by Col PJ Lewis TD Col AD Res Manning DM(A).

100 Pnr Sqn gained some revenge by winning the 5 a side football. A nearest the pin golf challenge in aid of the ABF, raised a lot of money primarily due to healthy competition between the Adjt and the Trg Major. The Adjt was victorious.

Fox Trophy

100 Pnr Sqn annual Fox Trophy took place at Albermarle training area, the section teams patrolled between stands consisting of AFV recognition, an LF3 shoot, assault course, observation, pioneering skills and MT. The CO presented the Fox Trophy to B Tp (Hexham), led by LCpl Hester with Sgt Barrett, Pte O'Brien and Pte White. White was also presented with the best shot



■ Sgt Jones on his US/UK exchange programme

Picture: Supplied



■ WO2 Foy receives Warrant

Picture: Supplied



■ WO2 Headlam receives Warrant

Picture: Supplied



■ 168 Regimental Dinner Night

Pictures: Supplied

award. The award for the most furious and aggressive assault course performance went to Pte Lock. All the teams relaxed in the evening with a BBQ quiz night and undertook a PFT the next morning.

Op Herrick 13

100 Pnr Sqn have been busy preparing Cpl Flitcroft, LCpl Hester, Pte Coulthard and Pte Earnshaw as they mobilise and integrate into the 23 Pnr Regt Command Sp Tp ready for Op HERRICK 13. The training culminated in a Sqn range package at Ponteland ranges. Lt Dan Mitchell from 101 Pnr Sqn has also mobilised for Afghanistan. He will be working for RHQ 13 Air Asslt Sp Regt on Op HERRICK 13. Good luck and as they say "stay low and move fast".

Maj K Greenough

All ranks of 168 Pnr Regt congratulate Major Keith Greenough, OC 34 HQ Sqn, on his award of the QVRM in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. A truly fantastic achievement for the longest serving officer in the Regt. Congratulations also go to Sgt Scott, 104 Pnr Sqn, on his GOC's Certificate, awarded for his leadership and control at a serious road traffic collision.

Skiing

Once again the "Chunkies were on the Piste" with SSgt Rushbrook, PSI 100 Pnr Sqn leading the Regts Nordic team in the RLC Champs. The team was small but determined and consisted of Sgt Strong, Pte Donnelly and Pte Hutton. None of the

team had ever done any Nordic skiing before and Pte Donnelly had never even seen a pair of skis. Despite all the team bearing bruises the size of small countries they enjoyed themselves and did the Regt proud. The CO thanks them all for their sheer guts and determination.

Change of Training Major

The 168 Pnr Regt has bid farewell to Maj James Phillips and welcomes Maj Mark Stuart as the new Trg Major. Another arrival is SSgt "Geordie" Holmes who joins 104 Pnr Sqn in Middlesbrough, as their PSI. We wait to see how his black and white shirt will be received.

New OC at 100 Sqn

100 Pnr Sqn based in Cramlington has a new OC. For the first time in many years it is a Regular Officer, Major Jules Forrest-Anderson. Joining us from 1 (UK) Armd Div he will have to become accustomed to the Geordie twang. Former OC Major Richard Bilton moves south to Grantham to become OC of 101, the Regts national Pioneer Sqn. Acting OC, Capt Pete Mitchener, moves back to the 2IC post, many thanks for all your hard work.

US/UK Exchange

168 Pnr Regt had two of their SNCO's accepted onto the UK / US exchange programme this summer Sgt Strong visited North Dakota and Sgt Jones went to Missouri via lunch at the Pentagon. We will reciprocate by hosting two US servicemen from the National Guard on

Ex Pioneer Focus.

Sgt Jones's exchange started with a stay in Washington DC at Andrews Air Force base. He did the touristy bit by visiting the White House, Capital Hill and finished with lunch at the Pentagon. The lunch was hosted by the Chief of Staff to celebrate 25 years of the British and America Exchange programme. During the Pentagon visit he had a tour of the building where 25,000 people work; they even have their own shopping mall it's that big.

The actual exchange commenced when he flew into St Louis, Missouri for 2 weeks with 1438 Engineer Company. His exchange buddy was 1SG Andrew Ralston who trains at the Macon Armoury, their equivalent of a TA centre.

1438 Engineer Company are a National Guard multi-roll bridging company (MRBC) whose mission is to provide float and fixed bridging, however it soon became apparent that Pioneers do not do bridging and so he was attached to Recon and spent the rest of the exercise recceing bridging sites.

On some time off he managed to visit the Budweiser brewery in St Louis, a crap job but somebody had to do it.

WO2 S Foy

Double congratulations to WO2 Steve Foy, SPSP 101 Pnr Sqn. His fiancée Caz finally made an honest man of him. His wedding was a truly Yorkshire affair with mushy peas on the menu. Second he was presented his Warrant by Comd RLC TA in the PWOG Bus Sgts mess. Sadly no mushy peas were served.



A WARTIME LOG FOR BRITISH PRISONERS

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

CAPT. A. L. HALE

P.O.W. NO. 3263 (XC)

INSIDE COVER (J. VERALE)

Gift from
THE WAR PRISONERS' AID OF THE Y. M. C. A.
37, Quai Wilson
GENEVA - SWITZERLAND



A Wartime Log

The wartime diary of Captain AL Hale – POW No 3263 (xc) was recently acquired by the RPC Association

Report: Captain AL Hale
Pictures: Captain AL Hale

WE SAW the grey ships leave us in the night, Our hope is gone; depression takes its place. The information that urged us on to fight Has left us. Exhaustion stamps each face, for fifty miles we sweated, marched and fled. Now pain pours in to every bone and joint. All is thrown away; and there the dead, line the road, at many a bloody point. Prisoners marching back along the road, damaged lorries bear a grisly load. At Galatos, starvation rules the day, with nothing else to do but sleep and pray. Our minds are numbed, shocked by such calamity, Barefoot, hunger, thirsty, warped humanity.

June 8th 1941

The following officers will be ready to move off at 1300 hrs. For some obscure reason my name was in the first twenty or thirty and I climbed into the lorry, one of the few occasion in my life when packing has not worried me. I had nothing to pack. All I had was in my small officer's haversack strapped on my shoulders. It contained, one enamel plate, my holdall with knife, fork, spoon, tin-opener and corkscrew; an ever ready razor a few blades, a shaving brush, a toothbrush, a bottle of aspirin, a tube of veramon, my personal army papers and my brandy flask. I was wearing S.D., dirty and bloodstained. I had repaired my shoes with pieces of cardboard. I carried a water-bottle and I had no hat.

The lorry moved towards Malene, rumour had it that we were to be taken off by air. The road seemed very tidy after the shambles of Canea. Beside the road were graves of German and British soldiers distinguished by the different tin hats. As we neared Malene we entered a different graveyard – crashed aircraft. I lost count about the two hundred mark.

I didn't like the look of Malene landing ground, I had seen beautiful aerodromes in England. I have seen the rough grounds of the desert but I had never imaged planes could take off from this uneven surface. However, I had no choice I entered the second plane a Junkers 52, we sat along the sides. There were three Germans in the plane, two in front behind a sliding door and a young wireless operator with us. He signalled to us to put on some things that looked like wicket keepers pads. These we put on as waistcoats.

The engines started we rushed over the ground, we slowed down, we turned, our speed increased we rushed straight at a low stone wall, we were going to hit it, I braced myself for the shock, it didn't come, we were over the wall. I was flying, I looked down. So that was Crete; there were the live trees we had thought good cover. I could see through them quite easily. What fools we must have looking playing 'oranges and lemons' among the olive trees! We were over the sea going North, not a ship in sight. We looked out anxiously for a British destroyer, but with

mixed feelings. The sea seem dotted with islands we were only about two hundred feet above the surface. It was an enjoyable sensation. At last Greece, yes, there was the Acrofolis I remembered the last time I had been there. A hill rushed towards me, the land came up to hit me, I felt sick, somebody was sick. We rushed past the hills, the hills rushed at us. We dived at the ground. I closed my eyes, there was a slight bump, we rushed across the ground and stopped.

When we got out a German Air Force officer met us, he offered us Greek cigarettes. It was the first cigarette I had had for a fortnight. He gave away all he had and sent a Greek boy off for some more. He was a Gentleman.

Before the boy came back we were packed into a covered lorry and driven off. I had learnt wisdom and got in last. Through a hole in the canvas I saw that we were driven to Piraeus and there to Athens through Constitution Square and then north for about a mile to some Greek barracks.

June 9th 1941

Macaroni – Station – Trains 1st Class – Green Plums

June 10th 1941

The train rumbles on, my stomach rumbles with it. I was a fool to eat those green plums the German NCO bought us. I would eat them again though. I am still hungry. The train stops, "You will get out here", says the German, "You have to walk about five kilometres, the bridge is blown up".

We got out of our first class carriage quite pleased to stretch our legs. It is two o'clock in the morning and we don't know the joke about the five kms. We fell in, I get in the front row of three I reckon I can then help set the pace. Off we go, my stomach feels awful. We march for an hour when we rest for five minutes. I spend my five minutes wretching, we march on with five minutes rest every hour. Dawn comes, we have climbed up a road to the top of a range of mountains. We take a longer rest, a lorry comes up, some sick are in it. A number of others reckon they're sick too and climb on. I reckon I'm sick to see the way some young fellows run for that lorry. We stop on a grassy slope, we are about to go down to the valley. We can see Lamia. Like the promised land, in front of us, but it is at the end of a long straight road from the bottom of the mountain. We hear that the real distance is twelve kilometres to the top, twelve to the bottom and twelve along the flat. Well, we're at the top.

We go down, taking a short cut through woody scrub, it's quite pleasant I think, I've got rid of the green plums. We reach the bottom and get turned into a field for rest and water. Most people fall flat I keep walking about, I think that if I lie down I won't get up. The guards have about had it too. We start off along the straight road, the cardboard has come out of my shoes, I think my feet are bleeding. It is hot. An old Greek woman is standing by the side of the

road watching us come along, I am in the front again on the side. She gives me a piece of bread out of her basket. I give half to the Major on my left. It tastes good, hell it's the best food I've ever had! We march on, this Lamia doesn't seem to get any nearer. About eleven we reach an iron bridge across a small river. We are stopped and get a drink from the river.

The German guards have an argument among themselves. We go over the bridge and they turn us sharp left. We are not going to Lamia after all. Maybe we are going to march to Salonika! We march along a country land and come to a village. The people must have heard we are coming. They are lining the road with bread, sandwiches, hot potatoes and even soup. I get a sandwich, the Germans get annoyed and try to drive the people away but they are pretty tired themselves and many of them go into a wine shop, but they don't let us. They keep us going in the front of the column, the boys behind seem to be doing well. We have gone the wrong way. We turn back and take a track across some sun baked fields. The dust is about two inches thick, everybody grumbles except me, I like it, I feel as though I am walking on a good thick carpet in my bare feet instead of on broken glass. We come to a farm, we stop and get a drink of water, we rest leaning against a wall. Two figures on donkeys come towards us from the rear, one of them is the padre, he looks all in, but he's still there. Good old Restus!

Off we go again, somebody starts singing, I join in, all of us in the front are singing, "My eyes are dim I cannot see, I have not brought my specs with me". We see a station in front of us. We go to it. We stop in the station yard. One of the chaps who was on the lorry has fixed up some tea for us and another gives me an egg. Some of the fellows collapse, I go and get them some water. At last I sit down, it is two p.m.

June 11th to July 22nd 1941

Salonika (41 days, 17 days hospital). We arrived at Salonika on June 11th in the pouring rain. We marched off to the camp. We started to sing but were stopped and orders were given that singing and talking were to cease. We started to whistle, we were halted again and forced to march silently. The camp on the East side of the town was some old Greek barracks. There were Serbs, Jugo Slavs, Arabs and Cypriots in the same camp. We were at first put in stone buildings surrounded by a garden, in a separate enclosure. There were iron beds but no mattresses and the place was swarming with bugs.

Most officers met other ranks of their units and managed to buy extra food and clothes but I had no money and thought I knew no other ranks. Our food consisted of 1/15th Greek loaf, 3/4 Greek biscuit, a terribly oily soup at midday and herb tea mornings and evenings. After three days I managed to get £5 worth of drachmas for an English cheque. Some officers had plenty of money! With this money I bought some Greek boots an English blanket and a



Mr. Hale.

pair of socks. On June 18th it was rumoured that Germany was at war with Russia and by the 22nd this was confirmed.

On June 24th I went to hospital with sand fly fever, temperature 105°F. It seemed to be a bit of heaven to have a mattress as the wire of the beds cut into my back like a cheese. My fever developed into a violent cold and I had only three handkerchiefs. One night some Cypriots attempted to escape, there were unsuccessful and their bodies were left lying in the parade ground. The next day, June 30th, was a day of excitement some men had escaped during the night and the ration stores was raided, the whole camp was searched. I was turned out of hospital the next day and spent the night in a different barracks. The next day I was helped back to hospital, this time to the dysentery ward where I had bronchitis. July 9th was a red letter day as we had a small bit of sausage and some cheese from the Red Cross and some sweets from the canteen. On July 13th I left hospital although the Serb doctor said I had pleurisy. I also had lice.

Officers not in hospital had been moved on the previous day and I joined No 6 syndicate in Block 14. There were no beds and most people slept outside at the risk of being shot. As the bugs didn't bite me I slept inside in spite of the rats. Lectures and debates were started, one subject was "In the opinion of this house the war will be over before Xmas 1941". July 19th was another red letter day with an issue of tomatoes, water melon and pears from the Greek Red Cross.

In this camp I was paid five times but I used all my money buying extra food from anyone who had it to sell. During this awful time at Salonika food was our main thought, we were desperately hungry. I started to teach a young Serbian doctor English and at most lessons he gave me a slice of bread and jam and I consider it is the highest fee I have ever received for a lesson.

All kinds of 'rackets' started in the camp, everybody doing all they could to obtain food. On one never to be forgotten occasion I got my water bottle filled with brandy by a Serb. The same man also used to give me extra soup the doctors didn't want and I had nothing to give him.

The day we were leaving I saw an OR carrying a pile of greatcoats. I recognised him as the barman of a desert canteen. He remembered me and said he would try to get me a greatcoat. Just before we moved of he ran up with one.

July 22nd to July 29th 1941

Salonika to Lubeck

Occasionally a light flickered through the barbed wire in the top left or top right corners of the cattle truck as it rumbled onward through the night. Inside thirty five men were lying shivering in cramped positions. One got up and staggered over legs to the barbed wired ventilator.

"Sorry you chaps", he said.

With muttered oaths the three men nearest the ventilator cleared a space. Somebody produced the square board which showed the messing strength in Salonika. The unfortunate one entered the mess tin that was hanging outside and soon the sounds and odour of diarrhoea permeated throughout the truck.

"Has anybody any paper?"

After a pause a few scraps were passed up torn up letters that had been saved for sentimental reasons, letter from refugee bins,

rich was he who possessed a sheet of newspaper. A few precious matches were struck and the tin carefully emptied outside and replaced. The train rumbled on through the night.

It was daytime, the sun scorched the sides of the cattle truck, sweat poured off naked bodes on to other naked bodies. Lice intercoured freely. The train stopped, the doors were slid back the the guards shouted "Aus, Aus!" The seven hundred men on the train poured out and crouched down beside the railway line to allow bottled up nature to function again. It was the first time the doors had been opened for twenty two hours. In five minutes an

'Food was our main thought, we were desperately hungry'

order came to remount and the baked truck was re-entered. Tins of Yugoslav bully were opened and Greek biscuits were crunched. In spite of the conditions jokes were cracked by those who were not absolutely prostrated. After all seven hundred men performing at once, one at least still retaining his monocle did have a humorous aspect. The doors were closed but the train did not move. At last she rumbled off again. Slowly the day passed, shirts were put on as it grew cooler. At sunset it was time for the evening relief parade, men queued up for the tin hanging outside the ventilator. Suddenly without a word of warning the second man in the line fainted right across the men on the floor. He was only a young lad and it had at last proved too much for him. At the next stop the one doctor on the train was summoned. There was nothing he could do beyond informing the guard as he had no drugs. The lad was got off the train next day. Altogether in that truck there were seven cases of dysentery and three of malaria but only two were taken off on the way the rest lasted that journey its full length.

July 29th – October 8th 1941

On July 29th, I was deloused, had my fingerprints taken and given my prisoner of war identification plate 3263. Before all these things happened some amusement was caused by the German officers inspecting us and trying to find Jews. However, none were discovered and the next call was for people suffering from dysentery, some twenty of us stepped out and were marched off to the hospital.

I spent my first eighteen days in hospital, and my chief interest during those days, and indeed for the rest of my stay in Lubeck, Oflag XC, was in food. I was no Robinson Crusoe in that respect. My notes at the time refer entirely to food obtained on different days from the canteen. Although we were paid regularly we spent all our money. We bought salt, scrubbing brushes, boot polish, note books, tinned tomatoes, celery paste, fig biscuits, Russian salad, pickles, matches, beer, rhubarb wine, bowls, teapots, pipes, Gaulois cigarettes, Yugoslav tobacco, sauces, soups and saccharine. All these things were rationed out and expensive.

Somehow or other I was appointed Camp Librarian, without books! On Sept 12th some books which we had ordered, arrived, and on Sept 15th the library opened. As we had less books than readers there was no choice and in order to speed up circulation and buy more books I introduced a fine system for books not returned within seven days. Most of the books were Albatron and Tauchant paper backs and they were very well read. The Library was in Block 12 and I worked in it

mornings and afternoons. Even when the block was closed as a punishment we carried on elsewhere.

We received no Red Cross parcels in this camp and the first letters arrived only just before we left. I did not get any. The weather grew colder and I bought a long shirt, a long pair of cotton pants and two 'cloths for the feet' from the Germans. We wrote letters and cards, attended lectures and classes, drew up model menus and played bridge. Some people even played basket ball. How they managed to do this on such food was annoying for our rations were 7 a.m. German tea, 12 noon Soup and four potatoes (potato soup), 2 p.m. 1/5th loaf of bread, German tea; a little fat cheese, jam, sausage issued on different days of the week).

I used to collect the tea at seven in the morning and with it I collected the used herb tea leaves, these I dried and smoked. There were no English cigarettes in the camp except when new RAF prisoners arrived and their cigarettes soon went.

Air raids were fairly frequent and on the night of Sept 7th-8th we had a spot of excitement when a shower of incendiaries fell in the camp. The German officers mess was burnt down but all the incendiaries that fell inside the wire were extinguished. Unfortunately one struck Major Holden who subsequently lost his leg.

On October 98th we were ordered to give in our blankets other than Red Cross! We were given a day's ration and marched out of the camp. We got into cattle trucks which had wooded seats and a bucket. There were two guards in each truck but four RAF managed to escape by sawing a hole through their truck! We arrived at Warburg the next day.

The Gefangenen Creep 1941

"Shoulders hunched
Pockets full of hands
Slouching around in several foreign lands
Scarves round neck
By barbed wire kept in check
We do that well known Gefangenen creep.

A shuffling gait
A hanging look
Carting around an exercise book
Up and down our beat
We drag our weary feet
We do that well known Gefangenen creep

But when the meal time gong is sounded
You should see us run
Into activity we're galvanised
Oh the rush we make for food
Is really rather rude
We show a turn of speed that makes us
most surprised.

And then we creep away
The same old weary way
Sagging at the centre with a back and
forward sway
Well bent at the knees
'Cos we've got that new disease
We do that well known Gefangenen creep"

October 9th to November 24th 1941

October 9th was a dismal day. We saw and heard a boy whistling, 'We'll hang our washing on the Siegfried Line'. It was announced to us from the German newspapers that the last Russian Army had been defeated. Some of us were deloused and had a cold shower after we had marched into a huge muddy dreary looking camp.

The next five days saw our spirits rise from out of the depths. We watched officers

arriving from other camps. They were all extremely generous as soon as they saw our miserable state. Clothes, cigarettes, tobacco and food were given to us by total strangers. On Sat October 11th we had 1/3rd of a Canadian Red Cross parcel each; in our room, Block 10 room 5, the sixteen occupants were far too excited to sleep. I drank a cup of tea and had a decent meal for the first time since May 19th. I remember Hugh MacDonald, Jo McCaffrey and myself drinking tea about 3 a.m. The craze song was 'Room 504' and I never hear this without recapturing a little of that wild intoxicating excitement.

From October 22nd to November 24th I spent in hospital, reaction had set in and I was considered one of the cases that needed special feeding. I suffered a good deal at night from cramp, and my arms were useless at first. However mentally I was 'a happy little kriegy' for I received my first letters and had some clean clothes and good food. While I was in hospital my crowd moved to Block 25 Room 6 and we all soon settled down to our life as kriegies.

August 31st 1942 to November 22nd 1943

At the end of August 1942 we heard that our camp was to be divided and moved to other camps. The 'Air Force' went to one camp, the majority of those over thirty five and a few others went to Rottenburg 9AZ and the rest of us went in three parties to Eichslott VIIIB.

August 31st was a chaotic day. The news was that we were moving alphabetically A-E in the first party. This split up our room; Cecil Shaw, Ian Felstead and myself made no preparations to move. About 7 p.m. Felstead was told that he was to go as well and finally about 9 p.m. I was told to move. Of course my packing under the circumstances left much to be desired. I hoped to be able to repack when I was searched. No such luck, however, as when I went through at midnight I was singled out for special attention and had to strip; by the time I had dressed again my heavy baggage was covered up and a lot of it I never saw again.

After we were searched we were packed into a hall where we sat all night, on the stage facing us was a machine gun. The atmosphere was terrible, no smoking was allowed and those who were in the hall from an early hour were suffering agonies. The kriegy temperament was at its best however I shall never forget the cries of "Luft Luft" – "Air Air". Then someone who knew a little more German stood up and asked a German Officer for air ending his pleas with a compassionate "Bitte Bitte – Please Please". On which one wag called out "Two Bitters".

The dreadful night came to an end at last and then it seemed as though the Germans changed completely, for we walked in easy time to the station, got into Second Class Carriages and were served by our orderlies with porridge. It was the first decent treatment I had received as a prisoner. We spend the most of the day and the next night in the train and on Sept 2nd arrived at Eichstadt. Here it looked as though they expected us to make an attack for we were marched to the camp through streets bristling with machine guns. There seemed to be as many guards as prisoners. It was hot, but our new camp seemed to be a pleasant place. We were marched on to a green football pitch where we were searched, I was stripped again, then we were allowed to go to our new barracks.

The Canadians from Dieppe were in the camp and we quickly made contact with them.

During the month of September the other parties arrived; we settled down into messes and tried, sometimes in vain, to collect our baggage. Heroic work was done by Cpl Beddows (Handlebars).

Early in October came 'chaining', the story of which has been told so many times. I was in Block I where it was decided to keep the chain gang. We volunteered on mass to be chained but our application was refused and only those people last on parade were taken. The story of the 75% turned out of Block I is not remembered, sympathy naturally being directed to the chainees. My experience was that in three months I lived in seven different rooms, slept in fifteen different beds, and was never in a mess. In December I joined a mess, although my name was down as a permanent volunteer for Block I.

In July 1943 I returned to Block I and chains. Chaining came to an end on Nov 22nd 1943.

(On January 15th 1945 all our mattresses, stools and tables were taken away. The reason given was that Camp 306 in Egypt had no mattresses, stools and tables. Some stools and tables were returned on March 29th 1945).

A day in the life of a Kriegy – November 1944 VIIIB

"Rosie Lea – Tea Up!" Wakes me up. I jump down from my top bed, pull on my socks, push my feet into slippers, get into my great coat, grab the once white enamelled jug, go out and collect tea for eight. I come back, wash up the cups from the over-night brew, make the milk, put out the tea, put saccharine in those who want it and take the mugs round. Two of the seven sleepers wake up, one lights a cigarette, some of the others grump, the rest go on sleeping. It is 7.30 a.m.

I drink my tea, put on my clogs, take off my great coat and pyjama coat, put a towel round my waist and go upstairs to the wash room where I clean my teeth and wash. I come downstairs, take down the black out and shave – two blades last me twenty days. I dress leisurely and think of all the things I have to do. I make my bed, collect all my note books and papers from the table and put them on the top of the bed. I clean my boots – polish Sundays only.

The bugle goes for parade at 8.45 and the others get up. I stroll down to the parade ground. After parade I collect up all the bed linen in the room and take it to the QM for changing. I rush up to R's room and get the Arabic text book we are studying. When

I return the stooge has made the tea and I have my breakfast, two slices of bread, margarine scraped on, one with slices of beetroot, the other cocoa spread the PMC has made. Thank God we draw parcels today!

At 9.50 I go the barber's shop for a haircut, booked and paid for yesterday. When I get back I am able to start work as the orderly has swept the room. I work fairly steadily until lunch time apart from the usual interruptions, "Containers for potatoes", "Here's the bread 1/3rd of a loaf to go to Room 26". I cut the loaf and take 1/3rd to 26. While I am in there I sell my chocolate which I haven't yet received for 75 cigarettes.

"Soup Up" at 12 noon. It is pea soup and not too bad. I eat this and the PMC gives us

a slice of bread which owing to the shortness of spreads, he spreads himself. Some have the cocoa job others the remnants of the jam. We pull cards for choice I draw the King of Diamonds and get first pick, I choose a cocoa job. The stooge makes the brew.

I go out into the cold after lunch and do an hour's Arabic with R. I have to collect parcels at 2.35 but the time is changed to 3.10. R has a haircut at 2 p.m. When he goes to get this I go to the library and return an overdue technical book, handed to me as Block book representative.

On leaving the library I go to Block 3 and borrow a pair of football boots, I am playing against Block 7 at 3.45. When I return to the Block I collect up 17 empty tins (3 Klim) and at 3.10 go down for our four parcels, these are running late and by the time I get back it is time to change for football. We draw nil-nil, I want my tea and feel hungry. When I come in I drink my tea have my three slices of bread, two jam, one beetroot, then I wash. I have just time before parade to collect reserved books from the library and a few new books that have been censored. These I gave out, the last one on parade at 5.30.

After parade I empty the box of cigarette indents for the week and start my job of making a consolidated list and indent for Staircase 3. We eat at 6 p.m. and I willingly stop work for this 1/3rd Canadian Meat Roll, heated in a tin with potatoes, Canadian biscuit and cheese. I get straight on with my indent, drink my evening brew, take back the football boots, run upstairs with my chocolate and then instead of playing bridge as usual sit down and write this. I shall go to bed at 10 p.m.

A day in the life of a Kriegy – Abnormal VIIIB 1944

It is Friday 13th or it should be. I awake too late for the tea. When I climb up to take the blackout down I step on somebody's razor which doesn't do it any good, in fact it is 'Kaput!' I am stooge so I start the breakfast brew. I burn my fingers but at last get the fire going just before parade.

We go down to parade. While we are on 'Appel' we see a large number of 'Goonies' march into the camp. "Search! It's Block I". Of course it is, I haven't had any breakfast and not even a drink. The search lasts all the morning. When we are allowed in we clean up the mess and have our lunch – millet soup! The orderly is on a fatigue so I wash up, sweep up and tidy up the place as well as possible. I forget to go to the library and the OMC forgets to tell me to take the food to the kitchen. I am late with the food but I put on a line that it is unavoidable owing to the search this morning. I can't think why, but I get away with it. We have borrowed a place for tea and as I come back from washing up the tea things I drop all seven plates, the borrowed one is the only plate not broken. I am popular!

In the evening we play bridge at least my partner and I watch our opponents play. I play one hand all the evening and go light. My partner plays one hand and makes one climb. We are only 29 down at the end of the evening.

When I go to bed I get involved in a senseless agreement as to why the lines of longitude don't go up to 360°. A perfect end to a perfect day.

April 14th – April 23rd 1945

On April 14th we started off to march to Moosburg. We are like a lot of Sunday School children going on a treat. Every

conceivable kind of cart was pressed into service from perambulators bought for cigarettes, wheelbarrows made out of dartboards, to camp carts. The young of Eichstadt followed joyfully salvaging the wrecks of homemade carts which didn't last many yards.

After a mile the head of the column halted, the tail was still in camp. We watched two Mustangs fly over us and various remarks were made as to how grand it was to see them. Suddenly our joy turned to dismay and fear as six Thunderbolts called up by the Mustangs began to machine gun us. After the first burst they dropped their bombs on the road opposite which we appreciated. Then they came back and machine gunned us again. For half an hour we dug into the earth or took what shelter we could. Eleven fine fellows were killed and forty severely wounded.

We throw our luggage from the carts and used them to transport our wounded back to camp.

What a change of spirits! What a reassessment of kit! When we moved the next night it was in comparative silence with the minimum number of carts, one to each company equipped with white strips and first aid kit. All eyes watched the skies.

Really the march to Moosburg was delightful for those who knew how to walk and had looked after their feet. We holed up in barns during the day and marched by night. The weather was excellent.

April 15th 2100 hrs left Eichstadt

April 16th 0400 hrs arrived Crainersheim
2100 hrs left Crainersheim
Crossed Danube Hadenheim

April 17th 0500 hrs arrived Ernstgaden
2000 hrs left Ernstgaden

April 18th 0200 hrs arrived Rodenegg

April 19th 2000 hrs left Rodenegg

April 20th 0400 hrs arrived Manberg

2000 hrs left Manberg

April 21st 0300 hrs arrive Grafendorf

April 23rd 0600 hrs left Grafendorf
1300 hrs arrived Moosberg

April 23rd – April 29th – Moosberg Stalag VIIA

In this camp conditions were appalling, I was with 199 other officers in one room. There were no beds, only blocks of three tier bed frames. I occupied a corner on the floor behind the door. We were divided into syndicates as at Solonika for Rations and Red Cross Parcels.

At midnight on April 24th we were all awakened by Major Miller (Senior Australian Officer) who outlined a scheme which was to be put into operation when the camp was relieved. Different people were detailed for special jobs. I was a Lance Corporal in the Guards.

On April 26th, I was promoted to Corporal and given a section, but the next day the guards were disbanded. However on April 28th we were reformed and the excitement grew as we saw German armour going by the camp.

That night the Senior British Officer was sent by the Germans on parole to contact the Americans and to try to delay the American attack. Of course he went but told the Americans to get on with it and came back with very encouraging news about the strength of the two opposing forces.

At 9 a.m. on April 29th the battle began and machine gun fire came directly over the camp. Soon American, French, Greek and British flags were flying everywhere and at one o'clock carriers and tanks of the 14th Division of the 3rd American Army entered the camp.

Some amusement was caused by the German guards of our camp climbing the wire to get inside to escape from the SS.

The haze of smoke from thousands of smokeless heaters, the dirt, smells, hunger and discomfort were all forgotten in the realization that we were free.

April 29th – May 2nd 1945

Armed with a white arm band, I patrolled a section of the perimeter of the camp. It was rather an unpleasant post as an American gun was firing directly over it. However, I was relieved about 4 p.m. only to discover that we were to march out at once to act as guards in Moosberg town. We were only to be allowed out if we were properly dressed and wearing a white arm band.

I had lost my side cap on the way to Moosberg and now this was most important. I couldn't buy or borrow any headgear from the other 199 in my room so I went into the next room. There I managed to get one because of my Bristol accent. A fellow lying on a bed said, "Say do you come from Bristol?" When I said that I did he told me that he came from Staple Hill and I soon had my side cap.

On the way out of the camp we were halted outside the Kommandatur. There I saw a British orderly bringing out a huge picture of Hitler. He placed it up against the wall at an angle and stood looking at it. Then he stepped back a few paces and took a running jump at it. My word he got a thrill out of that and a cheer from us. He looked round a bit sheepish at that, as he didn't know that he had a crowd of spectators.

Well, my section were given a large barn to guard. It contained Red Cross Stores but to our dismay only electric light fittings and miserable stuff that couldn't be eaten. We were split up for guard duty. Wally and I were together on this for two hours and when we came back into the barn, frozen stiff, we found that Johnny Burke and Jimmy Lodge had scrounged some food from American soldiers. This they divided with us. Jimmy, whom I should have known better, implored me to have a drink from his water bottle. I did and nearly passed out, it contained neat spirit – Red Biddy – real dynamite. I slept very comfortably in a pile of straw.

