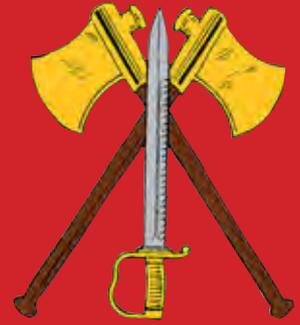


the



the newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

Pioneer



April 2012

www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk



PLEASE SUPPORT THE DERBY DRAW
Full details on Page 3

Remembrance

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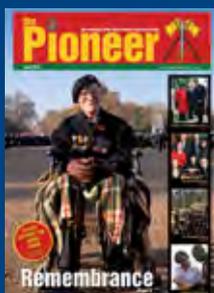


Reunion Weekend
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Picture: Paul Brown

■ Sgt Geordie Taylor



Front Cover

Richard Goedecke,
Cenotaph Parade
Picture: Paul Brown



Back Cover

Last photograph of 206 Pioneer Squadron. Copies 18"x12" can be obtained through the Association at a cost of £6
Picture: Paul Brown

In her Diamond Jubilee speech to parliamentarians in Westminster Hall on 20 March the Queen said "And as we reflect on public service let us again be mindful of the remarkable sacrifice and courage of our Armed Forces. Much may indeed have changed these past sixty years but the valour of those who risk their lives for the defence and freedom of us all remains undimmed...". Thank you Ma'am.

As you are probably aware, from May the cost of posting these Newsletters will rise dramatically, a large number of members are satisfied to read the Newsletter online. This saves both postage and printing costs, if you are willing to view the Newsletter this way please let me know.

With this Newsletter there is a booking form for the Reunion Weekend which is 6-7 July, although planning is still in its earlier stage it is envisaged that the format will be similar to last year's very successful event. If you wish to attend please return the booking form by 22 June. If accommodation is required please be advised that some accommodation is likely to be at St George's Barracks, as usual however, transport will be provided. Alternatively if you own a caravan, motor home or even a tent why not bring it! Toilets, showers etc will be available.

Finally, once again, enclosed with this Newsletter are tickets for the Derby Draw, the

two draws we hold annually are our main source of income – your support is very much appreciated. If you can sell more tickets I will gladly send them to you.

I must thank members for informing me of change of address, the last distribution of the Newsletter resulted in only 32 being returned as "Gone Away".

It was pleasing to see a large number of Association members attend the disbandment parade of 206 Squadron, many attending for the first time since they left the Corps. I hope you enjoyed the day, although a sad event, and that you return to the "Home of the Pioneers". The RPC Association has prepared a CD which contains the full history of 206 Coy/Sqn. This includes entries from all RPC Magazines and the RLC Sustainer relating to 206. It also contains copies of the Historical Reports and photographs. These are available at a cost of £5 from the RPC Association.

Copies (18" x 12") of the Disbandment photograph on the back page can also be ordered through the Association at a cost of £6.

Finally entries are always welcome for the Newsletter if you have a story to tell please let me know.

I am looking forward to seeing you at this year's reunion, please send in your return early.

Norman Brown



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PAST EVENTS



■ IT WAS a case of one good turn deserves another for a team of Bicester soldiers.

Three soldiers from 23 Pioneer Regiment opened Crown Emporium, in Crown Walk Bicester.

And in return for the favour, all five shops based within the former bakery will donate 10 per cent of their first week's profit to the 23 Pioneer Regiment Benevolent Fund, a charity set up this year to support wounded soldiers and their families.

Many soldiers from the base have served in Afghanistan. WO2 Charlie Wood lost his life and Josh Campbell and Alex Stringer lost limbs in explosions there. Steve Waddup, of Select Furniture, who organised the launch said, "I think the soldiers do a fantastic job for the country and it needs recognition. We wanted to give something back to them for what they do for the country. The 23 Pioneer Regiment Benevolent Fund is for the local boys, and it's closer to our hearts."

Crown Emporium is part of a new initiative by Crown Walk landlord Sainsbury's to breathe new life into the shopping precinct, which had eight empty units.

From now until Christmas businesses have moved into empty units for free and will ply their trade until the new year. Traders say the scheme has been a big hit with shoppers and hope it will be extended into 2012.

■ 28 December 2011, marked the anniversary of the death of WO2 Charlie Wood.

A group of soldiers from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC together with Mrs Heather Wood ran from Garth Park, Bicester to the Red Lion Public House, Islip on 28 December 2012. A photo can be seen on Page 27.

■ MEMBERS OF the 39/93 Club attended their reunion on 30 Sept/1 Oct at the Red Lion Hotel, Fareham. In the words of Bill Goode (Chairman)...

Friday night was spent as guest in the company of members of the Duke of Connaught's Own Club with members of the group taking a fair share of raffle prizes. Eleven sat down to the Saturday evening meal with a further two joining us in the lounge later. A very great effort was made to attend by Dennis Reeves who was accompanied by his carer Nigel, we had not seen Dennis for about ten years due to reoccurring illnesses. Dennis has always taken a great interest in the 39/93 Club, being as he was a founder member, taking a valuable interest in matters of welfare and to this end both him and his wife Pat have supplied many raffle prizes to keep the funds afloat and keeping in touch with members of the group by phone. Unbeknown to be this was to be the weekend of all times with my birthday being on the 1st of the month and Beryl my partner being on the 6th. However, sadly, Beryl passed away after a short illness on the 5th August 2011. Her funeral was attended by Les Rowley and members of his family. On my arrival I was feeling pretty low but Les and Dennis and others had carried on behind the scenes with birthday arrangements that included members of the staff at the Red Lion. Everything was done to help me forget my problems for a short time for which I shall be eternally grateful.

Sharing a joke

At the Field of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey



■ Micky Hull and SSgt Patrickson sharing a joke with HRH Duke of Edinburgh

Picture: Paul Brown

THIRTY-FOUR members of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association (including two of Sgt Scully's daughters) attended the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 10 November 2011.

The British Legion have decreed that a ticket for this event is now required and the RPC Association have been allocated thirty tickets. In-Pensioner Mickey Hull and SSgt Patrickson stood in front of the Corps Plot and both talked to HRH The Duke of

Edinburgh.

The normal London Lunch followed the Field of Remembrance held at the Marquis of Westminster Public House in Wilton Street, Victoria. Once again serving members of 23 Pnr Regt RLC and former Corps members had a very enjoyable meal. Following the lunch a number did the courteous thing and escorted In-Pensioner Mickey back to Chelsea and support the Hospital by drinking in the Club bar.



■ Association members with Richard Goedecke and his lovely family

Pictures: Paul Brown

“I have never felt so special”

The Association were well represented at the Cenotaph Parade

ONCE again the RPC Association were well represented at the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall on Sunday 13 November 2011.

It was nice to see some new faces this year such as Tom Appleyard and Chris Gilbert.

The Northampton Branch of the RPC Association booked a mini-bus from Northampton, this proved so popular that it is hoped to do the same this year.

It was commented that the marching this year was much better than usual was this because we had 3 ex Regimental Sergeant Major's in our presence or was it because Paddy McPhillips could not attend this year!

The BBC did us proud by mentioning the Royal Pioneer Corps and they zoomed onto our contingent many times.

Mr RWE Goedecke, a 91 year old Pioneer Veteran had always wished to attend this parade and really enjoyed his day. Unfortunately he passed away shortly afterwards.

Our condolences go out to his family. Mr Goedecke's son Paul sent the following letter:

I can't thank you and all the members of the Royal Pioneer Corps enough for

making the Remembrance Day parade such a wonderful experience for my father. He enjoyed every moment and, in his words, "I have never felt so special".

This is something he has wanted to do for a number of years and we as a family are so pleased that he was able to achieve this wish in the twilight of his life.

Thanks again. Regards. Paul Goedecke (13096407 Pte Richard Walter Ernest Goedecks (4 Dec 20) enlisted in London W1 on 17 Jul 41 and joined 6 Centre Pioneer Corps for training and served until 19 September 1946).

For The Fallen by Laurence Binyon

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children, England mourns for her dead across the sea.

Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit, Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill;

Death august and royal Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,

There is music in the midst of desolation

And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,

Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and

aglow.

They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted; They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;

They sit no more at familiar tables of home;

They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;

They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound, Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight, To the innermost heart of their own land they are known

As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,

Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;

As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness, To the end, to the end, they remain.

PAST EVENTS



■ **CROWDS GATHERED** in Mablethorpe as the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne was officially announced last Monday morning.

The new town crier for Mablethorpe, Trusthorpe and Sutton on Sea, Roy Palmer (ex WO2 RPC), made his call at 11.30am at the Mablethorpe War Memorial. Also present were representatives from the Mablethorpe Royal British Legion and the town's Mayor, Irene Burnett.

It was exactly 60 years to the day since Queen Elizabeth's reign officially began.

The actual diamond jubilee holiday is not until Tuesday, June 5, when a thousand boats will take part in a special parade along the River Thames in London.

(The above was published in the Louth Leader on 13 February 2012)

He made another announcement on 23 April 2012 to mark St George's Day when he rode through Louth on a white horse making a proclamation in the Market Place at 9am.

His route then took him to the coast where he proclaimed at Mablethorpe War Memorial at 1030am and then at 1130am at Sutton.

■ ON 16 Feb 12 Lt Col J Starling and Mr N Brown were invited to the home of the author Helen Fry in London for the 90th birthday party for Mr Colin Anson a World War 2 Pioneer before transferring to the Commando's.

Other guests included Mr Willy Field (Aged 91) ex Pioneer Corps before transferring to the Royal Armoured Corps, Mr Harry Rossney (Aged 92) ex Pioneer Corps and Graves Registration Unit, Mr Bill Howard (Aged 92) ex Pioneer Corps before transferring to the Royal Navy.

Mr Geoffrey Perry (Aged 89) ex Pioneer Corps who was commissioned in the Corps and shot and captured Lord Haw Haw, Fritz Lustig (Aged 93) ex Pioneer Corps before transferring to the Intelligence Corps, Mrs Susan Lustig ex ATS and Intelligence Corps and Mrs Alice Anson ex WAAF (Bomber Command).

■ ON 28 April 2012 Lt Col JA Starling attended a Memorial Service to mark the 60th anniversary of an explosion that took place at Pembroke Dock when 19 personnel were killed when a lecture on mines went drastically wrong.

Among those killed were 5 members of 87 (Alien) Company including the OC, Major GT Garrett MBE, who was taking the lecture. Others killed were Sgt G William, Cpl H Abraham, Pte H Schwartz and Pte L Rosenthal. a plaque commemorating the event was also unveiled. Further details will be shown in the next edition of the Newsletter.

■ ON 28 April 2012 thirty five members of the WOs' & SNCOs' Pioneer Reunion Club attended the Army v Navy Rugby match at Twickenham.

This event is now in the Club's events every year. Membership of the Club is open to all Sergeants and above who have served in the RPC or RLC/AGC in a Pioneer unit.

Membership is only £6 per year, to join simply contact the Royal Pioneer Corps Association.

Guest of honour

Private Alex Stringer opens old people's home



■ Private Alex Stringer, Guest of Honour for opening of Juniper House

Picture: Capt Jessop

PPRIVATE Alex Stringer was a guest of honour for the opening of Juniper House, a nursing home in Brackley, Buckinghamshire on Wednesday 29 February 2012.

The management wanted a local hero and Alex was honoured to have been asked to officially declare it open and he was supported by a number of colleagues from the Regiment.

Private Stringer is 20 Years of age and joined the Army in June 2008; he has served for 3 years and 3 months as a Pioneer Soldier in the Royal Logistic Corps. During this time he has been based with 23 Pioneer Regiment, Bicester, Oxfordshire.

He deployed on Operation HERRICK 13, his first Operational Tour, on 6 November 2010 as a Searcher with the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (CIED) Task Force. During pre-deployment he was trained in all aspects of detection on the current threat of Improvised Explosive Device's. Pte Stringer was held in high regard and was trusted as point on search; on 19 January

2011 Private Stringer, as part of the Task-force CIED team call-sign BRIMSTONE were tasked with a route clearance when he sustained life changing injuries as a result of an explosion from an Improvised Explosive Device. He lost his left leg and the majority of that hip and his right leg above the knee and also his left arm at the elbow.

He featured in the BBC 1 Documentary 'Bomb Squad' which was screened in Sept 2011; he is seen on task prior to his injuries and then at home during hospital leave.

He is currently assigned to 49 Brigade Personnel Recovery Unit and is completing rehabilitation at Headley Court and is still undergoing medical treatment as required; his will to "battle back" is nothing less than inspirational.

He lives in Essex with his fiancée, Danielle, and they have recently purchased a house there; they are planning to marry in July 2012. They have two children; Millie and Harlie-Rose and are looking forward to a new arrival to the family in the summer.



■ Re-build of Afghan training village, Op Tosca with 23 Pioneer Regiment and 104 Sqn Leadership Development Weekend

Pictures: Supplied

Reserve Pioneer Day

The latest news from 168 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps

THE Reserve Pioneer Day will take place on Saturday 23 June 2012 in Grantham, it will be a celebration of the Regiment's achievements over the last year on operations and at home.

It will include a Pioneer Past & Present social function, a church service, march through town and a Diamond Jubilee medals parade in Prince William of Gloucester Barracks.

Any one who wishes to attend please contact the Adjutant (Capt Andy Apps) 0115 957 3309.

104 Pioneer Squadron, hosted students from the Newcastle Business School (University of Northumbria) on a Leadership Development Weekend, over 17-18 Mar 12 on the Wathgill training area at Catterick.

The delegates, including international students, were put through a number of physical and mental command tasks designed to test their leadership, team working and problem solving skills.

Many of them had only just met and were thrown in at the deep end but

gelled quickly and performed very well.

A number of soldiers from 168 Pnr have recently returned from OP TOSCA with 23 Pioneer Regt following a demanding 6 months on the Green Line in Cyprus managing the frictions that still exist between the Greeks and Turks.

They are all glad to be back and are looking forward to getting back into the swing of normal home, work and regimental life.

In February, 49 Pioneers deployed to Cyprus to re-build the Afghan training village, Shal Aki' Kalay, in Akrotiri Station.

Over 3000 tons of earth was moved, 20 shops and stalls built, a mosque minaret rebuilt and fitted with speakers, 7 ISO containers re-designed into shops and an Afghan residential area built.

The troops are looking forward to returning in September to add a platoon house, Afghan village and rebuild a Forward Operations Base or FOB.

168 PIONEER REGIMENT RLC
RESERVE PIONEER DAY
23RD June 2012





1100hrs Church Service at St Wulfram's Church
 1200hrs March through Grantham
 1400hrs Medal Parade in the Barracks
 1500hrs Family Fun Activities
 1600hrs Free Food!!!
 Open to all past and present members and their families.

For further details please contact Capt Apps
 on 0115 957 3309 or
 email at 168PNR-Adjtt@mod.uk

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE AGM** of the RLC Association will take place in the Tela Theatre Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut on Wednesday 9 May 2012 at 1700 hrs.

Tea will be served from 1630 hrs. All RLC serving officers and soldiers and members of the RLC Association and Forming Corps Associations are encouraged to attend.

Details of the audited accounts for 2011 will be posted on The RLC website ahead of the meeting.

■ **IN HONOUR** of Her Majesty The Queen's 60-year reign Armed Forces personnel will parade through Windsor and muster at the castle on Saturday 19 May 2012.

2,500 Service personnel from the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force will parade through Windsor in the presence of Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh.

They will then muster in the castle grounds for a Military Tattoo to be witnessed by an audience of more than 3,000 other Armed Forces personnel, their families and Veterans.

An impressive, tri-Service flypast of current and historic aircraft will conclude the celebrations.

CDS, Gen Sir David Richards, said: "Her Majesty The Queen's support and encouragement over the years has created a very special bond between our monarch and her forces. That link is felt by all those who have the privilege to wear Her Majesty's uniform both in the UK and on many varied operations overseas.

The parade and muster will truly be a day to remember.

It is an opportunity to highlight the unique relationship the Queen has with the men and women of the Armed Forces and of the role she fills in our lives."

The custom of the Army Forces paying tribute to the monarch during a jubilee year is an established tradition. Similar celebrations were held for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, a Fleet Review was held at Spithead, Hampshire, and a Grand Military Tattoo was performed for her at Windsor.

For the present Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, Her Majesty attended a Fleet Review at Spithead, a review of the Army in Sennelager, Germany, and a review of the Royal Air Force at RAF Finningley, South Yorkshire, with further visits to the Royal Marines and Cadet Forces.

■ **A NATIONAL Jubilee Pageant** will take place at high tide on the afternoon of Sunday 3 June 2012.

The boats will muster between Hammersmith, Fulham and Wandsworth.

The Queen will lead the flotilla from Battersea to Tower Bridge and there will be a gun salute at London Bridge. Up to a 1,000 boats will be taking part, which will include RLC vessel and three former RASC boats. These are:

The RASC Amients – built in 1944 as a 14 Battlefield Class High Speed Target Towing Launch.

The RASCV Peggoty – built in 1944 as a Mk 1 Dickens Class General Service Launch.

The RASCV Humber – Built in 1946 as a River Class Fast Launch and was the last wooden vessel in service in the Army.

News from 23

23 Pioneer return to a Homecoming Parade



■ 206 Disbandment Parade

Picture: Supplied

AT THE time of writing, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC is recovering a Sqn (-) of personnel from Op HERRICK 15 whilst sending the next iteration out the door on Op HERRICK 16.

During both iterations soldiers have been or are deployed in the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Search role, in providing Force Protection for Combat Logistic Patrols or in the Mortuary Affairs role. Additionally the RHQ, a Sqn (+) and attached personnel from 27 Regt and 168 Pnr Regt (V) are currently returning from Op TOSCA in Cyprus. All elements continue to be supported by a committed Rear Party. The Regt is pleased to

congratulate Cpl Bysouth on a JCC Commendation for his actions on Op HERRICK 14 as part of the Command Support Team providing Force Protection to CLPs; equally Cpl Downs (Mortuary Affairs), Cpl Martin (C-IED Search) and LCpl Thomas (C-IED Search) are to be congratulated on receiving DRLC Commendations for their professionalism and courage on Op HERRICK 14.

RLC Cross Country Championships

On the 25 January a team of 8 participated in the RLC Cross Country Championships at Abingdon. The course was run around the airfield and took in



■ Homecoming Parade, Oxford. Lt Col Dom Fletcher, Commanding Officer of 23 Pioneer Regiment leads the march past.

Picture: Paul Brown

the delights of the wet & muddy driver training area. The team of 8 ran well with 6 of the 8 runners finishing in the top 22. This strong team performance was good enough for the team to be RLC Major Unit Cross Country Champions for the 2nd successive year. Notable performances were from LCpl Beadle (3rd), WO1 Lane (5th), SSgt Clarke (13th) & Pte Rice (14th). Capt Jen Lockett was Runner Up in the female competition. LCpl Beadle & WO1 Lane were then selected to represent the RLC at the Inter Corps Championships.

Commando Speed March

On the 2 March a team of 11 departed Bicester for Fort William, Scotland, to participate in the commando Speed March. Held annually, it commemorates the original initial Army Commando test, a march of 7 miles carrying 35 lbs (17 kg) with an ascent of over 600ft within 1 hour. The March is held over the original course between Spean Bridge Railway Station and Achnacarry House in the Scottish Highlands. The event is open to all Regular and Reserve units and to foreign units.

23 Pnr Regt RLC won the Commando Speed March in 2011, the first time an RLC unit had won the event. This year the competition was predictably even more fierce, with 3 Cdo Bde & 16 Air Assault Bde units fully recovered from Op HERRICK. March 2012 attracted over 230 Regular and Reserve competitors from all three Services.

Individual times contribute to the Team's aggregate scores. 23 Pnr Regt

had 5 individuals within the top 15 with LCpl Beadle winning the event overall in a time of 45 minutes and 31 seconds. This was over 2 minutes quicker than the next individual who ran the course in 47 minutes 47 seconds.

Overall the Team came first out of 22 teams entered, to win the coveted 'Brigadier Joe Starling Shield', beating 8 Fd Coy into second place and 7 Para RHA into third.

23 Pnr Regt RLC had significantly more individuals in the top 15 (with 5) than 40 Cdo RM (who had 3), 7 Para RHA (who had 3) and 8 Fd Coy (who had 2). The greatest contribution to the Team's winning result came from the quickest 5 individuals; LCpl Beadle (1st place), LCpl Stephen (7th place), Cpl Young (11th place), Pte Rice (088) (13th place) and Pte Rice (089) (14th place). But all members of the Team contributed by competing and completing the March.

The Disbandment of 206 Pioneer Squadron

On 22 March 2012, 206 Pioneer Squadron was disbanded. The Squadron has had a long and illustrious past.

206 Pioneer Company was formed in August 1940 at Westward Ho and moved to London in January 1941 for bomb damage repair work. After a short period in Northern Ireland it moved to Nesscliffe Ammunition Depot in 1942 and remained there until 1958 when it arrived at Long Marston.

Notable events in the Company's recent post war history include 1977, when they

received the Wilkinson Sword of Peace, following aid to the local community in a variety of initiatives; in the same year the Company provided cover against the firemen's strike and raised funds for orphanages, children's homes and hospital wards in the West Midlands.

Throughout the post war period the Squadron supported exercises and operations in Germany, Canada and Libya (Operation GARDEN CITY in 1969). In 1982 the Company deployed elements in support of the Falklands Campaign.

On 30th March 1990 206 Company Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) under the command of Capt Mike Neve, disbanded at Long Marston.

On the 1st June 2000, 206 Squadron reformed and almost immediately elements were deployed to Sierra Leone in support of the Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTFH). This was followed by deployments within the UK to the United States, Sierra Leone and Oman. The Squadron subsequently deployed to Iraq on Operation TELIC in 2003. The Squadron later deployed to Cyprus as the Cyprus Reinforcement Regiment.

The Squadron has contributed to and continues to support operations in Afghanistan. It provided the Mastiff Group, delivering armoured mobility and fire support, in 2008. Deployments since have included a Troop (minus) providing force protection to UK Combat Logistic Patrols, a team providing a mortuary affairs capability to the Role 3 Hospital in Camp Bastion and Search Advisors and Search Teams in support of the Counter

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **ROYAL NAVAL** Air Station Yeovilton will be commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Falklands Campaign on Saturday 23 June.

The Falkland Islands could not have been retaken without air power. The Sea Harrier defeated the Argentine Air Force, scoring over twenty air combat victories; the RM and Army Commando Squadrons provided support to ground forces with troop insertion and resupply; Lynx helicopters provided anti-ship capability and were used successfully in coastal waters.

An extensive flying and static display will take place to mark this significant anniversary with historic naval aircraft such as the Swordfish, Seafire, Sea Fury and Sea Vixen coming together with their modern counterparts.

Throughout the day there will be plenty of entertainment on the ground for all the family.

UK Armed Forces (Service & Veterans): £16 (on the day) £23 (Children (3-15 yrs inclusive) £5 (on the day) £8)

■ **PAST MEMBERS** of the Royal Pioneers TA & 168 Pioneer Regiment RLC(V) are invited to attend a Reserve Pioneer Day to be held in Grantham on Sat 23 Jun 12.

The day will consist of a presentation & march past in Grantham Town Centre followed by a medal parade, family's day & BBQ in Prince William of Gloucester Barracks.

Entrance will be by written invitation only. Persons who would like to attend are requested to contact the 168 Pnr Regt Chief Clerk at 168PNR-ChiefClerk@mod.uk for details.

■ **THE RLC Corps Day is 30 June 2012 at Deepcut and takes place from 1100-1700 hours on Dettingen Fields.**

All Association members are encouraged to attend this family gather, bring wives, husbands, parents and children, together with friends.

■ **THE PAST and Present Officers Dinner** will be held on 19 October 2012 in the Officers Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Bicester.

Past and serving officers wishing to attend should inform the Secretary by 5 October 2012.

■ **THE WOS & SNCOS will be holding a Ladies Dinner Night in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Bicester on Saturday 20 October 2012.**

A Newsletter will be forwarded to members in August 2012. If you would like to join this Club please notify the Secretary RPC Association.

■ **THE FIELD of Remembrance** will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 8 November 2012.

Tickets are now required for this event, these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.

■ **LONDON LUNCH - We will, once again, be holding the London Lunch.**

It follows the Field of Remembrance and will be in the Marquis of Westminster Public House, nr Victoria Station.

■ **THE DATE** of this year's Cenotaph Parade is actually on Remembrance Day 11 November 2012.

Tickets can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.



■ **Pte Craig Winspear receives his Afghanistan Medal on the homecoming Parade**

Picture: Paul Brown

Improvised Explosive Device (CIED) & Search Task Force. On the eve of the disbandment 52 soldiers from the Squadron are preparing to, or have deployed on Operation HERRICK 16, providing force protection, mortuary affairs and search capabilities.

Although the Squadron is disbanding for a second time the Regiment is diversifying to meet the challenges of the 21st century. 47 Air Dispatch Squadron and 65 Logistic Support Squadron will soon join the Regiment. The Regiment will increasingly encompass a variety of trades and will remain a vital enabler for future operations.

The day of the disbandment was marked by a parade at St David's Barracks for serving and ex members of the Squadron and their families. Over 300 people attended the event in glorious sunshine. Brig Capps, Comd 104 Logistic Support Brigade was the Senior Officer present. The day was an opportunity for all to remember, to reflect on an era of proud service and also to look forward to the challenges ahead.

Over one hundred Association members (mostly ex 206 Coy) attended the Disbandment Parade of 206 Sqn at Bicester on 22 March 2012. Only a few of the Squadron were on Parade as many are currently on tour in Afghanistan. Following the Parade displays had been erected around the square showing the

Regiment's capabilities. Everyone then went to the Scully Club where members of the Regiment received Long Service and Good Conduct Medals and RLC Commendations. There was then a curry lunch.

Following this the Corporals Club and the Sergeants' Mess hosted the many visitors in true Pioneer style!

It was pleasing to see so many old faces a great number had not visited Bicester since they had left the Army – in one case over 50 years ago! I hope they do not leave it that long before returning. The following are some of the comments made on Facebook:

Good luck with the parade today lads was never 206 but sorry to see it go
Dougie Durrant

Sorry can't be there but have a great day all and I'll raise a glass for 206 SQN tomorrow.
Lee Walsh

I have to apologise to my army friends, that a pressing job has come in for tomorrow, that I must do so I will not be able to make the 206 disbandment parade, I hope you all have a great time and the old stories go down well with the beer, I will see you all at the reunion, regards
Derrick Shaw

Have to say I felt honoured & privileged yesterday to be part of the 206 company disbandment day.....I met some real heroes who really do deserve an awful lot of credit for what they went through &



■ Members of the Pioneer Search Team, Op Herrick 15, Brimstone 39

Pictures: Supplied

what they are still going through from their Afghan experiences.....Massive respect guys *Cudgie Smilie*

Nice to see so many old faces *Al Batchelor*

I had a memorable day at Bicester yesterday, tinged with sadness due to the disbandment of 206 again, but the lads and lasses on parade did us all proud. And the presentations for LS&GC's and the Commendations was the topping off of the day, well done everyone. *John Hatfield*

Proud to have been there yesterday to support 206 but sorry i had to go so early due to the dreaded manflu. *Steve Kohut*

Good day yesterday Norman sorry 206 are now no longer but nice to see a few old faces thank you see you all at the reunion. *Kev Broome*

Dear Norman, I was really very delighted to meet yourself again last Thursday and to see so many of my old colleagues. I believe that it was through your good services that I received an invitation to the 'ceremony' OK - it was sad to view a disbandment of an old and auspicious formation, but 'needs must'! It was so good to meet up again with so many old pals such as Terry Burden, Paddy Guy, Mel Smith, Kev Church, Terry Warren, Rueben Lynch and many others! OK - I am almost 65 years old but my problem is that I know peoples' faces, but I cannot for the life of me remember the names - It is an absolute shame for which I am very sorry! Anyway, Norman - thanks for everything and I have nothing but admiration for you as to how you have

'revitalised' the Corps Magazine! Take good care - be in touch soon *John Allen*

Herrick 15 - Brimstone 39 - Pioneer Search Team

We arrived in Camp Bastion on the 20th September and began the 5 day RSOI package. Once complete we collected our search equipment and went about completing Role Specific Training (RST) which consisted of four search tasks being validated by a Pioneer team from Herrick 14. During this phase we were able to adjust our search skills in order to meet the requirements of Afghanistan and refine our techniques with different search equipment. Due to being one of the last teams on the ground we were tasked with staying in Bastion for the first few weeks testing search kit and equipment, including new improvements to certain pieces as well as how they detect under different environmental conditions especially with damp ground. This resulted in some excellent findings and will benefit all those on the ground and training for future deployments.

Pte Carpenter and Pte Carter were the first to deploy on the ground in a search role both assisting other search teams due to lack of man power, two extremely difficult tasks including working with the BRF operating in the Burma AO. The task involved the clearance of compounds in search for a vital weapons cache. It all went extremely well and resulted in a variety of enemy weapons and ammunition being discovered. The extraction from task became very

interesting when we were contacted from a Taliban stronghold and had to fire and manoeuvre back for 4km under constant harassing fire, however the team arrived back safely and a successful first task.

Brimstone 39 under the command of Lt Hunter were soon deployed out to NES(N) to provide continuation search training to infantry C/S on the ground. As a 'get you in training team' we were tasked with rebuilding search lanes and confirmation pits, utilising the artisan skills amongst the team as well as training on Horn and valon for the ANA Plt attached to 1 Yorks BG.

After a successful two weeks training we were soon deployed back out onto the ground with 2RGR 'Delta' Coy attached to 1 Yorks BG at FOB Karnakar NES(N). Where we have carried out a variety of 10 liners including a whole spectrum of IEDs, working closely with our EOD Destroy team to support the Inf Coy on the ground and provide them greater freedom of movement around the area.

We have also carried out a few planned searches including a clearance Op of a heavily seeded abandoned school and Mosque in order to place surveillance equipment in the area, providing greater security for the FOB.

So far the tour has been very challenging, however the team has performed well and looking forward to their R and R in Feb.

Brimstone 39 - Lt Hunter, Cpl O'Hare, LCpl O'Hare, LCpl Thurman BCR, Pte Carpenter, Pte Charlton, Pte Carter, Pte Norris.

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE NEW Army Structure and the SDSR of 2010 gave clear pointers to the future in terms of national emphasis.**

Key parameters are:

a. An Army reduced in manpower to 82,000 regulars and 30,000 trained reserved by 2018.

b. Returning the Army from Germany by 2020.

c. Replacing the heavy armoured capability to reflect the character of conflict.

d. An adaptable Army for multiple challengers from the intervention to stabilisation, to capacity building and engagement with partners.

e. Scales of effort that call for multiple intervention operations up to Battle Group level, or the ability to engage in an enduring brigade operation.

f. Periodically to be able at longer notice to deliver a division comprised of up to three brigades plus theatre troops as part of a joint war-fighting force.

g. The need for a reinvigorated Army Reserves to deliver a more assured contribution to operational and peacetime activity.

■ COL GARY Cooper sent the following email:

Greetings One and All, Having grown increasingly frustrated at not being able to claim a range of 'military' benefits and discounts either here in the UK or overseas (especially the USA) I discovered the under mentioned web site which I commend to you.

Whilst the MOD continues to prevaricate and procrastinate on the subject of what support it can provide Veterans and, clearly, budgetary constraints preclude any early resolution, three ex-servicemen decided to do something about it and formed an organisation known as British Veterans.

Their aim to produce a veterans recognition card which would qualify holders to receive discounts offered by participating organisations. The front man is Simon Lamb (who is likely to answer the telephone number quoted on the web site), he advised me that the organisation has been running since 2003 and has some 5000 members.

Sadly, in my view, his organisation is not as well known in military/ex military circles as it deserves to be hence this email. If you are not put off by Bob Stewart's patronage!!!, I can vouch for the fact that the discount I missed from a one weeks car hire would have covered the cost of my first year's subscription. Kind regards, Garry www.britishveterans.co.uk

■ **EX SSGT ME Smith now lives in Sri Lanka and has telephoned the Association to state that he is willing, and at no charge, to arrange holidays in Sri Lanka.**

Further details can be obtained from the RPC Association.

■ **RESULTS from the RPC Association Christmas Draw 2011. Well done !**

1st Prize £1,000 Mr IM Chapman,
Ticket No 39691 Liverpool

2nd Prize £500 Pte P Dunn,
Ticket No 51181 23 Regt, Cyprus

3rd Prize £200 Mr WA Law,
Ticket No 23168 Walsall

4th Prize £100 Mr P Armstrong
Ticket No 44767 Maybole

5th Prize £50 Mrs V Shaw.
Ticket No 10315 London



■ Cpl Paul Downes receives his LS&GC and citation

Picture: Paul Brown



■ SSgt John Bell receives his LS&GC Medal

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Sgt Paul Casey receives his LS&GC Medal

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Cpl Colin Martin receives his Director RLC Commendation

Picture: Paul Brown



■ LCpl Adam Thomas receives his Director RLC Commendation

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Medal ceremony at the Homecoming Parade, Oxford

Picture: Paul Brown





■ **ONLY TWO** people correctly identified the Cuneo Mouse in the October edition of the newsletter.