For three days we guarded the barn. We found billets in a house opposite and thoroughly appreciated sleeping in a bed and warming at a stove. It was snowing on the night of April 28th and from midnight to 2 a.m. when I was on guard was pretty cold.

That morning I watched American soldiers pile rubbish in the road, put a broken telegraph pole on top, pour petrol over it and set fire to the lot. That was really warming and Johnny Burke had scrounged a tin of Ham and Eggs for eight. Did we have a feed.

On May 2nd after the GIs' had moved on for the battle of the Isar we were moved back to the miserable camp at Moosberg only to find that the things we had left behind had been flogged by the men in the room. I returned the side cap.

Orderly Chaos

On May 7th at 4.30 a.m. we were told to get out to transport. We started shaving when suddenly there were shouts of the lorries are here, worse still the lights went out. P packed my few things into my knapsack which Vince Miller had made me

in Eichstadt and rushed for the lorries. There was no need to have rushed but this was a time one did not want to miss. O lost my other razor in the unseemly haste, I had given one to Gary Sanders who was Block I at Eichstadt.

We arrived at Landshat and were eventually billeted in a modern (1945) peoples flat. There was a wonderful stove which would burn anything but no furniture. We all went on the scrounge, someone found some potatoes and we had a meal of them. The stove was jolly good with the rubbish we had scrounged and we slept on the tiled floor around it.

May 8th This (my birthday) was the most exciting day of my life. We were taken to the airfield and arranged in parties of 24 for the planes. Johnny Burke and I were together but nobody else of our Eichstadt room. Some planes took off and we moved on to the strip. The next plane started off, a tyre burst and it carried all over the place into other planes before it burst into flames. The only casualty was the pilot who in

throwing himself out broke his collar bone.

We were ordered back to the side until new planes arrived. Suddenly a plane came in to land. It was a German and everybody went mad. Shots were fired at it from everywhere and the bullets just cleared our heads

as we went back to the side. We were told it had come in to surrender.

Later as we sat by the side a sniper started taking pot shots at us. I don't think he hit anybody. About 2 p.m. the weather began to change, a black cloud came up and I thought it was a good idea to see if I could get anything at a nearby farm. I got shelter from a thunderstorm. About 4 p.m. Johnny Burke rushed in, "Come on Les", he said, "The planes are coming in". We went. We got on a plane that evening and sped westwards. Hours later we landed at a deserted aerodrome at Rheims. The pilot said he would get transport for us. At midnight there was a tremendous row, guns firing, flares going off and lights flashing. We didn't know what it was but it was the end of the war. Shortly after transport arrived and we were taken to the Rheims Camp.

There we were told to get food if we wanted it. If we wanted it! Johnny and I joined the queue. We were served by German POWs. Coffee, hard boiled eggs, bread and butter, we sat down on the ground and ate it. "What should we do now," said Johnny. "Join the queue again", said I. Which we did.

Suddenly there came an announcement "Those going to England go to the main gate". "That is us", I said and off we went. We met 20 others at the main gate who said "We have to have officers with us, will you take us?" "Sure", we both said. In no time we were off to the aerodrome, we got into the plane and there we taxied to a remote part of the aerodrome, where we stopped. Time passed.

At last about midday a crew arrived for our Lancaster. Apparently flights had been halted because of an accident. I learnt later that an old school friend of mine, who was the pilot, had been killed.

We soon set off and had a marvellous trip. We were in a Lancaster and we were told we could go up into the gunners seat if we liked. Two or three ORs went up but as there were no further volunteers I spent the trip in this position. The weather was fine and the view of England from the Channel was magnificent. We landed at Wing about

'Camp conditions were appalling, I was with 199 officers in one room.'

2 p.m.

Then we received a shock as Johnny and I got off the plane a crowd of glamorous girls in uniform ran towards us seized us by the arms and started to drag us towards the buildings. I looked back and saw 20 bewildered lads looking at us so I released myself and said, "I think they need your treatment more than we do." It was the first time I had seen a woman in uniform in the war, and the war was over.

Officers went one way ORs another. For the third time in a few days we were deloused this time with DDT powder guns. I don't remember seeing a louse from the time I arrived in Lubeck.

Somehow I was separated from Johnny Burke. I think we had to go separately. At long last I got onto a lorry about 4 p.m. and were taken on a tour of the Buckinghamshire countryside, we went round High Wycombe twice. The driver could not find where we had to go. What did it matter we were home. At 6 p.m. we arrived at Little Chalfont where we were given a hut with beds.

We went into a bar and had drinks and dinner and felt absolutely marvellous. I did not know anyone there but I received some money, sent a telegram to my wife to say I would be home the next day May 10th, filled in a paper for a vote in the election, told there was a dance in the village and that we would leave the camp the next day. Everybody there was most apologetic as it was not a camp for officers. My wife received the telegram but I did not get a vote in the election. I went to the dance and watched until the end, then I walked back through a wood to the hut and slept like a log.

Next morning we had breakfast, climbed on a lorry and went to Amersham station where I got a train to Paddington.

There I saw a chemist on the platform and went in and asked if they had an Ever Ready Razor. The girl looked at me as if I had gone mad. I realised that these things were unobtainable. However she saw my new white kit bag and said, "Are you just back from a POW camp?" "Yes," said I, and from under the counter she produced one. As a result I was able to shave before I left Paddington. I remember nothing of the journey only getting out of the taxi and seeing Doris looking at me over the gate – May 19th 1945.

At the end of the diary there is a list of 169 books that Capt Hale read in 1944 and a further 45 books read in 1945.

There is also the following British Legion Essay written in January 1944:

"I remember, I remember the house where I was born, the little windows where the sun came peeping in at morn."

Unfortunately in many houses the sun is blotted out by the homes in the next street. When I return to England I

do not want to see long rows of squalid houses, narrow streets, queues of unemployed and people with that hopeless look on their faces. I want to see, wide roads, well planned town and people with smiling faces.

Many people realise the evils of overcrowding and mushroom expansion and wish to see good communications, good lighting, central heating and a plentiful supply of hot and cold water in every home. It is obvious that these amenities can be obtained if the haphazard methods of the past are dropped and the vital force of the country is directed along

well organised lines.

Thus my hopes and ideas for post-war conditions are bound up in a well organised state; a state which will guide local authorities in an overwhelming attack on Sir William Beveridge's five giants, "Want, Squalor, Disease, Ignorance and Idleness." The machinery of local authorities, built up through the centuries, should be maintained but the present division of the country into counties and county boroughs is out of date and changes must be made. The country should be divided into regions in accordance with the major physical features, water supply and drainage. These should be governed by local authorities which will create the environment in which other ventures can flourish.

The war has caused the destruction of many buildings, but we shall have to destroy many more before we can rebuild, not as our grandfathers or fathers built, but in the way suggested by the modern town and country planning association – with foresight and beauty. We must build for our children so that they may know the way to live.

The work of the government should consist in the outlining of a general plan, the determination of a national standard of living, research work, and the approval, co-ordination and enforcement of all detailed plans by local authorities. The government should also be responsible for the main communications by road, rail, water and air. It should proportion the industries of the country for it is noticeable that the worst unemployment has been in areas where the industries are of the same type.

It is only when the problem of unemployment is solved that national insurance will become possible, and this is essential if the citizens of the state are to feel secure, that is free from want and abject poverty. The new schemes for continued education will also be of assistance in solving the problem of unemployment.

To obtain the new England which I desire the British Legion should do its best to influence the government to take us arms against the great evils. In the branches found in every town and hamlet open warfare can be declared. Each district will have its own problems according to the economic, industrial or agricultural conditions in existence in the area.

The British Legion Branch will have to study the problems in order to give its members every possible assistance. The best work the Branch can do will be to educate its members in the way to live, in improvements in the district, and in the employment of leisure. It should attack Disease, Ignorance and Apathy.

I think it is the duty of every member of the Legion to press for compulsory voting, not only for parliamentary elections, but

also for local government. If all are compelled to vote they they will want to know the requirements of the parish, region, country and commonwealth.

One of the main ways in which each Branch can help is by the arrangement of courses of lectures on hygiene, economics, sociology, civics and finance stressing the particular requirements of the district. Excursions to factories and beauty spots should be organised to illustrate points in these lectures.

In order to carry out this programme a suitable club house must be rented or built. In addition the committee should arrange a

comprehensive sports programme including outdoor and indoor games. Entertainments such as concerts and plays should be a special core of the Branch while if funds do not run to the provision of a library, attention should be drawn to the means by which books on any subject are to be obtained. The Branch must work in close co-operation with the local employment bureau not only with a view to finding employment for its members but also with the higher ideal of seeing that each member has congenial employment. "No square pegs in round holes", should be the motto. The Central Organisation should keep its Branches informed of developments within the Commonwealth likely to be of interest to the members many of whom have formed close friendships during the war with men from overseas.

The British Legion must prepare its members both for the new industrial revolution and for the social re-organisation which in my opinion will come in the years following the war. Each member must be made aware of his responsibility towards the community, of the need to help his neighbour.

This principle is above all party politics, it is part of all religious beliefs, and it is common to all classes. When peace comes it will be the duty of the Legion to assist in the conversion of National Service into natural and normal peacetime vocations so that immediately war is at an end the organising committee should say:

"It resteth now that we have as great a care to govern in peace as conquer in war."

Tucked into the back of the Log is a newspaper cutting which shows how Capt Hale spent the next 13 years of his life:

19 Years In Egypt

A Bristol man who has spent 13 years in Egypt as a permanent official of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and who was summarily dismissed after Egypt's abrogation of the 1936 Treaty, is in London this week appealing to MPs for Government intervention on behalf of Egypt's Association of British Officials who are in a similar plight. He is Mr A Leslie Hale, whose father, Mr Alfred Hale lives at 6 Hillside, Cotham Hill. Mr Hale who is 43 arrived in Bristol on Friday with his wife and young child.

Educated at St George Grammar School, he took a BA degree at Bristol University and after teaching experience in London and Stroud went to Egypt as an English master at a secondary school.

In POW Camp

In 1940 he joined the Pioneer Corps rising to the rank of Captain and was taken prisoner at Crete. He spent four years in a German POW Camp.

He returned to Egypt in 1945 with his wife, whom he had met when she was studying science at Bristol University, and was appointed a lecturer in English at the Teacher's Training College, Assiut, in Upper Egypt.

Mrs Hale told the Evening Post that the abrogation of the Treaty students staged a demonstration outside her husband's room. She was stoned in the streets and had abuse shouted at her.

Farewell Gifts

But not all Egyptians were anti-British. Mr Hale said there were touching farewell scenes. He received farewell gifts from poor Egyptians, who voiced their admiration and respect for him. ■

**'For the third time
we were deloused
with DDT powder
guns'**

The Erinpura: Basotho Tragedy

633 Basotho soldiers of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps lost their lives

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Norman Brown

ON 1 May 1943 the troopship *Erinpura* was sunk by a German air attack in the Mediterranean with the loss of 943 lives of whom 633 were Basotho soldiers of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps.

In June 1941 recruiting commenced in Lesotho (then Basutoland) for the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps (High Commission Territories). The Paramount Chief Seeiso Griffith had already announced at the outbreak of war with Germany that his people were 'at war and they awaited any call for service made upon them.' That call finally came in the form of a request to the High Commissioner from General Wavell after his victories over the Italians in North Africa and Abyssinia. Similar appeals were made for volunteers from Botswana (then Bechuanaland) and Swaziland.

Large numbers of trained soldiers were wanted who could be relied on to work hard and steadily making roads, unloading ships, loading and unloading trains and lorries, building railways and defensive positions in spite of the possibility of enemy attack.

With the support of the Paramount Chief tribal chiefs and sub-chiefs, there was no shortage of volunteers. Thousands of men passed through the tented Ha Ratjomose Camp (Walker's Camp) near Maseru and were trained by officers and NCOs sent out from England. Uniformed in khaki drill (later there would be battle-dress in winter) and equipped, the first six companies, each of about 350 men, embarked at Durban for Egypt on 6 October 1941. Thereafter others followed as training was completed and shipping became available. After a short spell in Egypt at Qassassin the first thirteen companies went to Palestine and Lebanon to join the Allied force preparing to meet the threat of a German advance from the Caucasus if the Russians failed to hold them there. Their first job was to build defences in the mountains west of Damascus. Living in tents they suffered severely from vicious windstorms and heavy snowfalls.

More companies followed to work at closing a 100 mile (160.9 km) gap in the coastal railway between Acre, north of Haifa, and Tripoli. The previous experience of many of the Basotho in South African mines with automatic drills and dynamite was found to be most valuable. 1927 Company was among these and was one of

those that provided a guard of honour for a visit by the Duke of Gloucester.

Other companies, including 1919, remained in Egypt carrying out such tasks as unloading ships in the ports and providing guard units. Some companies worked behind the lines at Alamein and were among those told, on the morning of 23 October 1942, the plan for the attack that night. When the enemy finally broke and ran, Basotho companies followed the pursuing Allied forces mending roads and airfields, opening new railheads and unloading supplies.

Malta had survived its siege successfully and its facilities were being developed to improve it as a base for sea and air attacks against the enemy. It was decided to send Basotho, Mauritian and Palestinian troops to help with this work. Basotho Companies 1919, 1921, 1923 and 1927 were selected. 1923 made the still very dangerous passage safely in February 1943.

The last of the German and Italian forces surrendered in Tunis on 12 May 1943. In endeavouring to support and supply them in the last weeks of resistance, the Luftwaffe squadrons based in Sicily and Italy had suffered crippling losses in aircraft and air crews. Their ability to attack Allied convoys in the Mediterranean had been severely reduced.

On or about 28 April, Companies 1919 and 1927 boarded the troopship *Erinpura* in Alexandria. This vessel under Captain R V Cotter was the Commodore Ship of a convoy of twenty-three merchant vessels and eleven naval escorts. On board the *Erinpura* were 179 crew, eleven DEMS gunners and 1,025 troops, of whom over 700 were Basotho.

Among those who boarded her were Captain Bill Westrop, then 2IC of 1927, CSM Gabriel Lehlabaphiri and Private Dyke Sebata (later Sergeant), both of 1927 and Private Mokhethi Leluma of 1919. The latter three were all from the Butha-Buthe district in north-eastern Lesotho. Westrop was one of the first group of officers, WOs and NCOs who came from England to serve with the AAPC. Arriving in Durban in October 1941 they had a crash course in Sotho and were allocated to companies in Maseru the following month. He started as a Lt in 1903 Company serving mainly in Palestine and Lebanon. Later he was transferred to 1927 where he became 2IC.

The *Erinpura* was a twin-screw steamship of 5,143 gross tons, built in 1911 for the British India Steam Navigation Company

for service in the Bay of Bengal and Singapore. She was a fast ship with an original speed of over 16 knots, ideal for mail, passenger and cargo service between Calcutta, Madras, Rangoon and Singapore. She was considered a beautiful vessel with fine clean lines. In 1914 she went into Government service as an ambulance carrier and hospital ship, mainly in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Still under Government control in 1919 and in a sand-storm, she ran onto a reef in the Red Sea. There were no casualties, but it proved impossible to tow her off. Eventually she was cut in two, the fore-part abandoned on the reef and the aft towed to Bombay. A new fore-part was built in Scotland and shipped to Bombay in sections, enabling the ship to be re-assembled and returned to peace-time service in 1923.

She was still a fast ship and in 1941 she took part in the evacuation of personnel from Singapore when its fall was imminent. Thereafter, she was in Government service, mainly as a troopship.

The *Erinpura* had an upper and a lower level of troop-decks. 1919 Company were billeted in the lower one and 1927 above them.

In the late afternoon of 1 May 1943 the convoy was in six columns on a westerly course not far from the North African coast. The first warning of air attack came at 18:43 when a single aircraft approached the convoy out of the sun. Flying at about 50 feet above the sea it flew between the starboard line of escorts and the convoy, so that only two ships were able to engage it. Apparently no hits were made. Reports differ as to whether it released a torpedo or jettisoned something, but no ship was hit. This aircraft retired to the north-east pursued by shore-based fighters who claimed to have destroyed it. It would have been able to report the convoy's position by radio before it was shot down.

Shortly after 19:10 another plane attempted to repeat the same tactics, but it was driven off by fire from the escorts. Retreating to the north-west it, too, was pursued and destroyed by fighters.

Finally the main attack commenced at 19:50. A German source says that it was made by two Gruppen (equivalent squadrons), 111/KG 26 under Major Nocken and 11 KG 26 led by Major Werner Klumper, who also commanded the attack as acting wing commander. British estimates of the number of attackers vary



from 18 to 36. The lower figure seems more likely. The attack was synchronised by two groups so as to confuse the defence. British reports differ. Apparently the first attack was made by bombers. Ships in the convoy twisted and turned to avoid the falling bombs and no hits were made. All vessels were firing their anti-aircraft weapons. At the same time a Heinkel 111 was seen to drop a torpedo about a mile from the convoy, later a flash was seen and an explosion heard. The tanker British Trust was hit, her port side was opened for a third of her length and her cargo of oil caught fire. She listed heavily and sank in about three minutes. No boats could be lowered and difficulty was experienced in getting rafts clear, but her crew, mainly Indian lascars, behaved very well and many survived to be picked up.

The action intensified at about 20:10 with many bombers overhead, the guns of the convoy and escorts firing furiously and the scene partly lighted by the burning oil from the British Trust. At this time fighters were probably overhead attacking the bombers, as shore command claimed that it had three Spitfires, eleven Hurricanes and a Beaufighter airborne very quickly.

In the Erinpura all troops had been ordered to their action stations or below to the troop decks. This was to minimise casualties if the ship was machine-gunned or bombed when men were crowded on the open decks. 1929 Company commander Major Tulloch was on the bridge with Captain Cotter. Westrop and a Guards officer were stationed on the starboard boat-deck.

Early in the second attack the Erinpura was hit, probably by a bomb which passed through the forward hatch-cover or deck to explode below doing enormous damage. The general din was so intense that Westrop did not realise that the ship had been struck, but noticed that the water seemed to be rising fast on starboard side and that the ship was tilting slightly. When the water had risen almost to the rail he went forward to see Tulloch on the bridge. Looking forward he saw that the whole of the fore-peak was under water. He shouted down the nearest stairway, 'Everyone overboard' and soon afterwards took to the water himself.

The sea was rough. As he swam away to get clear of the ship before it sank, Westrop turned and saw it, bows under water, stern up at an angle of 45 degrees. It capsized as it sank by the bows, but there was little suction or pull from the vortex. It had disappeared within minutes of being struck.

The DEMS gunners under Gun Layer Albert Whittle kept on firing their 12-pounder until the ship sank. Only six of the eleven survived. Captain Cotter was knocked unconscious on the bridge by a column of water. He was rescued and placed on a raft by Indian seaman. Many of the troops must have gone down with the ship, especially those from the lower deck.

The fire from the ships against the aircraft lasted for some time but no other ship was hit. The men in the water, nearly all in life-jackets floated or clung to wreckage. As soon as the planes departed, the escorts started the work of rescue using their searchlights. Some of the men in the water thought that the lights were from German ships looking for them and were reluctant to call out for help. Later they decided that it was better to be saved, even by Germans, than die in the water. Some of them only realised they were among friends when brought aboard the rescue ships.

Lehlabaphiri was on a small middle deck below his men on the upper troop deck.

He made his way to the boat-deck and ordered his men overboard. He, too, went over, but was trapped below the surface by cordage. The capsizing motion of the ship as it sank released him and saved him from being dragged down with it.

Dyke Sebata of 1927 Company was mixed in with the men of 1919 on the lower deck, but he managed to make his way out in his shirt and shorts and went overboard. Well supported by his life-jacket, he was alone in the sea until he bumped into a piece of wreckage, a 'plank', which was supporting another man. He joined him and they floated together. Three times an escort vessel approached them and they shouted for help, but it turned away to pick up others. They were seen the fourth time, ropes were thrown down to them and they were hauled aboard.

Leluma of 1919 was in the lower deck. He was one of the few that managed to make their way upward and jump safely into the water. There he got into trouble among the ropes and wreckage and his legs were pulled into a violent split which injured him severely. He was partly paralysed, but while the battle raged above him he floated away alone. Later he managed to pull himself onto a plank and lay there face down, praying to God. An escort vessel found him and threw down a rope. He held on to it with his hands, but his strength failed and he fell back into the water. Next time he held on to rope with his teeth and was pulled aboard. Partly paralysed and crying out with pain and distress.

Lehlabaphiri after escaping from his trap of ropes floated in his life-belt. He and some others found a floating raft, but when they climbed on it a wave threw them off. They held onto its side ropes until they drifted into a mass, a 'nest' of wreckage and were able to perch on that until they were picked up by an escort vessel soon after midnight.

Westrop went on swimming around, always confident that he would be picked up. He found a floating spar with men sitting on it, but there was no room for him. A ship approached and he called to it, but it turned away. This left him a little disheartened, but soon afterwards he was picked up and hauled aboard the minesweeper HMS Santa.

As he sat thankfully with his back against the warm engine-room casing, the man next to him said, 'Don't go on about this. I've been torpedoed four times.'

Survivors said that the water had not been very cold, but men had drowned and died in the water and some expired on the rescue ships. Rescue ships coming out from Benghazi, 30 miles away, arrived at 13:00, but found no one alive in the water.

Two Basotho soldiers had a remarkable escape. They were trapped below decks with the water rising and no escape route open. The water compressed the air and forced them up through a ventilator to the deck. They were picked up and saved.

The RAF Command ashore claimed that four of the attacking aircraft had been shot down, one by AA fire and three, plus one probable, by the fighters. One official report noted that the captain of the British Trust had now had five vessels sunk under him and suggested that he be considered for a shore job!

Six hundred and thirty-three Basotho lost their lives, along with sixty-one Batswana. Only about 100, seventy-five

from 1927 and twenty-five from 1919, survived.

The bedraggled survivors were landed at Benghazi next morning. Westrop made the long hot walk down the pier in bare feet. He and others were billeted in a large building with many small rooms which they believed must have been a convent. Later they learned that it had been an Italian military brothel! They were issued with new kit and equipment and in due course transported to camps near Cairo. From there they were given two weeks leave to Jerusalem.

1919 Company was not reformed, but 1927 went on to Tripoli and later landed in Taranto. They worked on airfields at Forlì and were attached to 83 RA Regiment to

train and serve as gun-crews.

Many of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps companies served in Italy. By this time, from being highly regarded labour troops they had diversified into other activities. Many served as muleteers carrying

ammunition and supplies to forward positions, and on foot where mules could not go when, beside their own kit, the standard load was a 60 lb (27 kg) pack and a two-gallon (9 l) can of water in each hand. This sometimes in rain or snow up slippery mountain paths. They suffered casualties from mines, air attack, artillery and small arms fire.

By the time they came home AAPC troops had served in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Tripolitania, Tunisia, Malta, Sicily (where they took part in the initial landings), Italy (where a company landed at Salerno), the Dodecanese and again, after the war, in Palestine. In general they displayed high standards as disciplined, reliable soldiers. Beside the appropriate campaign stars and service medals, including for some the General Service Medal with 1945-48 bar, they were awarded two MBEs, seven MMs, eight BEMs, sixty-one MIDAs and twenty-three Commendations. 21, 462 Basotho, about 10, 000 Batswana and about 3, 500 Swazis served in the AAPC. The total fatal Basotho casualties were 1 216, so that more than half were lost with the Erinpura.

Westrop went to Italy with 1927 Company. Later he was promoted to major in command of 1044 Company. He was and is highly regarded by his men who knew him affectionately by a nickname which he translated as 'Old Baldy'. At the end of the war he returned to England from Italy.

Lehlabaphiri went to 1944 as CSM with Westrop. After the war he returned home to the Butha-Buthe district. A burly, impressive, jovial man, he manages a country store for an expatriate white owner.

Sebata was mentioned in despatches. He returned to work his small-holding in a remote valley 'over the mountain' from the Lesotho Highlands development. His two rondavels and his fields are kept in immaculate condition.

Leluma spent many months in military hospitals before and after returning home and being discharged.

His hospital certificate refers to 'motor hysteria after a fractured pelvis'. He feels that he was badly treated by the military doctors. He lost his 'land rights' in a family dispute and has never been able to work on a regular basis. He receives a Basotho military disablement pension of R10 per month, augmented by the grant of a similar amount from the South African National War Fund. ■

'Erinpura was hit by a bomb which exploded below causing enormous damage.'

The National Arboretum

A living tribute to the war time generations of the twentieth century



Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Norman Brown

THE NATIONAL Memorial Arboretum was conceived as a living tribute to the war time generations of the twentieth century and as a gift to their memory for future generations to reflect upon and enjoy. From the start it was seen as a place of joy where the lives of people would be remembered by living trees that would grow and mature in a world of peace.

As planting began in 1997, it seemed most appropriate that the site should also celebrate the turn of the century. The Millennium Chapel of Peace and Forgiveness is a central part of the site and was created in such a way as to offer a place of tranquillity and reflection to people of every faith or none. This is in keeping with the planting philosophy which has always been inclusive as can be seen in the many and varied sites. Nearly all of these were designed in partnership and consultation so that every group could feel a sense of ownership of the plot to which they had contributed.

The project began with no money, no land, no staff and no trees. The National Lottery, in the form of the Millennium Commission, granted some forty per cent of the funds needed and this was matched by thousands of donations, both large and small, from a wide variety of organisations both military and civilian, men and women, corporate and voluntary. The land was kindly leased for a peppercorn rent by Redland Aggregates (now Lafarge) who have generously supported the idea from the beginning. The site was created by a staff of thousands; a small paid group; a dedicated and very active Friends of the National Memorial Arboretum organisation; and countless others who have either planted individual trees or helped create a plot for their organisation. The initial planting took place thanks to grants from Forestry Commission and the National Forest. We once estimated that the involvement of so many supporters made The Arboretum the most popular of all the Millennium projects – rightly so, in our opinion and it will, certainly, be one of the longest lasting.

The future of the project became assured when three proposals were agreed. These were: for the site to be the location of the Armed Forces Memorial, for the Ministry of Defence to pay a significant grant-in-aid to allow for free entry and that the Royal British Legion would accept the gift of the site as the focus for the Nation's year round remembrance. With these arrangements in place the trees can look forward to a very long, healthy and much visited future.

Why the Memorial is so important

Every year we are rightly reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by men and women during the two World Wars that disfigured the 20th century. However, it is widely accepted that there has been insufficient recognition of the men and women of our Armed and Merchant Services who have lost their lives in conflict, as a result of terrorist action or on training exercises since the end of the Second World War.

During this period the men and women of the Armed and Merchant Services have taken part in more than 50 operations and conflicts across the world, often as part of United Nations, NATO or other international coalitions. These actions have ranged from hot war to peacekeeping; from humanitarian assistance to fighting terrorism; from the jungles of Malaysia to the storms of the South Atlantic; from the streets of Aden to the streets of Northern Ireland.

It is not just Service men and women who have made sacrifices. Behind every name on the Memorial there are the wives, husbands, partners, parents, children and colleagues who loved them and who live with the pain and consequences of their loss every day.

The Memorial

The Armed Forces Memorial (AFM) dedicated in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen on 12 October 2007, is a nationally significant focus for remembrance, providing recognition and thanks for those who have given their lives in the service of the country since the two World Wars.

The Memorial is a stunning piece of

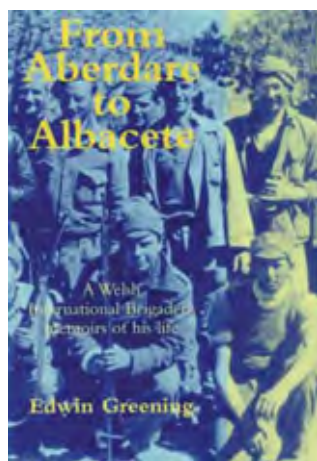
architecture designed by Liam O'Connor which draws its inspiration from the ancient landscapes of prehistoric Britain and the classical forms of ancient Rome. It consists of a large 6 metre high earth mound, 100 metres wide at the top, which is based on early British barrows or tumuli. The spiralling walkway up the grassy tree-planted slopes provides accessibility to people of all ages and mobility. At the top of the mound stands a 43 metre diameter stone structure, comprising two curved walls and two straight walls which are constructed of 200,000 bricks faced with Portland stone panels.

The Memorial is particularly important for the many families and friends who have no grave to visit, or who remember names which are on the other side of the world in far off places. The Memorial plays a valuable role in helping all who grieve for a Service person come to terms with their loss, by providing a focus for their grief as they pass through different stages of their lives.

The Sculptures

At the centrepiece of the Memorial are two evocative bronze sculptures, the embodiment of loss and sacrifice. Created by Ian Rank-Broadley, best known for his effigy of HM Queen Elizabeth II which has appeared on UK and Commonwealth coinage since 1998, the sculptures bear silent witness to the cost of armed conflict. This significant new work is becoming an icon identifiable to all and especially to those who live with the consequence of the Nation's call to duty. ■





From Aberdare to Albacete

"I thought his time in WW2 may be of interest as he served in the Pioneer Corps. He served in North Africa, Normandy, Belgium and Germany with 199, 194 and 296 Companies..."

**Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Norman Brown**

MR DEREK Luker writes: "Dear Norman, I've just finished reading a wonderful book called 'From Aberdare to Albacete'. It is the story of Edwin Greening, a Welsh miner who left his home in the valleys to volunteer to fight as an International Brigader alongside the Republican forces in Spain.

This memoir is, however, more than an account of his fight against Franco's fascist forces in Spain between 1936 and 1939.

Of the 15 chapters in the book, only four cover the years in Spain. The first eight describe his upbringing and youth in Aberdare.

Born in 1910, the young Greening was working as a miner by the tender age of 14. By day, he struggled to win the coal. By night, he won knowledge and understanding from the books in his uncle Gwilym's house or in the nearby Workman's Institute. Following the General Strike and lock-out of 1926, Greening became dissatisfied with his lot as a miner, with its constant danger, breadline wages and periods of unemployment.

His insight into the politics of the time was developed over long evenings spent at night school and given shape and focus from his youth in the ILP Guild of Youth and later in the Communist Party.

I thought his time in WW2 (Chapter 14) may be of interest as he served in the Pioneer Corps. He served in North Africa, Normandy, Belgium and Germany with 199, 194 and 296 Companies."

Chapter Fourteen World War Two

On 14 August 1940, I bade farewell and went up to the station where there were many young men going to war. I met an old friend, Noel John, who had just taken his degree at Bristol University. Together we travelled as far as Bristol in the company of three Army Sergeants who gave us the benefit of their military wisdom in a very amusing fashion. Then Noel and I parted as he was going to Birmingham, I would not see him again until 1946. On arrival at Westward Ho, we were lined up in ranks of three and marched off to the camp. After a meal, we were taken to a hut with beds and told about the camp. We were also told that we were going to be in 199 Company Pioneer Corps. The next few weeks consisted of being kitted out, getting our pay books, understanding Army Regulations, making out Soldiers' Wills and receiving basic training. I quickly made friends and settled into the routine of the camp. A new era of my life had begun.

One day in early September, as I was

walking along the road to Westward Ho village, I met a sergeant coming towards me. There was something familiar about his walk and his face. He, too, looked closely at me. I said "Flanagan!" He stopped and extended his hand. "Taffy Greening of the 1st Company the British Battalion!" he said. He was one of the men in Spain who had married a Spanish girl from Tarazona de la Mancha. At the collapse of the Spanish Republic she had failed to get out of Spain. He did not know where she now lived.

We sat on a nearby wall and discussed the situation. He was now in a Pioneer Battalion of Republican Spaniards. He had volunteered to serve in it and he invited me to apply for a transfer to his battalion. Flanagan was a good fellow and I spent several days thinking about it, but I eventually decided against it.

I was thinking of getting on with my studies and I would avoid any promotion that detracted from that plan. The days were passing by and there were rumours that our Company would be moving from the training base into the wider military world.