The mouse was on page 66 in the cartoon, look on first shelf on left between the curtains.

Congratulations to Karen Butler, your prize will be with you shortly.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse. Terence Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse which was his trademark and somewhere in this Newsletter we have hidden a Cuneo mouse and it's not the one on Page 66.

Names of correct entries will be entered into a draw and the first 'out of the hat' will win a prize.

It is intended to draw the winning entry at the Reunion Weekend. Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 5th July 2012.

■ **THE RLC Museum Archive** holds a complete set of RLC and Forming Corps Journals dating from the Nineteenth Century to the present day. The website www.rlcarchive.org has placed on-line all of those which the Forming Corps published between 1914 and 1964, covering the period from the start of the First World War to the end of National Service. The Journals can be browsed from page to page or searched by a word or phrase of choice.

The Journals are a valuable source of information on the activities of the Forming Corps and the lives of those who served with them. The Journals provide details of operations, exercises, unit news and Corps sport.

For those wishing to learn more of individual soldiers and officers who served in the Forming Corps the Journals can be a very useful source of research. The Journals published details of individuals' promotions, postings, marriages and obituaries. Casualty lists, seniority lists and medal awards were also published in the Journals. At the very least the Journals can provide general background information to an officer's or soldier's time in the Forming Corps.

Over time, the format of the Journals did occasionally change. Consequently the content emphasis does vary. Please also note although this website offers access to all the Journals published between 1914 and 1964, within these years there were periods when some of the Forming Corps did not produce a Journal. However, activities and operations that did occur in years which Journals were not published are usually written up retrospectively when publication of the Journals resumed. Details for when the Forming Corps did not publish Journals are as follows:

Access to the Journals is on a pay/view or subscription basis. They contain the RPC Corps Journals from 1943 until 1964 – later journals will be added at a later date. This project has not been without cost not least the monthly fee the RLC have to pay for the server and it would be impossible for the museum to offer this service for free.

Please see www.rlcarchive.org for further details.

Pioneer Reunion Weekend 2012

Last year was the biggest reunion weekend ever



■ Photograph from a previous Reunion Weekend, "Hey that's me!"

Picture: Norman Brown

ALTHOUGH planning for the weekend is still in its early stages, it is likely that the format of the weekend will follow the successful routine of the last few years. A brief programme for the weekend is likely to be:

Friday 6th July - 1300 hrs onwards arrive and for those who have booked accommodation take over accommodation

1500 hrs - Bring a Boss - Corporals Club (all veterans invited)

1830 hrs - Reception - WOs' & Sgts' Mess – Fish/Pie & Chip supper

Saturday 7th July - 0900 hrs - AGM WOs' & Sgts' Mess (Members only)

1030 hrs - Form up for Church Service (outside Scully Hall)

1100 hrs - Church Service at Corps War Memorial

1130 hrs - Group Photograph – steps of Officers Mess

1200 hrs - Association AGM – WO2 &

Sgts' Mess - points for inclusion on Agenda should be forwarded to the Secretary by 20 Jun 12.

1400 hrs - Open Day on sports field (this will include a 6 a side football Tournament, it is hoped that the Veterans will provide two Teams. (Bring your boots!)

1800 hrs - Evening entertainment (including BBQ/or curry)

A booking form is included with this newsletter, this should be returned to the Secretary by 20 Jun 12.

Note: ground floor accommodation will be at a premium, if you can manage one flight of stairs please indicate on the form.

If you have a motorhome, caravan or even a tent we will provide facilities for all of these.

It is likely that some accommodation will be at St George's Barracks, mini-buses will, as usual, be provided to transport individuals to and from throughout the weekend.



■ The National Arboretum

Pictures: Norman Brown

National Arboretum

“This memorial is a special place to honour our loved ones, to reflect with pride on their ultimate sacrifice, to remember them and to see others remembering them.”

IT IS now ten years since the Arboretum first opened to the public and there are ambitious plans for the future.

The development of its buildings, to include much improved educational facilities and a world renowned Remembrance Centre, is planned. An £18 million appeal was launched in 2009 under the patronage of HRH Prince William for this purpose.

Situated in the heart of the Nation, the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire is the UK's year-round centre of Remembrance; a spiritually uplifting place which honours the fallen, recognises service and sacrifice, and fosters pride in our country.

The Arboretum, which is part of The Royal British Legion family of charities, incorporates 150 acres of wooden parkland and over 200 memorials representing military and civilian organisations in addition to many individual dedications.

It is a beautiful and lasting tribute to those who serve their country, or who have died in conflict, and an ideal space

in which to contemplate.

While its role is particularly important for families and colleagues who have lost loved ones and friends, it also helps everyone to appreciate what service and sacrifice for the country can involve.

The focus, however, is not totally military. There is a large area devoted to Police who have fallen while on duty, as well as other areas given over to the Fire and Rescue and Ambulance services.

National charities that represent those who have died in particular circumstances, including children, and people killed in road incidents, are also to be found in the Arboretum grounds.

Visitors to the Arboretum, who are from all walks of life, now number around 300,000.

Over 200 special events are held annually, many of which are attended by veterans, making it a place of coming together for a wide variety of shared purposes and reunions.

One of the best known memorials is the striking and award winning Armed Forces Memorial, which commemorates those

who have been killed on duty or as a result of terrorism since the end of the Second World War.

It is a magnificent structure in Portland Stone commemorating nearly 16,000 men and women of the UK Armed Forces.

Jenny Green OBE was closely involved in the creation of the Armed Forces Memorial.

Her husband, Group Captain William Green, was killed in a Tornado crash in 1990 just before the start of the Gulf War, and his body was never recovered.

For her, with no grave or headstone to visit, the Memorial has enormous significance:

“This memorial is a special place to honour our loved ones, to reflect with pride on their ultimate sacrifice, to remember them and to see others remembering them.”

The Arboretum is open every day of the year except for Christmas Day. Entry is free but donations are welcome.

For more information, visit www.thenma.org.uk



Happy 100th Birthday Bill

Surrey-born Lt Col Bill Lanaway celebrated his 100th birthday recently and reflected on his 19 years of military service with the Royal Pioneer Corps. “They were the best years of my life... I know I’ve been extremely lucky, but I would happily do it all over again...”

**Report: Bill Lanaway
Picture: Bill Lanaway**

DESPITE his rural family background, 14-year old Bill signed on for a seven year typesetter apprenticeship with the Surrey Mirror, with wages of ten shillings (50p) a week, rising to £3.16shillings (£3.80p) as a qualified compositor. But with war clouds looming over the Continent, newly married Bill joined the local TA, believing that at 28 he'd be too old for military service.

Then shortly after Dunkirk, the age bar was raised to 30 years so by early 1942, he signed on as a regular soldier and because of his previous TA experience was quickly promoted to Sgt. Soon afterwards he was commissioned into the Royal Pioneer Corps and in that September, Lt Lanaway joined 115 Company at Wallasey on Merseyside.

Training there included camp and road construction along with fire watch duties around the Liverpool docks, and when the unit shifted to Marchwood the only interruption to the training were visits from King George VI and Ike (General Eisenhower). There was always time for sport and Bill became a keen footballer and enjoyed cycling too. He also loved motorcycling and as one of his many tasks included Transport Officer, Bill often led convoys from astride his favourite motorcycle the Norton 16H.

But by May 1944, Bill had joined 170 Company at Netley Camp, Southampton where more serious training began; mines and beach obstacle clearance, road and beach track-laying. All of this was in preparation for the big assault and when D-Day finally arrived, 170 Company arrived at NAN Sector of White Beach, one-hour ahead of the main assault groups to clear away the heavily mined obstacles.

Under heavy gunfire, Bill's section got stuck in but the others weren't so lucky as he recalls that the OC Major Boyde's party received heavy casualties, as did Lt Bonney's craft which struck a mine killing several Pioneers and injuring others. Finally throughout the constant shelling, strafing from pillboxes and sniping, the Pioneers cleared all the obstacles then built lateral beach tracks, vehicle exit lanes and a temporary HQ, before pushing on and doing the same beyond the cliffs. Having established a HQ further inland at Courseulles, 170 Coy under heavy air attacks, repeated the work at Green Beach before moving swiftly on to Bernieres, clearing and maintaining tracks and beaches especially those with high tidal

breaches.

Extracts from War Diary 170 Coy PC:

3 Apr 44 - Moved to NETLEY Camp, SOUTHAMPTON – training

25 Apr 44 - Inspected by HM King George VI

13 May 44 - Inspected by Gen Eisenhower

31 May 44 - Officers:- Maj E L Boyde – OC, Capt S W Acott – 2IC, Lts W Lane, W T Lanaway, R A Sime & J Bonney

6 Jun 44 0825 hours - first serials landed in NORMANDY. Capt S W Acott and Lt W T Lanaway's parties landed on NAN Sector, WHITE BEACH.

Lt J Bonney & R A Sime's party landed on NAN Sector RED BEACH.

1330 hours - Maj E L Boyde's party landed on NAN Sector WHITE BEACH having been delayed owing to casualties among the LCA conveying the assault troops

Serial 1518 – Lt J Bonney – LCI struck a submerged mine on landing which blew in the starboard side, injuring 2 ORs who were evacuated (one since died of wounds) a third OR was found to be missing after disembarkation (it is now known he was killed)

Serial 1518 (a) – Lt R A Sime – One OR missing after landing

Enemy Opposition – some opposition on RED and WHITE BEACHES, particularly heavy sniping on RED, some isolated pill boxes still holding out. These were eventually silenced by guns of landing craft.

Tasks. Clearing RED, WHITE and GREEN Beaches, laying lateral track and constructing wheeled and track exits and connecting up laterals between them. 2 sections on RE dump. HQ temporarily established on WHITE Beach

7 Jun 44 - HQ established at railway terminus COURSEULLES. Work concentrated on WHITE and GREEN Beaches. Red Beach closed as unsuitable

8 Jun 44 - Enemy air raid – 1 OR killed and 1 Sgt and 1 OR wounded

11 Jun 44 - Moved to BERNIERES – work on beaches continued

12 Jun 44 - Working on beaches and roads

29 Jun 44 - Lt W T Lanaway – sos as 2IC 292 Coy

Work on beaches, clearing breaches after tides, general repair and maintenance of tracks. Construction work at BERBIERES by-pass road. Road repairs in COURSEULLES

By the end of June, Bill was promoted to Captain and made 2IC of 292 Coy which was constantly moving towards Albert, all the time building roads, encampments and organising supplies of fuel, ammo' and rations for our attacking units. On 29th October 292 Coy moved first to Donck, then on to Mol where the only blot on Capt Lanaway's otherwise sparkling military career occurred, resulting in a rapid but short-lived demotion to Lt.

It followed a Stars in Battledress (ENSA) show and "was all Vera Lynn's fault" he cracked. "She's a lovely person alright but her troupe of gorgeous showgirls were really wicked". Bill was in a nearby pub having a quiet drink when the lasses arrived and began plying him with drinks – "Well I couldn't refuse now could I" he chuckled.

But staggering back to his billet, he fell amongst a large heap of coal and awoke the following morning covered in coaldust. Needless to say his OC was not amused.

Extracts from War Diary 292 Coy PC

29 Jun 44 - Capt W T Lanaway – tos 2IC

8 Jul 44 - CSM A J W White – tos vice V L P Cox (sos RQMS 32 Group)

27 Jul 44 - Lt F W Clinton – sos 90 Coy Lt R Webb – tos

14 Aug 44 - Moved to LA BERTHERIE – road making

21 Aug 44 - Moved to ST OUVEN

24 Aug 44 - Moved to LE FRENE – camp construction

6 Sep 44 - Moved to GLISSY – RAF supplies and petrol

11 Sep 44 - Moved to ALBERT – supplies and petrol

26 Sep 44 - On the move

30 Sep 44 - Moved to DIEST – supplies and petrol

29 Oct 44 - Moved to DONCK

30 Oct 44 - Moved to MOL

Capt G Tolley – tos 2IC vice Lanaway (reverts to Lt)

8 Nov 44 - Lt A Bamber – sos PW coy

10 Nov 44 - Lt A T M Stephen – sos CLU

29 Nov 44 - Lt M Summers – tos

1 Dec 44 - 2 sections with Ordnance 4 sections with RASC

3 sections with CMP

8 Dec 44 - Lt M Summers – sos 166 Coy

12 Jan 45 - Lt W T Lanaway – sos as 2IC 71 Coy

However by mid-January 1945 with his rank and reputation restored, he was posted to 71 Company as 2i/c under the OC Major SC Beach. Swiftly moving to Eindhoven his unit handled ration supplies at 56 Brigade Supply Dump and three weeks later, it moved into Kevelaer (Germany) doing the

same work but as part of 35 Group. By May 56 BSD arrived in Freistatt, then moved on to Luneberg and Ebsdorf, controlling petrol and ammunition supply dumps.

Extracts from War Diary 71 Coy PC:

13 Jan 45 - Capt W T Lanaway – tos 2IC
31 Jan 45 - Officers:-
Maj S C Beach – OC
Capt W T Lanaway – 2IC
Lts R J May, T G Phelps & E G Rice
2Lt J Green
6 Mar 45 - Moved to EINDHOVEN – handling rations at 56 BSD
30 Mar 45 - Moved to KEVELAER, Germany – part of 35 Group – same work
11 Apr 45 - Moved to BURGSTEINFURT – 81 BSD part of 40 Group
30 Apr 45 - Officers:-
Maj S C Beach – OC
Capt W T Lanaway – 2IC
Lts J Green & A W Tutt
3 May 45 - Moved to FREISTATT – 54 BSD

26 May 45 - Moved to LUNEBURG
7 Jul 45 - Moved to EBSTORF
On the 8th July 1945 Bill was promoted to major and OC of 209 Coy which had the job of clearing out a former SS prison at Rennesberg, and supervising a local labour force. After rounding up the staff, and replacing the huge Nazi flag with the Union Jack, Bill's men rounded up the prison guards, organised court martials of the senior SS officers and in some cases executions too. "That part was unforgettably traumatic" he says, "but obtaining the addresses of local sympathisers and commandeering their houses to accommodate my men gave me great satisfaction".

Bill has proudly hung on to that large enemy flag, and he takes great pleasure in displaying it at any and every opportunity.

Extracts from War Diary 209 Coy PC:

8 Jul 45 - Maj W T Lanaway – tos OC

11 Jul 45 - Moved to RENDSBURG – guards and supervising German labour
27 Sep 45 - Maj W T Lanaway – sos to 308 Coy

Coy disbanded at RENDSBURG
By September, his work at Rennesberg was completed and the unit disbanded, after which Bill became OC of 308 Coy, first at Kiel then a month later at Schultup where the unit undertook the supervision of German labour units.

The work lasted until the following February when the unit was finally disbanded.

Extracts from War Diary 308 Coy PC

27 Sep 45 - Maj W T Lanaway – tos OC
14 Oct 45 - Moved to KIEL – supervising German Labour
2 Nov 45 - Moved to SCHULTUP
30 Jan 46 - Maj W T Lanaway – sos 53 Coy

4 Feb 46 - Disbanded at SCHULTUP
Major Lanaway then took over 53 Coy, where he spent the next 12 months organising the extensive guard duties in and around Lubeck.

In February 1946 he became OC of 134 Coy in Neumunster which also held a Disarmament Wing for grounded RAF pilots.

"They were all under 23 years old, had flown the maximum hours allowed and were all head cases" he says.

When the job of destroying a wing of captured Messerschmitt's came up, they happily volunteered to help, soaking the planes with petrol, firing Bren guns in unison and cheering madly as the 110's went up.

He also recalls that their officers mess was the upstairs boardroom of a local brewery, in which there happened to be a large old grand piano. After one particularly heavy drinking session, a group of young flyers launched it out into the courtyard below.

"It shattered completely in what sounded

like massive peals of bells, reverberating all around the area" Needless to say the miscreants were duly and appropriately punished.'

Extracts from War Diary 53 Coy PC:

25 Jan 46 - Maj W T Lanaway – tos OC vice Buckle (sos 308 Coy)
16 Feb 46 - Maj W H Fennell – tos OC vice Lanaway
Guard Duties

20 Apr 46 - Disbanded at LUBECK
Two months later his Army service ended on 12th April 1946, and Bill was finally released from military duties (demobbed). Back in civvies, he swiftly returned to the publishing trade working on the Jewish Chronicle and the Daily Mail.

After a lengthy spell at the Mail, he became production manager at the Surrey Mirror group which had absorbed the Croydon Times, Dorking and Crawley Advertisers and was expanding into West London.

But Bill's service days were far from over because, with the onset of the Suez crisis in 1956 and Israel's 'Six Day War' with Egypt he was recalled to the Colours in the rank of Lt Colonel.

He completed a great deal of pre-conflict preparations but as the Crisis stalled the invading groups were eventually stood down.

It might not have ended there for Bill because, he was offered the post of DDL (Director of Direct Labour) in Singapore with the rank of Brigadier, however family health problems prevented his acceptance, and so his 19 years of Army service finally ended.

But with three children and eight grandchildren, the President's post at the Merstham branch of the Royal British Legion, regular visits to Age Concern and a busy dance schedule, he's kept himself amazingly fit in his old age.

"How do I do it? Just keep on moving – that's my motto in life" he smiles. ■

Son in first visit to father's war grave as dead are honoured across county

The following article appeared in the Derby Telegraph newspaper on Saturday 12 November 2011 and has been reproduced by kind permission of the editor

Report: Derby Telegraph
Saturday 12 November 2011

AS THE war dead were remembered across the county, Ed Hill spoke to a man visiting a Derby cemetery for the first time to see his father's grave.

David Underwood was only 18 months old when his dad, serving in the Royal Pioneer Corps, drowned in a snow-covered septic tank.

Corporal Charles Underwood had been guarding a barracks near Derby, during the Second World War, when he accidentally stood in the hidden tank.

His frozen body wasn't found until days later, his bosses thought the 38 year old had deserted his post.

David, from Kent, has a black and white picture of his father, who died in January 1945, and his earliest memory is being given a wooden lorry by his dad.

But, until yesterday, he had never visited Cpl Underwood's grave, in Soldiers' Corner at Nottingham Road Cemetery, Chaddeesden.

Yesterday, pockets of veterans gathered for the Armistice Day service at the cemetery, Derby's official war memorial.

And an emotional Mr Underwood, 68,

stood amid a crowd of 100 as the Last Post was played and standards were dipped to pay respect to Britain's war dead.

"I was born out of wedlock," he said. "I only found my dad's family a few years ago.

David grew up, got married had children, but always wondered about his father.

He tracked down an uncle to New Zealand and arranged to meet.

I said to him "What was my dad like?" – he said just look in the mirror.

"I'm glad I've come."

"And I'll be back, God willing." ■

The Suez Crisis 1956



The history of the Suez crisis, Pioneer involvement and personal memories by Roy (Brummy) Newey (22561655) 263 Company

Report: Norman Brown / Roy Newey
Artwork: Roy Newey

IN 1956, the Suez Canal became the focus of a major world conflict. The canal represents the only direct means of travel from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, making it vital to the flow of trade between Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S. Normally, free passage was granted to all who used the canal, but Britain and France desired control of it, not only for commercial shipping, but also for colonial interests.

The Egyptian government had just been taken over by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who felt the canal should be under Egyptian control. The United States and Britain had promised to give aid to Egypt in the construction of the Aswan High Dam in the Nile. This aid was retracted however, and in retaliation Nasser nationalized the canal. He intended to use the funds raised from the operation of the canal to pay for the Dam.

Angry British and French politicians joined forces with Israel, a long time enemy of Egypt, in an attack against Nasser. The Israeli army marched toward the canal on October 29, 1956. Britain and France reinforced the Israelis, and the joint effort defeated the Egyptian army quickly. Within ten days, British and French forces had completely occupied the Suez region. Egypt responded by sinking 40 ships in the canal, blocking all passage. The United Nations sought to resolve the conflict and pressured the two European powers to back down. The rest of the world shunned Britain and France for their actions in the crisis, and soon the UN salvage team moved in to clear the canal. Britain and France backed down, and control of the canal was given back to Egypt in March 1957.

The Egyptian government was allowed to maintain control of the canal as long as they permitted all vessels of all nations free passage through it.

PIONEER INVOLVEMENT

(Note: 1,091 General Service Medal 1918 with the Clasp "Near East" were awarded to Pioneer Corps personnel)

Extract from The Royal Pioneer Issue No 48 – September 1956

Editorial: At the time of writing, the minds of all of us are occupied with thoughts of the Suez Canal crisis and its implications. It can only be hoped that as this appears before you in print, a solution satisfactory to all concerned will have been evolved and put into operation.

Extract from The Royal Pioneer Issue No 49 – December 1956

'Up the Pioneers' and High Morale of British Troops – From our Correspondent LONDON – Monday

British and French troops yesterday boarded ships of a big invasion fleet assembled in a sunlit Cyprus harbour. In port were merchant ships and a variety of Allied warships.

Men of the Pioneer Corps grinned and waved to tough, bronzed French troops. Long lines of men in battle trim shuffled on board, bristling with rifles and small-arms.

People at home may be split on the Suez issue, but that, says the London "Daily Mail" correspondent, cabling from Nicosia, has no effect on the morale of these boys.

They joked with each other: "Is your journey really necessary?" One Corporal summed up, however: "Let's get rockin' and rollin'!"

Extract from "The Star" Johannesburg

10 Group RPC was reformed for the Suez Crisis in August 1956 and was made up from 71 Company (from 52 Group), 263, 522 and 524 Companies (from 23 Group) and 6 PCLU (formed). All units were called up in early August 1956 and were mobilised on 13 August 1956 at Tilshead Camp, Salisbury.

The following are extracts from the diaries of those units:

HQ 10 Group RPC. Embarked on 30 October 1956 on HMT "Empire Parkstone" and disembarked on 10 November 1956 at Suez (1 Officer and 1 SNCO wounded). Re-embarked and then disembarked at Southampton on 29 December 1956.

Extract from The Royal Pioneer Issue No 50 – March 1957

30 Group and their role in Operation 'Musketeer'

In early August 1956, information was received that 263, 522 and 524 Companies were to mobilise for overseas and come under command of HQ 30 Group, which was then to be mobilised at the Depot. All concerned worked well, and mobilisation was completed by 13th August.

Operation "Watermark" brought a change of plan, and we moved to Tilshead Camp, Salisbury Plain to train with units of 2 (BR) Corps, in readiness for "Musketeer." Concentration on the Plain was completed by the 24th August, and after a series of conferences, training started in earnest. The spirit of the troops was tremendous, and Operation "Watermark" lived up to its name, the rains coming down in torrents. This however failed to dampen the enthusiasm of our troops, and they were well rewarded when word came through of a grant of 72 hours leave. Special buses and trains were organised, and after this welcome break, we sat back waiting for our orders to move.

At last they came, ships were named and embarkation orders received. At the last hour these instructions were cancelled, training recommenced, and as thoughts of "SUEZ" dimmed, so hopes of spending Christmas at home took their place. But this was not to be. On 30th October, embarkation orders were received, and Group HQ proceeded to Lyneham, there to join up with a detachment of 6 PCLU, and we found ourselves airborne in two Hastings aircraft of RAF Transport Command. Meanwhile, 263, 522 and 524 Companies had embarked at Southampton

on SS New Australis, Asturias and HT Empire Fowey respectively.

The airborne parties stopped at Malta for refuelling, then proceeded direct to Nicosia Airport in Cyprus, where we caught up with 71 Company, only to find that they were off the following morning.

On November 9th came the great day and Group HQ together with 6 PCLU, embarked on HT Empire Parkstone for Port Said, disembarking there some 12 hours later after an uneventful trip. OC 71 Coy, now under our command was at the quayside to meet us, and we were soon established in a six storeyed building.

A quick reconnaissance was made with a view to accommodating the remainder of the Group who were shortly to join us, and a Naval Barracks and large storage sheds on the Navy House quay were soon earmarked. Navy House itself was a burnt-out shell, the result of pounding by RAF rockets, and the rest of the site was indescribably filthy. Blocked latrines and sewers, together with burst mains and broken electricity cables did not ease our job, but by November 13th, with the aid of the rest of our companies, who had by then disembarked, the place was well and truly cleaned-up, and water and sewage brought under control. Two dead Egyptian soldiers located during our spring-clean were disposed of through the appropriate channels. Cooking arrangements had perforce to be rather primitive, since our G1098 was still at sea, but scrounging and the building of field kitchens by our cooks, enabled us to eat and enjoy the rations provided us.

Work was now going on right around the clock and it may be interesting to list some of the tasks we were called upon to perform:

Unloading:

POL - NAAFI Stores - Ammo - Aircraft - Vehicles - RE Stores - Ord Stores

Guards:

POW Camp - NAAFI Shed - Airfield - Captured Dhows - Lighters with Stores - Barclays Bank - HQ 40 Sub Area

Repairs:

Sweet Water Canal - Deep Trench Latrines Drains - Sewers - Reed Cutting, Sweet Water Canal - Making of Thunder Boxes

Unloading for UNO:

Red Cross Trains - Red Cross Ships - Erecting Camps for UNO Troops -

General:

Field Bakers - Cooks for POW Camp - Butchery - Batmen for PRS - Field Hygiene - Spraying - Reloading and lashing of vehicles on ships. Dumping Enemy Ammo, Arms and Vehicles at Sea. Sups Issues - Erecting Security Fences - Escorts for vehicles - Embarkation of Refugees - Burying War Dead - Exhuming War Dead

It will readily be appreciated from the above, that there was a great and constant demand for Labour from all Units in the Force

Our own casualties were fortunately light. One Officer and one NCO were wounded by small arms fire, and several others hurt in working accidents. All have survived to tell the tale.

During the first fortnight, the populace of Port Said appeared to be keen on establishing friendly terms, and troops were

encouraged to visit the town between 1400 and 1700 hrs when off duty. Street trading was brisk, and many English homes today have a souvenir purchased in Port Said during the operation.

HQ 30 Group, now firmly established, held a drinks party, to which a large number of guests, including a number of our French Allies were invited. The absence of female company in no way impaired the success of the evening which went with a swing.

News of our impending departure brought a change in the feelings of the locals, with the result that the town was placed out of bounds, and security intensified. Several cases of ambushing and bomb-throwing occurred and our troops employed on guard duties soon found their tasks no sinecure. One sentry post accounted for three Egyptian thugs who attempted to force the docks perimeter, two being wounded and all three captured. Such attempts were not repeated in our particular sector.

Orders for the back-loading of stores, equipment and vehicles came as something of an anti-climax after all the hard work performed such a short while previously unloading these items. However, our troops set to with customary vigour, and in a short while one would have been hard put to find even an angle iron picket on the quayside.

This article would not be complete without a word of praise for the outstanding work done by all ranks, under what were sometimes particularly adverse conditions. Their willingness and cheerfulness reflected great credit on the Corps. The Reservists, uprooted from civilian life proved themselves outstanding, and were indispensable to the success of the operation.

30 Group has now disbanded, and its Companies returned to their former locations and Groups. They may rest assured that their journey was really necessary, and be content that their record is one of which they may be justly proud.

71 Coy. - Comments on "Suez Emergency"

1. Warning Order. Notification was received on 9 August 56 that the Company would mobilize to a 10 section Company and prepared to move overseas by 24 August 56.

2. Reinforcements. The Company at the time had a strength of 6 sections and Coy HQ but by 24 August 56 the Company had been brought up to strength by the arrival of 98 Reservists from Wrexham and 79 posted in from 260 Coy RPC.

3. Stores and Equipment.

a. The Company were fortunate in that they were in possession of a complete scale of stores on the Lower Establishment but indents had to be submitted to complete to the Higher Establishment. Little difficulty was experienced in obtaining these stores and on receipt it only remained to have them re-packed and marked with the appropriate Serial Nos.

b. Baggage Weights - Loading Tables. List showing contents of each box, weight and sizes were listed for loading purposes for despatch either by sea or air.

c. Vehicle Loading. Practice loading of vehicles was held in order to determine best methods of loading and to ensure that the same boxes were loaded on every occasion when necessary.

Owing to the limited amount of transport available to a Company these loading

practices were of assistance in determining what extra requisitioned transport was required to move all the Company's stores to the Port.

d. Weapons. All examined prior to move.

e. Inspections. Complete overhauling and inspection of all personnel clothing and equipment held. The Reservists arrived complete to scale and apart from numbering clothing no extra work was involved.

4. Documents. 100% inspection and check of all documents to ensure correctness.

5. Mobilization Report and Move. A final Mobilization Report was forwarded to HQ on 28 Aug 56 but there was much frustration before the

Company finally moved. Stand-by dates and orders to move were constantly being cancelled or postponed, thus causing a slight dislocation in labour administrative details with the CAD.

However on the 31 October the Company again received a 'stand-by to move' order and at 1030 hrs further orders were received to move the main party by 1500 hrs the same day and the remainder of the Company at 0400 hrs the following day to an Air Transit Centre.

This abrupt move resulted in the whole of the Company's vehicles, stores and documents having to be left behind as there was no time to arrange for despatch to the Port of Embarkation.

Air trooping facilities, although uncomfortable, were well organised and the Company arrived in different flights in Cyprus by 1200 hrs on 2 Nov 56.

During the stay in Cyprus the Company were accommodated in a transit Camp, and time being spent in issuing further supplies of ration packs, currency exchange, obtaining G1098 stores, briefing and lectures.

The Company finally embarked on the "Empire Ken" on 4 Nov 56.

On 5 Nov 56 the 'Ken', together with the remainder of the convoy anchored a few miles outside Port Said, finally anchoring in the Port. The company prepared to disembark from 0800 hrs 6 November but much to our disappointment this was postponed until AM 7 November after news of the 'cease fire' had been received.

Disembarkation orders were brief and very quickly carried out. Soon the Company were ordered ashore, settling in on a piece of waste ground.

The cease fire at that particular time appeared to be a myth as gunfire was heard throughout the town continuously. Having received instructions from HQ 40 Sub Area to commence work immediately, sections were detailed off to work on unloading, loading and stacking ammunition, water, rations, stores and petrol. For the next 3 days the Company worked practically day and night on these tasks.

Other tasks were sorting out captured weapons, cleaning up certain areas which had been strewn with items of equipment left by the Egyptian Army.

On 10 November the Company moved by stages to a large empty building and during this move the Company were ordered to provide a section for starting up a POW cage.

This section was shortly afterwards increased to two sections, their duties being guarding of prisoners, escorts to prisoners and all the admin duties necessary for the running of such a cage.

'The site was indescribably filthy with blocked latrines and sewers!'

These duties were carried out in a splendid manner and continued up to embarkation for UK.

On 11 November HQ 30 Group arrived and within the next few days another 3 RPC Companies arrived.

The 14th November saw the Company moving to a new location in the warehouses and rooms in the Quay Area of what was once Navy House, now a shell of a building.

Clearing the area up to make it habitable did not last long and sections were soon out at work. With the arrival of other Companies the tasks became more varied and 71 Company throughout the remainder of their stay were employed on POW Cage, loading and unloading planes on Port Said Airfield (where two duties involved two detachments and a headache in finding sufficient equipment), unloading at the docks of ammunition, petrol, rations, water, Engineer Stores, NAAFI Stores and other stores essential for battle.

Other tasks were clearing the Sweet Water Canal of weeds and rubbish, spraying of buildings with DDT, assistance to Civil Affairs Offices, guarding of various buildings and in one instance assisting in settling in a new building of the Civilian Governor of Port Said (an Egyptian).

6. Health and Casualties. During the period in Port Said there was very little sickness, daily average three. Casualties were few and arrangements were made to expedite replacement whenever HQ Cyprus were notified.

7. Messing/Water. The messing on the whole, although monotonous, was excellent, and whenever fresh food was issued the best menu available was turned out. Water had of course to be boiled or treated before use.

8. Documents. Due to the fact that no documents, stationary or files were taken with the Company documentation was extremely difficult, letters had to be done in longhand, proforma had to be taken to other units to be run off, and Army Forms were obtained wherever possible.

9. Transport. Within 24 hours of our arrival in Port Said the Company acquired an Egyptian Army 3 Ton vehicle. This, together with what we were able to borrow from other units was barely sufficient, but details were kept up to schedule until Transport Sections arrived when it was possible to indent daily for transport.

10. Embarkation for UK.

On the 6 December the Company embarked for UK on the "Dilwara", arriving at Southampton on 17 Dec 56. Due to previous arrangements made by Group HQ it was possible to despatch the Reservists to their homes within 18 hours of their arrival at Tingewick. The remainder of the Company were despatched on leave on 19 Dec.

Lessons to be learnt.

1. a. Companies should in Peace Time hold their complete Higher Establishment of stores.

b. This enables correct and up to date loading tables to be presented whenever possible.

c. Stores held must be inspected and where necessary tested monthly.

2. Orders should be issued by Higher Authorities to ensure that all stores are despatched by the unit to the port prior to the move.

3. Although a difficult task Reservists should be more suitably selected. In a few cases it was obvious that there was extreme hardship.

Final Comment

On the whole the Reservists worked extremely well. Prior to the move and despite the postponements their morale was high, due it is believed to being kept busy both on work details and training, and continually being kept in the picture.

A flying Visit - Personal Impressions of the Port Said Affair

The six o'clock news on 30th October 1956 informed us that an ultimatum had been sent by the British and French Governments to Egypt. This would never concern us, 71 Coy were under warning for active service, we had been for the last three months, but someone had cried 'wolf' too often. We had received no less than five movement orders all of which had fizzled out.