On the afternoon of the 13 September, we were ordered to pack to be ready to move out the next day. As we marched along the roads of Devon, I thought back to Spain and the dusty roads of La Mancha, the frozen roads of Aragon, the curving roads of the Ebro Valley and the boys of the old 15th International Brigade of the Spanish Republican Army.

At first we went to Hertfordshire and then after a few weeks to Duxford Airfield, Cambridge. I noted that we built protective walls of sand bags all round the airfield but not around the tents. I pointed this out to Sgt Keen who said there was no need to do that. I thought that, as a regular soldier, he should know that you have to be prepared for anything in war.

That night, the airfield was bombed by the Germans and the next morning we were ordered to dig trenches and sandbag the tents. Sgt Kent looked at me and said, "You have been a soldier before". I did not reply.

I decided that I had to study for my London University Matriculation, and the next day I sent off to the University Correspondence College in Cambridge for a course. It was around this time that I received a letter from Dai Davies in Aberdare enclosing a cutting from the South Wales Echo. It was all about Lance Rogers who had grossly slandered me when we had both returned from Spain in December 1938. The cutting read 'Fighter for Spain refuses to fight for Britain'. Lance

had been handcuffed to a policeman and was being marched to prison through the streets of Merthyr Tydfil. He had gone all religious and would not shed blood. I read the cutting; Lance was no coward. What game was he playing now as a conscientious objector to war? I could not understand.

On 19 September 1941, I returned on leave to Aberdare, which was now a vastly different place from the depressed town that I remembered in the 1930s.

Unemployment had almost disappeared; the only people now without work were the old, the sick and mothers with young children.

Thousands were in the armed forces and thousands worked in the mines and factories. Aberdare was crammed with official and unofficial refugees from the London and Midland areas. Pupils from the Boys' and Girls' Grammar schools from Ilford, Essex were now living in Aberdare and sharing the Grammar schools on a shift system. Walking through the town one could hear dozens of different dialects and dozens of European languages spoken. The town was crowded, the cinemas and pubs were always busy and underneath the blacked-out streets there was a hive of activity with concerts and repertory companies visiting the town.

In September 1941, we were suddenly ordered to clear the camp and we boarded trains to move to our next base. As we rumbled through the night, we saw station after station pass by: Newmarket, Cambridge, Oxford, Didcot, Gloucester, Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and Carmarthen. As dawn was breaking, I

watched the beautiful green land of Wales roll by and then we came to a halt in the town of Pembroke.

What do I remember about this time? Well, it rained a lot and there were quite a few storms. We were

sent out in working parties all over the district and spent much of the time in Pembroke Station unloading Nissen huts. In November, I received a letter from my nephew, Terence Phillips, Nellie's eldest son.

He wanted to know how to study for his matriculation and I devised and sent a study programme for him. Later that month I had a few days' leave and went home to have a very bitter discussion with my father about his refusal to make a reasonable contribution to the household expenses. I told him frankly that I insisted he pay £2 a week to mother for her maintenance and that I would pay £1 a week out of my army pay.

He reluctantly agreed. I returned to camp

"He had gone all religious and would not shed blood"

a few days later where it was dreary and grim, but I did not worry about such conditions after Spain.

In September 1942, it was obvious that our company was going to be posted overseas. We were given inoculations and plenty of machine-gun practice with old kit being replaced by new. I was transferred to 194 Company Pioneer Corps, and promoted to Corporal.

I got a 48-hour pass and, returning to Aberdare, I was shocked at the appearance of my mother who had become very frail. I realised that if I were sent overseas I would never see her again. A few days after returning to camp, we were told that we were moving out.

After a long train journey we arrived in Glasgow. Eventually we reached the docks and struggled up the gangway of a large Dutch ship. Day after day, we practiced boat drill and poison gas drill and the ship made trips around the Clyde, whilst more and more ships appeared.

Suddenly the news went through the ship that mosquito cream had come aboard and then the rumours started flying. We were going to India, Madagascar, Italy, Spain and Egypt. But we still remained in the Firth of Clyde, Scotland. On Sunday 20 October 1942, on a beautiful morning, we sailed down the Clyde and out to sea. We were on our way – but where to?

The voyage continued with plenty of zigzagging and the ship altering course a lot to outwit any German U-boats. Eventually, we steamed into the Mediterranean, it was apparent that we were probably going to North Africa and this turned out to be the case.

I was ordered to read a pamphlet about the area to the men in my section, and instead gave a talk. With my knowledge of the area and my experience of public speaking it went down so well that for the rest of the voyage I was ordered to go from unit to unit giving the talk. On the 8 November 1942, we were ordered to go and get a ration of rum. Shortly afterwards the ship engines stopped and we were ordered to wait until our particular party was to disembark. Hour after hour we waited, watching as others disembarked. After climbing down the net, we had to jump into the invasion craft, which was rising and falling with the swell. Eventually the men, machinery, and equipment were deposited on the beach.

I was sent with my party to camp up on a hill, and decided that we could expect a visit from enemy planes. I started to dig a slit trench. The other men camp up and laughed at me, but I had experienced German planes before. Later that night, as we finished our meal of tinned rations, dusk was falling and suddenly the convoy guns opened up in a gigantic and terrifying roar. The sky was ablaze, with enemy planes dive-bombing the ships.

The bombs came down with a sickening roar, reminiscent of Spain. After it was over, we settled down to a bitterly cold night. The next day dawned with a massive raid that sent every one scattering. Immediately after breakfast, everyone started to make slit trenches, but later that day we had orders to move to Algiers. As we marched along the roads, we saw terrible poverty in the Arab villages, with the people in rags, looking half-starved and living in mud huts. In contrast were the large rich villas of French settlers, who were much better off. Here and there were tall palm trees, fig and

orange groves. To the men with me it was a new and exciting scene, but it reminded me of Spain.

I was determined to make the most of my time in North Africa and continue with my studying. When I was on duty, I would walk around with my rifle and there was usually a crowd of teenagers gathered round speaking in French and Arabic. I asked them in my broken French to get me a French grammar book, but I could not get them to understand what I meant.

A woman came out of a nearby house and thinking that she looked Spanish I spoke to her in Spanish, and she replied. I was able to tell her what I wanted and she spoke to the boys and told them what to do. Soon I had a book, and as I had to speak French in my contact with the public, I soon began to be able to speak it reasonably well.

What I found in North Africa was terrible poverty, with many of the Arabs looking half-starved and in rags, and when I write rags, I mean rags. Never before had I seen such utter poverty.

Time went on and the Company moved to various camps in Northern Algeria whilst I followed the course of the war in Russia and Germany. Intelligent people knew that Germany had been defeated at Stalingrad and that this was the end for Germany. However, final victory for the Allies was a long way off.

The railway workers in Duvivier, where we were stationed at that time, were exultant at the German defeat at Stalingrad as most of them were Communists. One of them was called Francisco Borond, and one day one of the American soldiers came up to him and started to talk to him in Spanish. He noticed me listening, turned, and said, “Entiendes el espanol? Si, Yo entiendo.” He asked where I had learned Spanish and I told him in the Spanish Civil War. He became a close friend and every day we would speak in Spanish and discuss the Civil War, World War 2 and politics. It was most interesting and my Spanish improved rapidly.

Life was interesting around the station with plenty going on. One day a train brought a group of British soldiers who turned out to be Spaniards from the Army of the Ebro. I had a long chat with them in Spanish and then their train drew out.

After this, I was sent to Souk-el-Arba where we were at the front line, and in the distance artillery rumbled ceaselessly. Here we had the grisly task of searching the rotting corpses of enemy soldiers on the mountainside. I thought of what the Germans had done to others and how they deserved the hammering that they were getting. We had to search the bodies, find their identity tags and then bury them, saying the short burial service for

enemy soldiers. The stench of putrefying flesh and the swarms of flies made the task very unpleasant.

On 26 May, letters came from home with the news that my sister Olive, who had married Dr Alistair Wilson a few years previously, had given birth to their second son Hugh. I was thrilled at the news and happy to have a letter from my mother who had not written for a long time because of her ill health. In June, it was my mother's 65th birthday and I wrote a long letter of congratulations to her.

On the 5 July 1943, I was busy studying at my desk when the shout came “Letter for you, Corporal Greening!” “Excellent!” I

shouted and opened the letter to be struck dumb with the news from my brother George telling me that Mother had died at dusk on the evening of 21st June. During the days that followed, I was grief-stricken at the loss of my mother, my oldest and dearest friend. I was hit by depression; experienced many poignant memories of my mother and scenes from my childhood came surging back. I decided to make a new will leaving everything to my sister, Alice, who was not married, and in the event of her death, to my other sisters and my brother.

Life went on, and a few weeks later I received a letter from George giving details and a form about the new emergency teacher training scheme. It was just what I had been preparing for and I was determined to find out more about it and to finish my matriculation and then, when the war was over, to apply for a place.

On the 21 July, I heard a discussion outside the marquee between Lt Matthews and Sgt Cook. Lt Matthews wanted to send me with a work detail to Beja, but Sgt Cook pointed out that I had been up all night on duty. Sgt Cook was ordered to take the men and, later that day, we heard that he and the men had started to unload the lorry full of German mines which had been rendered harmless by the Royal Engineers. Suddenly the lorry blew up and Sgt Cook and ten of the men were instantly killed. Ambulances rushed to the scene but all that could be done was to pick up the fragments of the bodies. It made me think of the chances in life that determine your fate.

Shortly after this I was transferred to the City of Tunis to join 296 Company as a clerk. This made life easier for studying, as the office had to be manned in the evening for the phone to be answered; I volunteered to do this every night, which delighted everyone else. However, that eventually came to an end, and it was back on to the lorries for the long journey to the port of Phillipville and the embarkation on the American troop ship, the Thomas H Barry. Now we faced the journey home and the dangers of sailing in the North Atlantic; with German U-Boats lurking.

From now on danger and death lurked on every side; all day long two planes circled the convoy to be ready to pounce on any suspicious movement, whilst fast destroyers hovered in a protective screen all round ready to dash off if trouble started. Dawn and dusk were the most dangerous times and lights were forbidden at this time. Then, on November 24, I woke to find that we were back at the mouth of the Clyde and eventually, after disembarking, went to Newmarket.

It was Christmas and 296 Company were paid and given leave. I went to London and then on to Cardiff and Aberdare. Entering the house in the early hours of the morning of the 14th December 1943, I sat and dozed by the fire. My father coming down stairs awakened me. As he saw me he said pathetically, “Edwin, you're back”. We shook hands and embraced affectionately. The leave came to an end and then it was back to Newmarket, and life as an army clerk.

Two things happened in 1944 that had an effect on my life. The first was the sad death of my brother-in-law, Billie Phillips, from a heart attack at fifty-one years of age. I was allowed to go home for the funeral, which was a very sad affair.

During this brief leave, I decided that I had to make a date with Bronwen Davies, whom I knew by sight and to whom I was very attracted. Nellie advised me to wait by Aberaman Bridge at lunchtime and, as

‘The bombs came down with a sickening roar, reminiscent of Spain.’

Bronwen came past to make a date. I did as I had been told, and that night went to the cinema with Bronwen.

This was the start of a new phase in my life. I knew that the war was coming to an end and I was now romantically involved with Bronwen.

Then I was posted overseas again this time to Normandy; then Belgium and eventually to Germany. At the end of October 1944 I was sent to escort some German prisoners to Dieppe. The first time that I had seen Dieppe was in 1937 on my way to Spain and then in December 1938, when the British Battalion returned from the Spanish Civil War. Those were passing-through visits, but now I had time to look around the town, and a fine town it was too. While in Dieppe, I attended a big meeting of the French Communist Party where there were interesting speakers.

From there I returned to Arras and then we were sent to Lille. Life was interesting as we entered the L'Hopital des Incurables and took over the duties of orderlies.

During the bitterly cold December, I was feverishly studying the last stages of my English and Mathematics after a day of hard work.

Still it could have been worse. I could have been in a slit trench facing the Germans in Holland, Belgium or France. I had no desire to fight again as a front line soldier. I had had enough of that in Spain.

We were moved to Roubaix where we took over some mansions as our quarters, which quietly became a den of thieves. Two deserters from infantry units lived among us. Everyone knew that they were there except the officers. They ate, slept and acted like the other men. By day, they acted as orderlies working for the cooks and at night they went out round the cafes of Lille and Roubaix trading in illicit goods. No one gave them away. One night someone went into Lt MacMenamy's room and stole all his bedding. Lt MacMenamy ordered all on parade and called in the Special Security Branch. Hearing the news, the deserters fled at once. French black marketers now began to frequent the mansion and the discipline in the unit began breaking down.

One day, a letter came from London University informing me that the examination for the matriculation would take place on January 9th, 1945.

The day of the examination dawned and I went to the attic room of the Chateau, which was the examination room, and met Lt MacMenamy who was to supervise me. It was English and I felt that the examination went well. At one o'clock, I went for dinner and then went back to the attic ready for the maths paper. Disaster!

The university had sent the wrong paper. At once, Major Letch wrote to request that the right papers be sent. On the 21 January 1945, I received a letter from my sister telling me that Gwilym Ambrose was to open a new Teacher Training College at Llandrindod and that I might be bale to go there.

At last things were looking up, But I would have to pass the rest of the matriculation, including mathematics. The next day, as thick snow and blizzard conditions covered Northern France, I sat the maths exam in the officers' quarters. After the exam was over the officer in charge sealed the papers and I went to dinner hoping that I had passed.

On the 25 February we packed up and went to resume our duties of wandering

round the mining and industrial towns of Northern France and Belgium, guarding German prisoners and doing special jobs in the rear of the allied forces. One day on 2nd March, 1945, we were ordered to guard some barges in Lille canal docks only to find that there was a party of Spanish-American soldiers from New Mexico USA there and I was able to practice my Spanish with them. The next day, I received a message which ordered me to report to the Chateau at once, which I did. I was met with the news that I had passed the first part of my matriculation examination. That night I began to study for the next part of the examination, after first writing to Nellie and Bron to tell them the news. Again I was studying in earnest when I received the news that I was to leave 296 Company forever. Together with another soldier I was sent to Brussels and then to Bruges. I was greatly relieved when I was told that I was to be sent back to Britain for a two-month course in military administration in Germany.

'I thought I might be sent to Burma which would have setback my plans'

I had thought that I might be sent to Burma, and that would have been a serious setback for my plans to be a teacher. Instead, I found myself back in Britain and was able to go on leave to Aberdare to see the family and Bron. I resolved now to end my matriculation studies in September 1945, although I would be going back to Belgium in June, this time to Antwerp then on to Munster in Germany.

Life was now pleasant as I had good quarters with my own large bedroom and work, which was clerical, was easy. Every night I was able to study and then write home to Bron, family and friends. Then on 25 July I came downstairs to the news that Labour had won the election, I jumped and shouted for joy. I knew that it would not be a socialist government but would be liberal and reformist, reform was needed.

On the 7 September 1945, I left Hanover by train to travel through Holland to Harwich and then London. I stayed with my brother George and his wife Kate and baby Lorna, then went to South Kensington to the examination halls to sit the exams. There were large numbers of service men and women taking exams. After all the exams had ended I had seven days' leave which I spent in Aberdare with Bron and for the first time in years I had no studying to do. Returning to Germany, I was greeted with the news from my brother, George, that he had started teacher training at Crowndale Road Teachers' College, London. I was very glad for him.

On 6th October I had gone out with some of the boys to one of our depots, twenty miles away and returning to base I was told that Major Preira had phoned a message through to me. After tea, I phoned HQ to hear the Major say, "Sergeant Greening, I want to tell you that you have passed your exams, Congratulations!" I had studied in England, Wales, Scotland, Algeria, Tunisia, on the Atlantic, France, Belgium and Germany. The war was over and in December 1945 my nephew, Terence Phillips, came to visit me and we had a good time drinking, eating and dancing in Hanover. Then I received my demobilisation papers and pay and was taken to the transit camp where I saw some familiar faces from 194 Company.

Now I was back with some of the men whom I had met that first day at Westward Ho camp over five long years ago.

I had entered the army as a clerk, once a labourer and miner, with no prospects, and

now I was leaving the army with a good London matriculation, £450 in savings and excellent prospects of being a teacher.

13071160 GREENING Edwin

(Date of Birth 2 August 1910)

Enlisted at Reading on 15 Aug 40 and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps (Westward Ho!) for training.

On completion of training posted to 199 Company:

199 Coy

Aug 40 Formed at Westward Ho!
14 Sep 40 Moved to Newmarket
1 Oct 40 Supporting RA with some sections attached to RAF
10 Nov 40 Moved to Cranwich
18 Nov 40 HQ & 4 Sections moved to Methwold
31 Jan 41 7 Sections hutting at Didlington
18 Apr 41 Moved to Chippenham Park, Newmarket – hutting
19 Jul 41 Moved to Shadwell Park, Thetford
24 Oct 41 Moved to Castle Martin, Pembrokeshire

Posted to 194 Coy 27 Jun 42

30 Apr 42 HQ still at Mumbles – hutting and camp construction
31 Oct 42 HQ & 2 sections at Mumbles remainder of Coy at Avonmouth
8 Nov 42 Embarked at Avonmouth
13 Nov 42 Sailed for the Clyde
23 Nov 43 Landed in Algiers
30 Nov 42 Proceeded to Bonefor for work at Base Ordnance Depot (BOD)
12 Dec 42 Moved to Souk Ahras
2 Feb 43 HQ & 7 sections at Souk Ahras with BOD, 3 sections at Buvivier on railway construction
30 Apr 43 Detachments at Souk El Arba and Beja
15 Jun 43 HQ moved to Beja, 4 Sections at Souk El Arba (petrol and DID), 3 Sections at Bullia Regia with Ordnance, 1 Section at Bou Arada on petrol.
19 Jun 43 HQ moved to Souk El Arba

Posted to 296 Coy 1 Aug 43

8 Jul 43 Moved to Tunis
12 Jul 43 5 sections with RE Camp Commandant, 1 section with Ordnance railhead
31 Aug 43 Coy administering PW camps
20 Oct 43 All PW companies handed over
8 Nov 43 Moved to Philippville
10 Nov 43 Embarked
26 Nov 43 Landed at Gourcock
27 Nov 43 Moved to Newmarket
4 Dec 43 Moved to March
8 Jan 44 Moved to Norwich, Coy on miscellaneous work in scattered detachments
8 Aug 44 Moved to Newhaven for embarkation
11 Aug 44 Landed in Normandy
15 Sep 44 Moved to Hervieu for work at 14 AOD
11 Sep 44 Moved to Amiens
14 Sep 44 Half of Coy placed under the 2IC at Ostend
23 Sep 44 Coy concentrated at Amiens
28 Sep 44 HQ moved to Moreuil, misc duties in scattered detachments
15 Oct 44 Moved to Lomme
5 May 45 Transferred to RASC ■



■ Sgt Lesley marches troops to church service

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ian Dewsnap trying to keep them in step

Picture: Paul Brown



Picture: Paul Brown

■ March Pass at the Reunion Weekend



■ Alan Fawcett and Ginge Hurdman lead the way

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Members of 23 Regt at Church Service

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Sgt Lesley gives the "Eyes Right"

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ian Dewsnap still trying to keep them in step

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Preparing to lay wreaths

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members at Church Service

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members at Church Service

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Group photo on steps of Officers Mess

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Vets v Regs football match

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Keith Burrows tries out his new hammock

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The Padre goes for a dip

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Stan Hussain empties the pool

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The Regiment bring on a four legged substitute

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Vets v Regs football match

Picture: Supplied



■ Paint ball competition

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Inter Sqn Iron man competition

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Colin (Dinger) Bell has diving lesson

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Gaz Howe finds the water too hot

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Owl Display at Reunion Weekend

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Can I take this home

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Cpl and Mrs Georgie Foreman

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Bluey Joyce pinching someones beer!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Alec Cardow & Ian Dewsnap smile (someone buys them a beer)

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Yes I will have a beer says Mr Phethean

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Gus Paton and Kelvin Smith

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Alec Cardow claims Claire Wilkinson

Picture: Paul Brown



■ WO2 Dave Ravenscroft and Mr Sammy Johnson

Picture: Supplied



■ Billy Dilkes meets old friends

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ The Goode brothers in discussion

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Pete Thomas wishing he had Welsh beer

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Alec Cardow will sit on anyone's knee

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Old friends meet up again

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Paddy McPhillips sits down in case he falls over

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Paddy Haddock gives tips on how to pass your driving test

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Kelvin Smith, Reg Land and Alan Batchelor

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Micky as usual with the ladies

Picture: Paul Brown



■ WO2 and Mrs Heather Wood at Twickenham

Picture: Supplied



■ Mr Ginge Hurdman flies the flag on his boat

Picture: Supplied



■ Ex CPL Alan Fawcett during a break in filming of Holby City

Picture: Supplied



■ RSM and WO's of 23 Pnr Regt RLC at Sgts Mess Summer Ball (Western Night)

Picture: Supplied



■ Five former members of the Corps of Drums at the reunion after forty years.

C Moorhen, Henry Watkins, E Avallone, A Rickard and D Bryant

Picture: Supplied



■ In-Pensioner M Hull with Mr I Dewsnap, Mr P Tubridy and Mr N Brown at Founders Day

Picture: Supplied



■ Members of 23 Regt with Mr D Bryant and Mr N Brown at a charity boxing night in Northampton in aid of Help 4 Heroes.

Picture: Supplied



■ CO & WOs' from 23 Pnr Regt following a trip to the Arboretum Picture: Supplied



■ Northampton Branch members outside Simpson Grange Picture: Supplied



■ Mr E Saunders and Lt Col J Starling at Book Launch Picture: Supplied

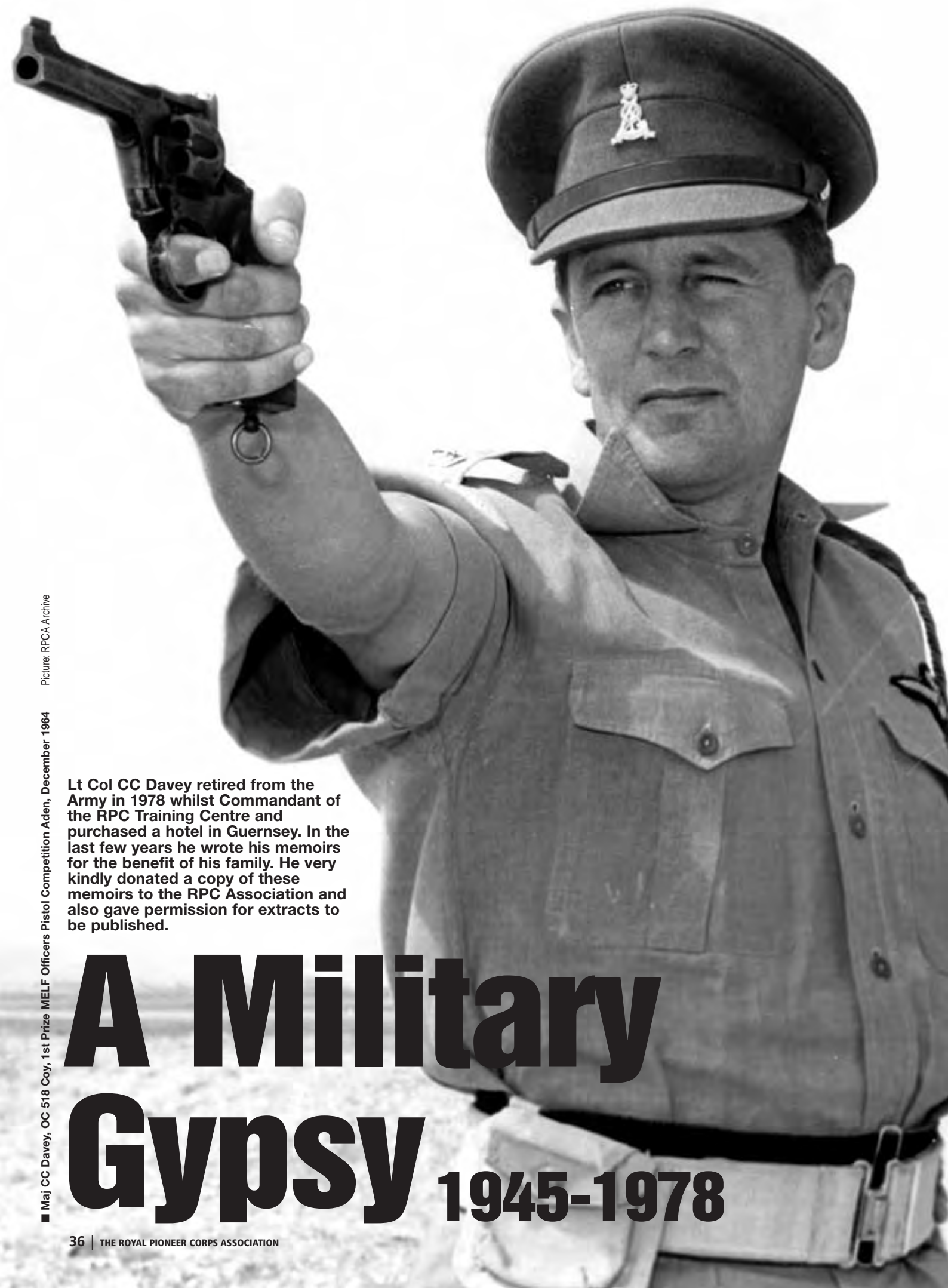


■ Refurbished canons at St David's Barracks Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Party time at the Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown



Picture: RPCA Archive

■ Maj CC Davey, OC 518 Coy, 1st Prize MELF Officers Pistol Competition Aden, December 1964

Lt Col CC Davey retired from the Army in 1978 whilst Commandant of the RPC Training Centre and purchased a hotel in Guernsey. In the last few years he wrote his memoirs for the benefit of his family. He very kindly donated a copy of these memoirs to the RPC Association and also gave permission for extracts to be published.

A Military Gypsy 1945-1978

LT COL Colin Davey enlisted into the Royal Artillery on 9 February 1945 and commenced training on 4 April 1945 at 5 Primary Training Centre (OCTU), Winston Barracks, Lanark. On completion of training he was asked whether he would like to go to the War Office Selection Board, after passing this he was selected to attend 148 Pre Officer Cadet Training Unit at Wrotham, Kent on 25 September 1945. On 28 December 1945 he arrived at 163 (Artisan Rifles) Infantry OCTU at Alton Towers, Staffordshire.

His father at this time had extended his Emergency Commission to a Short Service one and had been re-badged Pioneer Corps and in February 1946 posted to 689 Company PC part of 23 Group RPC.

On completion of OCTU Colin Davey was posted to the Regimental Depot of Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment into which he had been commissioned at Invicta Lines, Maidstone. In July 1946 his long awaited overseas posting orders were published, he was ordered to join the 1st Battalion RWK in Greece. However, on 18 August 1946 the Regiment moved to Egypt. His father subsequently was also posted to Egypt as 2IC of 3100 Company at Tahag near Qassasin this was a German POW Company whose members were almost entirely ex Afrika Corps.

Following a successful 'How to become a Military Policeman' Course he was attached to 208 Provost Company at Haifa in the north of Palestine. With the partition of Palestine in 1948 to form Israel he returned to Egypt first as Detachment Commander of 203 Provost Company at Port Said and then as MTO of the Company Headquarters at Moascar. Here he spent several happy occasions in various locations with his father. He returned to Southampton in January 1949 and for the next two years was a civilian although on the Regular Army Reserve of Officers'.

Disillusioned with civilian life he applied and was accepted for pilot training and commissioning in the RAF but then changed his mind and with his friend decided to 'have some fun' and become a 'Private Eye'. Following two years and a variety of jobs he decided to re-apply for the Army and accepted a Short Service Commission in the RWK but again attached to the RMP. At the end of 1951 he again left Southampton on board the Empire Fowey on the four week journey to Japan on his way to Korea. His posting was to 1 Commonwealth Division Provost Company 'up country' for 18 months.

His next posting was to the RMP Depot and Training Centre then located at Inkerman Barracks, Woking as a Training Officer of new recruits to the Corps. His OC was Major Frank Walker (Later Brigadier, DAPL). After being appointed MTO (again!) he applied to join The Glider Pilot Regiment to be trained as 'Light Liaison' aircraft pilot. He qualified at Middle Wallop on 1 April 1955 by which time he had received his third pip. A further transfer from RMP to RASC who he thought, at the time, were attempting to 'corner' the army flying business. Following an attachment in Munster he applied for a Regular Commission and passed the Regular Army Commission Board at Westminster. However, he was then told because of the reduction in numbers in the Army there were no vacancies in the RASC for his age group and was recommended for the Pioneer Corps. He was ordered to report on 14 January 1957 to the RPC

Training Centre, Hermitage Camp, Wrexham.

Wales/England/Germany (1957-63) *Wrexham/Longtown-Weedon-Rhyl/Krefeld-Mönchengladbach-Rheindahlen*

My posting to Hermitage Camp, on the outskirts of Wrexham on a winter Sunday afternoon was a rather depressing experience. The camp did not have an air of military efficiency about it and the mess was a wooden 'Spider' type of accommodation that had seen better days. The few resident officers had abandoned the anteroom on grounds of fuel (coal) economy and had retreated to the smaller TV room where afternoon tea was being served in a gloomy atmosphere. My spirits were however raised slightly by a chap of about my own age (Captain Barry Webster) who poured a cup and told me not to feel 'odd'. "We are" he said "all odd here". He was quite right. In the next few days I met a motley group, which included several who became life long friends and others with dubious backgrounds and who were surprisingly not reluctant to detail some of their more nefarious escapades in wartime venues, and wished to celebrate with privately introduced bottles of whisky. The reason for this opening of their hearts I discovered to be the celebration of the introduction on 1st January 1957 of the Army Act 1955. This parliamentary legislation, I knew, introduced a limitation on prosecution for most misdemeanours that had been committed by service personnel prior to the past three years. As an ex Military Policeman, I had to make certain mental adjustments.

The RPC Depot & Training Centre was split between two locations. The headquarters was at Hermitage Camp but most of the training took place at Horsley Hall, previously an elegant country residence, now suffering from the occupation by many wartime and then National Service soldiers accommodated in the house and temporary buildings in the grounds. It was located about five miles from Hermitage. We had a separate mess there and I became resident in it whilst becoming 'acclimatised' to my newfound Corps; I was made 2IC of the Training Company. My OC was Major George Eames, better known as 'Gunner' Eames. The reason for the nickname was that although he had been in the Corps for several years, he had come from the Royal Artillery and had refused to become 'acclimatised' to his new surroundings. Also in Training Company was Sergeant Ross Bennett, recently transferred from REME and many years later to become my quartermaster at Northampton. He and George Eames would share the cab, with the driver, of a furniture van hired by the unit in lieu of a military vehicle, on their return home in the evening! As the weeks passed, it was difficult not to become disillusioned as I realised that we actually had officers in the RPC from every branch of the army and from both the Navy and the RAF. The only army elements not represented were the Army Catering Corps and the WRAC (at that time, females were not amalgamated into the then all male Regiments and Corps). Possibly because of this amalgam, esprit de corps was an illusive entity. At my initial interview with the Director of Pioneers and Labour (DPL), Brigadier Guy Eden, the less than able (other than at golf) brother of Anthony, the recently displaced Prime Minister, he (the DPL) had promised me that after six months' satisfactory 'probation', I would be permitted to return to flying duties. I had to

wait. What I did not know at the time was that there had been considerable correspondence circulating in the War Office regarding my future. It became a tussle between the Staff officers representing the Glider Pilot Regiment and the DPL (Eden). Whilst the former took probably the broader view, that there was a severe shortage of army pilots and that I had only recently undergone expensive training, the latter demanded the final say as the RPC, he wrote, had 'given me a home'. He insisted that I could not be made available for flying duties, for two years – not six months as he had told me!

The RPC was a Corps of the army that existed only from 1939 to 1993, with the 'Royal' prefix being added to the PC in 1946, the most rapid recorded of the attainment by any Corps of that accolade; due to exceptionally diligent efforts during the war. The RPC had a temporary predecessor, The Labour Corps, formed in 1917 from soldiers of other Regiments and Corps (mainly infantry) to carry out all those duties that had previously been done by soldiers undergoing their 'rest' periods from front line fighting; duties that were not somebody else's designated responsibility e.g. moving ammunition, erecting barbed wire fences, burying the dead and many other essential but less than glamorous tasks: the Labour Corps was disbanded in 1919, having lost over 5,200 killed in action or died of wounds. The Corps was re-formed at the beginning of the Second World War as the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC), dropping the 'AM' soon after the evacuation from France in 1940, where a Pioneer Group under command of Lieutenant Colonel Donald Dean, VC had distinguished themselves in the 'last ditch' defence of Boulogne.

The wartime officers of the Corps were initially mainly drawn from the Cavalry and Infantry regiments that contained quite large numbers of 'old fashioned' types who could not or would not adapt to modern devices such as the tank! The result was that some very distinguished soldiers took control and moved the Corps from relative obscurity to eventually a respected 'Royal' element of the regular peace-time army. Such eminent commanders as Colonel Dean, VC, TD, Brigadier Prynne CBE, MC, TD, as well as many other decorated officers led the way in bringing together half a million men from all parts of the Commonwealth and Empire to form the largest Corps in the British Army. After hard won experience in North Africa and Italy, the invasion of Normandy saw 13 Companies of Pioneers landing on the first tide of 6 June 1944 (D-Day) on the beaches (about 400 men to a company) where they distinguished themselves in achieving the myriad tasks allotted to them. Within five days there were some 19,000 men of the Corps ashore and by D+25 there were no less than 14 Groups comprising 115 Companies with a total strength of 33,500.

On learning the history, I was less disappointed than at first on adopting my sixth cap badge since enlistment in 1945. On the whole, those 'originals' still remaining were an elegant lot and provided us all with much amusement and not a little understanding of their pre war and wartime style. One of these was an 'elderly' Major Douglas McLaglen, renowned for his shouted order from his bath to his batman: 'Smith, another gin and tonic please'. Douglas's elder brother had been Victor McLaglen, a Great War lieutenant in the Military Police who in the 1930s became a well-known Hollywood actor. He had famously fired a Vickers

Machine Gun from the hip in a film called *Beau Geste*. When I joined, in 1957, the basic terms of reference for the Corps included the responsibility for the provision of military labour and Defence Units for Formation Headquarters under combat conditions, and the supply and control of civilian labour in theatres of actual or potential active service: and of course any other tasks that were not somebody else's responsibility! In addition to the still operational theatres of the Middle East and Far East, BAOR (Germany) was included as one of these theatres as being potentially an active service one. By 1991 the strength of the Corps was reduced to about 2,000 and eventually to 1,000 before being incorporated into the Royal Logistics Corps in 1993 as 23 (Pioneer) Regiment.

Before my six months of 'probation' expired, I was posted to 27 Company RPC at Longtown, north of Carlisle and close to the Scottish border, as 2IC. The Company was one of three under command of 10 Group RPC HQ at Pocklington, near York. My duties, in retrospect, were not unduly onerous. They were entirely administrative and I was not obliged to venture into the RAOC Ammunition Depot, the workplace of our three hundred or so soldiers. My job was to run five accounts, administer some form of discipline and to indulge my particular interest in Military Law. I had of course been pleased to obtain a Regular Commission but like many others had been unaware that this would entail the passing of promotion examinations! By dint of length of service, I was excused the lieutenant to captain one, but not of course the captain to major. The note at the foot of the appropriate regulation included words to the effect that failure to pass by the age of 37 would result in termination of one's service: probably at that time the only profession requiring one to continue to qualify in order to remain in it? The examinations were held annually in November, usually in a central location in each UK or overseas Command. Catterick Camp near Richmond, Yorkshire was my venue and was where I found myself in a draughty gymnasium sitting next to John Napier, from another company in the Group, and sharing with him an inadequate paraffin 'Valor' stove. He later served with me in Aden and BAOR. The examination comprised a total of six papers: three Tactics (General, Battalion Operations, and Internal Security duties), Military History, Military Law and Current Affairs: plenty to keep the midnight oil burning. Although my interest in Military Law stood me in good stead in that I achieved an exemplary pass in that subject in my Examination, it helped me only slightly in my dealings with the local magistrates when supporting some of our more difficult soldiers. One lad so convinced me of his innocence regarding his failure to recompense the Hire Purchase Company to which he was indebted, that I persuaded the Longtown magistrates in his favour, only later to discover that he had sold the article which was not his and spent the money on the 'soldiers' friend' – booze! My OC's Annual Confidential Report on me that year was probably entirely accurate in the comment: 'He is inclined to adopt too lenient an attitude towards the more pronounced delinquents'.

My OC at that time was Major Ted Judson. He had joined the army as a boy soldier and would often say that he would have been grateful if he had made it to

RSM, much less major. He was a stern disciplinarian and very thorough in regimental duties. After many years of negotiation with the providers of accommodation, we were about to take over a newly built three-storey barrack building for our soldiers, otherwise accommodated in corrugated iron roofed 'Nissen' huts. Ted was proud of this new acquisition and managed to persuade the suppliers of the 'new-issue' metal lockers to furnish his 'pride and joy' building with them. He was so concerned that no damage should occur to the fabric of the building that he instructed the RSM to 'line the walls of the staircase with soldiers whilst the furniture is being delivered'. The building was unscathed and there were few soldier casualties. We of course had no control over the construction of the building and we were, after several weeks of occupation compelled to ask the 'Works' department to investigate the unseemly odour pervading the premises. It was discovered that although the urinals had been properly installed, their drainage system ended on the inside of the outside walls!

Although life in the north was relatively comfortable, I still hankered to get back to flying. I had not however reckoned on the determination of our 10 Group Commander, Lieutenant Colonel 'Bunny' Austin. He was known in the Corps for being 'difficult' but at the time I was not aware of this. He was also an ardent Freemason and I was not. I had, after a few months in my new location to relinquish my appointment as 2IC on the arrival of a very senior and thoroughly acceptable Captain Thomsett, to whom I handed my responsibilities without demur. I quickly of course sought interview with Bunny and demanded (requested?) that the promise made to me by the Director should be implemented. By then we had a new director and after much discussion I was persuaded to drop my claim to return to Glider P on the assurance that I would have a 2IC appointment at 523 Company,

'I would have a 2IC appointment at 523 Company, Weedon, Northants'

Weedon, Northants, with prospects! Again, I found myself in a congenial and undemanding role and was lulled into doing Bunny's bidding and sorting out yet another failing organisation. By now, National Service was in full swing and the soldiers sent to us, whilst not academically of great ability, were young men of great potential but requiring the confidence and cohesion which probably only a military unit could provide at that point in their lives. Life became, in peacetime terms, quite hectic. The need for the exercise of a rather paternalistic administrative system to our men, the constant dealings with Welfare and Probation organisations across the country plus the regular prosecution or defence of the more recalcitrant soldiers, at the fortnightly court martial sessions at Nottingham, kept us on our toes. All officers are obliged to acquire sufficient knowledge of the law to be able, after two years commissioned service to sit on a court martial board (with a minimum of two other officers) to adjudicate on a charge referred for trial by court martial, by a unit commander. They must equally learn to act as either prosecuting or defending officer in the presentation of evidence to a court on behalf of either the crown or the soldier defendant. Another task initiated in the company, as I had done at Longtown, was the literacy classes for the more than

10% of our NS recruits who on enlistment could neither read nor write. My OC was Major George Seaton, a man of great humour who, together with our subalterns, Bob Colville, John Snowdon and Peter Standley, remained friends for many years. My interest in Military Law had not diminished and I saw it as my duty, when preparing the prosecution case for a court martial, to guide Bob, Peter or John on their defence tactics. Thus I did not always win a prosecution case. I did not however lose a case that I was defending – not until later in my career that is.

The company duty was primarily the guarding of the Weedon weapons depot, an establishment responsible for the receipt and decommissioning and/or disposal of small arms as they became obsolete or surplus to service requirements. The unit was housed in the 'Old Weedon Barracks', a structure erected by George III (shortly before his death) as being deemed to be in the 'Centre of England' and therefore furthest away from any point on the coast at which Napoleon might land. Our camp was outside the weapons depot and was dominated by three yellow brick 'Pavilions'. Legend had it that George occupied the centre one (subsequently the home of countless willing and unwilling soldiers) with his Cabinet to the right and his Mistress to the left. The OC sat where the Earl of Liverpool may have sat, and several senior warrant officers too, as that room had also been a sergeants' mess in its time. The building to the left was and had been since anyone could remember the officers' mess, and previous soldier staff had complained that a ghost type lady used to walk by night. Perhaps their annoyance was due to her elusiveness. In any event the problem (domestic) became acute and it was only with great difficulty that a soldier could be induced to remain at night to defend himself single-handed. It took more than a year for an otherwise extremely robust member of the staff to admit that for months he had lived in trepidation of opening a door after dark. At an enquiry he stated that 'the lights had been switched on, having been extinguished for the night, door handles had turned in the hand – with nobody on the other side of the door etc. etc.' It is said that the officer investigating the scene decided: 'I think we shall continue the inquiry in my office'. The Company had four detachments in various locations around the countryside, the largest located off the road to Daventry. This last was surrounded by a barbed wire perimeter, with clocks at intervals requiring regular attention by our guards, without which attention an alarm would sound in the Daventry Police Station and the company Duty Officer would be obliged to attend. It always seemed to be my turn to attend at the scene when I was either enjoying a dinner invitation or a Mess Function.

Having eventually achieved a relatively successful organisation, it was disappointing to learn that the company was soon to disband. The demise of 523 Company meant for me a temporary return to Wrexham before posting to Rhyl, in north Wales as Camp Commandant of a Territorial, Army Emergency Reserve and Cadet Training Centre. The camp was a summer one, intended for tented occupation only. I arrived in the spring of 1960 to establish my office in one of the few dilapidated 'permanent' wooden buildings, to undertake my first duty, which was the erecting of 100 or so tents. These of course had to be positioned in proper military layout and with all appropriate

facilities provided in close proximity. My squad of soldiers did well. It was a gently sloping grassed area of about 30 acres and I bought myself a BSA 125cc Motor Cycle to 'ride the range': great fun. The summer was taken up with all the minor incidents to be expected in coping with adult Reservists and CCF Cadets who, in the main saw the camps more as a holiday occasion than a work situation. With my training staff, which included Captain George Haines (of OCTU days) and Lieutenant Christopher Etherington, we set about training the Cadets and disabusing the Reservists of their misapprehension: they earned their pay! At the end of the season, with the ground cleared of tents and accompanying accessories, I visited the nearby RA Training Centre mess to lunch one day. At the bar, demonstrating with elaborate hand movements the positioning of his imaginary aircraft and to the rapt attention of his audience was a chap who had been one of the more flamboyant members of the flying course after me at Middle Wallop. He had at that time achieved fame (or notoriety) by consuming an excessive amount of Guinness at lunchtime on the day of his graduation (admittedly in the belief that he would not be flying in the afternoon) and had then, during his final solo training flight attempted to fly under some power cables. He became something of a celebrity having claimed that he was the only person recorded as having been awarded his flying badge by the Group Captain Station Commander, in hospital. Some weeks after witnessing his impressing his listeners in the Rhyl mess, I learned that our friend had, after refereeing a game of Rugby, been driving a colleague home when they picked up a pair of young lady hitch hikers (an acceptable practice in those days). Some miles further on, and feeling the need for a 'comfort break' he stopped the car and with a brief apology, crossed the road to take advantage of the privacy afforded by the other side of a low wall. He was no doubt aware that eyes would be on him, and therefore of the need to demonstrate his agility. He placed hand on wall and vaulted over. His companions waited but as he had not reappeared within about five minutes, his male friend decided to investigate. Unfortunately, and obviously unbeknown to our hero, on the other side of the wall was a 30ft drop. His young widow was much in demand when it was discovered that only a week before the accident he had taken out an insurance policy to cover the loss of future earnings and pension in the event of his redundancy or death.

In September 1960, the end of the camping season meant a further move; and after a two week Civil Labour Course at 371 Company, Harwich, I was soon on the way to BAOR. As was usual about that time, I received three posting orders to other locations before receiving verbal instructions to proceed to Krefeld, some 20 miles west of the Rhine. The written order arrived 15 days after me. My appointment was as officer in Charge of 'B' Detachment, 4 Pioneer Civil Labour Unit (PCLU) and my office was in Bradbury Barracks, the home at that time of 16 Signals Regiment, to whose mess I was accredited. My OC, based in Mönchengladbach was Major Etienne (Steve) Marot, of French Mauritian extraction and of rather volatile nature. He had however a good sense of humour and when telephoning would open, in a thick French accent with 'allo, guess 'oo'? My main responsibility was the administration of the 600 or so German civilian

employees of the British Units in the area and my 'parish' extended from RAF Larbruch near the Dutch Border to the REME Workshops in Mulheim on the other side of the Rhine, to the east.

Shortly after my departure from UK, the dreadful Hermitage Camp was closed and the RPC Training Centre moved to Quebec Barracks at Northampton, renamed as Simpson Barracks in honour of General Sir Frank Simpson, the Colonel Commandant of our Corps. This excellent accommodation had become available as a result of the amalgamation of the Northamptonshire Regiment with the Royal Leicestershire Regiment at Queniborough, Leicester. Brigadier Osborne-Smith (the then Director) had been in the Northamptonshire Regiment and was a member of several local golf clubs. Thus the new location enabled him to visit the Depot and of course use the new M1 motorway as a convenient weekend communications route from his office in Berkeley Square to his preferred golfing venues. Krefeld turned out to be my first experience of almost total autonomy in a military environment, in that I was more or less, left to my own devices, to make my own decisions and to make myself acceptable to unit commanders as an authority regarding their inevitable difficulties with their German civilian employees. The military aspect of the appointment was most of the time limited in the conventional army sense, to the wearing of uniform. As far as 16 Signals Regiment was concerned, I was treated as a unit commander and therefore without such duties as Orderly Officer or Messing Member, Mess Secretary of the officers' mess. I did however feel, in view of my close association with the local community the need to have some grasp of the German language and with that in mind retrieved from store my copy of 'Teach Yourself German'. The first sentence in the book was 'Der Winter ist kalt!' and I repeated the words, and several others until I had them firmly fixed in my memory. My driver had no English, a circumstance that my Chief Clerk (Fraüline Dassler, (later Frau Langer) considered as advantageous, if I was to learn German. Three weeks later, she asked me what I had learnt from my driver. I replied: "Der Winter ist bloody kalt". It was during my Krefeld posting that I received a telephone call that I had not been expecting. The voice on the other end said: "hullo, this is your brother Michael". I could only reply: "my goodness, you do sound American". He answered: "sure, and you sound English". He arrived three days later en route from his home in Toronto, Canada to visit his wife's parents in Hamburg. We had an evening or two in local hostleries.

In June 1961 I was promoted to Major and given command of 6 PCLU at Rheindahlen, with the primary task of coping with the legal and practical problems relating to administering the work force in HQ BAOR, Rheindahlen Garrison and units to the west as far as the Dutch border. My PCLU had no detachments but the employment of the large number of civilians that were required in Rheindahlen Garrison (including HQ BAOR) required the Garrison Civil Labour Officer to be an RPC Captain (Roy Innocent, who was later a detachment commander of mine in Malaya). There were of course many additional duties but those were mainly military emergency training responsibilities related to the 'Cold War'. The political situation resulting from the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the USSR required the

BAOR to adapt (as best it could?) to a new form of defence. Our efforts were guided by the 'Purple Pamphlet', at that time a 'classified' document, which purported to provide a coherent response to a nuclear attack from the east. It is doubtful whether the instructions it contained would have helped.

A relatively large proportion of post war army officers have served in the Rheindahlen complex and it was not uncommon to meet up with colleagues of former years. I was not however prepared for quite such a surprise as I experienced on collecting my permanent pass for entry into the HQ Building. The entrance door (No. 6) was guarded by blue uniformed 'bobbies' of the War Department Constabulary, and the inspector in charge, to whom I reported, was none other than Paddy Bryan, my RMP OC in Moascar in 1947-48!

Within a year, Bunny Austin, now commander of 45 Group, of which both 4 and 6 PCLUs and 3 PCLU at Dortmund were subordinate units, had decided that I was to become his adjutant and I moved from Rheindahlen to Mönchengladbach, where I found myself carrying out a similar function to the one in Rheindahlen except that now my tormentors were just about everybody in authority from the C-in-C, the Chief of Staff, the Brigadier Area Commander (Stares) and several colonels commanding major depots, all seeking to retain what they considered to be their diminishing 'privileges' of large labour forces in the face of Government budget cuts. It was of course 'my fault'. Nevertheless, there were plenty of social activities to provide relief from these pressures, and advantage was taken of many of the available opportunities to enjoy the facilities that being stationed in Germany still offered, including skiing trips to Austria and summer holidays in the south of France and Italy. Bunny was of course to have his revenge for my refusal to join his beloved Freemasons and required me to participate in the 'Winter Essay Competition', an exercise demanded by the MoD of all officers under a certain age. I had just passed that age but Bunny insisted that I should do it 'for the benefit of the Corps'! With no option but to comply, I set to and at least had the satisfaction of seeing my effort forwarded to MoD by HQ BAOR as one of the three best in the theatre: there's boasting for you. The generally congenial service life in BAOR was of course, once again to be interrupted by the designs of those in high places. Thus in 1963 I was warned for posting to Aden in September.



Aden Brigade Aden (1963-65)

I arrived in Aden at 07.00 hrs on 24 September 1963. The Captain of the BUA Britannia charter aircraft announced that the temperature outside the aircraft was 89°F when the door of the aircraft was opened, I quickly discovered what that meant. Unacclimatised new arrivals dispensed rapidly with temperate climate hats, coats and ties as the perspiration developed from a trickle to a torrent: the wearing of civilian clothes during the flight was obligatory as the chartered aircraft flew over certain countries that suffered from acute sensitivity in regard to British military activities.

My Posting Order stated that I was to take command of 518 Company RPC in Aden and in brief correspondence with my predecessor I had learnt that the Company was housed with, though not under command of, the 1st Battalion, The King's Owns Scottish Borderers (1 KOSB) in Waterloo Barracks. However, my hope of some sort of 'handover' was dashed when I was greeted by Lieutenant Christopher Etherington, whose cheerfulness I did not share as he told me that the previous OC had left for home 11 days previously. My apprehension began to increase as I was ushered into Etherington's private, tiny, elderly and rusting Austin A35 motorcar with the cheerful apology that two of the three unit vehicles were 'off the road'. My spirits really started sinking when my casual enquiry as to the whereabouts of the third vehicle (a 3 Ton Truck) evoked the reply that the Company had started moving that day to 'Little' Aden, some 25 miles round the bay from 'Big' Aden.

Perhaps it is advisable at this point to paint something of a picture of the geographical and military setting in that area. Aden and Little Aden are twin peninsulas of volcanic rock, each jutting out from the mainland of South Arabia about 100 miles to the east of the southern entrance to the Red Sea. Between the two peninsulas, the bay forms a natural harbour. This had been the bunkering station for world shipping for many years. Aden State boasted a total of only 74 miles of Tarmacadam road, and much of this former Crown Colony was inaccessible inland, other than to goats (and, I discovered later, ourselves). The dominating mountain of Sham San in Aden and the cathedral-like walls of Silent Valley in Little Aden give an impression of lunar eeriness, particularly after sunset. In 1954, with the establishment of the British Petroleum (BP) refinery at Little Aden, the accompanying facilities of electricity and water provided the essentials for the setting up of a military base in that western part of the State (for security of the refinery?). In 1963, the high ground at the western end of the 'Big' Aden peninsula, known as Fort Morbut accommodated Headquarters, Middle East Command (HQ MEC) which had arrived from Cyprus a year or so previously and at the bottom of that hill, on the sea front, stood HQ Aden Garrison (later Aden Brigade). During the 10 months that 518 Company had already been in Aden the three working Sections of the Company had been allotted to the Commander Royal Engineers (CRE) (Deployment Camps), and under the technical control of his Garrison Engineers (GEs) as the labour force for the building of the first of the new camps for the redeployment of 24 Infantry Brigade from

Kenya to Aden, anticipated in 1964. An additional camp, currently under construction and nearing completion was Normandy Lines in 'Big' Aden, adjacent to Waterloo Barracks, the location from which the Company was in process of departing and where it had had the benefit of much assistance from the major occupying unit, 1 KOSB. Normandy Lines was to become the home of 518 Company on our return from Little Aden in 1965.



518 Little Aden

Upon my arrival at Waterloo Barracks I was introduced to the Company Second in Command, a rather dejected looking Captain Mike Burnett (who left the army prematurely some three years later). He was supervising the departure of the Company's remaining stores en route for Little Aden. The bliss of an air-conditioned office was magnetic and I obtained what briefing I could from Burnett at floor level in the otherwise empty room of our office hut. It seemed that most of the Company were to be accommodated in the new Falaise Camp at Little Aden, from where it was to support the newly arrived 12 Field Engineer Squadron who were in station for a 12 months unaccompanied (by families) tour. A further addition of military support to the building programme was that of 48 Squadron which, together with the 38 Regiment Headquarters, to which the squadrons belonged, had arrived for a six months 'Blitz' on the construction of the Deployment Camps. The third Section of our Company was initially to remain in Big Aden to complete the building of Normandy Lines.

The priorities of the time seem mundane when viewed in retrospect but at that time the purchase of appropriate uniform was an important matter. After much conflicting advice before leaving UK, I had deferred (correctly I discovered) the purchase of Khaki Drill (KD) until my arrival in Aden. The problem to be faced I realised was that of obtaining the essential three sets of shorts and shirts with minimum delay. My memory of Egypt was that these were produced in 24 hours. However, unbeknown to me, the departure of our unit from Waterloo Barracks had devalued the Company's influence with the camp

tailor and the normal 24 hour production time was so extended that I was compelled to attend on the Aden Garrison Commander, Brigadier Harbottle, in borrowed (somewhat oversize) kit. This interview, though sartorially just satisfactory, left me with the impression that in his eyes the reputation of our Company was not high. This impression was confirmed by the Brigadier's somewhat belligerent insistence that despite the redeployment of our Company, plus my only recent arrival, the 'Annual Fitness for Role Inspection' due in nine days time would not be postponed. This insistence was in spite of the protestations of Major Derek Hainsworth who accompanied me in

'Normandy Lines was to become the home of 518 Company'

his newly acquired appointment of DADPL, MEC, an appointment held additionally to his primary one of OC 908 PCLU, the unit responsible for the recruitment and employment of local civilians supporting army units. His duties also included Industrial Relations, a subject involving not a little difficulty with the Aden Arab Trades Unions.

Establishing our Company (less one Section) in Little Aden provided something more than one might expect of a routine administrative problem: although not because of the accommodation itself. This, by local standards was excellent, comprising a 'permanent' two-storey stone barrack block and a 90 ft. long Twynham hut as offices and stores. The difficulty with which we were faced in the Company (and particularly me, as a new arrival) was the less tangible but dauntingly antagonistic attitude of the 'Employing Service'. With our move to Little Aden, the colonel CRE (DC) had allowed the CO of 38 Regt (a lieutenant colonel) to assume responsibility for the technical direction of 518 Company's work activities in this new location. Unfortunately he appeared to be something of an 'Empire Builder' and made no bones about his intention to 'take us over'. He clearly saw our company as a substitute for his third squadron (24, which had returned to UK when replaced by 12 Sqn) and made determined attempts to have us placed 'under command'. It occurred to me that the unsympathetic attitude of the Brigadier at our introductory meeting might be connected with that of the CO of the RE regiment. As stated, my predecessor had not been available on my arrival to advise me regarding personalities! The official organisation was:

I soon came to the conclusion that the morale of my soldiers was at a low level and that I had to decide upon what attitude I should adopt towards raising it. The many changes within the army at that time included much debate about leadership styles, with considerable attention being paid to the view that there should be a more familiar relationship between those commanding and those under command than had previously been the case. The more traditional style of a clear delineation between ranks and responsibilities – starting at lance corporal – was in some areas being blurred with, some said, deterioration in disciplinary standards. I decided that my men required a more 'old fashioned' attitude. I was encouraged in this belief by the knowledge that my predecessors had 'lost' soldiers in circumstances justifying official Inquiries. I determined therefore that I should not 'lose' a soldier (officers are another matter!) unless due to enemy activity over which I had no control. No doubt due to my lack of direct contact with RPC soldiers below the rank of sergeant for the past three years, I was not yet aware that although in the interim National Service had ceased, still 10% of my men were illiterate and 25% did not have the basic (Grade 3) educational qualification expected of soldiers before they could be considered eligible for advancement. What previous experience did suggest to me was that my men were in need of a spot of 'military paternalism'. My particular concern was that although I had experienced many occasions, since 1946 of being 'in charge' of soldiers, this was the first time that I was 'in command'. I should explain that the army system of discipline is clearly defined: a Commanding Officer (usually a lieutenant colonel) has powers of punishment enabling him to place a soldier in detention

for up to 28 days. 'Detention', a confinement and a severe award requiring an entry in a soldier's Regimental Conduct Sheet (AFB120) could bar him from the award of a Long Service and Good Conduct medal even after 18 years service. A Subordinate Commander, usually a major in say a company of a battalion had powers of award up to 14 days CB (a minor award, entered in AFB121, a document destroyed three years after the last entry). As an independent company commander I had for the first time powers of a Commanding Officer, a daunting responsibility.

During the year prior to my arrival, the men of 518 Company, most of whom had moved to Aden from Cyprus, had been engaged in the work of erecting the Meccano-like Twynham huts under, as previously indicated, the technical direction of the colonel CRE (DC), his Garrison Engineers (majors) and their Clerks of Works (staff sergeants). Concrete plinths were laid and the steel frames of the buildings were bolted to the base. This construction was then clad with exterior aluminium panels, chipboard interior walls and with insulating material between. 90% of the building construction was carried out by our men; procedures requiring certificated expertise, such as electrical connections, being performed by the tradesmen of the RE Squadron who at other times were engaged in tasks around the Command. With the arrival of the new engineer elements (HQ 38 Regt and 48 Sqn) for the six months 'Blitz' to build the 'Redeployment Camps' to accommodate the troops expected from Kenya, it might have been thought appropriate to concentrate on achieving a satisfactory integration of all the elements involved. Regrettably this was not so and serious breaches of discipline were avoided only by ensuring that a Company or Squadron officer was available to intervene at whichever worksite trouble appeared imminent. It was noticeable that Royal Engineer and Royal Pioneer soldiers had little difficulty in getting on with each other, and they with the Arab contract labour. When trouble arose, it was with engineer regimental management and supervision: my 'Worksite Officer', Christopher Etherington was a most excellent arbitrator over minor disputes and was able to bring other, more senior officers than himself to accept that the soldiers of 518 Company were on a two-year and not a six months tour, and had also Internal Security duties and other training responsibilities to cope with.

The efficacy of the requirement for Internal Security training had been well demonstrated on the arrival of the advance party of 518 Company from Cyprus earlier in 1963. The party, with Lieutenant Etherington in charge had arrived by Landing Ship, Tank (LST) to learn that the first of many riots was in progress in the Arab town of Crater on the other side of the Sham San Pass. The Staff officer who met them at the harbour announced that they were to deploy immediately to the scene and to apply the fruits of their training. Fortunately, their stores included not only their weapons and ammunition but also the banner that must be displayed in places where British legal jurisdiction obtains, to a potentially riotous crowd, before any discharge of firearms is permitted. The universal wording was 'DISPERSE OR WE FIRE' on one side and on the other, a translation in the local language. Unfortunately, having come from Cyprus, the translation was in Greek! Whether it was for that reason or because of the

ferocious appearance of our soldiers, the crowd quickly dispersed. At that time the 1st Battalion, The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (1 A&SH), under command of Lieutenant Colonel 'Mad' Mitchell, who received much publicity for their actions in Crater, had not arrived in Aden.

The determination of the CO of 38 Regt. to 'take us over' was further demonstrated one evening at the officers' club when he summoned me to join his party and then to order me to remand a particular NCO of mine for his (38 Regimental) Orders, on a charge about which at that time I had heard nothing. The remand did not of course happen. In fact I do not recall that the NCO was ever arraigned on a charge. Also, during the six months of the winter of 1963-64 I noted that the usual banter exchanged in the small mess we shared with the RE officers, many of whom joined us in expressing our mutual disaffection towards their regimental commander, had a sharper edge than one would normally expect. However, most situations have their lighter moments, as when an RPC junior NCO of Scottish origin and considerable service, was erecting the new company signboard, alongside the one belonging to the adjacent engineer regiment orderly room. The NCO was approached by an RE officer, who said:

"You can't put that there, corporal"
Cpl (still hammering): "Ma OC told me to put it here"

Officer: "Well, you will have to move it".
Cpl (still hammering): "Ah'll move it when ma OC tells me to move it".

Officer (reflecting perhaps that he had upset the corporal): "It's a very nice signboard, anyway".

Cpl (glancing at RE signboard): "Aye, makes that one look a bit scruffy, doesn't it".

Exit officer.

By March 1964, with the departure of the 'temporary' Sappers, rationality had been re-established and the worksite tasks were happily divided roughly as follows:

Arab Locally Employed Civilians (LEC)

- Unskilled labouring tasks e.g. rock breaking, excavation, with Engineer or Pioneer supervision
- Labouring assistance to Engineers and Pioneers.

Royal Engineers

- Plant operation
- Tradesman tasks e.g. carpentry, electrical fitting, plumbing
- Supervision
- Miscellaneous tasks unconnected with the Redeployment Camps project e.g. Internal Security fencing in 'Big' Aden.

Royal Pioneers

- Twynham hut erection (less electrics, plumbing) with Garrison Engineer Supervision
- Individual Plant operating and plumbing tasks.
- Bulldozer and Dump truck (1½ cu. yd.) driving.

Early in 1965 it became apparent that the main Redeployment Camp, 'Salerno', would be completed at least three weeks ahead of schedule and as much of the engineer element engaged on the project would be returning to the UK, I thought it opportune to try to provide a change of scenery and a break from the excessive heat and humidity of Aden for the men of

518 Company. After much negotiation with a wide variety of interested and influential parties, an agreement (if unofficial) was made with 45 Commando RM (based in Little Aden, adjacent to the BP Refinery) for two Sections of our Company to spend 2 – 3 weeks sampling the blissful mountain air enjoyed by 45 Commando 'B' Company, located at Dhala near the Yemen border. In exchange, the Pioneers were to devote part of each day to the construction of a canteen building for what had become a semi-permanent Commando outpost. In the remaining time they would join patrols, field firing exercises and team games; a

happy compromise for all concerned. The third Section I allocated to the 'up country' training camp at Mukarios, to join there, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment. Our plans were implemented with understandable enthusiasm and those heading for Dhala

joined a convoy departing at dawn for the 40 miles or so desert journey north.

The success of my 'battle' with the CO of the Engineer Regiment, to retain command of my soldiers had involved my assuring the Aden Brigade Commander Brigadier Louis Hargroves (*Sir Louis Hargroves CBE, died in February 2010*), who had replaced Harbottle that I was able to retain direct control of my troops dispersed around the Aden Protectorate on various tasks. By good fortune, the CO of the Army Air Corps (AAC) Squadron (Lieutenant Colonel Francis Graham-Bell) had been a contemporary during my flying days at Middle Wallop, where we had enjoyed many parties together. Francis very kindly let me know that I could, as 'supernumerary pilot' utilise any vacancy on any of his fixed wing or rotary wing aircraft that were used extensively for communication duties in the theatre. Thus, no soldier of mine was more than half an hour (at least those within the Aden Protectorate borders) beyond my reach. On the day of the move of my 'spare' Sections to Dhala, I discovered that an NCO of the AAC who had instructed me at Middle Wallop was to fly north in the last remaining Auster of their squadron. I joined him. We landed on a relatively flat strip of desert, near to but out of sight of the convoy that included my men, and which had paused for a 'brew-up'. There were some ribald comments such as 'you can't get away from him' when I appeared over the desert horizon to carry out an informal 'inspection' of my soldiers.