Yet less than thirty-six hours later as our RAF Transport Command aeroplane taxied down the runway of Lyneham Airfield bearing forty of the Company and myself, I can't say I was surprised, everything happened so quickly. We had received five hours notice to be on a special train the previous day after a midnight signal to 'stand-by'. After a tremendous rush by some means or other, we managed it after going to an Assembly Centre in Southern England, here we were taking off into the unknown! Everything happened too quickly for us to realise that we were going almost straight to Egypt.

Highest secrecy surrounded the whole operation, easy to maintain because we knew precisely nothing of our destination, our role, or what opposition to expect wherever we were going. In some ways we received as much information in Malta as anywhere. We waited an hour to refuel and have a meal, and the darkened airfield was noisy with the taking off bombers, flying sorties somewhere in the Middle East.

Nicosia next stop. We made a bumpy landing into that world famous trouble spot and, formalities completed, we were driven through darkened streets to an hastily improvised transit camp. But the next day we learned that Nicosia was not for us and only a break in the long journey. After, for me, an all too short stay on this delightful island, we set out again, before dawn on Sunday 4th November 1956 over the mountain road from Nicosia to the port of

Limassol which we reached without mishap - as luck would have it, for our route was ambushed a few minutes after we passed at one point, and a bomb exploded in a part of Limassol with fatal results, while we waited to embark

on our ship.

We seemed to wait a long time. It is difficult to adequately describe the means by which we eventually boarded the HMT 'Empire Ken'. It was my first embarkation but usage did not seem to have reconciled my brother officers to the catalogue of delays, frustration and blind chaos, which fulfilled the morning and early afternoon. But, somehow we found ourselves aboard, and within hours we knew our destination as Port Said.

The next day we found ourselves part of a large convoy, ringed by destroyers: at dawn on Nov 6th that did their work and Port Said was bombarded. In the hours following dawn we saw helicopters flying in Commando troops to form up with the Parachutists who had already dropped on the El Gamil Airfield. The helicopters were flying into a haze of smoke. Through

binoculars I could, however, see a few main features of the city - the lighthouse, the port installations and the blazing oil storage tanks. A rocket attack by the RAF was in full swing. By the afternoon we steamed into the outer reaches of the harbour, distinguishable by bouys and ruined forts on the great jetty, and soon the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the designer of the canal, on its vast plinth at the end of the Casino Pier was clearly seen, and the buildings on the front became visible - the Casino Palace Hotel, scarred by shellfire, and, down a great avenue of palms, the octagonal tower of the Greek Cathedral. From the centre of the town came the thud of shells and the rattle of automatic fire. A bedraggled group of Egyptian prisoners were escorted to a temporary camp by the Royal marines Commandos.

We were ordered to disembarkation stations and stood-by, it seemed, for hours. Then, to our intense disappointment, we were told that no one would disembark until the next day. The only units on shore the first day were Commandos, Parachutists and Tanks.

Then to our amazement a cease fire was announced to take effect at midnight. I stood on deck and looked at the city, lighted brightly by several fires and listened to the shooting, wondering what 'fire' the 'cease fire' referred to.

Next morning, we moved slowly from the centre of the harbour in a Tank Landing Craft to Casino Quay and from there to our first camp site - a stretch of waste ground behind Casino Pier, in the shadow, as it were, of the Statue of de Lesseps (which the Egyptian Chauvinists pulled down within hours of the final withdrawal). The streets were deserted except for patrols and, but for intermittent firing, the town was silent. There was a brooding and sinister atmosphere - strange circumstances in which to set foot on a new Continent, I thought.

The discomfort of these first few days in 'De Lesseps Camp' can be better imagined than described, but somehow work was so continuous that living conditions mattered very little. Within hours of establishing the camp, we had working parties unloading ammunition at Fishermen's Quay and another working at a dump of captured small Arms, mostly Russian models, and over the next few days parties worked night and day unloading petrol and aviation spares.

No sooner had we improvised a modicum of comfort at 'De Lesseps Camp', than we moved to permanent accommodation, in fact we had a roof over our heads. It was a large, once elegant house, late a shipping office in Sultan Hussein Street which runs beside the Canal and the docks. 'Our own camp at last' I remarked with satisfaction as I surveyed the front one night: but not for long.

Meanwhile life slowly returned to the city. The snipers who had caused us to walk warily for the first few days were routed out; sleek Egyptians of the upper class, in fez and suits of deplorable pattern, fellaheen in pyjamas, and undersized children at last began to appear. Comic opera policeman patrolled in pairs hand-in-hand, and vendors of obnoxious commodities took up their stand on the boulevards.

All of a sudden we moved again, this time to Navy House, or rather the buildings behind it, for Navy House itself was merely a blackened tribute to RAF marksmanship. We set about converting our third site into the resemblance of a camp.

We were now doing a variety of jobs,

'Comic opera policemen patrolled in pairs hand-in-hand'

several guards in the town and a detachment running a POW Camp, and another was permanently at El Gamil Airfield. I will remember that chiefly for the masses of flies everywhere and, more pleasantly for the glorious sunsets each night over Lake Manzala, which was forever alive with strangely rigged craft, whose design had not greatly changed since the days of the Pharaohs.

But the show was folding up rapidly. After a few weeks, we found the emphasis more on the back-loading of stores to ships, a sad change from the first exhilarating days when we thought we might go the length of the Canal. The city was alive with rumours of a withdrawal and rumours do not always lie. We were the first RPC Company in, and we would be the first out. The end came like the beginning, a message in the early hours of the morning, warning us to be ready for embarkation at noon the following day, and at a minute or two to two we stepped on a Z Craft which was to take us from Navy House Quay to our ship, the HMT 'Dilwara', and so we left Egyptian soil. We drew away and those who had gathered to see us off became less and less distinguishable. Only Navy House, a vast white, gutted, shell stood out clearly, a reminder of the first day on the Invasion. Few of us were sorry to miss the final withdrawal.

2Lt GALLUS

522 Coy

19 Oct 1956. Coy warned to proceed on Ex 'PRESSURE COOKER' on 23 Oct 56.

22 Oct 1956. Coy stood down Ex 'PRESSURE COOKER' postponed – Normal Work-Trg-Leave

23 Oct 1956. AFB 2609 Rendered. Appendix A11.

24 – 29 Oct 1956. Normal Work-Trg-Leave.

30 Oct 1956. Instructions received Coy proceed to Southampton on 1 Nov 56 for embarkation HMT EMPIRE FOWEY for service in MELF.

1 Nov 1956. Coy entrained Donnington 0900hrs for Southampton, arrived Southampton 1520hrs. Strength 6 Offrs, 1 WOII, 1 C/S, 10 Sgts, 2 R&F- Vehicle Party, 263 R&F – Main Party.

Southampton. Embarked EMPIRE FOWEY 4 Offrs, 1C/S, 4 Sgts, 169 R&F (inc 9 ACC, 1 RAPC) Cardiff. Embarked TEMPLE HALL 2 R&F plus vehicles.

2 Nov 1956. Southampton. Embarked HMT ANTORIUS 2 Offrs, 1 WOII, 73 R&F. Embarked HMT DILWANA 1 Sgt, 21 R&F

7 Nov 1956. No 23281115 Pte Atley P sustained injuries on HMT FOWEY and admitted to Hospital MALTA.

10 Nov 1956. PORT SAID. 2 Offrs, 1 WOII, 5 Sgts, 73 R&F Disembarked ex HMT ASTORIUS.

Coy occupied Accommodation in Warehouses on Navy House Quay Port Said, Work Details in Maintenance Area, Port Said as detailed by HQ 30 Gp RPC.

13 Nov 1956. PORT SAID. 4 Offrs, 1 S/Sgt, 4 Sgts, 169 R&F Disembarked ex HMT FOWEY

15 Nov 1956. PORT SAID. 1 Sgt, 21 R&F Disembarked ex HMT DILWANA

19 Nov 1956. PORT SAID. 2 R&F and Coy Vehicles Disembarked ex HMT TEMPLE HALL.

20 Nov to 17 Dec 1956. 4-6 Sections on night work. Remainder as above.

18 Dec 1956. Unit Vehicle and Driver embarked LST CYMERIC.

The following ranks embarked on HMT NEW AUSTRALIA.

RPC – 6 Offrs, 1 WO, 1 S/Sgt, 10 Sgts, 22 Cpls, 225 ORs

RAPC – 1 Sgt

ACC – 1 Cpl, 7 ORs

29 Dec 1956. 522 Coy RPC composed as above disembarked at Southampton at 0530. Arrived Donnington 1500hrs.

30 Dec 1956. The following were released at 1500hrs.

Reservists NSM 21

Reservists REG 40

R/Regs 3

Officer Reservists 1 (Capt Clare)

160 ORs proceeded on Disembarkation Leave.

Unit due to recontinue work on 21 Jan 57: 10 Sections COD and 2 Sections REME

524 Coy

1. Mobilised wef 8 Aug 56 for Operation MUSKETEER and establishment changed to higher establishment. Draft of 67 Reservists received from RPC Depot and Training Centre wef 11 Aug 56, Non Effectives posted out to 196 Coy RPC same date.

GENERAL

The Unit was employed at 1 ESD until 5 Aug 56. On the 8 Aug 56 the Unit was mobilised and moved to TILSHEAD on 23 Aug 56 and remained under canvas at TILSHEAD on the 23 Aug 56 and remained under at TILSHEAD until the 1 Oct 56 when orders were received to return to 1 ESD LONG MARSTON.

Whilst at TILSHEAD the Unit was engaged in military training and all ranks fired their annual range classification course. The MORALE and DISCIPLINE of the Unit was very good, all ranks were pleased at the opportunity of serving abroad and enjoyed the training.

All problems effecting Reservists were dealt with and no serious complaints were received.

Mobilisation of the Unit proceeded smoothly and on 17 Aug 56 the Unit paraded in F.S.M.O. for inspection by Col W C O Phibbs OBE Station Commander 1 ESD.

On 1 Oct 56 the Unit returned from TILSHEAD to 1 ESD LONG MARSTON and remained engaged on Operation MUSKETEER. On the 9 Oct 56 an advance party of one officer and 8 ORs proceeded to 71 Coy RPC TINGEWICK, Buckingham to standby to take over 71 Coy RPC camp.

On 17 Oct 56, One Officer and One Section proceeded to ALBANY BARRACKS, Newport, Isle of Wight for work on loading of ammunition into craft for back-loading to Ordnance.

On 31 Oct 56 orders were received for the Unit to proceed to Southampton on the 1 Nov 56 for embarkation on SS EMPIRE FOWEY for service overseas.

At 1230hrs 1 Nov 56 the Unit had embarked at Southampton fully equipped and complete to establishment with no deficiencies in personnel or stores.

On the 14 Nov 56 the Unit disembarked at PORT SAID and proceeded to billets at Navy House Quay PORT SAID.

On the 14 Nov 56 the Unit fully employed on day and night work on CHERIF and ABBAS QUAYS PORT SAID on dock work and other work in the area of PORT SAID and also guard duties at Prisoner of War Camp, PORT SAID.

On the 17 Nov 56, 2Lt M ANGEL suffered gunshot wounds in right ankle and left thigh, he was admitted to 2 CCS PORT SAID on 17 Nov 56 and evacuated to BMH NICOSIA the 5th Dec 56 and evacuated by air to UK on 9 Dec 56 and admitted ROYAL HERBERT HOSPITAL WOOLWICH 11 Dec 56.

On 14 Dec 56 a draft of 34 ORs from the unit was transferred to 518 Coy RPC Cyprus, this draft were all volunteers.

On the 18 Dec 56 the Unit embarked on SS NEW AUSTRALIA for the UK, the SS NEW AUSTRALIA docked at ORAN, North Africa on the evening of 24 Dec 56 and sailed at 0600hrs 25 Dec 56, no shore leave was permitted. Midnight Services were celebrated abroad the SS NEW AUSTRALIA for all denominations and were very well attended.

Xmas Dinner for ORs was a good show and thoroughly appreciated by all ranks.

The SS NEW AUSTRALIA docked at Southampton on the evening of 28 Dec 56 and disembarkation commenced at 0600hrs 29 Dec 56.

524 Coy RPC entrained Southampton 0824hrs 19 Dec 56 and arrived at 1 ESD LONG MARSTON at 1230hrs,

All Ranks were paid, issued leave passes and warrants and proceeded on leave by 1700hrs with the exception of the reservists

who had to be medically inspected and down-kitted, this was completed by 2030hrs 29 Dec 56 and the only persons remaining in the Unit were the OC, 2IC and a small maintenance staff, the OC and 2IC proceeded on leave wef 30 Dec 56 leaving one subaltern in command of the camp and maintenance party, no great difficulties were experienced and all ranks proceeded on leave and release with extremely high spirits, excellent morale and discipline.

I must pay tribute to all ranks of 524 Coy RPC for their work during Operation MUSKETEER, especially the recalled reservists whose experience conduct and discipline was a great help throughout the operation, the standard shown by the recalled reservists was an example to the Regulars and national Serviceman of the Unit with the final result that the Unit has a happy team spirit and did a good job of work which received very favourable mention from employing services and senior formations.

Maj WH Stread OC

6 PCLU Officers: Capt F C Howie Lt R A Henderson (No diaries exist)

PERSONAL MEMORIES – By Roy (Brummy) NEWEY (22561655)- 263 Company

The start of the Suez Campaign for me started on 13th June 1956. I was discharged from the Colours to the Reserves for 7 years. I got myself a job after 2 weeks leave and settled down to civvy street. We then heard that Nassir had nationalised the Suez Canal. I never thought I would be called up, it was August and holiday time, two days later I got my calling up papers to report to Wrexham, this is where I first went to when I joined in 1951.

We spent 2 weeks there getting jabs and to be kitted out and ID photos taken. I remember it was a Saturday when we left Wrexham to go to Budbrook Barracks in Warwick. We stayed there for a while then went off to Salisbury Plain. We lived in tents until October when it got too cold for tents, so it was back to Budbrook Barracks for I do not remember how many times we were on standby. One day a dispatch rider turned up and said that we would be off near the end of October and to be ready at 0600 hrs the next morning. The Major was right this time, coaches came and took us to Warwick Station where a troop train was

'Lt M Angel suffered gunshot wound in right ankle and left thigh'

waiting to take us to Southampton. We boarded a ship called "The New Australia". It used to be used for immigrants going to Australia until the Government took it over. There was a band playing and women waving their handkerchiefs as we sailed out into the channel. Our first stop was Gibraltar, then on to Malta to take on supplies. We then left the following morning.

It was just about dusk when two destroyers came up with their hooters going. We had one each side of the bow until we got to the Navy landing craft which were waiting. We went down the side of the ship with full kit into a TLC which took us to just outside the docks.

The whole of Port Said seemed to be smoking. All wooden houses on the beach had been destroyed by bombs or shells and when we got to the docks the Navy House was just a heap of smoking rubble.

A Major from the Royal Engineers came and split us up, some went to look after POWs, my squad was assigned to the docks. First we found somewhere to bed down for the night, it was like a big stable with a cobbled floor and very cold at night as we only had one blanket each which we had come ashore with.

Next day we started unloading petrol from barges until it was dark then we had to do guard duty with so many hours on and so many hour off.

We lived on 24 hour rations pack for most of the time. This routine went on for two weeks with us still patrolling the docks at night. The Engineers then supplied a generator to enable a field kitchen to be established and we started to have hot food for which we were very grateful. Other

tasks involved us going to Port Faveid to guard some warehouses and also going out in a boat (lighter) with an Engineer as skipper to get some fresh bread from the "New Australia" in the Bay. Sometimes we would drive up the Tretley Road to work on the Sweet Water Canal and they then found us another billet. This had once belonged to the Egyptian Army and there was half eaten food on the plates that had been left on the tables.

Things then started to slow down with talk of the UN taking over. Most of our time was spent guarding the main gate and patrolling the area. Every night the Tracers used to come over, one night we let a patrol of Royal Scots out into Port Said, when they came back they said their Major had been killed by sniper fire.

We were lined up one day to go to a show on one of the carriers out in the Bay when there was gun fire. Two of the men were hit, one in the leg and the other with bits of concrete in the face, it was the French shooting at things in the water from a boat. After a while the French came into the Docks with their tanks ready to pull out.

We started to load petrol that was to be dumped out at sea with the arms that we had captured. It was to stop the Egyptians getting them. The French left together with a lot of British troops as the UN started to arrive. The French had a parade through Port Said with flags flying and drums beating. Just before we left a Lieutenant from the West Yorks Regiment went missing, I think he was kidnapped.

You were not allowed to go into town unless there was at least a party of two. I do not think he was found until after we

had left.

We were allowed into Port Said and we had a soldier who played the guitar and we had a sing song on a big green where he used to sing all Elvis Prestley songs and a large crowd gathered. There were French and British troops all cheering him on. I wonder if anyone else from 263 Company remembers him.

I left Port Said about the 22nd December. First stop Cyprus to drop of reporters then on to Malta. We got to Southampton on New Year's Eve and got a troop train to Lichfield Barracks where I had some food and a hair cut, as it had not been cut since I had left England!

We then changed our Army money into pounds, given our passes and told we could go or stay until morning, so those that could get trains left.

I got home at half past eight on New Year's Eve, I had not even had time to take my jacket off when there was a knock on the door. It was a neighbour collecting for a Royal Marine who had been killed, name of "Goodfellow". He had been a mate who I used to have a drink with when I was on leave. That put a damper on my home coming and the New Year. ■



Wounds are not always visible

King's Lynn became home to the first contact centre for The Bridge for Heroes

Report: The Bridge for Heroes
Picture: The Bridge for Heroes

IN 2011, King's Lynn became home to the first contact centre for The Bridge for Heroes.

The idea was to have a walk in facility on the high street offering support and advice for service personnel, veterans and their families. The motto of the charity is Wounds are not always visible.

This focuses on the fact that a lot of people are suffering, but not from any obvious injury. The founder of the charity is Mr Mike Taylor, himself a veteran of many conflicts.

Personnel from all forces can walk in for a tea or coffee; they will find the facility is there for them to sit and have a chat with our volunteers. We can provide advice on a vast range of services including war pensions or helping signpost them to other agencies. The help can vary from simply

helping a veteran to fill in a form or chatting to a family who are dealing with a loved one being away on active duty.

The contact centre also has a military education display, including military uniforms, medals and a collection of conflict memorabilia ranging from World War 1 to the present day.

And a charity shop, selling books, DVDs and CDs, both of which are open to the public. The donations received from visitors who purchase goods goes towards enabling us to fund the project.

The running cost of the centre is between £25- £30 per day which is why we fundraise constantly and we always appreciate any financial help.

One of our volunteers is a member of the Royal Anglian regiment. He was severely wounded while on duty in Afghanistan and is currently undergoing rehabilitation at Headley Court. Other people who help out have various reasons

behind why they volunteer and the charity is always looking for more people who can spare a few hours.

We are also looking for professional people who can spare 2-3 hours a month to sit as a trustee on our board, or to take on the position of company secretary. One of the newest subjects that has arisen is the problems faced by long serving personnel having to integrate back into civilian life after many years of a strictly organised regime, due to redundancies.

The future of the centre is bright and over the next few months we are running activity afternoons for our beneficiaries.

There is now the provision for school visits enabling children studying History of Conflict to see the military area and speak to people who were involved.

For any information the staff can be contacted on 01553 760230 or contact@thebridgeforheroes.org The centre is open Tuesday- Saturday 10.00-16.00. ■

Waynes Keep

There are three Pioneer graves in the cemetery

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: SSgt Lewis

WAYNES Keep Military Cemetery in Nicosia is where many of those who died on active service during the Cyprus Emergency are buried.

The colonial authorities established it originally during World War 2. Today the cemetery, two and half miles west of the divided capital on the Myrtou Road, lies in the United Nations Buffer Zone, which separates the Turkish and Greek Cypriot controlled sectors. To the north and west, it is overlooked by the Turkish Army, to the south by the Greek National Guard and to the east by an UNFICYP Observation Post, manned by British soldiers wearing the Blue Beret. Volunteers of the British Contingent - BRITCON - work hard to maintain the cemetery as a respectable field of rest and not the wilderness they inherited in the early 1980s. Three locally employed gardeners assist them.

A shallow well in the cemetery provided adequate water in spring and autumn to keep the cemetery's grass and flowers alive, but in high summer it dried up and the gardeners had to rely on water brought in by military bowsers. Now the Water Board of south Nicosia has laid a mains system and the flowers bloom. There is an ongoing programme of refurbishment. Twice yearly representatives of the Eastern Mediterranean War Graves Commission check on the cemetery's upkeep.

One of these annual visits coincides with the Remembrance Sunday service held there, which organised groups British expatriates in both North and south Cyprus usually attend.

There are three Pioneer graves in the cemetery:

PAL/11838 Pte Paul SINGER who died on active service on 9 Jul 42. He had enlisted at Sarafand, N Africa on 5 Aug 40. (Grave 3.A.12)

Capt (191273) Francis Angel ATTARD-MONTALTO who died on 29 Mar 43 (Grave 1.A.8)

Maur/18082555 LCpl M ENAMALLY who died on 10 Apr 53 (Grave 17.B.9.) ■

Ed Note: Thanks go to the very knowledgeable SSgt Martin Lewis for an excellent tour of Waynes Keep.





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Disbandment Parade

22nd
March 2012





■ Association members on Horseguards

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members marching opposite Horseguards

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Northampton Branch Members before the March

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dusty Bryant is dwarfed by the Kuijper Brothers

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Chatting amongst the ranks

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members after the march in the Civil Service Club

Picture: Paul Brown



■ London Lunch after Garden of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Roy Palmer (Ex WO2) New Town Crier for Mablethorpe, Trusthorpe & Sutton on Sea

Picture: Supplied



■ 39/93 Club, Bill Goode, Dennis Reeves, Les Rowley

Picture: Supplied



■ Wet D-Day Service in Normandy

Pictures: Supplied



■ Norman and Lt Col J Starling at home of author Helen Fry for the 90th Birthday for Mr Colin Anson, a WW2 Pioneer. Article on Page 6.

Picture: Supplied



■ Heather Wood and WO1 Reg Lane. Article is on Page 4.

Pictures: Supplied



■ Garden of Remembrance, 2011

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Garden of Remembrance, 2011

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ledra Palace, Nicosia, Cyprus

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Valentines/Blind Date Night at the MFR

Pictures: Paul Brown



■ Guest of 23 Pioneer Regiment, Op Tosca, Ledra Palace, Cyprus

Picture: Paul Brown



■ A memorable evening with the lads on Op Tosca

Picture: LT Lee Ebsworth



■ Lt Lee Ebsworth

Ed Note: Thanks for the great tour of Centre Troop

Picture: Paul Brown



Picture: Pte Peirson



Picture: Pte Peirson



Picture: Pte Peirson



Picture: Pte Peirson



Picture: Pte Owens



Picture: Pte Owens



Picture: Pte Owens



Picture: Cpl Connelly



Picture: Cpl Connelly



Picture: Cpl Connelly



Picture: Cpl Connelly



Picture: Pte Beveridge



Picture: Cpl Short



Picture: Cpl Short



Picture: Cpl Short



Picture: Cpl Short



Picture: Pte Beveridge



Picture: Pte Beveridge

23 Pioneer had a **Photographic Competition** in Cyprus There were some very good entries, here are a select few...



■ **Commando Speed March Team. They won again... Well done!**
Ed Note: Next year they are going to carry me!
Picture: Supplied



■ **Capt Ross has to control his old Warrant Officers**
Picture: Paul Brown



■ **Checking Pte Dunn's ticket. He came 2nd in Christmas Draw. Well done!**
Picture: Paul Brown



■ **Pte Windspear and girlfriend Hayley getting crowded by Khaki**
Picture: Paul Brown



■ **Clan Ross with Norman Brown**
Picture: Paul Brown



■ **Mickey shares a joke with Brig Capps and Col Wheelton**
Picture: Paul Brown



■ **Long Service and Good Conduct Medals being awarded after the Homecoming Parade. From left to right: WO2 Ellis Langford, WO2 David Williams, SSgt Tony Kirkham, Cpl Jamie Hewitson, Cpl Dave Temple**
Pictures: Paul Brown



OP HERRICK GALLERY







Homecoming Parade

14th April 2012





Grand Père William's War

I found this account fascinating, I hope you, the reader agrees

Report: Jean Riom Picture: Archive
Translation: Christopher Robinson

IN February 2010 the Royal Pioneer Corps Association received the following letter:

Monsieur Jean Riom gave me a copy of a book he had produced containing his grandfather's account of his time in the trenches as a Private in the French Army in 1914-16. He was at Verdun for part of that time. I found it a vivid account, and have been prevailed upon to translate it into English.

Monsieur Riom has both approved my translation and asked me to 'communicate it to those Associations concerned with this slice of history'.

As his grandfather was in the French 'Pioneers' I thought it might be of particular interest to your Association, and consequently I enclose a copy. Since I received Monsieur Riom's approval I sent a copy to the Imperial War Museum which has accepted it for its archive. The museum commented that they have relatively few French accounts of this time.

I would be grateful to know how it is received so that I can tell Monsieur Riom

Yours faithfully, Christopher Robinson

(Ed note: I found this account fascinating, I hope you, the reader, agrees – please let me have your comments)

Preface

Trenches, crapouillots (trench mortars), marmites (shell bursts), Lebel (8mm rifle invented in 1896 and used by the French Army in various forms until 1941) and fatigue parties...the families' ears were inoculated with Grand-Pere William's memories of the 14-18 war.

As a young lad I was lulled off by Grandpa's tales. I knew he had kept a diary of the events, and Maman had corrected his spelling mistakes on the rough notes on the notebooks for maths and physics of the Lycee Edgar Quinet.

Grandpa went to the school at La Brousse until he was eight. His style is a narrative which carried some grammatical

faults. In contrast his handwriting was remarkable. His teacher said any ass could do that.

He had kept black and white photographs of his war service, and had cut out the pictures out of papers and magazines at the time. Perhaps it was because of this I only ever saw his war in terms of black and white, and did so later with the films of the time that were black and white too.

That was so, even when the sky had been blue, the trees and the grass green, and the blood red where people had given their lives.

My first holiday at La Brousse was in 1950, when I was twelve and finished the class at level six. My grandfather was still a proud man, and had shown me, for the first time, his handwritten notebooks of his sixteen days at Verdun. They were remarkable, and even now forty-nine years later, I am still full of admiration.

His tales always followed the same pattern, from the viewpoint of a soldier of the Second Class*. Four years of war, for those that came back, could only mark their lives, and I could well understand how it shaped their religion, their outlook and subsequent life.

'Pepe' had last put his hand to this diary about his departure and mobilisation into the 279th Infantry Regiment when he got to the front at Artois.

He asked me, as he had done with Maman before, to correct his faults in the written French. With the confidence of someone out of the sixth level, I corrected his spelling and grammatical mistakes.

With the passing of the years one holiday followed another at La Brousse, always happy. 'Pepe' still had his memories, and we heard plenty of them among other things when he had his tea after his siesta.

Was it his age? 'Pepe' never made a fair copy of his notebooks while we were in the neighbours' fields getting ready for the hunting season.

'Pepe' loved hunting, true hunting, the sort that had been done at an earlier time

and he made it part of my education. He was a real hunter knowing his game, nature, the make up of cartridges. I was just twelve when he dared me to try his twelve bore. I hit my first pigeon, but I had a sore cheek for two days.

Time passes, and it was in August 1960 while I was doing my military service that I heard that my grandfather had died. He undoubtedly took his war memories with him. My grandmother followed him four months later. A page of my life had been turned.

**A private A First Class was the promotion from that.*

In March 1962 I came back to France with an early three month release to marry Nicole and settle to civilian life.

My father gave me grandfather's maps and notebooks, and family and professional life took over. In 1963 Cleveland Tramrail opened a factory in Luxembourg. I set off from Toussus-le-Noble with my Director General of Fenwick Manutention in a single engine Cessna, and flew at low altitude over the 14-18 battlefields (or some that I knew about). We could see the outlines of the trenches, the shell craters and the effects of the artillery barrages. On my way back we flew near Verdun.

Later on I travelled to Luxembourg by car, and stopped at Verdun. My first visit was as a tourist – cemeteries, the Forts of Douaumont and Vaux, the memorials, but with the recollections of Grandpa's writing in my head.

My subsequent visits were more serious, with a proper map and compass. I looked for and found the Fort de Souville, the woods and ravine of La Caillette (the latter is still sealed off with entry forbidden, as it has yet to be made safe). In 1980 I went to Lorraine, Richmardmenil and Nancy.

I made numerous visits to the battlefields of Verdun, but also to Eparges, Leondrey, Bois le Pretre, la butte de Vauquois, le Viel Armand, Le linge...

Verdun is a sanctuary. Nearly 500,000 perished from the two sides. It is still the height of the horror.

Faced with an attack on the right bank of the Meuse, with the careful preparation of the Germans the French Army was bleeding to death over a sector of several hundred square kilometres, poorly defended by badly armed and located forts, its defensive works of trenches, strong points and barbed wire entanglements stretched to the limit, the French Army was in a weak position.

The German attack was launched on the 21st of February 1916, and made a rapid advance despite fierce resistance by the French. Dousumont, which was as much of a symbol as a defensive fort, fell on the 25th February. The German artillery was markedly superior to the French in the number of heavy guns in this sector. The orders were to hold the ground with no thought of withdrawal. The losses were enormous in the infantry which needed reinforcements and intensive rotations of corps and thus the naming of the road to Verdun the 'voie sacrée'.

Grand-Pere William's diary started on the 20th of March during the rest period at St Andre en Artois. It reads without pauses. Grandpa wrote as he spoke and told of his sixteen days in the trenches, under the intense German bombardment. His thoughts are those of a ranker and a 'poilu' aged thirty-seven, on the chances of surviving (and death), on the officers, and the misery of war.

The release to the public of the military archives off the First World War, made me determined to find out more about the 279th Infantry Regiment. It wasn't until 1997 that I knocked on the door of the Service Historique des Armees de Terre at the Chateau de Vincennes for the first time.

Asking about the 279th all I could get was a list of the rations entitlement of the regiment (which I had already found in Grandpa's papers). There was nothing else. What a deception.

When I made a second visit I had had guidance from a military archivist, and I was able to see the official record of the 70th Division of which the 279th formed part.

Then I had some luck! After a lot of searching I found the official documents from day to day for the sixteen days that the brigade was at Verdun. It was a moving experience to find the orders to attack, the daily reports, the results and conditions of the losses from the shelling, the reports to superiors on the patrols written in pencil on pages from notebooks, the plans and sketches of the trenches with notes about them.

In this mass of information I came across the names of the officers mentioned by my grandfather. Colonel Vincendon, Commandant of the 140th Infantry Brigade, formerly head of the 279th, who according to the writing of William was an exceptionally humane officer.

Lieutenant Colonel Chaufardet, Commandant of the 279th, distant and punctilious in his writing. Captain Maupoil Commandant of the 6th Battalion and taking temporary command of the 5th. A no-nonsense officer who had to manage eight companies in combat.

Travelling through these documents in the archives, I could see the debates that had raged about what to do and the reactions to the daily events, the problems of communication with the artillery, the evacuation of the dead and wounded tying in with the positions of neighbouring units.

Complementing the records of my grandfather I was able to follow the movements, the attacks and counter attacks of the 33rd Army Corps.

The graphic representation of the

organisation of this corps of the army (Nudan group) showed, included among others the 70th Division (General Gallon), part of which was the 140th Brigade (Colonel Vincendon of the Infantry) which incorporated the 279th Infantry Regiment (Lieutenant Colonel Chaufardet). More precisely Grand-Pere was part of the 5th Battalion 20th Company Second Platoon.

The 5th Battalion was immediately put in reserve to the north-east of Fort de Souville in roughly improvised shelter and trenches.

On the 25th of March the battalion was sent to the front line in support of the 226th to the south of fort Douamont. By cross checking I was able to confirm that Grandpa's platoon had been in the trench at Haulville beside the outerworks (from Roman times forts generally had a series of one of more outerworks which were less substantial as an early defence to prevent surprise attack) of the fort at the edge of the ravine of La Caillette.

The 226th had had no attack for a period of five days other than the constant bombardment. The intensity of these were such an immediate attack was anticipated. It came on the 31st of March, with two flame throwers facing the 279th, a trench taken and then regained in the confusion. About fifty Germans were killed.

The attack was renewed on the 2nd of April after a heavy bombardment. The trenches at Haulville ran on a north-south line and were enfiladed, and completely destroyed with heavy casualties of the troops in them. The 269th Infantry and 42nd Chasseurs were annihilated and 110 of the 144th killed.

This part of the sector was less well protected by French counter bombardment and the Germans stormed into the ravine of La Caillette. The French counter-attack was launched by the 74th Infantry Regiment (9th Brigade of the 5th Division General Mangin's), supported by two companies of the 5th Battalion of the 275th, and the reformed survivors of the 269th, 226th and 42nd under Colonel Vincendon.

The attack was maintained, despite heavy losses and half of the ground that had been lost was recovered. It was halted at "the trench of the Chasseurs" in the centre of the ravine of La Caillette. The breach had been stemmed.