My men quickly endeared themselves to their 45 Commando hosts and speedily constructed a building of local stone, as a canteen for what was thought would become a permanent base. About two weeks later, I visited them, was included in a reconnaissance patrol, and stayed overnight with 'B' Company Commander. However, before my departure back to Aden I learnt from him that the Second 'Radfan Expedition' was about to begin and that the road south would be closed. I realised that I had better move quickly to retrieve my soldiers back to Aden if I was not to incur the wrath of those in higher command who were unaware of our congenial arrangement. My departure from Dhala was in the hands of Aden Airways; a commercial organisation owning three C47's (Dakotas), flown by expatriate and invariably bearded pilots whose daring style did not always inspire confidence. My fellow civilian passengers were difficult to identify, as most were female and appropriately covered in their 'Burkas'.

'The universal wording was Disperse or we fire'

Some brought their chickens and goats with them but it was said that their warlike tribesmen husbands were too apprehensive of the 'metal bird' to venture aboard themselves.

My return to Aden became a frenetic search for assistance in getting my men out of Dhala and back to Aden in the few days remaining before the operation against the Radfan insurgents began. My pleas to all my friends and contacts for transport, was of no avail. The RAF Belvedere helicopter squadron commander was sympathetic but that was all; road transport was not available. I was about to 'fall on my sword' in front of Louis Hargroves when I met a chap at the Club who turned out to be the OC of the RAF Beverley Flight: freight aircraft with lots of space that lumbered around the Protectorate with stores. Next morning I joined him at dawn and we 'staggered' up to Dhala to collect my lads and return them to Aden. Phew!

With my company reassembled, I was surprised to receive a message that an additional Section (26 men) had arrived in 'Big' Aden and were awaiting collection. I sent a signal to 23 Group HQ in UK (Tony Ridings) seeking clarification. The reply told me that these new arrivals were for immediate employment at Thumier in the Radfan. Clearly, those at home had no idea that it would take three weeks of acclimatisation for anyone to undertake operational duties in the Aden climate. Although my other soldiers were on a two-year tour and in some cases were accompanied by their families, I agreed with the CSM that we should send our best men north while he 'toasted' and trained the new arrivals. Thus we acquitted ourselves well and I received many words of praise from those units we were supporting regarding the standards of our men. Initially, the main duty of the Pioneers was to provide defensive patrols on the hills on either side of the Dhala Road being constructed by the Sappers and on several occasions, my men were required to return the fire (successfully) of dissident Arab parties. Fortunately our only casualty was a radio - close to the ear of one of my men! The work on the road (directed by the new CRE (Operations)) was to say the least arduous and the RE Squadron Commander realised that my men would be more suited to the work than his own. The soldiers exchanged duties, to the delight of both his and my men.

My association with the Army Air Corps, during the Radfan operation revived my interest in flying again and in a conversation with Francis Graham-Bell he suggested that I should apply for another three year flying tour. My application was made with alacrity and shortly after, I attended and passed an aircrew medical. By September 1964 my application was being considered at the War Office. My file from there has a note dated 12 Nov 64 that 'the Jan 1965 AAC Board will decide if Davey can be accepted for a flying tour in Sep/Oct 65'.

Unfortunately, Bunny Austin was now the RPC Director in London and his agreement to my plan was required. The final note on the file includes the words 'the DAPL cannot agree to lose this officer for a period of three years'. That was that! Despite Bunny's reluctance to let me go, when in my 1965 annual confidential report the Colonel AQ recommended me for promotion, Bunny added 'I have known the officer for five years and do not agree with

the recommendation'. However, Brigadier Hargroves then added 'I have known the officer for the whole of the period of the report and support the recommendation'.

In April, 1 KOSB departed Aden for UK and such was the rapport between their men and ours that three truckloads of KD were delivered to our 'Q' Stores before the departure of the Jocks. Thus, each of my men had extra suits of shirts and shorts, allowing them to have plenty of spares for worksite use and for 'parade'. Even so, we still had a surplus and when in May the advance party of 10th Royal Hussars arrived we were able to kit them out, to the eternal gratitude of their leader Major James Courtney-Clarke, who joined me on the night of their arrival at the Brigade Operations Room where I perchanced to be Brigade Duty Officer. About this time, the 38 Regt mess was closed and I was reluctant to join the newly established Little Aden Garrison one. I was surprised and delighted to be invited by Lieutenant Colonel Bill Lithgow, CO 10 H, who had arrived with the remainder of his Regiment, to become a member of his mess. He insisted that I would pay only the level of fees that I would be charged in other messes: theirs was an expensive organisation. I was treated elegantly and even invited as a guest to their Regimental Dinner Night.

I was just becoming acclimatised to this comfortable situation when I was notified that our unit was to move back to 'Big' Aden. The accommodation allocated to us was in 'Normandy' Lines next door to Waterloo Barracks where the 1st Battalion the Royal Anglican Regiment had replaced 1 KOSB. We said farewell to our friends in 'Little' Aden and speculated as to how long it would be before the cross on top of the expensive church that had been built there would be replaced by a crescent. My 2IC, John Napier was still in a married quarter in Little Aden and on the departure of 10 H for the Far East, I became a temporary member of the Garrison mess there (rather than join the one in 'Big Aden') and which was adjacent to my Twynham accommodation that I had recently converted to a 'two room apartment' i.e. I erected a partition to create an air conditioned sitting room in which I could satisfactorily offer a drink to friends.

When, on my first arrival in 'Big' Aden we had moved at once to Little Aden, I had taken it for granted that the CSM (Merrick), although in married quarters in Big Aden, would take the 06.00 hrs work parade in

Little Aden and that with no army transport for him he would either drive himself or live in mess at Little Aden. I was surprised to learn that he had no car and did not drive! I could not of course relent and it is to his great credit that he

bought a car, detailed a soldier who could drive to accompany him and travelled daily between the two locations, at the wheel. Within a month he had taken and passed his driving test. There's determination for you!

The company offices and the soldiers' accommodation in our new location in 'Big' Aden were quite satisfactory. Our soldiers however had a little difficulty in accepting some of the standards of dress and behaviour of several of the other elements, with whom they were required to share messing and canteen facilities. As a result Sergeant Major Merrick and I agreed to build our own unit canteen. We needed, amongst other things 2 tons of cement to

construct the plinth on which the building would stand. Fortunately, the 'reserve' under the control of the civilian Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (MPBW) amounted to just over that amount and after much cajoling, my friend the civilian officer concerned agreed that I might have my requirement and we quickly transported it to our location before he could change his mind. The rest of the materials for the project were 'stolen' piece by piece from the worksite in Little Aden where we were still engaged in construction work. We were allowed 3% wastage of materials but ensured that damage was minimal! Within three months, our Company Club was ready for occupation. The only thing missing was a connection from the underground mains electric cable to run the installed lighting and air conditioning equipment, until CQMS Markham came up with a brilliant idea. All buildings were numbered and the company office was No. 7. He therefore painted in the appropriate position on the adjacent 'Club' building the number 7A, and followed this with a telephone call to the MPBW electrical department to inform them that there was 'something wrong with the electricity in building 7A'. The Arab contractor duly appeared and after much head scratching and digging into the sand, admitted that he was unable to find the 'faulty' cable and had decided to install another. Thus, with an appropriate donation to his family fortune, we had electricity installed in our 'phantom canteen'. In order to legitimise our new construction, I invited the Brigade Commander to cut the tape at the opening ceremony. Some weeks later, the MPBW Clerk of Works appeared. He sought explanation regarding his site plans, noting that there was an unidentifiable building that did not appear on his copy. We suggested that his plans were not up to date and he happily drew in our Building 7A. Thereafter, my soldiers enjoyed the privacy and comradeship of their own 'Club'.

It seemed however that word had got around. It was not long after Brigadier Louis Hargroves had performed the opening ceremony that he sent for me and confided that he was in trouble with London because a soldier had complained to his MP that he had no church to attend. Would I build him a church? Understandably I demurred and equally understandably he was insistent. It would be a favour to him, he said, 'out of all proportion' to the difficulties for me. Within two months, the MPBW architect had designed for me a front wall in local stone. This was built by Arab labour and a 'scrounged' Twynham hut was erected so that it was 'hidden' behind the stone façade, which soon boasted an imposing entrance door. The RACHD 'head man' at Command Headquarters acquired and added religious accoutrements that would have graced any house of worship.

With the ending of the small war in the Radfan, the local operational situation was deteriorating quite rapidly, with many attacks on 'soft' targets in Aden itself. One of these had an indirect but considerable effect on my activities. The GOC MELF (of which Aden Brigade was part) was a Major-General Cubbon, a first class commander, but also with a flare for showmanship. He had decided that it would be good for both military and civilian morale if we could hold a 'Military Tattoo' and, on Brigadier Hargrove's suggestion visited me in my tiny Twynham office to 'request' me to undertake the Direction of his coveted enterprise. He said that he would give

'By devious means we had electricity installed in our phantom canteen'

instructions that I should be allowed an 'Indulgence' flight with the RAF to Brize Norton and after a brief leave, to escort the intended Producer of the tattoo, an elderly retired RE major of much experience in the military tattoo business, on the return journey to Aden. All went well until I met up with my 'Producer' at Brize Norton on the morning of the intended return flight. The RAF Corporal in charge of the few passengers on the freight VC10 advised that there was only one vacant seat. I asked for it to be allocated to my 'charge' and for me to be 'wait-listed': we waited with apprehension. About 30 minutes before scheduled departure time, I suggested to the corporal that it was the appropriate time to close the passenger list. He agreed. Five minutes later an RAF corporal, a 'legitimate' passenger appeared on the scene in order to claim his seat and on receiving the obvious reply demanded interview with the Commanding Officer. I waited with baited breath and was relieved when the aggrieved corporal reappeared with a broad grin and the announcement that he had been granted an extra week's leave. My elderly 'charge' was not in the fittest condition; he did not travel well. Nevertheless, on arrival in Aden I handed him over safely to a staff captain from the headquarters and returned to my Company. Sadly, my man did not stay long, the Aden climate being quite different from anything he had previously experienced: within two weeks I was on my own! We had embarked on a schedule for a 90 minute show with so many units participating that the prospect of bringing them all together for rehearsal was so daunting as to be impossible. I therefore arranged for the tape recording of the music to which each contingent was to perform and visited each in turn to watch their individual rehearsals. The operation allocated to my men was the erection of the scaffolding structure of the seating stands. Materials were begged, borrowed or stolen from as far away as Kenya and Nottingham. We actually arranged for an aircraft carrier about to depart from UK to delay departure in order to take on board 'borrowed' flood lighting equipment that was being transported for many miles in England on icy roads to the docks. Such was the response at that time to a request from a General! Three weeks before our opening night, an Arab threw a grenade into the garden of an officer's married quarter, seriously wounding the teen-age son of the Commander-in-Chief. The next day, General Cubbon came to my office and 'asked' me to agree that we should cancel his beloved show. After all the work that we had put into the project, it was a great disappointment. It was also of course a great relief to me in that the responsibility for the direction and co-ordination of such an extensive project was no light one. However, our opening number '76 Trombones', remains as a nostalgic reminder of our intended enterprise. The attacks continued and in due course the situation seemed to be heading in the same direction as had Palestine. The Arab town of Crater was placed out of bounds, weapons were carried at all times and casualties were suffered. Nevertheless, we managed to find occasions for social activities and I was delighted to discover that George Miles (from Korea days) had joined the Army Security Vetting Unit (ASVU) based in London and had arrived in Aden to interview those officers recently appointed to positions requiring access to sensitive material. We renewed our happy association from the past.

The slightly cooler weather of the 'winter' 1964-65 was a great relief but the return of the blazing heat in the spring was the cause of a debilitation, known as 'Adenitus', a so called affliction affecting many who had served more than one summer in the station. Whatever the reason, there was a noticeable deterioration in discipline in 'Big' Aden and the number of Courts Martial seemed to be increasing. The problem was not one for me and I took little interest in it. My soldiers knew where they stood and my unit 'Crime Rate' was virtually non-existent. One of the reasons was that I had arranged with the OC of the Army Port Squadron that shipped stores to Sallalah and other coastal 'up country' locations, that I would provide three soldiers per trip to load and unload stores at each location. This meant extra effort on the part of the working soldiers to allow three men 'free' for this 'unofficial' duty. It was for the lucky ones a fishing holiday. The CSM let it be known that only those with 'good disciplinary records' would be eligible for the 'holiday'. The stores were of course unloaded in record time, to the delight of my transport colleague. I was able to visit my men at Salalah from time to time by courtesy of the OC of the RAF flight of Argosy freight aircraft that flew between South Arabian stations.

In due course I was summoned to the office of the Colonel AQ at HQ Aden Brigade who told me that the Permanent President of the Command Court Martial Board had gone on leave, that there was a case awaiting trial and a President of the Board was required. Would I be kind enough to do the job? I read the papers relating to the trial and realised that it was one requiring a judgement that could affect considerably the future of the accused. The PP had not been known for his severity and it dawned on me that once again I had been identified as the 'Hatchet Man'. The other two officer members of the court and I heard the evidence, the words of the prosecuting and defending officers and after conviction, the pleas in mitigation of sentence before sending the three accused down for 18 months each. They did not appeal.

Departure from Aden in September, following my handover to my 2IC, John Napier (I had had the luxury of a major as Second in Command since the departure of Burnett in 1963) was a welcome relief, being by the SS Victoria, a small but comfortable Italian 'passenger' ship. At time of departure there was a dock strike in operation in Aden.

This, together with a heavy sea swell required the lifting of my first Volvo motorcar from the heaving deck of a lighter on to the waiting ship. The car made it safely and after a pleasant trip to Brindisi, survived a motor journey through Italy, Austria and France and to Strathclyde University in Glasgow where I was to undergo a post-graduate course in Industrial Personnel Management. October in Scotland is quite different from October in Aden.

The total casualties recorded from 1964-1967 were:
Radfan: Killed 24, Wounded 188
Aden: Killed 68, Wounded 324

Scotland/Germany/England (1965-69) Glasgow/Dortmund/Northampton

My year at Strathclyde University was an education in more than the usual sense, I

had served with many Scottish officers and soldiers but that of course had been in a disciplined environment. I was not prepared for residence in a region of the country that still exhibited the extremes of affluence and poverty more appropriate to some of the less wealthy overseas countries in which I had served. I discovered that there was a sort of enclave to the northwest of the city called Bearsden. It was administered separately from the high rateable value area of Glasgow City proper, had its own 'Blue Train' with Bowler-hatted city gentlemen commuting daily from the suburb to the city centre, and was bereft of Public Houses. In fact to obtain a glass of beer anywhere in Scotland on a Sunday, it was necessary to drive a minimum of three

miles (thereby becoming a genuine traveller). Fortunately, there was a delightful pub 3.2 miles away from my Bearsden abode, called the Clachan Inn, on the edge of the Campsie Fells. The pub boasted a voluble Mynah bird in the entrance hall and one would

receive on arrival an appropriate welcome from the thing: a truly relaxing environment. On the other side of the coin, so to speak, there was an average of one murder on each Saturday of the year in Sauchiehall Street: Glasgow's 'Piccadilly' in the city centre.

The civilian nature of this existence was alleviated by the presence of the second military man on the one-year post graduate course in Industrial Personnel Management I was attending: Major Martin Lee. I had met Martin briefly at a Corps function at Harwich in 1957 but otherwise he was a stranger. He immediately impressed me on day one by joining me as the only other student in the lecture room at the appointed 09.00 hrs start. 15 Minutes later we were joined by the lecturer, followed spasmodically by most of the other students who sauntered in up to an hour later. Martin was even more flabbergasted that I was. His style was well demonstrated by his '1938' double-breasted pin striped grey suit, his copy of the Daily Mail and a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes. He became not only a great friend but also my 'Best Man' at my wedding the following year.

Shortly after the commencement of the course, I was asked by Joe Kelly, our course director, tutor, and psychology lecturer to undertake a research project (on his behalf!) into MacDonalds Biscuit Factory (later bought by United Biscuits) on one of the city's industrial estates at Pollockshields to the south, with a view to offering advice as to how they might improve on their exceedingly high rate of staff turnover. My colleague/assistant for the project was a young lady, also from England who had recently completed a BA first degree in German. Sadly she was unable to operate a typewriter and I therefore purchased a Czechoslovakian machine for £17.00 (I think it is still in the attic). She was also not terribly skilled at constructing coherent written sentences in her native English. She did however accompany me when we visited the homes of some of the all female ex employees of the firm, to question them regarding their motives for leaving their employment with MacDonalds. Our expeditions, necessarily at night had soon to be abandoned, as we tried to locate our quarry in the dreadful rabbit warren of granite tenements in Govan and The Gorbals. The presence of my attractive girl in such an environment nearly brought disaster when we were spotted by a group of some of the seedier inhabitants of the

'Once again I had been identified as the 'Hatchet Man''



■ By Building 7A - John Napier refuses to watch



■ The only lawn mower in South Arabia?



■ Canteen foundation, it takes two Sgts to supervise



■ Al Mihla Village, Radfan



■ Sgt Bowler organising the airstrip



■ Jack McNulty, 'B' Coy, 45 RM Commando



■ Corporal in charge of the Check-in Desk, Thumier



■ Down wind for Thumier landing strip



■ 'Difficult' country, the Radfan



■ Bill Freeman, Arthur Biggs, Charles Cusack (back)



■ Harry Stanley and Frank Walker



■ RPC Senior Officers' Course - N'pton & Cranfield



■ Martin Lee, Harold Waterhouse, Pat Legg, Alan Mutch, Gerry Walker, Tony Ridings, Tom Buck, Steve Marot, Frank Walker, Colin Davey, Walter Clarke, John Ryall

area. Our research became less empirical than we would have liked! Nevertheless, my (our?) report was so appreciated by the managing director that after an entertaining luncheon, he offered me a job as Personnel Director with the company, if of course I was prepared to leave the army. I thanked him but could not really envisage undertaking even such a financially rewarding career, that far from civilisation.

The subjects that we were required to study required a degree of concentration, being relatively far removed from our usual military ones. The law syllabus, conducted by a lecturing solicitor whose enthusiasm seemed to be more attuned to football matters, was apparently designed to discover how much detail one could remember about specific, if landmark cases rather than the military method of identifying where to find the answers. Thus I still remember that the principle of the law of 'duty of care' was decided in "Mersey Docks and Harbour Board versus Coggins and Griffiths, 1938"! Probably more interesting was the lecturer who knew about people and with whom Martin and I would share a beer after 'school', Eric Lomax. I did not realise at first that he had been a POW of the Japanese in Burma. He subsequently wrote a most interesting book about his experiences as a prisoner, *The Railway Man*, winner of the 1996 NCR Book Prize.

The course completed (our Diplomas appeared about nine months later), I proceeded with my family via temporary accommodation in a previously long uninhabited, and therefore initially in rather grubby state, army quarter at Warminster in Wiltshire, to BAOR and my posting as OC 3 Pioneer Civil Labour Unit (PCLU) at Dortmund. I had been told that there would be no married quarter available so bought and towed there a caravan, intending it to be a temporary housing measure. In the event, on being greeted at my new HQ by my 'A' Detachment commander, Captain Richard Abbott who, due to an inherent stammer, took time to tell me the good news, I learned that we had in fact been allocated a married quarter.

My duties, in addition to the inevitable military exercises in anticipation of trouble from the east, were primarily the supervision and control of my detachments at Dortmund, Münster, Iserlohn, and Hamm and advising, on civil labour matters, the largest civilianised unit at that time in the army, 23 Base Workshops REME at Wetter: in addition, responsibility for solely RPC matters (as differing from operational ones) at 451 MCLG at Münster, commanded by Major Martin Lee, fell to me. In civilian terminology of the time, my responsibility was for the personnel management of some 10,000 German civilian employees of the British Army in that area of BAOR. My 'domain' also included at Hamm, the Depot and Training Centre of the Mixed Services Organisation (MSO), the blue battledress uniformed civilians originating from refugee servicemen or other non-German civilians mainly from such countries as Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Russia etc. The OC of the MSO Depot was none other than Major George Haines DCM, from OCTU and Pre-OCTU days who ironically wore a 'second hat' as one of my PCLU detachment commanders.

The Civilian Working Groups (CWGs), as

all our uniformed civilian employees were labelled evolved in a way that was probably unique to the European theatre of operations. The nearest equivalent I remember were the uniformed but civilian 'Blue Caps' enlisted in the Middle East to assist in police duties. By the time that I became involved they, the CWG had passed through many changes in their organisational structure since the system had been introduced immediately after the war. From providing a means of keeping large numbers of the otherwise unemployed in gainful employment in secure accommodation in a war-torn Germany, they had developed into an organisation with a military structure and commitment that had become an essential element in the NATO plans for dealing with possible aggression from the east. By now, the CWGs were in many respects substitutes for Pioneer or other soldiers. Of the two main elements, the MSO provided Defence Platoons and guards for headquarters and other sensitive areas that would otherwise have required the deployment of army personnel and were, where appropriate armed. They also

manned the Tank Transporter unit, so essential in operational circumstances. The members of that unit were of Polish origin with British supervision. The MCGs on the other hand, were exclusively German

(apart from a British officer and NCO) and in agreement with the German Government were not armed, although whether that agreement would have been enforced in the event of conflict with an enemy country is anybody's guess. They lived in barrack accommodation with full messing etc. arrangements and, provided a reliable organisation for the performance of essential skilled tasks as drivers, fitters etc. or the necessary and sometimes uncongenial manual labour that every military force requires. In the area of Germany for which the British were responsible there were many such units, commanded by British officers and NCOs that were integrated into the overall 'battle plan'. The units were designated Mobile Civilian Transport Group (MCTG), Labour Group (MCLG) etc. The MSO included a number of ex officers who became 'Superintendents' with identifying badges of rank. Similarly, the MCGs had their superintendents who were accorded the same status as their MSO counterparts. The superintendents had their own separate messes and were capable of 'directing' rather than 'ordering' their men. All civilian employees of the British Forces in BAOR, whether uniformed or otherwise were (if not UK based) under RPC administrative control.

As usual there was a surprise for me on arrival. This one was that the British Government of the day had decreed new reductions in the Forces support services and I had been chosen to handle the pilot scheme for its implementation by imposing 400 redundancies on a workforce already sensitive to what they considered as generally lower rewards, mainly financial, than those enjoyed by employees in equivalent German civilian organizations. We achieved what was euphemistically referred to as 'retrenchment' without significant industrial unrest.

Apart from those occasions when we were alerted to manning our 'emergency' stations to ensure that we were prepared for possible trouble from the east, there was

only one other military exercise for me. Someone at HQ BAOR had discovered details of my previous involvement in army flying and although that was 10 years behind me, I was detailed to act as an umpire to monitor the competence of what was now the Army Air Corps in the use of helicopter borne missiles! Thus for several days I sat behind the pilot and his gunner in a helicopter above the training area east of Bielefeld as they followed instructions received on their radio. The aim of the exercise was to discover the value of the newly developed 'stabilised sight'. Unfortunately, these devices were not yet available so it was decreed that 'stabilised binoculars' would be issued in lieu. Unfortunately, there were no stabilised binoculars available. "Therefore", came the order, "standard binoculars will be used"! Anyway, it was fun.

Although expecting my posting at Dortmund to last at least two years, it was not to be. During a visit in 1967 of the new UK DAPL, Brigadier Frank Walker (he had been my Company Commander at the RMP Depot in Woking in 1953) he told me that he wanted me to take over as Chief Instructor of the RPC School at Simpson Barracks, Northampton, as he had many plans that he, as a new Director wanted to implement and he wanted me to assist him. Would I agree? With obvious reluctance at leaving the relative comfort of BAOR I accepted!

The reception on arrival at Northampton in March 1968 was unfortunately not appropriate to the status that I had been assured by the DAPL I would be accorded. The Commandant of the RPC Training Centre, of which The Pioneer School was a part, was, unbeknown to me, in a long-term feud with Frank Walker. Possibly as a result of this, I was allocated an inferior semi-detached civilian house, known as a 'Hiring' in a less than salubrious area of the town (the garage was too small to accommodate our car) and there was apparently no prospect of being allocated a Married Quarter in the immediate future. As soon as work permitted, I set about finding and purchasing a home of more suitable proportions than the 'Hiring' and discovered a 1939-46 built house with four bedrooms, decent sized gardens and garage at Little Billing, surrounded by open country on the eastern outskirts of Northampton. We were pressed for time by the anticipated arrival of an addition to the family and I went to see Max Engels (yes, that was his name), a Solicitor with whom I had had many dealings in my days at nearby Weedon in connection with the defence or prosecution of National Service soldiers involved in Court Martial proceedings. I told him that I wanted completion of the Conveyance within seven days and that the vendor was equally anxious for such an arrangement. Max said that my suggestion was an impossible one, and without precedent. The Conveyance was completed seven days later, and we became the proud owners of Oakleys, Little Billing, Northampton.

Military life in Northampton was quite different from our overseas existence. The atmosphere had a distinctly 'civilian' feel. It is difficult to explain now what effect this had then not only on adult Service personnel, but also their families. From a disciplined environment of boarding the school bus at the appointed place at the appointed time, and an understanding of the sudden departure of a friend, accompanying a posted father, the world for service children changed to the relatively narrow one such as a

'I had been chosen to impose 400 redundancies on a sensitive workforce'

Northampton Primary school could offer; and the unbelief of their new school companions that the new arrivals' previous school had been in a foreign country. Philip and Penny found themselves in this quite confusing environment when they attended Weston Favel Primary School (George was to experience a similar situation in Guernsey in 1978). They survived.

The route I took on my daily journeys to and from Simpson Barracks included a relatively steep hill where, each morning, as I was driving down I noticed a familiar figure pushing his bicycle up the incline. I thought I recognised him and in due course one day plucked up the courage to stop my car and approach the gentleman concerned. He expressed no surprise at seeing me as he had heard that a chap of my name had arrived at the barracks. It was David Common from Willingdon days and who was now art master at Northampton Grammar School: small world. We renewed our friendship and exchanged visits between our houses, even inheriting from his wife Jean their cat Jimmy. David put me in touch with an old colleague of his who was now running St. Andrew's Preparatory School at Pangbourne. We quickly enrolled Philip there, followed some years later by brothers William and George.

My tour of duty as Chief Instructor at the RPC School was interesting in that it brought me into touch with many senior officers on such occasions as making a presentation with Frank Walker on the role of the Corps in support of a two brigade expeditionary force, to the CGS and his staff at the MoD and organizing the first army computer course on personnel management matters at Cranfield College (later university).

I was much assisted in my responsibilities by probably the most industrious officer in the Corps. He was renowned for his meticulous attention to detail and his ability at finding solutions to problems. He was Major (later colonel) Pat O'Connell. He was also admired for his prowess at gardening. It is said that when he handed over his quarter to the reputedly least industrious officer in the Corps, the conversation when inspecting the garage went like this:

New man: 'What are these boots for?'

Pat: 'Gardening'

New man (apprehensively): 'And what is this old raincoat for?'

Pat: 'Gardening in the rain'.

New man: (bordering on panic) 'Yes, but what is this torch for?'

Pat: 'Gardening in the rain in the dark'.

As I was, by now, by virtue of my qualification from Strathclyde, a member of the Institute of Personnel Management, I was also called to attend with the Director, gatherings of the Institute in such pleasant surroundings as could be offered by The Swan Hotel at Harrogate and other similar venues.

Much as I enjoyed these new experiences, I was pleased when the Director offered me, after nearly two years of doing his bidding at Northampton, a posting to Malaya as OC 1202 PCLU and ADPL Malaya District/17 Division. He was however, perfectly frank (sorry!) in stating that it would probably be an arduous task that I had to perform – the organizing of the redundancy of the remaining 2,500 local civilian employees, leading to the closure of Far East Land Forces (FALELF) that had been decreed for October of 1971. At least I had for the first time that I could remember some warning of what the future held. On 29th December 1969, we left for

RAF Brize Norton and embarkation with the RAF from there to Singapore.

Malaya (1969-72)

Seremban-Penang-Johor Bahru

We were met at RAF, Changi by Captain Christopher Etherington. He had worked for me in 1960 at the tented camp on the outskirts of Rhyl in North Wales, and in Aden in 1963 where he also had met me at the airport; his was therefore a welcome face. He was Staff Captain to Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Biggs, DPL at HQ FARELF. Almost the first thing that Chris mentioned after the usual greetings was that his job had folded and he would be posted to BAOR in June. The family stayed overnight at the Services hostel and we boarded the train to the north early next day, arriving in Seremban in the evening.

Unusually for me, my predecessor, Major Derek Hainsworth whom I had known since joining the Corps in 1957 and who had been my colleague in Aden, was not only still in station but met us at the railway station with the unit Staff Car and a 'borrowed' Land Rover for the luggage. Derek had moved into the mess on departure of his family to UK and we drove straight to his now vacant married quarter, a very pleasant detached house on the outskirts of the town, to be met by our Amah, Ah Lan and her husband, Ah Kong. They were to remain with us throughout our moves between military stations until our departure from the country in 1972.

Next day I accompanied Derek on the obligatory visit to the camp tailor to be measured for my OG (Olive Green) uniforms before making a tour of the headquarters to meet the other staff and services officers, but not before meeting the most important person of all: Wong Chin Tong, the chief civilian of 1202 PCLU. Mr Wong was a Local Executive Officer (LEO) the top grade of any locally employed civilian and who proved a tower of strength during my two years in the unit. Not only was he fluent in several Chinese languages, Malay and English but he also wrote Chinese and had most excellent copperplate English handwriting. He additionally had some Japanese, acquired in his early teens during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya in WWII. He had at that time learned enough of the language to act as an interpreter. He was not only brilliant at his PCLU work (to which he was devoted) but was also a charming companion whose company I enjoyed throughout my tour. I was also pleased to find that I had a British NCO to deal with military matters: Staff Sergeant Poole originated from the Seychelles Islands and was ideally suited for and most competent at dealing with the indigenous civilians with whom he worked.

My 'Empire' stretched the length of the Malay peninsula and my HQ was located at what was left of HQ Malaya Area/17 Division on the outskirts of Seremban. 'A' Detachment (Capt Len Smythe) was conveniently located in an office over a bank in town. 'B' Detachment (Capt Roy Innocent) had an office in the vast Terendak military complex outside the town of Malacca, 'C' Detachment (Capt Dick McDonald) was at Penang, 'D' Detachment (Capt John Read), at Johor Bahru (JB) and 'E' Sub Detachment (LEO Wong Jin Jong) at Kluang. My relatively large geographical domain was of course to be a temporary one. The closure of Terendak had already been announced and within a few weeks this most expensive of British annual financial investments in the area was the

first to be run down prior to being abandoned to the Malayan (now Malaysian) army. The location was, like most in the peninsula, delightful and with the honorary membership that I was accorded of the Malacca Club in the nearby city of that name, one could through 'half closed eyes' conjure up a mental picture of a Somerset Maugham description of a more relaxed era. 18 Months later I was able to take a tour of southern Malaya, during which I stopped overnight at the Malacca Club, where I was able to watch a very 'English' Sunday cricket match.

My arrival in Seremban coincided with the announcement that the sequence of closures of the British garrisons in the

peninsula had been changed!

'Gardening in the rain in the dark'

In due course I discovered that the powerful leader of the MTUC (Malayan Trades Union Congress) and General Secretary of the Malayan

Transport and General Workers Union, who was as well known to the British Army Generals as he was to his Union Members, had worked hard behind the scenes to engineer the maximum possible tenure of employment for his members: his successful efforts continued to the end. Mr Saidi was a formidable opponent, as I discovered at the many conferences, negotiations and discussions that I attended during my two years in the country. It was nevertheless some time before I realised how right he was to fight so hard on behalf of those he represented. He was a Muslim and had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Technically therefore he was 'Hadji Saidi'! Despite our many battles, when we finally parted in 1972 he wrote a glowing report on our co-operation, to my seniors.

The outcome of the several changes of plan resulting from Saidi's manoeuvring was that, on closure of Seremban six months later, I was now to move to Penang: a congenial location but a long way from my Johor Bahru Detachment, 500 miles to the south: JB was to become my eventual FARELF destination. Although my military transport needs were adequately provided for by a Ford Zephyr staff car and a locally enlisted RASC Malay driver, it was clear that a civilian car was required for family use. The only English language newspaper in the country, The Straits Times, had the usual For Sale column and I spotted that the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur (KL) had a two-year-old Silver Grey Ford Zephyr, identical to the staff car, for sale. It turned out to be not only relatively cheap but also in excellent condition, particularly when compared with the other overworked and over priced possibilities on offer. I drove it home with delight.

Our six months' stay in Seremban was very pleasant as, even after the closing of the Division/Area Headquarters, the civilian Sungai Ujong Club provided a suitable replacement for the mess and those of us who were left were still able to operate our water skiing club at Port Dixon, 30 miles to the west. Dawn was the best time for this activity and 10 year old daughter Penny baulked initially at such an early start. She relented however when she was able to follow her early morning skiing exercise by enjoying, suitably wrapped in a large towelling bathrobe, a solitary breakfast on the Port Dixon Club patio, waited upon by two servants. My skiing experience was however tempered by an unfortunate episode when the 'captain' of the ski boat, a lieutenant colonel in the REME named Dennis Franks decided to subject me to one of his notorious 'pranks'. Having towed

me further off shore than was usual, in fact into what was accepted as the 'shark area' he 'shook me off' the skis and contrary to the accepted procedure drove away into the distance. It was anything up to 10 minutes before he returned to collect me as I tried to keep my head above water, wearing an inadequate 'midriff' buoyancy aid: I was not amused.

The family moved north in advance of me and with no army quarter available for us in Penang, occupied the palatial home of Ian Meek, the local British magistrate who was about to take three months leave in UK. There was a good airline service (Boeing 737's) from KL to Penang and on a trip there to visit my 'C' Detachment, I lunched with Ian at his house in Macalister Road. He said that he would be pleased for me to rent the house but later remarked that he would like his staff to remain. I must have paled, as he quickly added that he would of course pay their wages. This was just as well as I later discovered that the servants' compound housed no less than 26 souls of the servants and their extended families. One of the smaller Chinese children became a playmate for son William, who was nearly two years old at the time.

At the auction of property that preceded the closing of the headquarters mess in Seremban, I purchased some excellent hunting prints and several items of mess silver, one of which was inscribed as having been presented by Brigadier Cubbon (who as Major General Cubbon had been my GOC in Aden). I was also persuaded by the departing Station Staff Officer (a retired lieutenant colonel) to buy his elderly Triumph TR2 motor car, which I drove north over the hills and after several repairs by local 'garages' en route, via the ferry to Penang. On arrival there I asked the Warrant Officer in charge of the REME Workshops, to check it over. He reported that the bracket holding the steering column was severed but for 1/8th inch of metal and that I was lucky to have survived some of the more winding roads through the hills! Staff Sergeant Poole had already towed north, with a borrowed Land Rover our motorboat Ragged One.

It took 10 months to wind down the very acceptable Penang station and I initially became a member of the mess of the resident infantry battalion (1/10 Gurkha Rifles). The mess was organized and run to an exceptionally high standard. Every item of furniture was highly polished and even the cold beer was served in silver goblets by of course, an immaculately turned out and inscrutable Gurkha soldier. During my time in the Island and when it was thought that Penang might still be the last of the Malayan garrisons to be disbanded, we were visited by General Mogg, of wartime airborne fame, a former Glider Pilot and now Adjutant General at the MoD. A visit by the Minister of Defence, Sir Ian Gilmour, followed shortly after the General had departed. Both occasions required the provision of enjoyable and entertaining social functions, welcome relief from the inevitable tensions of running down and disbanding a long standing military station. An additional well remembered social event was the last military Summer Ball to be held at the Runnymede Hotel Officers Leave Centre, which occasion was graced by the presence of elder daughter Jane who donned (I believe for the first time) a full-length and elegant ball gown, and who

captured the attention of the few young officers, still in station. After Christmas, the Gurkha Battalion moved to Hong Kong, my 'C' detachment commander returned to UK and I moved my office to the Runnymede Hotel at the seaside and next to the civilian Penang Club, of which club I became a member. Nevertheless, every serving army officer is obliged to be a member of a Services' mess and the only one remaining in the garrison was that of the British Military Hospital (BMH). The mess membership, with the exception of Ian Governor, the Gynaecology Surgeon was composed of 17 female nursing officers, the senior one being 'the matron', Major Ann Dealy, a formidable lady who decided that I could make myself useful as PMC. I agreed! Ann later became Godmother to son George.

With the return of the Meek family from UK leave, we reluctantly vacated the house in Macalister Road and with the departure for Hong Kong of 1/10 GR and the closure of the army married quarters in their St. George's Barracks, I had to find alternative family accommodation. Fortunately I located a bungalow in Rose Avenue that had previously been an army 'Hiring': it distinguished itself primarily by having a built-in bar in the sitting room. There was still an RAF contingent manning the radar station on the nearby Penang Hill and our friends who worked there, including Squadron Leader Fred Flowers who became god-father to son George. They all lived nearer to Georgetown, the island capital and found our bar a convenient watering hole on their route home in the evenings. Fred and his wife, Pam, both of whom became friends for many years, joined us on several weekends with their RAF friends for congenial gatherings in our comfortable accommodation. One of our other guests was Francis Graham-Bell (from Middle Wallop and Aden days) and his new wife.

However, the hazards of living in a bungalow in that part of the world were much greater than at home. Whether that is still the case I know not. The particular problem in that part of Malaya was that the threat of theft was sufficiently prevalent to require all ground floor windows to have (even if sometimes considered decorative in daylight) fitted wrought iron grills; of course

all windows in a bungalow are on the ground floor. Returning one evening from an enjoyable dinner at Butterworth RAF mess on the mainland, I placed my white linen mess-kit jacket on the back of a chair near the bedroom window, open to allow in some fresh air on a hot night. It had just started to

rain. I awoke as a flash of lightning illuminated a very dark head and shoulders that belonged to the arm that was dragging my jacket through the wrought iron grill. It was fortunate that my concern for my jacket was greater than my instinct for retribution, for if I had attempted to strike the thief I would more than likely have struck the metalwork, with the obvious outcome. Instead I grabbed my uniform jacket and pulled. He also pulled and then disappeared into the night with no more than a uniform button. Unusually for me, I had not removed my wallet from my clothes. As the wallet contained amongst other things my Service Identity Card, I was much relieved.

Sometime in April, all other military people having departed Penang, I paid off the remaining army civilian employees and we headed south for what surely had to be

the final Malaysian military station, Johor Bahru. The family members' departure had of course to be by air and to RAF Changi on Singapore Island, to the south of the interconnecting road causeway with Malaysia. All appropriate arrangements were made. However, I still had my (now serviceable) Triumph TR2 and therefore the problem of transporting it to our new location: Staff Sergeant Poole took the army car south and I had to drive the family Zephyr. It happened, as is frequently so in the Services, that there was a helpful friend to hand, in this case a flight lieutenant at RAF Butterworth who had charge of several Beverley aircraft of the type that had flown my lads from Dhala to Aden in 1965. He kindly offered to ship my car south to Singapore and in due course I picked it up at Changi airfield and enjoyed its use until I could find a suitable buyer in the ANZUK Force that was now establishing itself in Singapore to fill temporarily the military gap after the demise of FARELF.

Johor Bahru was not an exciting station and the work of terminating the services of the remaining loyal employees, many of whose families had served the British army for generations, was not a cheerful experience. Nevertheless, with Staff Sergeant Poole, Driver Ahmed and our Amah Ah Lan we spent our final 10 months moving out of Malaysia in as cheerful and dignified a way as we could manage. We departed from that military station with one more member of the family than when we arrived. George appeared at BMH Singapore on 11 June as one of the last, if not the last of the many British service children to be born there. Those of the local population we were leaving behind were of course sadder than ourselves in that they had little to look forward to in terms of prosperity or even employment and only the few, such as Wong Chin Tong were entitled to a pension (miniscule by our standards). Both Wong and Ah Lan continued to correspond with us for several years after our departure. The knowledge that we were the last of a British military force that had 'belonged' to a part of the world where we were actually welcome, encouraged us to make the parting of the ways as cheerful as possible.

All remuneration to local employees was paid in cash and every fortnight I would draw a cheque on the JB branch of Barclays Bank (DC&O), in charge of which was a young British manager. He was, as were his opposite numbers around the country really only nominally in charge. The 'serious' work was performed by the highly paid 'Comprador', invariably a Chinese who dealt with the bank's clients, as only he knew how! The one at JB was not known to me: we only 'smiled and waved' to each other. Normally Staff Sergeant Poole was adequate armed escort for me but my last payday included all the service gratuities for the remaining employees and amounted to the equivalent of more than £1m and as our joint armoury was now reduced to two pistols and 12 rounds of ammunition, I 'borrowed' a couple of armed Australian soldiers from Singapore to act as my escort. Three days before payday, I went to the bank with Wong and our pay clerk and we spent all day 'bagging' the money ready for distribution and placed it in a padlocked ammunition box, which was put in the bank strong room. I had a cold drink with the British manager but he did not mention that he was going on leave next day. On payday I returned to the bank to collect my cash, whereupon the efficient bank clerk requested me to show him my receipt for the box! I did not have one. Oh dear! Even

'The arm was dragging my mess-kit jacket through the iron grill'



■ 1970 - Dick McDonald, John Read, Len Smythe, Colin Davey, Roy Innocent



■ Driver Rahman, in Jalan Indra Putra, Johor Bahru



■ Mr Arthur Biggs and Mr Saisi



■ With Steve Marot and Chris Etherington, Jan 1975



■ Families Day, Bracht 1974



■ With Herbert Sternagel, Rheindahlen 1975



■ Walter Muller, Monchengladbach 1975



■ Changing the Guard, East Berlin, October 1973



■ The Prince Richard Inspects the Guard of Honour



■ Xmas Day, Ross Bennett, Darryl Ingle, Colin Davey



■ The 'Standby Crew'



■ After the Parade, Charles Telfer and Colin Davey



■ Rear Row: Not Known. Middle Row: Maj G Piper, Maj J Snowdon, Capt J Rayner, Maj P Baird, Maj P Higginbotham, Maj J Hickman, Maj C Telfer, NK, NK, Maj B Markham, NK. Front Row: NK, Maj J Gurhy, Maj M Moore, Lt Col C Davey, Col A Mutch, Brig J Ryall, Col G Walker MBE, Lt Col A Ridings, Lt Col W Thomas, Lt Col F Lucas, Maj P O'Connell.

the persuasive Wong could make no progress. I had visions of complications approaching but after half an hour the Comprador appeared, smiled and waved to me, and my box of £1m was released. There is a moral somewhere there.

It was particularly pleasing to receive a message from George Miles from Korea and Aden days, and now stationed in Cyprus, to say that his ASVU duties required him shortly to visit Singapore for two weeks. Now that we were in the 'home straight', his stay was an occasion that we celebrated with the full force of the facilities available to us at the time. Our exploration of Singapore nightlife was an education in itself.

Our eventual departure from JB was something of an administrative nightmare. Not only was there no British Army HQ to handle the arrangements for the transport of our goods and chattels but also all our other departure details had to be organized directly with the individual elements concerned. Most of these were in Singapore and there were very few military telephone lines between what were now two separate countries: ones that were not very friendly towards each other. Unaccompanied baggage entitlement limits were of course specified and although in our case the allotment was adequate to accommodate our personal effects, we had the additional dilemma of having to dispatch the bulk of our belongings one month before our own departure, with the consequent need to decide what was essential to retain and could still be classed as 'accompanied baggage'. The RAF allowance was more than that of most civilian airlines of the day but even so, there was a certain raising of the eyebrows by the ground staff when we turned up with sixteen items of luggage, including a child's tricycle and a seven feet long aboriginal bamboo blowpipe. This last survived the RAF VC10 flight as far as Bahrain where, with a change of cabin crew (about which change I had no warning) a newly arrived and large WRAF steward bent the thing in two. Notwithstanding, I was determined to keep it, and after landing at Brize Norton, took it on the train from Swindon to London, only to leave it by mistake in one of the two taxis that transported us from Paddington to Waterloo. Exhausted as we were after our lengthy journey, which included a refuelling stop at Cyprus where we had a brief meeting with George Miles and Wife Hilda, who had crossed the Island for the occasion, it should have been a relief to have arrived at the army Hiring allocated to us in Sussex at Sharpthorne, north of Brighton. We were to discover however that this was not to be, as the country was suffering from the effects of a miners' strike and that meant that the house was without electricity; and this in February.

England/Germany (1972-77) Sharpthorne/Düsseldorf-Rheindahlen

The house at Sharpthorne was one of several in a housing cul de sac and was relatively modern by army standards. The sitting room had a fireplace and I set about lighting a fire with paper, a few sticks of wood and some ancient crumbs of coal that I found in an outside 'bunker'. By now it was raining quite heavily. It was soon apparent that there was a problem with the fireplace as the smoke was billowing into the room. In the belief that to avoid a draught, the previous tenant might have blocked the chimney, I poked a broom handle up the inside, to discover that it was blocked – but permanently! It had, I

discovered been converted into a false chimney and was not now intended to accommodate a real fire. Darkness soon descended and with neither electricity nor torch, we would have been entirely without light or food had it not been that 'Fairy Godmother' aunt Kitty Sauvary, living at nearby Horsham had visited before our arrival and left cakes, sandwiches and candles for us. Next morning, I travelled by train to Northampton to collect our motorcar that had been left in store in the belief that we would be in Malaya for only one year. It was in reasonable order and I drove it back to Sharpthorne, stopping on the way to scrounge a small bag of coal. I had noticed that there was a boiler in the kitchen and assumed that it worked on the same principle as the ones we had had in Germany. However, not only was it unsuitable for any fuel other than coke but it required electricity to run it. I found that there was a telephone directory in the house and sought the number of a nearby guest house or hotel that might have its own electricity generator or other form of lighting and heating but whilst doing so, discovered that the installed telephone only permitted incoming calls so that I had to find a public pay phone (cash only, of course). I decided first to call the Barrack Officer in Brighton for assistance. He told me that he had heard on the news that the strike would be over next day – and it was. February is not a good time to arrive in a cold country suffering from a 'three day week', after a flight in a propeller driven aircraft from the tropics, half a world away.

In the previous October, I had received an Annual Confidential Report, with all the appropriate recommendations, from Arthur Biggs before his departure from Singapore. On closure of FARELF HQ he had been posted as ADPL in the DAPL's office in Berkeley Square, where he would be the only military person apart from the brigadier. Arthur's main duties were liaison with MoD Staff Branches and promotions and postings within the Corps. I thought that I had a reasonable chance of promotion and was mildly disappointed on receiving my posting order as second in command (Major) of 45 PCL Group at Düsseldorf, and in correspondence with Arthur he indicated that it was not in any way due to his failure to advance my cause. There was of course the distinct possibility that there was a connection with the fact that unlike the DAPL of the day, I was not a Freemason! Career prospects and promotion for officers in the army (and probably the other two Services) are based on three criteria: qualification, recommendation and selection. From lieutenant to captain and captain to major, the first two criteria, qualification and recommendation are sufficient to ensure elevation but for promotion to lieutenant colonel or higher, Selection Boards sit to decide who will be chosen to fill which vacancy. The Board membership deciding RPC promotions included the DAPL, whose recommendation for selection was more likely to be accepted than not. I proceeded to Düsseldorf, at least happy in the knowledge that my CO would be Gerry Walker who although my junior was an old friend and good companion. There was no married accommodation immediately available but within about three weeks, a colonel's quarter (Group 3) in the nearby suburb of Lohausen was allocated to me and it was next door to Gerry's house.

'February is not a good time to arrive in a cold country from the tropics'

Our little HQ in Caernarvon Barracks was also the home of HQ Rhine Area, commanding all units in rear of 1 Corps, (the operational formation of BAOR, and whose HQ was at Bielefeld) and was immediately adjacent to Düsseldorf Airport. My duties were not very different in principle from those I had undertaken when I was adjutant of 45 Group in Mönchengladbach in 1962-63 except that there had been a number of significant changes that intensified the usual pressures of our work: the Collective Tariff Agreement (CTA) governing all procedures relating to the employment of our local civilians, new regulations and tighter financial controls had all been revised or introduced in my absence from the theatre since 1968. There had been another fundamental change; this in the structure of the MCLG's. These had always of course been made up entirely of German nationals but with the German 'economic

miracle' since the end of WWII, and the subsequent shortage of indigenous labour, it had become necessary to import Guest Workers (Gästarbeiter) from all parts of Europe, particularly Portugal. Initially this influx presented problems that will be well understood by those who know something of both German and Portuguese cultures. In due course, the German elements acquired a sneaking admiration for the diligence of the Portuguese, an understanding unlikely to have been so readily accepted by many British civilians at that time. The particularly good news was that the German Chief Clerk, Walter Müller was still in the same post and we continued our very happy working and not infrequent social relationship until my departure for HQ BAOR, Rheindahlen in early 1975.

I had known Walter Müller since 1960 when I had been posted to Krefeld and I started to work directly with him when I was posted to 45 Group in 1962. Here we had established a happy relationship from the start, his two particular attributes being his understanding and acceptance of military matters and his sharp sense of humour. Over the years that I knew him he taught me what little I know about German culture and attitudes, according me the rare privilege of inviting me to his apartment, and his (3rd) wedding. Since the days of the British Raj in India, social contact with the 'local population' had not generally been acceptable to the British, no doubt because they were usually the 'rulers' in a foreign country. Since my first expedition overseas in 1946 I had always felt that it was a pity not to learn something about the population of the country in which one was stationed. Walter was my connection to the otherwise separate world of the Germans.

In the Far East, the working atmosphere and general ambience had been very much a military one. In Düsseldorf however, it was noticeably more civilian in style. Apart from the three officers: Gerry, Captain (QM) Malcolm Bishop and myself and one Warrant Officer, our HQ staff members were all German civilians, but fortunately of great experience and efficiency and all known to me from my previous postings in Germany. Malcolm dealt with all military matters affecting the 17 officers and eight WOs/Senior NCOs who ran the Group, comprised of our HQ, the three units (3, 4 & 6 PCLUs) covering the employment of civilians in the area up to I Corps HQ at Bielefeld, and the uniformed civilian units (438, 444, 451 & 453 MCLGs and the MSO Depot) scattered between Bracht,

close to the Dutch border and Hamm to the east. My work was almost entirely concerned with the administration of the remaining 20,000 or so locally employed work force of the many depots and units that made up the Rhine Area command of Brigadier Mike Moore. My job was never dull in an administrative sense in that personnel matters are rarely identical and would become particularly interesting to me when a problem could only be settled by recourse to a German Labour Court or representation to the German Land Finance Ministry. Apart from the wearing of military uniform and travelling in military transport, there was only the occasional mess Dinner Night to remind one that we were in the army! This aspect of service life with its much greater independence than the relatively narrow one of a tightly knit infantry battalion or equivalent unit was one that I appreciated in the same way that I had, when leaving 1 RWK, and joining the wider world of RMP, then to Glider P and finally RPC: it had been an advantage confirmed by many of my original contemporaries and for which I was very grateful. I think it stood me in good stead in my post-retirement years. The best view that a junior regimental officer could have expected at that time if he wanted to obtain a broader outlook on life was a tour or two in a headquarters staff appointment, unless of course he expected further promotion.

With the recognition that there were many changes impending in both political and Service terms, my wife and I embarked on what was to be one of the last opportunities to travel by the British Military Train between what had previously been the 'British Zone' of West Germany and Berlin. This railway connection had remained intact since the end of the Second World War and had been kept open (except during the 1948-49 Berlin airlift) by the British, in the face of great provocation from the Russians and East Germans, and confirmed our entitlement to cross East Germany to access our garrison in what had been (and after reunification reverted to) the capital city of Germany, still a zone of occupation by the four powers (USSR, USA, UK & France). The train service operated daily, with the exception of Christmas Day and was conducted in an atmosphere that had not changed since its

inception. The crockery and cutlery in the Dining Car were clearly the original 1945 Service issue items and it was a nostalgic experience to recognise the white, with blue embellishment, tea cups and plates: some said that the boiled eggs served at afternoon tea were the originals! We embarked, with due ceremony at Hanover and relaxed until we reached the East German border at Magdeberg. Here we were required to hand our passports to the Train Conducting Officer (a smart young second lieutenant with a brief case and silver knobbed cane) whom we watched from the closed (as ordered) window of our carriage as he moved smartly along the station platform, halted in front of, and saluted a waiting Russian officer of rather scruffy appearance and with hands deep in pockets. The latter reluctantly removed his hands from the comfort of his coat to take the brief case apparently containing our passports: he opened and closed the lid and returned it to the British officer who saluted and marched smartly back to the train,

embarked and signalled that we might proceed. As it was still daylight, we had the opportunity of viewing the 100 miles of East Germany through which we passed. After the relative affluence of the west, it would not have been encouraging to anyone who might have been considering joining the other side. It was something of a relief therefore to arrive in West Berlin and to be met by Tony Ridings, who was ADPL Berlin and well known in that garrison. He and his wife Valda not only accommodated and entertained us extravagantly but Tony provided his car and driver for a tour of East Berlin and a direct viewing of that part of the world, which at the time was so often described but rarely seen. It was in all an illuminating experience.

In 1974, Gerry was promoted to colonel and posted from Düsseldorf to HQ BAOR at Rheindahlen as DPL. He was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Tony Mills, another old friend who, like me had spent two or three years out of the army after General Demobilisation in the late 1940s. Both Tony and I were particularly interested in boating although his interest was related to his passion for fishing. I had no interest in fishing but having enjoyed our family boating experiences in the Far East was keen to 'get on the water' again. After much studying of copies of 'Motor Boat and Yachting' magazine, I spotted an advertisement for a Coronet 21ft cabin cruiser that I thought might meet our requirements for cruising on the Rhine or Mosel rivers: the only problem was that it was berthed at a marina in Poole harbour in the UK. I was however sufficiently convinced that it was the sort of thing we would be happy with that I set out to inspect it. The owner and his wife confirmed my prejudice in favour of the craft and I settled with them on the understanding that they would put it on its trailer, transport it to Dover and arrange for the ferry people to carry it to Ostend, where I would collect it. I 'borrowed' a Land Rover from a friendly unit, travelled to the coast and watched at Ostend harbour as my trailer-mounted 'ship' was wheeled ashore. The first problem arose when I found that the vehicle coupling did not match that of the trailer! What to do? By remarkable coincidence a tank transporter vehicle of the Polish manned MSO unit of that name had just delivered a redundant

tank to the ferry and was about to depart on the return journey to the Ordnance Depot at Möchengladbach, which was adjacent to one of our Group's MCLGs where I intended to prepare my boat for launching. The British NCO in charge was a familiar face and he agreed to load my contraption on to his vehicle and convey it to the Depot. I followed.

We crossed the borders from Belgium into Holland and from Holland into Germany without customs difficulty, but night had set in before we reached the Ordnance Corps Depot. There, the duty sergeant concluded that my boat and trailer could be satisfactorily removed from the transporter only by crane. He duly summoned the appropriate vehicle and driver to the scene and in the illumination provided by spotlights and headlights, the removal took place. After thanking all concerned I completed my journey to Düsseldorf.

The next day I received a telephone call from the CO of the Depot, seeking to confirm the ownership of the boat on his

premises. I agreed that it was mine and he asked me to call on him: I did. He was understandably cross and I hoped that my apology for failure to seek his permission for my intrusion would suffice. He however won the day by presenting me with a bill for £18.00 for the out-of-hours hire of a crane and driver. We subsequently made much use of our boat, berthing it at Winnigen on the Mosel, and travelling the 100 miles each way on most summer weekends. It became a welcome venue for our friends.

Life continued much as before until late one afternoon in December 1974, Tony came to the open door of my office and with arms raised, and a hand on each doorpost said, "Colin, I think you are going to remember this moment. You have been promoted to lieutenant colonel: congratulations!" After making an appropriate telephone call home, I proceeded to our cellar bar where Tony had already joined the rest of the staff, and we had a drink.

In early 1975, I was once again on the move and rejoined Gerry; but this time in Corridor 'E' in HQ BAOR, Rheindahlen. I had been posted to the appointment of ADPL (Management) and within three months, Tony Mills was occupying the office next door to me with the newly created identity of ADPL (Industrial Relations), an appointment resulting from the setting up of a 'Highest Level Works Council' (HLWC), now the senior negotiating body for local civilian employees of the BAOR forces. Under German Law, the HLWC chairman was entitled to access to the Commander-in-Chief (as titular employer!) but of course this aspect of the C-in-C's responsibility was delegated to Gerry, as DPL: Tony was Gerry's designated staff officer. Although Tony's responsibility was for industrial relations, he was not always enthusiastic about some aspects of the work involved so that I found myself on several occasions replacing him at the negotiating table in the Finance Ministry at Bonn, at the German Trades Union Congress meetings at Oberammergau in Bavaria, Oberlahnstein in the Hertz Mountains or Bad Oynhausen in Lower Saxony, often with the representatives of the other NATO Sending States Forces (USA, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg) and enjoying every moment of it. Corridor 'E' acquired something of a reputation as a happy area of the HQ. The Headquarters of the British Army of the Rhine was, as one would have expected a place of serious business. It was after all the centre for the planning and control of British and other forces of the NATO Northern Army Group, not only in the periods of peace or tension but also in the event of hostilities from the east, and of course under the overall direction of the American Supreme Commander at SHAPE. Nevertheless, our Branch was much involved with people and we considered it appropriate to adopt a more relaxed attitude to life when opportunity permitted (always, of course ready for whatever might come our way). Thus, we smuggled into the building a refrigerator, a few glasses and something to put in them that would be welcome at the end of a stressful day. It was not long before some of the more senior officers found that they had occasion to visit us on a Friday afternoon or an evening preceding a public holiday. In 1976 Gerry Walker was replaced by Steve Marot (my first master in the RPC in Germany at 4 PCLU when I was stationed in Krefeld and then my colleague in Aden, who it may be remembered was of French

'You will remember this moment, you have been promoted Lieutenant Colonel'

Mauritian origin and with an acute sense of humour). We were pleased that he embraced our hospitality arrangements with equal enthusiasm. Steve and his wife also enjoyed an occasional relaxing day at the week-end with the family on our boat on the Mosel.

Our military and civilian staff were an exemplary group. In addition to an SO II (Major Dennis Higginbotham) who was primarily concerned with CWG organisation and training matters, I was assisted by not only a Staff Captain, Garry Cooper, a particularly bright and competent officer who eventually rose to the rank of colonel, but also by a clerical WO I (Shepherd) of great diligence and industriousness. The civilian staff members were headed by Herbert Sternagel, MBE, who became a great friend and I am pleased to say remained so until his death in 2009. His knowledge and his ability not only to cope with the complexities of German Labour Laws but also to explain them to me and the other officers in our branch enabled us to achieve many successful outcomes in the challenges that we faced in tribunals and courts. Herbert Sternagel had been conscripted into the Hitler Youth Organisation in his childhood but had clearly not been infected with the pernicious propaganda of that régime as was evident by his having survived the meticulous scrutiny appropriate to the award of an MBE to a foreigner. There were two senior uniformed civilians in our branch. The Senior Supervisor of the CWGs was V. Milanovitch, OBE, and the headman of the MSO element was Drussan Sedlar, MBE who had been with me at 45 Group: their origins and histories were of great interest to me. Although we were generally aware of the political backgrounds and the previous political diversities of our civilian staff, we did not of course involve ourselves in the detail of their differences. I had learned from the latter that during the war he had spent 43 days in the hands of the Gestapo. The mental, if not the physical scars were identifiable. He had never seen eye to eye with Walter Müller at 45 Group in Düsseldorf and they kept a polite but deep psychological distance from each other. The relationship between Sedlar and Milanovitch was worse. Sedlar was from Croatia and Milanovitch from Serbia. Noting the events that took place in those countries in the 1990s is probably sufficient comment. In 1978, by which time I had returned to UK, I learnt that Sedlar had been assassinated whilst walking in Münster: his killers have not been identified.

My attendance in place of Tony Mills at the various Sending States' meetings with the Trades Unions' representatives was usually in the company of Walter Müller. Herbert Sternagel did not object; a situation with which I concurred, for although Herbert's competence and expertise was undoubtedly superior, Walter was the more suited, I thought, to attend such occasions. Walter, as an ex wartime German army officer (and with an Iron Cross, in addition to his MBE) was a tall, well built and not surprisingly a strong-minded person with a dominating personality and able to impose his authority on the type of people we had to deal with at that time, on 'the other side' of the table. He was however inclined when speaking on some matters, to express his own opinion, rather than the official one for which I was responsible. My German was and still is, at best rather

limited but I was glad that I had acquired sufficient of the language to realise on one occasion that Walter was not translating quite what I had said but rather his views on the subject under discussion. He did not repeat his mistake.

With Gerry Walker's promotion, his predecessor as DPL BAOR, Colonel John Ryall had been promoted to brigadier and had moved to London as DAPL. The army, always undergoing change was now suffering even more from the new and quite drastic cuts in establishment numbers and all manner of other 'economies', including closing offices and barracks and,

'I peeked through the slit and all I could see was a handgun'

worst of all, failing to increase service pay and allowances commensurate with the galloping rate of inflation: amalgamations and reorganizations were gathering pace. Possibly intended as some compensation for these impositions, the RPC (and other 'Small Corps') had for the first time a member of the Royal Family appointed as their Colonel-in-Chief. In our case this was to be HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester. He did not have the handicap of having previously worn military uniform but this did not deter his advisors from selecting a date in the autumn of 1977 for him to pay an official visit to the RPC Depot and Training Centre, Simpson Barracks, Northampton in his new capacity (albeit in civilian clothes). John Ryall, whom I had known for many years, considered that I would be the most appropriate person to organize the reception of HRH. I did not greet the news with enthusiasm, not only because I was in an appointment I thought was suited to my limited talents but also because, the overseas allowances applicable to BAOR were very important in keeping one financially afloat, and would of course cease in July 1977 on our return to the UK. In January, we decided to make a second trip to Berlin at the invitation of Tony Ridings's successor, Pat Baird. This time we thought it better to travel by road and take sons William and George with us. Accommodation was arranged at the soon to be closed Edinburgh House Officers' Club and we drove to the border crossing and Military Police Check Point at Helmstedt. I exchanged greetings with the OC of the RMP Company who happened to be visiting his detachment. It was Tony Le Tissier whose brother Owen later became a close friend in Guernsey. It was snowing and although the weather was deteriorating we drove east, unaware that within 15 minutes the road had been closed to military traffic because of the weather conditions. On entering East German territory we were stopped by a Russian soldier (we did not accept the authority of East German forces) in front of a small wooden hut, the inside of which I discovered on entering via six inches of snow, was reminiscent of an abandoned wooden country railway station. It appeared to be empty but on one wall there was a narrow slit above a small protruding shelf and above the slit, in several languages the word 'Documents'. All was silent until I heard a cough and saw fingers protruding from the slit. I passed our passports and Movement Order through and waited. After a while and as nothing seemed to be happening, I bent down to peek through the slit. All I could see was a handgun! I moved quickly to the side and shortly after that my documents reappeared and I returned to our car. We 'skated' with some difficulty and in a state

of some trepidation the 100 miles to Berlin in a blizzard. On arrival at the RMP checkpoint at the end of the autobahn, the sergeant in charge was I think close to reporting me for 'disobeying regulations'. However, he accepted my assertion that had I been aware that the road was 'closed' I would not have been so foolhardy as to risk finishing up in the hands of the East German police, colloquially known as The 'Vopo' (Volkspolizei) who patrolled the route. The return journey five days later would have been more comfortable as far as the climate was concerned but the absence of snow exposed the appalling surface of the East German autobahn that had not apparently been repaired since 1945.