Throughout this affair Grand-Pere William had the most unbelievable luck:

1. After being subjected to the attack on the 31st of March that had been repulsed, his battalion had been withdrawn, and relieved by the 'Didier Battalion' of the 269th which had been put in the trench at Hautville with the 42nd Chasseurs, both of which had been annihilated on the 2nd of April.

2. The 17th and 18th Companies of the 5th Battalion of the 279th were sent to plug the breach in the line because they had not been in front at Artois and each one had their turn. The 20th Company (Grandpa's) was held back in reserve at Fort de Souville and put to work on supply the front line with munitions and material.

3. He survived thousands of shells from the German guns, and a few from the French ones.

During my researches at Vincennes I came across a number of documents giving a day by day account of these events. The reports that were made at the time on the position of the units that were engaged, the formal reports and 'debriefings' (franglais was unknown in 1916) corroborate

completely with my Grandfather's writings.

The cold stiltedness of the military terms does not hide the emotions that were aroused by this engagement.

So far as I was able I tried to match my research and the documents I found in the archives chronologically with Grandfather's diary. The quality of the photocopies of some of these documents is poor and it takes an effort to read them, but it is worthwhile for the content.

On the sixteenth day Grandfather arrived at Ligny de Barrois to rest and heard that the division would be heading for the Vosges. The records of the 70th make reference to certain units at Richardmenil. The 279th was to be rested and retrained at Bayon, and to go by Faviere. The retraining was to take place at Saffais which had been transformed to a military camp eight kilometres from Richardmenil. It's a small world! (Jean Riom's note: My great uncle Marc, a cobbler under Grandfather was killed on the 24th August 1914 aged 22 in a bayonet charge at Remereville, ten kilometres north-east of Richardmenil

(Battle of Great Couronne in defence of Nancy). He was reported missing and could well be in the communal cemetery Remereville (1820 Corps) or at Champenous (1651 Corps). In the end the 279th was put back in the line at Thiaucourt-Regneville, but Grandfather had stopped writing.

There! I have cemented my childhood memories of my Grandfather, and this filthy war of 14-18 which had got under my skin, and made me resolve to find out more. It has taken me until my early sixties to get there and finish these pages on the table at La Brousse, a suitable place for a fair copy of Grand-Pere's pocket books.

Poilu, Second Class William Lafrichoud, your grandson salutes you with respect.

La Brousse, February 1999
Jean RIOM

Introduction

It was in Paris in the early days of July 1914. There was trouble in the air. There had been the threat of war ever since the incident at Sarajevo on the second of June. Everywhere people were asking the question "are we going to have a war with Germany?"

I was a cobbler/shoemaker in charge of the shop at 50 rue d'Orsel in the 18th arrondissement. At the end of the month the rent had been paid to the landlord in small notes and five franc coins. Everyone thought they might have a greater need for their gold Louis.

I didn't think there would be a war. I could not believe the heads of state were so bloodthirsty as to let such a catastrophe happen. As a child I had hated war. I had learnt of General Boulanger's campaign to win back Alsace and Lorraine. At least he had the pretext of lots of partisans. He was elected a deputy in 1889 and arrested in parliament in 1891. He killed himself with a bullet through the head on his mistress's grave.

Then there was the Fachoda affair in 1900 against the English government and their Queen which was ended with the entente cordiale. (On the Upper Nile, a detachment of 200 which had set out from West Africa with instructions to stake a claim for France confronted vastly superior British Egyptian forces. The affair was resolved diplomatically between Commandant Marchand and General Kitchener).

'The release of archives of WW1 made me determined to find out more'

We had the coup in Morocco (Tangier, Algier, Agadir) which set us against Germany, but resolved without war. These outcomes gave me confidence. I hated the professional patriots like Barres, Deroulede and the rest as much as the pacifists whose work was to get the votes of electors.

You could describe me as a humanitarian, I was against war but all for people getting on together. I would neither shout "three cheers for the army" nor "to hell with the army". When our neighbours took up arms we had to too.

At the end of July matters got worse. Jean Jaures was assassinated at the cafe du Croissant, in the rue Monmartre by a nationalist fanatic called Vilain. The death of Jaures was a blow to the whole world. One relied on his wisdom to defuse the tension and the talk of war.

Then the mobilisation posters went up. I left two days later. The government might well say "mobilisation does not mean war". The pacifist Gustave Herve, editor of "La guerre social", was drafted to the 19th regiment and sentenced to two years in prison for insulting the flag and defaming the army.

The B list disappeared, everyone had left. This was the list of pacifists who would be interned on mobilisation. False rumours abounded. It was said the head of Maggi dairies had been stopped at the border with a million gold coins in his car.

Hooligans, who for the most part had not left, ran amuck in the streets wielding clubs and smashing the windows of any shops with names from Alsace. All the Maggi dairies were wrecked. Groups formed in the streets predicting the inevitability of war, but that it would be over in a fortnight. We had our 75mm gun, always the bayonet and of course our Russian ally who could crush everything like a steamroller.

This was food for thought. The mere idea of a bayonet made me shudder. I had done my three years' military service, and only had four months training with very little practice with a bayonet. For the most part I worked as a cobbler and was excused exercises.

With this in mind all I had to do was ready myself for leaving on Tuesday, the next day, the second of the mobilisation.

Needless to say my morale was zero.

Mobilisation

It was day two of mobilisation. It was two o'clock in the afternoon and I was at the landing stage at Charenton.

A gendarme pointed to a train "that's for you Neufchateau 52nd territorials". I was astonished to see a line of cattletrucks, marked on the side of one was "40 men or 8 horses". I walked the length of the train hoping to find someone I knew because they were a good lot on the exercises I had been on. I didn't find anyone.

The fellows called up arrived in groups, chatting amongst themselves and pleased to find someone they knew. I didn't see a soul I knew. I decided to get in the wagon beside me. There were several fellows on wooden benches chatting quietly. Among the four who got in together was a great oaf who plonked his bags beside my small parcel on the first bench. He sat there with his head in his hands staring at the floor lost to the world around him.

Then a fresh group got in, they were all in high spirits. "Hey, Parrau," said one of them, a great gangling fellow "haven't you seen Peignaud, you know the big Louis, the mason?" "You know like him I live at

Nogent. I passed his house and saw his wife in tears with their three lads – he'd only just left." "Hang on," said another, "Look over there that's him." They yelled together, Louis, Louis, over here". I saw a bloated great fellow with a face beaming from several glasses of spirits.

"Hello, you lot," he said, "I was stopped everywhere, I thought I was going to miss the train. I know everyone. I wouldn't have wanted to miss the train for the world. We are off this time it's serious. Oh the Germans, they wanted this war they'll see how it turns out." He took up the fencing position for a bayonet and jumped around as though he was in the middle of a parade ground. The gangling chap and I had to tuck our feet under the bench to stop them being trampled on. "That's it we'll get them with our bayonets" we shouted together.

The train set off, rolling through the stations, women, children and the old people all waved their handkerchiefs or their hats. "To Berlin, to Berlin" yelled big Louis and his mates.

As dusk fell the great bloated chap beside me began to eat, or rather drink.

His bags consisted of three flower baskets, and I could see four bottles of white Bordeaux in one of them. He said he wasn't hungry, he talked about flowers and travels. He came from Toulouse and spoke about his wife, his business and their children. It was all mixed up and I could not make head or tale of it. I gave up listening, but I could see he had drunk too much and carried on drinking.

Then I thought it time to have something to eat, but more frugally, a bit of bread and a slab of chocolate with nothing to drink. I wasn't a bit hungry and most of all I was sickened by what was going on around me.

The night came and the bawling stopped. The wagon doors were shut and we settled on the benches. As for me with my head held in my hands, I asked myself if I was dreaming. No sleep came, the bench was hard and the train shook along.

Night drew on, I didn't sleep a wink and didn't stop thinking of the last eight hours. The assassination of Jaures and the wild rumours everywhere. I could see again the mob with sticks attacking any shop with a German or Alsace name. Again there were the crowds wrecking and destroying, among them my neighbour who had called himself an anarchist who is now a great patriot. He's not leaving, he's got a wooden leg. I was stirred out of this by the glugging of my neighbour who was drinking in great gulps. Then I heard him crying as he talked, it was about his little Paul "I didn't hug you or your mother, you were out, I am going to die without seeing you again".

Then I understood what he had been trying to tell me earlier. He was a florist from Toulouse. When he had gone home to say goodbye his wife and son had already left to go to her parents. He had hit the bottle to drown his sorrows.

Then I thought of 50 rue d'Orsel and those dearest to me, my wife and little Germaine. It was all too much for me and I wept as well.

Eventually I dropped off only to be woken up by a cold blast of air. Big Louis and his mates had opened the door wide and were sitting with their legs dangling over the track talking quietly.

We passed a fort, I didn't know the name. A bit further at a station we picked up some gunners with their 75mm. That sent shivers down my spine.

Eventually we came to a large station. It was Neufchateau. We got out before the station. We assembled in a small square. An NCO called out our company. A lieutenant gave us a short talk the men spoke again of bayoneting, we will let them have it with that they said.

We were billeted two kilometres away in a filthy village with a pile of dung outside each house. The platoons and squads were formed up each one dressed differently. The trousers were too tight or too long and one of the jackets and caps didn't fit.

At the office the captain put it to me, "You will be cobbler and tailor to the company and you can sew on stripes as well." Captain, "I don't know how to sew." "You'll learn," he said.

A sergeant called us together to go to the town hall. There were three doctors one of whom was commandant. I complained about my rheumatism. "What's your trade?" asked the doctor "Cobbler" I replied. "Good, you'll do at the depot."

The Depot

The regiment set off towards Toul the following morning. The same evening we left for the depot. We were in the charge of a ridiculous number of NCOs. Like me all the men in the troop had been marked down for the depot by the doctors.

We arrived at the barracks in the dark. We bedded down in a stable on rough and uneven planks without any straw or covers. By midnight we were frozen so spent the rest of the night walking up and down in the yard to warm up.

The next morning we were detailed. I was attached to the 14th Depot company of the 52nd Territorial Regiment. The depot was made up of three companies from each regiment, the 79th of the regular army, 279th of the reserve to make up the 52nd territorial from which reinforcements would be drawn for the front.

We were given our equipment. I got a spoon and fork but no mess tins, and for two days I had my stew out of my tin mug. We bedded down in the training ring for horses without any straw. The barracks was right beside the railway line, and we saw the trains go by crammed with soldiers. On each engine "To Berlin" had been painted in big letters.

Now the initial high spirits had worn off and we nervously awaited the medical inspection. A lot of soldiers took to walking with a stick in the hope of persuading the doctors not to send them to the front. I will only give one example. One morning we were stretched out on the straw in the riding area. A few smart alics were showing off by some risking jumping around. One of the "unfit" fellows comes in and chucks away his stick and joins in with an even riskier leap. A lieutenant takes his name, "You're on the next departure to the front incredible invalid," he says.

One morning a sergeant searches me out to take me to the general stores, he hasn't a clue what for. When we got there I was delighted to see Monsieur Colin, a master shoemaker from the 79th Regiment who had asked for experienced cobblers. He was pleased to see me because he remembered during a spell of twenty three days in his workshop at Nancy I had made a pair of small boots for his son.

I started work straight away, he told me there were 20,000 pairs of lace up boots to make and we were 25 bootmakers.

The wild rumours abounded again. "The Germans cut off the children's hands, and set everything on fire". The 279th regiment had suffered heavy losses at Courbessaux and had almost been annihilated. In short a

‘The Germans wanted this war, they'll see how it turns out’

massive reinforcement of the 279th would be needed.

We spent a fortnight at the depot and the work went well, when we got the order to load all our equipment on to a truck. The depot was to be moved and we were to head for Nevers. The journey took a day and a half and we arrived at Nevers at night. We went through the sleeping town and crossed the Loire to be billeted in a big factory.

I felt ill and was put in hospital. I had succumbed to dysentery. I had a month's convalescence on leaving hospital part of it spent in the country. When I left the others said, "We won't see you again, the war will be over, it's only got another couple of weeks to run".

When I rejoined the regiment I started again at the workshop. I was astonished not to find anyone of my own age. They told me a month ago the depot had been virtually emptied to provide reinforcements for the 14th Regiment. Out of seven hundred men only thirty remained. There was no age bar, the territorials left for active service equally with the reserve.

The workshop had restarted with old territorials helped out on the work with hobnails and heavy stuff, by younger men who had been wounded or ill, evacuated from the front. We now counted 52 experienced workmen (bootmakers, saddlers and cutters).

Always the wild rumours were running. We would be transferred to the front. I was often asked by the others to question the boss about this. He always replied, "It's not going to happen you are staying here with me."

In February we learnt we would be leaving Nevers. In fact in March the whole depot left for Decize. We weren't badly off, the boss had requisitioned a good place on the banks of the old Loire, but it was infested with rats. It was a fishing area from all the banks even from the workshop, and on Sundays everyone went fishing.

It was too good to last, In July the whole of the army in the workshops was recalled cobblers, tailors, the lot. We were to undergo training preparatory to being sent to the front. In September reinforcements were made up. I was part of them and sure enough put in the 279th Infantry Regiment at Artois.

My arrival at the Front

We moved to Daubigny in the Pas de Calais. We were on the move for two days and nights, eventually arriving at four in the morning, and unloading quickly. With packs on our backs in columns of four on the road under the orders of a warrant officer, who like us was part of the reinforcement. The old hands from the front who knew the land pointed out the way to go.

My chum Huguenin wanted to initiate the greenhorn that I was at this stage of the war at the front. "Do you hear the guns? Those flashes on the right that's Arras, straight ahead its Lens. Hold on – you see those glimmers, they're the last flares for the night, dawn will be here soon".

A bit further along the road we passed a line of wagons. When we got level with the first one the driver stopped and called to someone he knew among us, "Hey, Birrol, you haven't got half way." "You still in the supply troops?" "Like you mate". "What's the news?" "Not much besides the 140th, they've advanced four kilometres, be seeing you".

"You see", said Huguenin, "All these wagons are part of the supply train going to get the grub for the whole regiment so they

are always in the rear. Did you see how cocky he is. You can see chum, to them, things are going well, an advance of four kilometres. Him, he's done the four kilometres on his backside, he doesn't have to risk his skin. As for those alongside the 140th, there could be thousands of dead and wounded strewn around the ground where they have gone through, and today or tomorrow someone is going to have to pick up the pieces, then I bet you he'll only hear good of it and have a big smile."

We came to a frightful dump, houses with thatched roofs and mud walls, streets full of mud and water. What hit me at the edge of the village was a military cemetery. A great portico had been put up at the entrance inscribed in big letters with "Salute those who have died for their country".

I couldn't help shuddering at the thought that I might end up at somewhere like that.

We had to halt to await orders. People we knew appeared from everywhere, the tailors, the cobblers all from the depot who had left for the front with us. My old mate Jacob came over and shook me by the hand, we were pleased to be together again. We learnt that we were going to set up a camp, and we were no longer part of the 279th but with a battalion of the 141st Regiment of the Line or rather part of the depot of the division in which we would work according to need.

Then we were dumped like a load of sheep in a dilapidated old barn, and we each marked our place with our packs. My neighbour was Glasdus, like me a cobbler, and father of five children. At the workshop we weren't particularly close, but here I was the one he knew best, and he swore he wouldn't leave me. A barber also became a good chum.

We were called to eat. Each morning and evening it never varied, it was beef stew. Some said "tomorrow it will be different stew and beef".

Next day I was detailed for the work party to get wood. We went to a nearby copse where there were a lot of dead branches. When we got back we found the barber at work. He didn't lack customers. Haircuts were badly needed, and he was pleased to get a few sous.

In the afternoon I had noticed plenty of dandelions in the nearby field, so I went and picked them. I got some oil and vinegar from the grocer and made a salad in my mess tin. "I'll pay for some wine", said the barber, "But let's go to the bistro to eat our stew and we'll feel much better." "Done!" The first bar was OK. We found a table with a litre bottle and three glasses. Others settled in beside us drinking wine too. When we came to pay we had had three litres, but one of the lads slid an empty bottle under the table and we only paid for two.

When we came out the barber said to me, "That's made an impression on me, you can see in reality, it's not us it's the others who are the villains, if you'd asked for a better wine, they would have given you the same wine bottled a week ago and charged probably 2.50 to three francs! All the bars are like that mate. It pays the army to exploit the simple soldier. Anyway I've no conscience you've got to be smart all the time."

The next day Jacob gave me a freshly filled pipe. "Have a smoke", he said, "You can't relax without smoking, it's time you

learnt, it'll pass the time and relieve the boredom." After several puffs my stomach began to heave. "That's enough", he said, "Have another go this evening". "Look mate", I said to him, "Keep your pipe have my ration of tobacco and smoke it if it gives you pleasure. As for me I don't need to smoke just because I am at the front."