We commenced preparations for our move to UK but before our departure were able to attend in June the spectacular occasion of the Queen's Silver Jubilee 'parade' at Sennelager. It was a daylong outing with which sons William and George coped admirably and after a two-hour drive to the scene we attended HM's revue of 4th Armoured Division, the last of the British formations of that size in Germany: there were 400 tanks on parade. We waited with baited breath for the drive past. Would they all start? The last one seemed to have some difficulty but just made it. I think I saw a REME artificer in the distance disappearing behind the burst of blue smoke from the exhaust of the tank's reluctant engine. Our later meeting with HM was in glorious sunshine and we also felt that our rather long day was justified when, having been told earlier that HM had left Buckingham Palace at 07.30 that morning to start her journey by helicopter and aeroplane to Sennelager, at 18.30 I asked a German policeman at the nearby petrol station why he was still on duty, he replied: "I am waiting for your Queen, she is having drinks with our Burgomaster". We were impressed.

England (1977-78) Northampton

My posting, with the family to Simpson Barracks, Wootton, Northampton in July 1977 was a disaster. The Socialist Government of the day were now even more reluctant to recognise the need to maintain the armed services at an acceptable strength and at a standard that would allow them to carry out their commitments without detriment to their performance (a situation not dissimilar from the one existing at time of writing (2007/8)). In particular, the Senior NCOs who were and always have been the 'backbone' of the army, suffered more than most as increases in pay and allowances were allowed to fall behind the rampant rate of inflation from which all ranks suffered. The junior officers too were certainly feeling the pinch and when I arrived from Germany to my appointment as Commandant of the RPC Training Centre, I learnt some of the details at first hand. The adjutant, Captain Darryl Ingle briefed me (as in Aden, my predecessor had not been available to hand over and in this case had disappeared into premature retirement). Darryl included in his briefing the information that Regimental Dinner Nights had not been held in the officers' mess for many months, one officer had felt obliged to have his telephone disconnected and another had given up his daily paper. In fact, I found the atmosphere quite depressing. My depression was enhanced when shortly after my arrival, I reported to District Headquarters at Colchester to be received by an equally unhappy Colonel AQ (the GOC's Staff

officer to whom I was responsible) and the news that my unit's 'Establishment' was to be reviewed to assess where economies could be made. Having spent nearly 50% of my service overseas where one was, if only partially, insulated from the machinations of whichever Government were in power, I concluded that I had to obtain soon, if not very quickly an overseas posting, or otherwise 'consider my position'.

Nevertheless, preparations were put in hand for the visit of our new Colonel-in-Chief, HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Prince Richard was a rather reluctant soldier.

He was an architect by profession and when his father, the Queen's uncle died, Richard's elder brother, William inherited the Gloucester title and the related official duties.

Unfortunately, the new Duke was killed in an aircraft accident and Richard was 'detailed' to fill the role for which he had not been trained. All 'Royal Visits' are of course meticulously planned and itineraries itemised minute by minute. The anticipated visit was presaged by an outline itinerary, to which I was requested to recommend an infill of detail. A visit by our visitor to the Sergeants' mess was of course appropriate if not arbitrary and in discussion with the RSM (Stewart) he enquired as to the nature of HRH's tipple; preparation is everything. My enquiry 'upwards' elicited the information that HRH drank only milk or water. Just as well we found out. In the event, he accepted at the sergeants' mess the RSM's persuasive words and sipped an orange juice. We provided in the officers' mess a glass of milk. Fortunately toasts are not normally made in service messes at lunch times. Shortly after the visit of Prince Richard, John Ryall retired from the army and the office of the DAPL was relocated from Berkeley Square to Simpson Barracks and the new incumbent, Brigadier Alan Mutch, became a member of my mess.

There was a reserved married quarter near the mess for the incumbent of my appointment and we occupied this on arrival, as our house at Little Billing had, during our absence become the target of 'squatters'. Although, after a great deal of difficulty we had managed to evict them, they left behind a trail of damage that modern vandals would probably consider

only minor damage. Every piece of domestic plumbing equipment had been smashed; every light switch had been wrenched from the wall. I shall not elaborate further. We started the process of restoration and resolved never to let to strangers, during our absence, any future home we might own.

The immediate task on arrival at Northampton was however to master the duties of my new and unfamiliar role. These duties included not only the reception and the organisation of primary training of newly joined soldiers but also responsibility for supervision of the Corps TA units and the all arms CCF contingents in Northern Command. I was just getting to grips with these (to me, new) tasks when, shortly after HRH's visit, we were notified that there was to be a national strike of

firemen.

I was told that my unit would be responsible for all civilian fire fighting duties in Northamptonshire. We collected from Bicester Ordnance Depot six 'Green Goddess' Fire Engines of 1950s vintage and welcomed a crew from the RN who had been trained in the use of portable breathing apparatus; also, an RAOC crew of trained soldiers and an RAF technical team, to supplement my crews of young trainees. With this rather motley bag, the RSM did a wonderful job in moulding teams that were able to cope with the many emergencies to which over the next few months we were called. However, in the familiar phraseology of the army, 'there was a shortage of kit'. The need to obtain quickly what I considered the essentials to do the job was an important matter and one that could not await the interminable obstructions of bureaucracy that would be encountered when 'following normal procedures'. The person best suited to deal with such a situation was of course the quartermaster (Major Ross Bennett). He by chance happened to be on leave: I therefore sent for his RQMS, WO2 Salmon. Within three days, the 'RQ' had 'acquired' all appropriate clothing and equipment; from firemen's helmets to specialist boots, and including searchlights for each Green Goddess and a flashing blue light for the roof of my staff car. His exceptional response to a difficult situation and his other abilities were well recognised and

two years later he received a short service commission in the Corps.

Our efforts at fire fighting were much assisted by a police car escort with a fire brigade officer, who was not of course a member of the striking trade union, to guide us in our new operations. Our trainees acquitted themselves admirably in dealing with the occasional dead body and in particular the saving of the Carlsburg Brewery in town. This latter success resulted in a large shipment of lager beer to the barracks in time for Christmas. Our first summons was to the Little Billing 'Aquadrome' holiday resort, which had a lake and a number of leisure boats. It was an unlikely venue for a fire and I thought at first that it might be a hoax. We nevertheless proceeded speedily to the scene, there to find a trailer carrying a boat with outboard motor apparently about to be launched, but which had caught fire. I arrived as my energetic soldiers were trying to extinguish the blaze by ladling steel helmets full of water from the lake on to the burning engine area. Seconds behind me was the RSM, who took one look at the scene, moved to the trailer, detached it from its towing vehicle, allowing the total contraption to run back into the lake: the other way of extinguishing a fire.

As expected from our new role, we were soon to be visited by the GOC from Colchester and on the appointed day he was due to land by helicopter in the barracks at 14.00 hrs. My army married quarter was in the barracks and I went home as usual to lunch.

During my break from the office I saw an advertisement in The Times. It offered a hotel for sale in Guernsey, an Island, which at that time I knew only from a one-hour ferry stop in St. Peter Port harbour when the family had been en route to Jersey in 1967. I took the newspaper back to the office (to study?) with the encouraging reminder that "You always wanted to run a hotel". On arrival at the office, the Chief Clerk informed me, that the General had been delayed. So, with a cleared desk and time on my hands, I telephoned the number in the advertisement. The lady who answered was the proprietor of the hotel and I said I had only one question: "why do you want to sell?" She was clearly quite elderly. She explained that a traffic accident in England had deprived her of her sight for several months and that she was only now recovering.



■ A Royal Visit. Back (L to R) 2Lt Rainey, Lt Shaw, Capt Allen, Capt Monkley, Capt Read, Maj Bennett, Capt Ingle, Capt Cooper, Maj Warren, Lt Hall, 2Lt Mapstone. Centre (L to R) Lt Col Clark, Maj Gurhy, Lt Hunting, Maj Snowden, Maj Grinnell-Moore, Maj Telfer, Maj Hickman, Maj Stott, Maj Wildgoose, Maj Markham, Maj More, Maj Cusack. Front (L to R) Lt Col Airy, Lt Col Lucas, Col Rifings, Col Mutch, Gen Sir Hugh Beach, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, Brig Ryall, Col Walker, Lt Col Davey, Lt Col Bland, Lt Col Broom.

Picture: Lt Col CC Davey

When she told me that the accident had been on the M1 and that she had been admitted to Northampton General Hospital, my fatalistic temperament 'kicked in' and I knew that I should investigate further. She did not tell me that her son was a dipsomaniac! Then the General arrived.

Next day, my enquiries to my Chief Clerk elicited the information that the Channel Islands were included in 'UK Leave Destinations' for which Railway Warrants could be issued.

So, a few days later I left the unit in the capable hands of my Second-in-Command, Major Charles Telfer and took the train to Portsmouth to embark on the overnight ferry sailing of the 'Caledonian Princess'. At several points in my journey and in the boarding process I asked for and received assurance that the ferry's first destination was Guernsey. It was only on being shown by the steward to my cabin that I learnt that for 'tidal reasons' the first port of call was to be Jersey and that there would be a stop in Guernsey of only 45 minutes – and that on the return journey to UK! On arrival in Jersey at 06.00 I telephoned the British Rail manager in his bed in an attempt to convince him that he should provide me with a flight either from Jersey to Guernsey or Guernsey to Southampton, to allow me time to reconnoitre our possible purchase, Le Carrefour Hotel. I failed to persuade him.

On the arrival of the ferry at St. Peter Port on the return journey from Jersey, I boarded a taxi driven by one Alf Le Marquand, who subsequently became our 'regular' driver. He never failed. By now it was pouring with rain and on our way to the hotel, I explained my predicament and he was of great assistance to me in ensuring that I did not miss the ferry for my return to England, which had I done so, would have resulted in my army driver, Weston being stranded at Portsmouth (no mobile phones in those days), and my absence from my unit for a further 24 hours.

In the 30 minutes or so available to me to inspect the property, I made maximum use of camera and sketchpad whilst

running round the house and garden to obtain enough information upon which we would have to make a decision regarding our future.

Although on my return to Northampton and military duty, a great deal of time was necessarily devoted to the running of the Training Centre and fire fighting matters, we nevertheless managed without too much delay, to 'do our sums' in connection with our new project and to take the decision that we would make a break from Service life. I had previously considered the possibility of making a move before the official retiring age for a lieutenant colonel of 55. On promotion, my seniority had been backdated to the previous June, putting me in possible contention for further promotion and I had subsequently received the appropriate recommendations in my Annual Reports.

However, it seemed to me at the time that with seven RPC lieutenant colonels competing for two colonel's appointments, and with the final competition for the single post of Brigadier Director a remote target, I would be better off with 'a bird in the hand'. I was not to know that of the two colonels, the first who was younger than me and therefore a formidable opponent, was to be required to retire prematurely less than a year after I had left, and that within a further year the second one, only a year older, was to drop dead after excessive sporting physical exercise. So, at the time and with three of our six children still to complete their education, a reasonable assurance of sufficient income for that purpose was of greater concern than staying put.

I had already made tentative enquiries about an adequately remunerated civilian appointment that I knew would shortly become available at the Joint Services Liaison Organisation (JSLO) in Bonn in Germany, an office well known to me and an organisation with which I was very familiar from my days in 45 Group and HQ BAOR. The unofficial assurance was that I had a good chance of getting it and I therefore attended a 14-day language

course at the Royal Army Education Corps School at Beaconsfield in an attempt to improve my limited knowledge of German. Having completed the course I duly received my piece of paper confirming that I had an acceptable ability to cope with 'colloquial' German. I waited, but soon learned that another officer, well known to me, who was married to a German lady and was living in Mönchengladbach had applied for the job and was more likely to be selected – he was.

At the earliest opportunity, I called on the DAPL to announce my intention to apply for premature retirement. He was quite cross and seemed determined to 'persuade' me to remain. I pointed out that my departure would provide a vacancy for a deserving officer to be promoted to my position from which I knew he, the obvious beneficiary would otherwise be barred on the grounds of age, the next time a normal vacancy was likely to occur.

Alan gave in with rather bad grace I thought and then emphasised his seniority by insisting that I should remain at my job for the statutory six months – this despite my offer to forgo my entitlement to a two-month 'pre-release civilian training course' to which I was entitled plus my emphasis on my need to complete the purchase of the hotel without delay if I was not to lose this opportunity. All this was of course in the knowledge of both of us that I had been his senior for some time many years before. We compromised.

By good fortune, my Second in Command, Charles Telfer was looking for a house to buy and I agreed to sell him Oakleys. The net proceeds from that sale plus the realisation of the rest of our limited assets, my army gratuity and a large two-year loan from the vendor of the Guernsey hotel we were purchasing were just enough to satisfy our new bank manager at Midland Bank Guernsey, Dennis Le Sueur that it would be reasonably safe for him to advance the balance of our requirement to embark on our project. I left the army with great confidence but with possibly excusable trepidation. ■



■ Fire Crew, Simpson Barracks, Northampton 1977.

Picture: RPCA Archive

AGM Minutes

62nd Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

Acting Chairman: Lt Col JA Starling
Secretary: Mr N Brown
Members Present: 77

AFTER welcoming members present and receiving apologies from, Brig HJ Hickman, Brig CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald, Col A Barnes, Lt Col JGO Lowe, Maj PJ Fleming, Maj R Teague, Capt M East and Mr D Luker the Chairman opened the 62nd Annual General Meeting, held in the Place2Be, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester on Saturday 3rd July 2010 meeting at 1200 hours and requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year after their names had been read by the Secretary.

ITEM 1. MINUTES OF 61st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 61st Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2. REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

2. Lt Col SD Fletcher CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC gave the following report:

He welcomed all to 23 Pnr Regt RLC and stated that he was not going to dwell on the heritage aspect of Pioneer History as the Padre had already covered this so well in his address at the Church Service.

He explained that the Regiment was as busy as ever and 45 were currently on operations in Afghanistan where they were being employed in the forward areas as Force Protection for the Combat Logistic Patrols. Training was currently being carried out for High Threat Counter IED Search Teams, 28 had completed training and 10 were now employed. A further 65 were preparing for Operations in Afghanistan.

On the sporting front the Regiment has had a very successful year. In the semi finals of the Army Championships the rugby team had narrowly lost to the Royal Welch. They had also been successful in the Army Sevens.

The Athletic Team had come second in the RLC Championships being beaten by 3 Log Sp Regt RLC whose team contained Olympic athletes. The Regiment had also competed in Nordic Skiing and, of course, football. On the individual sporting events the Regiment had the Combined Service Tennis and Combined Services Jet Ski Champions.

On the honours front the Regiment had received 2 commendations one on Operations and one winning the RLC Carman Trophy which is awarded to the best Private in the RLC, Pte Morgan achieved this from 10,000 RLC soldiers – no mean achievement.

3. Lt Col SJ Caldwell CO 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) gave the following report.

168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) continues to grow. The Regiment is now manned at 70% in terms of TA soldiers, a rise of almost 10%. Financial constraints mean that I am not allowed to rise above 70%. Recruiting

continues but I am being more proactive in discharging long term non attendees.

Officer Recruiting has improved, all national troop commander slots are now filled with numerous OCdts on the books. In the North East I now have a regular officer commanding 100 Pnr Sqn – this gives me a permanent foothold in NE England.

Last year I mentioned the possibility of moving the RHQ north to Middlesbrough following the demise of a TA Signal Regiment. Sadly the move was foiled when at Army Board level it was decided that no Regiments were to move.

Financial constraints have hit hard in that TA soldiers are in the main restricted to no more than 27 days training a year. A new army wide system called the Graduated Commitment Mechanism has been brought in to better allocate training days to those who are deploying on operations.

This time last year 2 soldiers were in Afghanistan as Counter IED Infantry escorts. I am pleased to report that despite some close calls all safely returned home. With their families I went to their medal parade at Wimbush.

Currently 4 soldiers are mobilised and training with other 23 Pnr Regt soldiers at Colchester. They will deploy to Afghanistan in September with 13 Air Sp Regt RLC as convoy logistic patrol force protection troops. This commitment of a 4 man fire time will endure for every rotation of Op Herrick.

Planning is now underway with regards to Op TOSCA the deployment to Cyprus in October 2011 as part of 23 Pnr Regt. It is expected that this will be a significant deployment and will become the regimental main effort once annual camp has finished.

Annual camp will primarily be held at Longmoor Urban Training Area and will continue numerous tasks initiated by 23 Pnr Regt on a recent exercise. 2 x US National Guard soldiers will attend the camp as 2 of my Sgts recently returned from an exchange exercise to the US in Missouri and N Dakota.

On the sporting front the Regiment remain the RLC TA Cross Country Champions.

Finally I am pleased to report that Major Keith Greenough, OC HQ Sqn, was awarded a QVRM, one of only four, in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

ITEM 3. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

4. Lt Col JS Starling gave the following report on behalf of the Chairman:

Our Chairman, Colonel Alex Barnes sends his apologies this morning but unfortunately he is employed on his military duties on a TA Commissioning Board.

Once again I would like to thank the CO 23 Pioneer Regiment for allowing us to use the facilities in his barracks and for allowing over 270 members to be accommodated, this must be a record.

It is wonderful to see you all, especially

those who have travelled great distances to renew friendships. Special mention must be made to Mr Simm from Denmark, Mr Lyle from Dublin and the many from Scotland. It is also nice to see our sprightly World War 2 Veterans and, of course, our one In Pensioner at Chelsea, Mr Hull.

ITEM 5. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

5. Mr N Brown gave the following report: I must apologise for those who are accommodated in St George's Barracks, unfortunately there is not enough accommodation here in St David's.

There is a regular shuttle service to St George's so there is no excuse for drink driving.

Can I ask all staying to respect the accommodation and leave it in a tidy condition. It would also be appreciated if you could also strip the beds, this will help the works party to tidy-up.

I would like to thank the members of 23 Pioneer Regiment who have worked so hard to make this weekend a success. Special mention must be made to WO2 Colin Bell SSM 144 Sqn who stood in at the last moment to once again help in the organisation and Sgt Clarke who is currently acting SSM and SQMS of 518 Sqn for his tremendous efforts. Cpl A Joy and his staff have worked tirelessly in arranging so much accommodation.

The Master Chef and his team must also be applauded for their work in ensuring that we have good quality meals.

This afternoon my son is to show a power point presentation in one of the tents on the sports field. Old photographs, approx 4,000, and DVDs taken over the years will be shown. I hope you will give this your support.

It is pleasing to report that the number of active members is remaining constant at 2,400. Since we met last year 53 have joined the Association, 2 of these served in WW2 and 8 served in the fifties.

The 39/93 Club continue to meet twice yearly at the Red Lion Hotel, Fareham where they have arranged a substantial discount on the normal hotel prices.

The next meet is to be held on 10 September, further details can be obtained from the Club Secretary, Mr Les Rowley.

The Association is allocated 30 tickets each year for the Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall, if you would like to attend please apply to the Association for a ticket.

I am always keen to receive articles for the Newsletter, have you considered submitting an article? We will gladly edit it for you.

An exhibition to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Blitz is to be held at the City Hall in London from 1 – 24 September 2010. This exhibition will include details of the Pioneer Corps involvement, 6 Pioneer Group Headquarters and 29 Pioneer Companies were employed in London during this period.

Last year we held the AGM in the Medal Room in the Officers' Mess, this allowed members to view the display of medals held there. This room will be open from

1300 to 1400 hrs today for those members who wish to view them.

During the year the Association receives hundreds of applications from families of former members of the Corps requesting historical information.

Because of the work carried by Lt Col John Starling we can now answer most of these queries as we now hold a data base of approx 700,000 ex World War 2 personnel. He is currently working on the post war records.

Finally I would like to place on record my appreciation of the help given to me by 23 Pioneer Regiment not only during the build up to the Reunion Weekend but throughout the year.

I would also, once again, to show my appreciation for the work carried out by my son Paul in preparing the Newsletter and keeping our web-site up to date and also

for taking photographs today.

ITEM 6 ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

6. In accordance with the Constitution one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year.

The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected: Brigadier CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald, Lt Col JGO Lowe and Maj PJ Fleming

ITEM 7 ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

7. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting would be 1 – 3 July 2011.

ITEM 9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8. Lt Col Starling informed the meeting that the RLC were to improve the Logistic

Grove at the National Arboretum at a cost of £19,000.

9. It was asked if the "Pioneer Museum" could move from Deepcut to Bicester. The Chairman explained that the museum at Deepcut was in fact the RLC Museum and contained items from all the forming Corps' and also the RLC. He pointed out that most of the items from the old museum at Northampton had been gifted to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford.

8. Mr P Thomas proposed and all attending agreed that a vote of thanks be recorded for the work carried out by the Secretary, Mr Norman Brown, and also to his son Paul.

10. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1235 hours.

N BROWN
Secretary

Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...



■ HQ 52 Group RPC

Picture: RPCA Archive

PAUL COOPER

Last heard of was living in Bicester about 10 years ago, discharged about 94/95 from 187 Coy. Please contact John Hay c/o RPC Association.

DUNCAN SIDWELL

Hi my name is Duncan Sidwell, I served with 144 company in Munster in the early 80's, I now live in Adelaide, South Australia.

If there are any persons that I served with who want to get in contact with me, my email is djazzz.sidwell@gmail.com.

My service number is 24551495.

HQ 52 GROUP RPC

Can anyone fill in the gaps from the photograph above.

"HQ 52 Group Royal Pioneer Corps. 1954".

The personnel are, as far as I remember:

Front Row (L to R)
RSM ?; he was commissioned shortly after this event, 2IC Maj ? (Scottish), CO - Lt Col Griffiths (Welsh Regiment), Adjutant Capt. J. C. Wood, Sergeant ?

Middle Row (L to R)
Cpl William ? - worked in stores, ?, ?, - worked in stores

came from Isle of Wight, ?, Mark ?, Brian Hopkins Part II/III Orders Clerk, Luscombe ? first name - Staff Car Driver, Cpl ?.

Back Row (L to R)
John Derrick - Despatch Clerk came from Salford. ?, Roger Haughton - worked in office, LCpl ?, ?, Alan ? - worked in office, ? (Frisby) - despatch rider, LCpl ? - IC MT and driver of 15cwt truck.

All are Privates unless otherwise stated.

RPC and NCC can be distinguished by their cap badges; the NCC was simply the letters 'NCC' which stands

for Non Combatant Corps.

Our 2IC Major did organize rifle practice for the HQ personnel and possibly for the whole Southern Command RPC. (Of course the NCC was not involved in this.)

Southern Command consisted of 4 or 5 companies each with a Major as OC.

I do not remember if 'our' Major was called Steer.

There were various changes in HQ personnel whilst I was there from 20 May 1954 until demobilization on 29 September 1955.

Contact Brian Hopkins
brianh@highlandrd.eclipse.co.uk

Blast from the Past

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



■ Stephen Hall writes I enclose a photo which was taken in Belize in 1982. I have tried to put names to faces, Cpl John Stenton, LCpl Stephen Hall, Brig ?, Lt Jim Murdoch, Pte Owen, Pte Pugh, Cpl?, Pte Ibbitson. Picture: Stephen Hall



■ 438 MCLG Bracht

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 518 Coy RPC (year unknown)

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 518 Coy RPC (year unknown)

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Gibraltar Barracks 1964-1966, Lt Baird & Sgt Downes

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Corps shooting team: (year unknown) Maj P Fleming (2nd from Left), Sgt Musselwhite (5th from Left), SSgt C Bunn (4th from Right), Maj GR Cooper (2nd from Right)

Picture: RPCA Archive

Rescued by someone who won the George Cross...



■ Lt Col Napier receiving the medals of Cpl Scully GC from his daughters

Picture: RPCA Archive

I THOUGHT members would be interested in the exchange of emails which originated in an email to my son Paul. A copy of the citation for Cpl Scully is shown at the bottom. Members may also be interested to know that Lt Col John Starling has recently purchased the MM which was awarded to Lt Chittenden.

Hello Paul,

I don't know if you are able to help me as I am not family of the Pioneer Corps, however I have been led to believe that my grandparents were rescued by someone who won the George Cross. I have researched the George Cross recipients and the only one I think it could be is Corporal James Patrick Scully. However one of the reports I read about him claims the couple buried were in their seventies, whereas my grandparents would only have been in their twenties. Their names were Alice and Joseph Carroll and they were buried under the staircase, they were the only survivors in their Street (possibly called Yardley Avenue, near Edge Hill, Liverpool) other than a young boy from next door.

My motives for finding out are I would love to be able to thank the family of their rescuers whoever they may be. Any help or information would be very, gratefully received, Best regards,
Paula Watt

Hi Val

Hope you and your sister are keeping well. My son Paul received the following email and forwarded it to me perhaps you would like to get in touch. If you do it might make a nice article for the Newsletter will you please keep me informed. Hope to see you both in November. Regards

Norman

Hello Paula

My name is Val Shaw. I am one of the children of James Patrick Scully G.C. I got a copy of the email you sent to Paul from his father. If you wish to get in touch with our family please give me a call on telephone number or email me.

Val

Hello Val,

Thanks so much for getting in touch I really appreciate it. I have asked my mum to send me more information as some of the reports I read on the internet don't quite add up with the story I grew up with. As soon as she replies I'll send it to you if you don't mind? I don't know if your dad talked about those times or not? I hope you don't mind me contacting you via email but I live in Portugal and the phone is a bit pricey! Thanks again, Best wishes
Paula

Hi Val,

Thank you for the copy of the citation, you have an amazingly brave father. My mum is going to read all the info I sent her and get back in touch. She thinks the name of the road was Ardleigh Road near Edge Hill and my Nanny and Grandad and a little boy from next door were the only survivors of the entire street. Apparently they were buried under the staircase and my Nan heard people above her but when she realised they were going away she pulled out a handful of hair and screamed, then the rescuers heard the scream but thought it was a child or animal! Then all I know was the rescue went on for hours and they were told that their rescuer was later awarded the George Cross. My Nan and Grandad would have been in their mid twenties and their names were Alice and Joseph Carroll. They didn't have any

children then so it goes without saying that me or the rest of the family wouldn't have existed without their rescuers! (currently 18 people). As soon as I know more I will pass it on, yours Gratefully

Paula

When houses were demolished by enemy action, a rescue party under the direction of Lieutenant Chittenden went to the incident and a search was made for trapped people.

Corporal Scully located a man and a woman and, with great difficulty, he managed to penetrate the debris and get to where they were buried. Lieutenant Chittenden followed him. Wood was obtained to use as props to shore up the debris, but they had no means of cutting it into pooper lengths.

A rescue party then arrived with tools to cut some wood into more suitable lengths for shoring. All available help was mustered and the men worked tremendously hard in their efforts to clear away the wreckage. Corporal Scully remained with the trapped persons and prevented any more debris falling on them. A long plank inserted to take most of the weight but as a result of further falls, the props began to sway out of position.

There was then a very real danger of the mass of debris sliding down and burying the injured persons. Realising this, Corporal Scully placed his back under the plank to try to prevent the props from giving was completely.

He steadied them for a time but gradually the weight increased until the props slipped. This left Corporal Scully holding one end of the plank and Lieutenant Chittenden supporting the other. Corporal Scully could have got away at this stage, but he knew that if he did so the debris would fall and probably kill the trapped persons, so he stayed under the plank. Gradually the weight increased and forced Corporal Scully down until he lay across the trapped man. Lieutenant Chittenden who was still holding one end of the plank reached over and supported Corporal Scully's head to prevent him from being suffocated by having his head pressed into the debris.

He managed to keep Corporal Scully's face clear, but he was fast becoming exhausted. Despite this, he kept up his spirits and continued to talk encouragingly to the woman. The man was unconscious nearly all the time.

Corporal Scully remained in this position throughout the night until, more than seven hours later, the rescue party were able to extricate him and the casualties.

When they first entered the house Lieutenant Chittenden and Corporal Scully knew there was a grave risk of serious injury or death.

As the high walls nearby appeared about to collapse at any moment. Had this collapse occurred, they would have been buried under many tons of debris. Corporal Scully risked his life to save the two people and, though the position looked hopeless, Lieutenant Chittenden stayed with him.

Significant number of Pioneer graves



■ Commonwealth War Cemetery, Libya

Picture: Dennis Higginbotham

I RECENTLY made a return visit to Libya, where I was stationed in 65-68. Most of the visit was in the form of an escorted tour which included the Knightsbridge & Commonwealth war cemeteries near Tobruk.

These were, as anywhere, beautifully maintained. There are a significant number of Pioneer graves; mainly of

Mauritian & Seychelles Pioneers but including a Lt Dunlop. I doubt that any Pioneer has seen these graves for many years as Libya has been largely closed to tourism. In the hope that they may be of some interest either historically or possibly for the magazine I attach some photographs.

Dennis Higginbotham

95 company



■ 95 Company, Pioneer Corps

Picture: Rein Aardema

IN 1944 and 1945 the Royal Pioneer Corps stayed in a small place near Arnhem, The Netherlands, called Laag Soeren.

They stayed in a complex which was used during the war by the German Waffen SS. They treated there wounded soldiers from the East front. Before the war it was a kind of hospital. They used a special treatment for the patients: cold water. Nowadays it has been rebuilt into

36 apartments. We, the inhabitants, are preparing a book of this complex. We do have two photographs of the Royal Pioneer Corps here. We wonder if there are still soldiers alive who can tell us something about (this complex in) those days. Or maybe they still have some photographs. Would you be so kind to publish this on your site?

Thank you in advance and best regards,
Rein Aardema, aarde1@wxs.nl

SSgts Andy Trenant and James Todd

I WAS sorry to read about the deaths of SSgt Andy Trenant and SSgt James Todd. I joined the Army in April 1972 and joined Burma Section where Andy was one of our training NCOs.

He was a Cpl then and he was great along with Cpl Mick Gavin. Andy always called me Treo, I still do not know where he got that name from, but I would always answer to it. I was a local lad and Andy always pulled my leg about it, he was a bit of a character and you could always have a laugh with him. On one occasion Andy told us that he was leaving and after the lesson we had whip round for him to buy a farewell gift - a bottle of whisky and a pen. He was very pleased with this and then Cpl Gavin informed us that he was only going on leave - we just sat there stunned. We then had to do a further collection when Cpl Gavin went on leave!

On completion of my training I did not see Andy again for a few years until I was sent back to the Training Centre on escort duty. Whilst in the guardroom completing the paper work I heard a voice in a Scottish accent shouting at someone. I recognised the voice immediately, it certainly brought back memories. Andy came into the guardroom, looked at me but did not recognise me and I called him Corporal. He then scolded me stating that he was now a Sergeant and then recognised me and called me Treo and shook my hand. As we had to wait for the prisoner Andy took me to the NAAFI and we had a good chat about old times.

I only knew Jimmy Todd for a few months at Long Marston and worked with him in the Bridging Park. He was a first class NCO who always got on well with everyone. When he was posted I did not see him again until we had both left the Army and worked for different Security Firms in Northampton. On one occasion we ended up working together and we talked about the old times.

I will always remember them.

Robert Tero

Give a little back

MANY THANKS for sending the cheque to me, after drawing and then winning one of the Derby Favourites. I was very pleased to be among the lucky winners.

I do know that some people moan about receiving the raffle tickets, but I consider it a small price to pay, in order not only to participate in the draw, but also to give a little back to the Association, which helps those in need.

I previously had a horse some years ago - which is probably still running, but to win this year and get the cheque on my birthday was just great.

Keep up the good work Norman.
Maurice Grange

Pilgrimage



■ The wrecksite of the Lancastria

Pictures: Paul Whitehead

I ATTENDED the 70th Anniversary Pilgrimage in France in June and was able to find my Great Grandfather's (Herbert Clark) grave over there.

He was in the Pioneer Corps - 73 company - you had already sent me some details and recommended books to read, from these I was able to find out where he was buried and able to arrange this trip.

I was taken out on a boat laid on by the French to the wrecksite of the Lancastria.

Thanks for Jim Atkins details - I was able to speak to him before I left.

I have enclosed some pictures of the memorial and marker buoy, including the other AMPC soldier buried in La Turballe.

If you could forward to Jim as well then I would be really grateful. Regards.

Paul Whitehead



You can't beat an old ex Pioneer

I WAS sorry to read in the April Newsletter of the sad loss of Jim Todd.

I first met Jim in 1966 at 521 Coy RPC, Bicester we were on the first D&E Platoon posted to 3 Headquarters Signal Regiment, Carter Barracks, Bulford. Lt Withers, Sgt Dennison, Cpl Todd, LCpl Cooke, LCpl Belsham, LCpl Latimer and 19 Private soldiers.

This was an excellent posting, Jim was a keen football referee, Lt Withers a football player, myself a mountaineer.

I met up with Jim again in Tidworth in

1975 at 6 Airborne Brigade and Signal Regiment, Jellalabad Barracks. Jim was now a Sgt and I was a Cpl.

Jim was then posted to 521 Coy RPC, this was the last time I saw him.

Myself I left the army in 1977 and now live in the Andover area working on security.

The past 33 years have flown by but I am still working at the age of 69 (70 in August) - you can't beat an old ex Pioneer.

Regards

Glyn (Taffy) Cooke

the Pioneer

■ **THANKYOU** for the copy of the Pioneer and for including in it my husband's account of his part in the war. It all seems so long ago now, but reading it made me feel that he was still here with me. I am sure he would have been delighted to see it in the magazine, and I hope it gives pleasure to your readers. The whole issue is very interesting and I would like to congratulate you on editing such a good read throughout. With best wishes.
Connie Hayball, widow of Lt Hayball.

■ **THANKS** so much for the latest edition of the Pioneer - an excellent magazine indeed! I was really sorry to learn of Andy Tranent's passing. I remember him very well from our days at the newly formed 187 Coy in Tidworth where he was CQMS. I have written a letter to Doreen Tranent with my condolences, I'd be obliged if you would put her address on the envelope and post it for me. I hope you are well and I appreciated your hard work on behalf of the Association.
Maj (Retd) Michael Hunting

■ **THANKS** for your latest edition of the Magazine, it gets better and better. Hoping that I may be able to come to the Weekend even if only for the Saturday. My health is a big issue now so no firm plans can be made. Give my regards should you see anybody I know.

George Lineham

■ **THANKS** for the mag enjoyed the read, served in Bahrain with the dog handler Dusty Miller in photo, also know some of the boys in photo with Tony Bloor, memories it brings back.

Seamus King

■ **THANKS** again for fab weekend Norman we all had a fab time.

Jill Burns-Smith

■ **THANKS** for a great weekend Norman.

Keith Burrows

■ **THIS** was my first reunion and will not be the last, roll on next year many thanks to all for a very good weekend.

Rod Curtis

■ **THANKYOU** for a well organised weekend. It was our first reunion and hopefully the start of many more.
Steve and Caroline Valentine



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



Colonel Dean VC

Dean also served in World War II as an officer in the Pioneer Corps. He witnessed the fall of France in 1940 and claimed to be the last British soldier to escape from Boulogne.

Edited by: Terry Crowdy
Pictures: RPCA Archives

DONALD DEAN lied about his age to enlist in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment in 1915 and served on the Western Front, where he worked his way up from Private to acting Captain.

Severely wounded at Passchendaele in 1917, Dean's account of the battle for 'Tower Hamlets' is a gripping account of the horror of trench warfare. Recovered from his wounds, it was in the last weeks of the war, late in September 1918, that Dean won his VC for leading a platoon in the determined defence of a recently-captured and isolated trench against repeated German counterattacks. In one of these attacks, the Germans actually broke into the trench, forcing Dean to break off a radio call for artillery support with the words, 'The Germans are here, goodbye!' Refusing to be overrun, he personally killed four of the Germans in the ensuing counter attack.

Dean also served in World War II as a senior officer in the Pioneer Corps. He witnessed the fall of France in 1940 and claimed to be the last British soldier to escape from Boulogne. His frank account of the evacuation challenges some cherished conceptions and is very critical of the conduct of the Welsh Guards in particular. Dean describes his distinguished service in Madagascar, Sicily and the Italian mainland up to and beyond the German surrender. When he died in 1985, Colonel Dean was the longest surviving recipient of the Victoria Cross from the Trenches. Author Terry Crowdy was granted complete access to Dean's private letters and diaries, never previously published, adding additional notes and material from official reports to give the reader context. The result is a moving, often amusing and inspiring portrait of a hero of two world wars.

There are some amusing moments (when he enquires how to establish a brothel in 1940 and ransacking a NAAFI before the Germans arrived) and a lot of interesting detail on how he had to manage what became a large force of commonwealth troops of varied faiths and ethnicity, plus thousands of Italian civilians. I am sure members of the Association will be interested in his description of the work performed by the corps.

The official release date of the book has been put back to October 2010 (it was due 30 Sept).

It is available from Pen and Sword Books (www.pen-and-sword.co.uk) and has a cover price of £19.99.

However, Pen and Sword are offering it on pre-order at £15.99. You will of course be able to get it on Amazon, etc. Of course, I would say it makes the perfect Christmas gift!

DONALD DEAN VC
Edited by Terry Crowdy
ISBN 978-1-8488-4158-1



■ Madagascar - clearing mined road



■ As an umpire in Ex. Touchstone in Mombasa



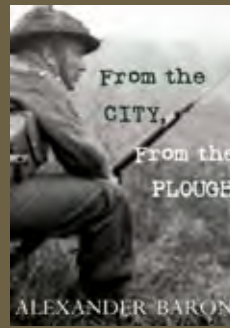
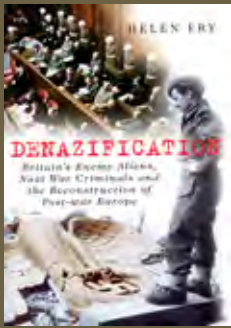
■ Vichy French prisoners on Madagascar



■ Remembrance Sunday



■ Formal portrait as Hon Colonel The Buffs



Brilliant and Compelling Enemy Aliens

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THE SLOW agony of the Afghan campaign has been very public. We know the name of each soldier who falls. Their faces appear day by day on the news. Their commanding officers call them "courageous". Their coffins glide through the streets of Wootton Bassett. And we watch their children weep.

In large scale conflicts, like the Second World War, the dead were invisible. Take this small tragedy: a soldier accidentally crushed against a wall by a passing (friendly) tank. "The 30 tons of steel lumbered on. The boy slid down the wall leaving a long smear of blood and filth; he huddled in a mound at its foot, a bundle burst in its rags. No one had more than a curious glance for the huddled body. Like a bug, thought the sergeant major. Killed in action; what a joke." This searing, yet weirdly laconic, description

comes from a novel about the Normandy landings of 1944 – one of the most authentic and moving pieces of World War II fiction, and one of the least well known. *From the City, From the Plough* was first published in 1948. Critics called it "brilliant" and "compelling" and VS Pritchett said it was "the only war book that has conveyed any sense of reality to me".

Now reissued, Alexander Baron's novel more than justifies this praise. Intense, episodic and sometimes documentary in feel, it tells the story of a lightly fictionalised Wessex battalion as it gets up to strength, trains and crosses to France. A gallery of characters is conjured up with delicacy and warmth. The climax of the narrative is the bloody and exhausting assault on Mont Pincon, after which the flayed remnants of the battalion come to rest.

The profoundly affecting nature of this book springs from traumatic personal experience.

Baron served in the Pioneer Corps in Sicily, Italy and France, where he learned about the viciousness of warfare and the cheapness of human life. The men he describes rarely dream of glory or dear old Blighty; they exist in a state of stunned exhaustion and fear.

His intimate knowledge of a soldier's existence shines through on every page.

There are the tiny details – the way rain trickles from a helmet's rim down a man's collar, the mud clods which cling "like lead" to their boots, the interminable digging of slit trenches – and there are the monstrous images no novelist could make up – shells making the earth quiver beneath them "like living flesh that was being beaten". Read this and get an inkling of what war is really like.

**FROM THE CITY
FROM THE PLOUGH**
Published by Black Spring
By Alexander Baron
ISBN 0948238445

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

MORE THAN 10,000 Germans and Austrians who fled Nazi

persecution served with British forces during the Second World War - a great number in the Pioneer Corps, as until 1942, this was the only Corps that they were allowed to serve.

At the end of the conflict, many returned to the land of their birth with the Intelligence Corps and Military Government to begin the rebuilding process.

The huge task they faced, which involved the removal of all adherents of Nazism and Nazi ideology from every facet of public life and employment, was termed 'denazification'.

Some of these ex-refugees were involved with the hunt for Nazi war criminals; others interrogated prisoners of war or gathered evidence from the concentration camps and interviewed the survivors to obtain the necessary information which would lead to the successful prosecutions of those involved.

Two of them even provided close protection for Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee - one an ex Private in the Pioneer Corps!

They were also instrumental (in the West, at least) in re-educating the German and Austrian people about the values of democracy and a free society.

This fascinating book, which is based on first-hand accounts from veterans and various publications and articles, provides an important insight into how Germany and Austria were rebuilt after the end of Nazi tyranny which had ruled their countries for over fifteen years.

DENAZIFICATION
Britain's Enemy Aliens,
Nazi War Criminals and the
Reconstruction of Post-war
Europe
By Helen Fry
ISBN 978-0-7509-5113-5

Pioneer Corps to Secret Ops

Review: Dr Helen Fry
Picture: Supplied

FOREWARD by historian Dr Helen Fry. I am delighted that Eric Saunders' autobiography has finally been published in English. In so doing he adds to the tapestry of oral testimony about the Second World War. That generation is fast disappearing and with it, their eye-witness accounts to a cataclysmic period in world history. His is a human story of survival against the odds - survival both physically and emotionally after being unceremoniously forced to leave the country of his birth.

Eric became one of the 10,000 Germans and Austrian who enlisted in His Majesty's forces in the Second World War. He not only served in the Pioneer Corps, a labour unit of the British army, but felt passionately that his duty was

to fight Nazism - to fight the evil regime which he had witnessed in all its brutality in his beloved Vienna. Eric could have stayed on in the Pioneer Corps, but instead made no hesitation in volunteering for hazardous duties and trained for what later became revealed to him as Special Operations Executive (SOE). During the time that I was editing the book, I was moved to tears on two occasions by this human story of survival - the first was when Eric was separated from his father whose fate and survival is unclear and at a time when his mother was safe. The second was when Eric lost his brother just hours before they were due to be reunited in Italy for the first time since the outbreak of war, both as soldiers fighting the Nazi regime.

I found the diary entries in this autobiography a captivating and amazing record of the

period - from life in Vienna to the blitz conditions in London and the progress of the war. Eric provides the reader with an insight into the extensive training in SOE and the close comradeship with fellow SOE operatives.

It is also apparent that so many people touched Eric's life in extraordinary ways and he pays tribute to them in the book.

He has not allowed his own suffering and personal loss to disrupt life in the post-war years, but in positive spirit and good humour has made every endeavour over the years to keep his eye witness alive and preserve the memory of his comrades.

SECRET OPERATIONS
From Music to Morse and Beyond
By Eric Saunders
Published by Collis, Bird and
Withey, Old Drayton Park,
London, N5 1NU

Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

BUTCHERS GORDON JOHN
23660657 Ex LCpl 28 Jan 10

Aged 70, Jaywick, Essex, Served 26 Jun 58 - 26 Jul 61

SINCLAIR HUGH PETER
13051357 Ex Sgt 27 Apr 10 Pinner, Mddx

Aged 89, Pinner, Middlesex, Served 22 Aug 40 - 13 Jul 43

WOOD RICHARD
13117104 Ex Pte 22 May 10

Aged 85, Knottingley, served Apr 42 to Nov 46 in 146 and 305 Coys

CORLETT WILLIAM DOUGLAS
23364772 Ex Pte 1 Sep 09

Aged 70 Isle of Man, Served Jan 57 - Jan 59

BAMFORTH EDWIN
23046625 Ex Pte 16 Apr 10

Aged 74 Dundee, Served May 54 - May 56

THOM KEVIN
24116746 Ex Sgt 28 Jun 10

Aged 59 Fochabers, Moray Served 1968 - 1991

Kevin joined the Royal Pioneer Corp in 1968 at the age of 17. He served for over 22 years. During his time he served in Kineton, Malaysia, N. Ireland, Cyprus, Long Marston and Germany.

He most enjoyed his time on the Dogs Section's in both Kineton and N. Ireland. He is survived by and will be sorely missed by his wife Irene of 39 yrs and children Steven and Debbie also son-in-law Paddy. Kev's natural home was the Sgt's Mess, he was an active member who regularly attended the functions, his favourite being the Fancy Dress ones - being fondly remembered as 'Hannibal' from the A-Team. Kevin was an outstanding Pioneer, a loving husband, devoted father and a great friend to all who knew him. He will be sorely missed.

CAMELO CHARLES DONALD
13110301 Ex Cpl 5 JAN 10

Aged 89 Harold Hill Served Feb 42 - Aug 46 in 187 Coy)

MAXWELL ROBERT CHARLES
22673400 Ex Pte 15 Jun 10

Aged 76, Plymouth Served 15th May 1952 to 6th June 1954

STREET CYRIL VIVIAN
14535399 Ex Pte 22 Jun 10

Aged 86, Birmingham Served 4 Feb 43 to 23 May 47 with 60 Coy

KIRKHAM, LES
24348359 Ex Cpl 13 Apr 10

Aged 52 Northampton, Served 1974 - 1992)



Les Kirkham

MAJOR J MERRICK

Brig HJ Hickman writes:

Major John Merrick died after a courageous and extended battle with illness which he fought in characteristically optimistic and actively energetic style.

John Merrick transferred to Royal Pioneer Corps in the mid-1950's from the Light Infantry following a lower-limb injury which he had been told would end his infantry career.

He set out to prove medical opinion wrong and from the moment he joined the Corps he set an example of physical fitness and endurance that few would match. Initially quartered some 5 miles from Hermitage Camp, he exploited this to regain his fitness; he simply ran to and from duty every day - a very unusual, even eccentric, response at that time.

He went on to become a superb all round athlete. Small and slight of stature and quiet and unassuming in manner he was readily underestimated.

However he had a rare alertness, versatility and quickness in adapting to new challenges that were to give him an outstanding RPC career. A small arms specialist and training all-rounder, he fitted perfectly his first role in the Corps in charge of the Potential Officers and NCOs Cadre.

During this time he also played rugby and hockey for the Depot & Training Centre and was a regular member of small and full bore Shooting teams. He was also a formidable badminton player who coached many juniors as well as playing at County level.

As CSM of 260 Coy on Fylingdales Moor he was rarely seen around his office; rather he was to be found among the sections and sub-units engaged in daily and dangerous mine-clearance work, endlessly bounding between units, patrolling to raise standards, to encourage and train soldiers to greater levels of safety and effectiveness. He had a keen eye and ear for those in need and an instinctive grasp of pastoral care before such language was adopted.

He was also at this time regularly playing rugby for Scarborough. His compact stature made him a surprising figure in the culture of Northern England rugby - but it was more than made up for by his sheer speed on the wing and extraordinary coiled-spring agility in mid-field.

A Summer detachment to clear Ross Links ranges on the Northumberland coast saw his unit literally on the beach for four months. Seeing the potential, he promptly insisted to his OC upon tropical hours.

The mine clearance day ran from 0600 to 1400 hrs and so, having as a first priority cleared the route to and then the beach, each afternoon was devoted to his programme of military and recreational training for which the beach was now perfect.

As RSM of the Training Centre in the mid 60's he had the unenviable job of running his unit whilst it was divided between the two sites of Simpson and Gibraltar Barracks at Northampton, whilst the former was rebuilt.

He rose to that challenge and inspired



Major John Merrick

new heights of achievement among recruit trainers and was instrumental in laying foundations for the Central WO's' and Sgts' Mess - a unique institution among Corps of the Army at that time.

He was also a prime mover and innovator in raising training standards for the TA. He was still engaged in competitive sports and shooting and captained the Training Centre team that won the Parachute Regiment Cup at Bisley. In a rare moment of visible glee he said the best part of winning it was that the Paras were runners-up!

He was, in every sense a soldier and an officer. His rare insight helped him to read personalities and many were helped by him directly and in ways which were never recorded or discussed.

His style was to simply get on and quietly deal with it. He had a countryman's twinkling sense of humour, endless patience and the gift of enabling others to raise their game.

Commissioned, he carved out a new niche and was an exemplary minor unit PCLU Det and MCLG commander, yet always in the same unfussy but formidably energetic and utterly reliable and distinctive style. He inspired loyalty and became a unit commander to whom his German staff were devoted.

As one former Director expresses it 'he impressed because he did not seek to impress'.

On retirement he returned to live in his native Shropshire and worked further with the Ministry of Defence. He is survived by his wife Dorothy and two daughters.

CORBIN, Amy **Serving LCpl 206 Sqn,** **23 Pnr Regt RLC 28 Aug 10**

One week after her wedding to Pte Corbin.
Eulogy by WO2 Lisa Brown:

I wanted to say a few words about the Amy I knew - Lance Corporal Amy Corbin the soldier.

Ever since she was a little girl Amy had always wanted to join the Army. Those of you sitting here that knew Amy well will know what a determined little madam she could be once she had got an idea in her head. So, true to form, she joined the Army Cadet Force and then went on to join the Regular Army. Her mother Sharon tells me that she was the only member of the family who decided at an early age exactly what she wanted to do and stuck by it.

Being a soldier is not always easy. You are asked to be aggressive and strong on the battlefield whilst being expected to uphold certain values. When I think of the values we expect of our soldiers then I am convinced that Amy chose the correct career path in life. During her painful battle with illness she showed time and time again that she had all the qualities that were demanded of her.

Courage is the power to act in the face of fear and Amy displayed immense courage and a great spirit from the very first day she was diagnosed with cancer. She showed great resilience when things were not always going well and most importantly she never gave up hope.

I never once heard her complain or feel sorry for herself. Always at the forefront of her mind was the welfare of her close family, her friends and her colleagues. She never wanted to be a burden. To have those who she cared for most worrying about her was her biggest fear.

Despite her terminal illness, Amy remained totally committed to the Army and loyal to her Corps. A Corps who's motto is "With Resolution and Fidelity" and it is with spirit that she voluntarily returned to work on two occasions, so desperate was she to continue to pursue the career she had always dreamed of. She once told me that the Army was her life and I have no doubt that if fate had not intervened she would certainly have gone on to achieve so much more in her Military career.

I, like so many of you have fond memories of Amy, but the one thing that I will always remember is her big beaming smile which could light up the room. Her favourite T Shirt had the words little "Miss Sunshine" emblazoned on the front and this accurately summed her up - because she was little Miss Sunshine to so many.

With my hand on heart I can honestly say that she was truly one of the bravest soldiers I have ever met. If I were in charge of issuing medals then I would find the biggest, shiniest medal and pin it to her chest because she was - as I'm sure you would all agree - a true hero in every sense of the word.



Amy Corbin

HOLMES ROBERT GEORGE MBE MM **Major (Retd) 8 Jan 10**

Brig JB Ryall writes:
A REAL SOLDIER!!!!!!!

It was with great sadness that I was to learn of the death of Major (Bob) Holmes on the 8th January 2010 in his 94th year (I was away overseas on holiday).

I first met Bob in Egypt in 1952 when he was commanding 2058 (Mauritian) Guard Company in Tel-el-Kebir (TEK). I was posted in as his 2IC and being initially unaccompanied I was frequently invited by Bob and Rose to their MQ in TEK for meals and was always treated as one of the family. (I knew TEK, for ten years earlier I had been posted as a Warrant Officer 1, Royal Artillery, to serve with 137 Vehicle Disposal Unit (a Pioneer commitment) and from whom I was then commissioned)

Bob had originally enlisted in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in April 1934. During the 2nd World War he served in the Western Desert and in Eritrea until captured at Tobruk in June 1942.

He managed to escape twice finally rejoining the 8th Army in Benghazi in November 1942.

In recognition of his great courage, perseverance and tenacity he was awarded the Military Medal by General H R Alexander, C-in-C Middle East Forces (who later became - Field Marshal The Earl Alexander of Tunis). The medal was presented to him by King George VI in 1943. He was commissioned into the Camerons in 1944 and then transferred to the Corps in November 1949.

It is true to say Bob was my mentor and from him I learnt the art of running a unit. Unfortunately for the Corps because of the age structure he could not be granted a regular commission.

After ten years as a Pioneer serving in Egypt, BAOR and UK he was subsequently granted a regular QM commission with his former regiment, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders (which in 1961 amalgamated to form the Queen's Own Highlanders). He retired finally from the Army on 1 June 1970.

I was posted subsequently to command an East African Unit and Bob and I never served again together, but we kept in touch. Bob was a frequent guest to Corps functions and likewise I was an invited guest to various Highlander functions.

We kept in touch year by year - phoning once or twice yearly, my last call was about a month before he died and as usual he sounded in good spirits.

After the sad death of Rose, Bob married Rena in 1990.

Bob and Rose had two children Peter and Pamela. Peter served in the REME. Pamela married Garry Cooper who also served in the Corps, retiring in 2000 as a Colonel.

Farewell Bob, I will keep in touch with all the family to whom I send sincere condolences.



Major Bob Holmes

REYNOLDS TONY **466600 Capt (Retd) 12 Jun 10**

Aged 77 Gillingham Former General
Secretary of the RPC Association
Brig HJ Hickman writes:

Tony Reynolds died following a difficult illness. He served during the 1960s and 1970s at Regimental duty, retired to Civil life where he made a new career in the business of industrial buildings and fixtures.

He returned to the Corps as Secretary General of the RPC Association and Benevolent Fund where he served from Dec 80 to Apr 91 when he transferred to the Army Benevolent Fund.

He joined the Corps on transfer from REME at time of acute shortage of officers and in consequence he was thrust immediately with no prior training into the world of BAOR PCLUs.

His main asset, which was true for the remainder of his professional life, was his ability to relate well to everyone he ever met. At regimental duty, whether in the Civil Labour field or in Company life he was quick to give credit to those around him and deploy a style of leadership which was heavily laced with a ready sense of humour, optimism and boundless enthusiasm. Any group of officers engaged in boisterous after dinner activity would include Reynolds.

He was also no mean rifle shot and competed well. He returned regularly to Corps functions from his life in the civil business world.

His return to the Corps as General Secretary was at a time when the Benevolent Fund was working at its highest level of intensity. Together with his Admin Officer, the redoubtable Reg Barkham, he threw himself into the welfare and Benevolent work and together they made probably the busiest and most effective case-load team in the field. Tony's speciality was to build an unsurpassed network of contacts in SSAFA, the welfare agencies and Social Service system and use this to ensure that Benevolent Funds were well spent.

He had a nose for real need as well as the less-deserving, an encyclopedic knowledge of welfare arrangements, and he appeared to have found a niche to which he was perfectly attuned. At this point he was almost certainly the most respected operator in the speciality - and continued to play to his strengths of dealing with people. He was never, he said, able to be quite so enthusiastic about the computerisation of the paperwork.

It was no surprise when he was recruited to their policy desk to carry on the same work for the HQ of the Army Benevolent Fund - from where he was able to continue to support the RPC work.

He was a truly safe pair of hands, and remained in that role until his final retirement from the Civil Service. He is survived by his wife Allison and their son and daughter.



Captain Tony Reynolds

ETHERINGTON CHRIS

461720 Major (Retd) 25 May 10

Aged 72 Beaminster, Dorset

Col RF McDonald writes:

I first met Chris Etherington in 1959 when he was serving with 405 Coy RPC at Corsham. Already an excellent shot he went on over many years to win a host of medals and trophies at Central and Non Central matches, often at Bisley.

He married June in 1962 in Cyprus and they subsequently had three children. His service life took him and his family to Germany, Aden, Cyprus and Singapore. In 1974, following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus he deployed 518 Coy RPC to the island to assist in the security and evacuation of families and property. He attended Strathclyde University in 1972 and later became the Senior Instructor at the Pioneer School. When serving at HQ BAOR in the late 70's his external interest focussed on his Sunday evening BFBS programme of light and classical music - a very popular regular event.

Chris retired from the Army in 1983, settling in Dorset. He became a successful Financial Advisor for a leading company and slowly immersed himself in local politics, eventually to become the political agent for Oliver Letwin MP. He was able to widen his life-long interest in antiques and was well known for his knowledge and advice on the subject - he even made a TV appearance on the Jilly Goolden programme.

He was a man of many talents, kind and generous who will be sorely missed. To June and the family we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

Brig JB Ryall writes:

Maj Chris Etherington was a subaltern in 518 Coy in Cyprus when I took over Command. I quickly realised he was an officer who I could rely on; always cheerful and willing to get things done. Hence when I was told by the Brigade CO to move the Company at short notice to Aden, I decided Chris should accompany me with the unit as my 2IC.

We were at sea for about eight days, finally landing in Aden and "setting up shop" as it were, soon the soldiers were hard at work on buildings and carrying out patrols and security measures. Chris was with me when we had to quell a riot (I had a brick thrown in my back which put me in hospital). Notable was Chris's success in a survival trial run over about five days. All regiments within Aden were required to nominate an officer to participate individually. Chris immediately volunteered (he always said I "volunteered" him!). Of all those who participated only Chris survived and completed the task.

In 1964 I left the Company to attend Strathclyde University and we never served again together, but the bond of friendship that had sprung up matured and we kept in touch when he was medically discharged and was snapped up as a Financial consultant. He and his wife, June, attended the funeral of my wife in 2005 alongside other officers who had known my wife.

Maj Etherington was only 72 when he died; along with several other retired officers of the Corps I attended his funeral at St Mary's Church, Beaminster. The service was took by the Very Revd David Shearlock with Col McDonald giving the Eulogy. The church was packed (including the MP for the county) pointing to the high regard with which Chris was considered.

Chris and I had kept in touch over many years; I send Mrs June Etherington and his family my sincere condolences, I will of course keep in touch.



Major Chris Etherington, (Front Centre), 518 Company in Aden





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

- ▲ **Corps Tie**
Two different styles
are available. One
with the older
'Blackpool Tower'
cap badge and
one with the newer
cap badge.
£8.50 each



- ▲ **Pioneer Mug**
Drinks taste
better out of
these!
£6



- ▲ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
£8



- ▲ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
£8



- ▲ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
£7



- ▲ **Cufflinks**
new badge
£5



- ▲ **Cufflinks**
bronze
£6



- ▲ **Tie Pin**
lovely
£2.50



- ▲ **Tie Pin**
lovely
£2.00



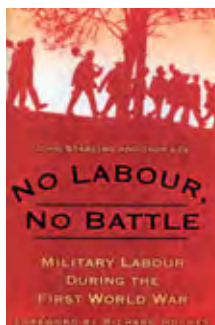
- ▲ **Wall Shields**
hand painted
£20



- ▲ **Wall Shields**
85-93 badge
£20



- ▲ **Pioneer Polo Shirt**
Top quality.
Available in
Green and
Red
£10



- ▲ **"No Labour, No Battle"**
Military Labour during the first World War
by John Starling and Ivor Lee
A new addition to the shop and only just published. Price includes a £10 donation to the RPC Association. Hardback.
£30



- ▲ **"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"**
by Major E H Rhodes Wood
This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of
£11



- ▲ **"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"**
by Major Bill Elliott
The Post-War History of the Corps was written by 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**
Stunning bronze statue
£65



And finally...



Private Josh Campbell has had a bath, another missing mouse and we pay a small tribute to Norman Wisdom...

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: RPCA Archive

A YEAR on following a devastating explosion in Afghanistan that left Private Josh Campbell fighting for his life, the young Melksham soldier is now looking to the future following his miraculous recovery.

Private Campbell, serving with the 23 Pioneer Regiment, was manning a heavy machine gun in the turret of a Mastiff armoured vehicle when it was blown up by an IED in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on September 17, 2009.

The force of the explosion made the personnel carrier topple over, crushing Pte Campbell's legs in the gun mechanism.

He was flown back to the UK two days later after an initial attempted flight had to return to base because his life was hanging in the balance.

His mother Helen Martin recalled receiving the news that her son had been seriously injured – and living through those first few weeks since that dreadful explosion. She said: "I didn't think he was going to come home because for six weeks it was touch and go."

She added that one night she 'sat by his bed and didn't know whether he was going to be there in the morning'.

Seeing her son walking with his new prosthetic legs during a Help For Heroes coffee morning last Thursday was an emotional moment. "He is just so amazing. I think his resilience has been a big part of his recovery. I'm just so glad he is here, anything else is a bonus."

Once back in the UK, Pte Campbell spent eight weeks in Selly Oaks Hospital in Birmingham before going home with his mother and stepfather. He then started his rehabilitation at Headley Court several weeks before Christmas.

His mum said she felt like she was on

'cloud nine' when she drove him home following his stay at the Birmingham hospital.

Talking about his time at Headley Court, the 20-year-old said: "It was a physical challenge starting there but I was quite determined. It is a brilliant facility. I don't think there is anything like it in the country."

Around four months ago he was fitted with state-of-the-art prosthetic 'bluetooth' limbs, worth £32,000, which help him to walk without putting too much pressure on his hips.

He said: "I've had these new prosthetic limbs for about four months which put me back to my normal height of 5ft 8ins."

"The limbs have sensors in the toe so when I put pressure on the toe it then releases the piston at the back of the knee. It's a lot less pressure for me."

He said that, following the explosion, he has done things that he never would have thought possible through Battle Back, an initiative involving all three services that encourages seriously injured servicemen and women to get involved in sport and other activities.

Since his accident he has taken part in a tandem sky dive, gone water skiing several times and rock climbing.

He has also met countless celebrities in the past year including Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne, Tommy Lee Jones, and the whole Manchester United team.

Pte Campbell, who is thriving on his independence, has his own adapted car and is hoping to go back to work next month.

"I'm planning to go back to work in October and will probably start off in the squadron stores and then move on to the armoury from it. From August 2008 to August 2009 I wasn't able to have a bath so all my friends are grateful too!"

Article by Rachel Allen, Wiltshire Times

D ID YOU spot the mouse in the April 2010 Newsletter? It was a hard one to spot and it was on the back page... the pioneer looking at the child in the middle of the page, the mouse is on his foot!

The winner was Cpl Geordie Foreman and he has already been issued with his prize.

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

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

I T IS with regret that we hear that Sir Norman Wisdom died on 5 October 2010. It is the popular belief that Sir Norman served in the Pioneer Corps, however this is not true - he served in the Royal Signals as a National Serviceman.

Members may remember his attendance at the Reunion Weekend in 2002 when he graced us with his presence (and claims to have won the tug of war competition!)

He did in fact play Pte Pitkin in the film "The Square Peg" which was released on 4 January 1959.

Norman Wisdom has to be one of the best British comedians of the 20th Century. For fifty years he has continued to entertain the British public with his films, TV appearances and one-man shows.

The plot for The Square Peg is that council worker Norman and his boss Mr Grimsdale come into conflict with the local military. They are then drafted into the army (Pioneer Corps) themselves and sent to Nazi-occupied France where Wisdom manages to foil the plans of a German general.

If you like Wisdom's comedy or just want a little entertainment, then watch this film, you won't be disappointed. The scene with Wisdom in his dual role as Norman and the General and German opera singer Hattie Jacques is side-splittingly funny.



■ Starring in The Square Peg film Picture: Rank

Picture: Paul Brown
Josh on Parade



Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Letters
- Photo Gallery
- News from 23 Pioneer Regiment
- News from 168 Pioneer Regiment
- Another unpublished complete story
- Reviews
- And much more!

Views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence. Whilst every care is taken to ensure that The Pioneer publication is accurate as possible, no responsibility can be taken by the Royal Pioneer Corps Association for any errors or omissions contained herein. Furthermore, responsibility for any loss, damage or distress resulting from any article in The Pioneer itself, howsoever caused, is equally disclaimed by the Royal Pioneer Corps Association.

the Pioneer



In addition to the wide distribution of the Newsletter within the U.K. and BFPO addresses, the Newsletter is also distributed to the following countries:

Australia
Belgium
Bulgaria
Canada
Cyprus
Denmark
Dominica
Eire
France
Germany
Gibraltar
Holland
New Zealand
Portugal
Qatar
Sierra Leone
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
USA



Picture: Paul Brown
■ LCpl Wood, Reunion Weekend 2010