We did not stay long at Gauchin-le-Gal as it appeared the division was to be relieved from the sector. The same evening a battalion from the 360th camped by us. We had a visit from an old cobbler who had been sent to the front for punishment. He was complaining bitterly. He was accustomed to moving every few days, and knew several tricks to disguise himself to get away, but today it hadn't worked and the NCOs were taking it out on him.

The next day with our packs on our backs we went back to Extraie-Gauchy and on another three kilometres. We put up at a big farm on the edge of the area. We learnt that the 279th was to camp there that day. That was lucky, as I had twenty francs to give to the son of the master cobbler.

Going into the street we were questioned by a soldier of the 279th. It was Lepreux, foreman cobbler, who had worked with us at the depot. "I've landed a cushy number, I'm cobbler to the regimental train", he said. Turning to Glandus he added, "You would have the right job with your five boys, but I'm well in with the lieutenant which is how I got the job. Glandus replied, "I hope they will send me back, I never wanted to leave the depot, but there is a lot of string pulling round here!"

Entering a bar we found a sergeant-major and a furrier at a table. I asked which company they came from, was it the 20th? This was a bit of chance as one of the lads at the depot had given me a letter for the furrier of the 20th. I gave it to him. "But it's not for me", he said, "I'm Camus and this is for Spert who is also in the 20th but as a corporal".

"We had better hop it", put in the sergeant-major, "Here comes the 5th battalion". We had hardly got outside when

'We had drunk three litres of wine but we slid a bottle under the table and only paid for two'

the questioning started, "Hey Glandus, Hey Lafrichoud!" It was the youngsters who had helped at the workshop.

Among them was little Weiss, the saddler, friendly but serious, he came out of the ranks to shake our hands. We had trouble recognising him he was in such a state. It was a pitiable sight covered in mud from head to toe. "You see I'm still here, wounded at

the start of the war with a bullet in the thigh. Yesterday I was buried under the muck from a shell, but came to no harm. I've had some pretty awful moments."

"Hang on", he said, "There are the guns of the 37th going by, you should see my son Colin". He had hardly spoken before we saw him. He too broke ranks and came over to shake our hands. He had spotted Glandus with his big black beard which stood out, then turned to his father who arrived to join us. I gave him his twenty francs. "We'll meet up this evening", he said, "I can't stop now".

When we got back to the farm we could see the stew was ready, a sergeant called out, "You over there, what's your name?, Good I've been looking for you. You can stand guard over the stew. We are forming into sections and squads, you will be under Corporal Keller, get your orders from him".

We didn't have much trouble finding him. As soon as we had had our stew we changed guard and left. The whole section

went off to a crossroads. Here's the instructions, "Stop everyone, ask for the password and if they haven't got it hold them".

There were several of us and the duty wasn't hard, luckily there were a couple of haystacks and one had already been taken apart so we had straw for our beds.

The next day we watched the French and German planes spiralling above us. We could count the number of shots they fired in each engagement. Each one left a little white cloud behind it. Sometimes we counted a hundred shots fired at the same plane which carried on flying as though nothing was happening.

That evening the guard duty was stood down and we went back to the farm. After our stew several of us went into the countryside. Next day was an exercise, training for everyone, fencing with bayonets, stomach crawl over the ground. Our Corporal was alright, he told us he had followed a squad of officer cadets and they hadn't impressed him. He wouldn't be looking for promotion. He was a teacher from Neufchateau in the Vosges.

After we had had our stew a new order came, we were to move to another hamlet Tincques. We got there in the evening and billeted at a farm a little outside the place. Nearly everyone was able to get shelter in an enormous barn.

At reveille we were astonished to see three quarters of our chums running around in a big meadow. They were looking for field mushrooms, horses had been grazing there, and the mushrooms were everywhere as they pushed through the soil with the first rays of sun. For the next hour everyone mucked in in groups cooking the harvest in mess tins.

At the side of the barn was a big walnut tree where the nuts were still green, but not for long. Sticks and stones were thrown into the tree to bring the nuts down. The farmer's wife yelled at us, but it didn't do any good. Some fine pear trees got the same treatment.

We settled down by the evening and decided to look around the place. It was the same as other villages, having houses with thatched roofs, the more expensive ones in brick. There was a brasserie selling beer at ten centimes a glass. We spent four days here, exercises every day and a route march, how we learnt to march!

The fifth day we got more reinforcements who crammed themselves into the barn beside the meadow. We blocked up the doorway and stuffed all the holes with straw. The new arrivals quickly settled in as they were tired from the journey.

It was usual to give the big door a few hefty kicks when we wanted to come in in the evening. One or two fellows would pee in the doorway. One fellow almost got the head of a new lad who was stretched out outside. The barber leapt to the doorway, "You swine you would pee on a mate, if I was him I'd belt you one". The other merely continued kicking the door furiously, "Open up if you want to do anything about it". "Come round you loafer and you'll have my hand round your throat". We saw a poilu (private in the infantry) in shirt sleeves come in, "Who's going to kick me up the arse?" "Me", said the barber. "Try it you won't get away with it", he said landing a punch.

We got between the two of them and got them apart. A sergeant who had seen the brawl came to see what the trouble was.

"He's to blame", said the man in shirt sleeves. It turned out he was a corporal and instructor. The sergeant was forced to punish the barber. The reason for giving him a week in clink was to maintain good military order.

Again we were to change place. A regiment from the division was to come here and we were to move to Bagneul-en-Coraille, a miserable dump.

One morning Glandus gave me "Le Petit Parisien". "Here, have a look", he said, "They want to employ the fathers of families where there are five children, that's encouraging". He asked me to write a letter to his Deputy (Member of Parliament) and thanked me for my help.

Every day Glandus went to the office. He was questioned by Cpl Deguan an instructor who worked there. "We won't be here long", he told me one morning, "They're going to form working companies with the latest arrivals and the rest of us will rejoin the regiments of the division". They made a company of 120 men and called it Recovery of Equipment Company. Its task was to pick up rifles, knapsacks, etc.

That company left and they made a second one, but didn't say what the work would be. I was part of it with Glandus and Huguenin. Our corporal and Jacob rejoined the 279th Regiment. We left early next morning and set off to Mont-St-Eloi. It's a fair step said the old timers. After Aubigny we passed by a military cemetery. A pal said to me, "Look at that, they call it civilisation, there must be thousands of wooden crosses there."

Ahead of us we could see the towers of Mont-St-Eloi. An old hand came up with a story. "You see half of the towers are destroyed. It used to be an observation post where Commandant Julien directed his batteries to shell the Boche positions. The Boches spotted it and shelled the post leaving it like that. Since then their lines have withdrawn several kilometres and they don't aim at the towers any more, but it doesn't stop them shelling the area."

Eventually we got there. What a hole, all the houses were gutted. We stopped at a crossroads to await orders, and had an unexpected visit. Our chum the barber. "My troubles are over," he told us, "I've been acquitted and the President of the Council, the Commandant of the 44th Chasseurs, has got me a change of regiment, and has taken me with him as barber. Now I am with the divisional hospital, I lost nothing."

Our officer came back and we went on again with our packs on our backs. We went through another village, had a break, and went on again. We marched in groups of ten, spread apart. We were in a danger zone. The old hands laughed, "We're not bothered – it's those two lieutenants who are in a funk."

Half an hour later we got to our new home Berthonval Farm (it had previously been an agricultural college) only the walls were standing. We went down into the cellars. "Sort yourselves out", we were told by the NCOs. Glandus and I found a spot at the bottom of a big cellar. We were tired and stretched out on the straw which smelt a bit mouldy. We had hardly got to sleep when there was a yell "Save your rations – hang your lunch bags on the books in the walls or they'll be gone", shouted one of the seasoned troops. There were big rats everywhere leaping about and even running over our bodies. Glandus was so

terrified he wrapped his legs in a piece of tent canvas.

Towards midnight I was woken by Glandus. I went out into the courtyard, "Come and look and listen" he said. There were several of 75s (the main French artillery was 75mm calibre guns, the Germans used 210, 105 and 77 mm, the size of the shell indicates who is firing) firing in salvos. Further off we could make out the Front Line from the trace of the flares. What a firework display! "Don't hang about", said a Captain, "A shell could fall any moment and the 75s pack a punch". We had the next day to sort ourselves out but we didn't so much as go near the straw. We settled in the kitchen with the washing.

One of the lads slipped and fell in a hole. He had a bad sprain, and we all envied him going off in an ambulance.

In the evening we were called together in front of the loading dock of the dairy. It was the most substantial of the buildings with the best cellars. The two lieutenants and staff sergeant had taken it and it housed the office.

The Commandant addressed us, "I've called you together to tell you the work we have to do. Our job is to bring back bodies. We need forty stretchers which you'll have to make with these poles and wire lattices. There will be twenty four men and every day they will go into the lines to look for forty bodies. The rest of you will work in the cemetery. I'm now asking for twenty four volunteers". Not a hand was raised. "Listen these twenty four volunteers will get coffee, grog, a slab of chocolate and sardines in oil before they set out in the mornings." "And plenty of other things I'd rather not say", murmured a joker behind us, "Does he think we're idiots". The Marseillais (would be played at a military funeral) murmured another.

Not a hand went up. "Alright", said the Commandant in an angry voice, "We'll choose – staff sergeant get the stretchers made up".

After our stew (beef and soup) the sergeants came up with a list of 80 names. Glandus was one of them. The twenty four men had to get up at three a.m. The rest were to assemble later in the morning for the cemetery.

Next day at three a.m. the work party for the bodies left. Glandus was pretty fed up at it he would have preferred to stay with me. At seven o'clock the rest of us paraded and it was our turn to set off for Mont-St-Eloi. At a dump we picked up picks and shovels. A sergeant told us, "It's not long since I've seen a corpse and we'll see some today alright."

We were led from a crossroads at the farm at la Motte. On a little plateau there was the beginnings of a cemetery. "That's it", said the Sergeant, "Look over there". We had already smelt the stench coming along the road, there must have been at least fifty bodies. It stopped our hearts. Several of us turned our heads to avoid looking.

A troop of territorials came up the same way to work. Then a corporal stretcher bearer and four men put us to work. Huguenin opted to dig the graves and I filled them in once the bodies had been put in them. I'd understood all the dead were given coffins – what a lie.

Here's what happened I saw it with my own eyes – two stretcher bearers pick up the identity tag, one reads out in a loud voice the name, Christian name, place enlisted and army number. Then they empty the pockets, and spread out on a cloth on the ground listing watch, wallet,

etc, and put in an envelope with a label. The corporal with his sleeves rolled up, is smoking a large pipe. He's got a book in his hand and makes out labels one of which is stuck in the end of a long stake. The body is put back on the stretcher, taken to the grave and dumped in it. We are given the label which is put at the end of the grave once it is filled in. Later it will be replaced with a wooden cross. There is a communal grave where all the unidentified bodies are lumped in together.

At the end of the day we all went back for the stew. Glandus seems half mad. He says to me, "Poor old pal, you must never do the job that we had to do this morning, it's horrifying and exhausting".

At the same moment we were called together to be told the next day the whole company would be gathering the corpses and there would be no work party at the cemetery. The lieutenant also called for a cobbler. All the cobblers put up their hands, there were a dozen of us. "Lieutenant, I've got five kids", says Glandus. "OK", he replies, "You can stay to work here".

A chum says it had been hard work picking up the bodies in the morning. He told us to take the thickest strap from our pack, fix it to the handles of the stretcher and loop it round the back of the neck. That would make things easier, a territorial had shown him how.

Like the day before we were up at three, coffee, grog and we left two by two on a track towards the road to Bethune, then 'the boyau de France' the main supply trench. We were led by a stretcher bearer called Mouton. All of a sudden we stopped. We had come to a point where trenches crossed. "We could get caught by cross fire", the Sergeant commented. "Funk" muttered a hardened old soldier. Shells started to whistle over our heads and we halted.

Mouton climbed out of the trench, "Come on all of you there are enough for everyone!" We climbed out on to the open ground. There were already some who had loaded up and left at speed. A flare lit up "Quick", said the other stretcher bearer, "Into a hole". We leapt into a deep shell hole. There were already three bodies in it. "Come on, grab him", said the other fellow. I took the shoulder but it wasn't easy and my grip slipped. "Here take him by the feet and hurry up it's not good here". I had another go and got the body on the stretcher. We left as quickly as we could tangled in barbed wire and got back to the trench. Phew we'd made it.

We were all there and set off in single file with about 60 stretchers. We followed the cross trench then joined the main supply one. Gosh it was heavy and we walked badly. My companion was shorter and we could not keep in step. Now we could see our burden. It was a man of about twenty-eight, a fine fellow about seventy kilos. His chest was completely bare, and he had three obvious wounds one above the knee, one in the arm and a big hole in the centre of his chest.

We reached the edge of a road and put down our load (that night wagons would come to get them). We were at Neuville St Waast. Just beside was the remains of a sugar factory. There was nothing but holes and bits or iron. Then we passed through La Tinette, how sad, the houses in ruins and the trees mangled. The shell of a 75 was lodged in one of the trunks when it had not exploded.

We got back to the farm as quickly as we could. No one was missing at roll call. A surprise awaited us, we were given really

hot tea. We were tired to death and after a good wash stretched out on the mouldy straw with the rats and fleas. We were done for.

The cooks were low on wood so we organised work parties to the woods of Berthonval nearby. There were two heavy guns in the woods and we weren't allowed to gather wood anywhere near them. Some of the others did better. They pulled down the walls of the farm and dragged out the beams.

Every other day we had our painful task. We cleared our area of bodies and were redirected to the supply trench towards the cavalry getting near the flank of the 140th. We didn't have to carry the dead so far to get to the edge of the road to Bethune.

I had changed partners. I was now with a fellow from the Auvergne who was the same size and we got on well together. The mornings of the work party he never failed to call me, "Laferchoud, are you there?" He could never pronounce Lafrichoud.

On our new patch there were more dead than ever. One morning at a crossing of the trenches we came across seven bodies piled on top of the other. They were all youngsters, part of the 402nd and 404th Foot Regiments. Often as we came back we would pass a work party of a regiment in the line. "Go by", they would say as they paused and turned away so as not to look at what we were carrying.

One morning I noticed that my partner was feeling low. In a rest in the supply trench he said to me, "Can you believe my poor Laferchoud what a miserable job we're doing? The grief of it all, oh, if the mothers, the grandparents, the sisters and girl friends could see what we carry, all those poor little ones that had been cared for, cherished. All these lads had been reared, taught, brought up, learnt a trade. Lots of them had girlfriends or were married, they were what made the family, now there's nothing, they've all been killed."

"You see, I've got a brother and brother-in-law, I've been wounded in the leg (he had drunk a little) yet I'm still here, and there at home in the country I've a wife and two kids".

"You know what I'd like, that they stopped the war, if only for a week, and let the German and French mothers see over our sector and the one at Champagne. If they did that I believe it would be the end of the war! But it wouldn't happen, and we're stuck in this trench waiting for a shell to burst on us". I saw him wipe a tear away quickly with the back of his hand.

"Don't let it get you mate", said one of the others, "We've all got cold feet".

On the way back to the road to Bethune we were surprised to come across the divisional chaplain. It was the first time we had seen him. He popped a mint pastille in the mouth of everyone.

It had been raining for several days making it difficult to walk. We often had water and mud up to the knees. There was a big pool of water in the farmyard, and when we got back from the work party we used it to clean up. We'd already got wet feet and our legs were soaked so there was nothing to getting wet again.

At the entrance to the cellar a fire burned day and night, but thanks to a partly blocked vent, it didn't spare us from being smoked. We used it to dry ourselves and to soften and shape aluminium, as one by one, we had all taken to making bracelets.

When we were out and about we never missed picking up the fuse cases from the Boche shells. When we had a rest day it was a veritable jewellers' workshop.

Some of the other fellows had jobs to do at Mont-St-Eloi. We had a rum one on that. As soon as he got in from the work party he went off with big flasks laden like a mule. When he came back he was plastered. He had a good voice and he told us he sang in the bars on the way and got paid with drinks. But the blokes reckoned the wine in the flasks was pretty awful. One day they followed him and surprised him scooping up water from a ditch and mixing it with the wine, that gave him a

daily bonus of two to three litres. It goes without saying we have been vaccinated against typhoid and it had given us immunity!

It rained heavily for five days, and there was no way we could go out for the bodies. We weren't able to get the way clear. We were

put at the disposal of the Genie (Army Engineers equivalent to the Royal Engineers) to clear the supply trench and carry supplies to the front lines, duckboards, grids, iron sheets, etc.

When the better weather came back it was the same work again for us. There weren't so many bodies and we waited in the cavalry trench while Mouton looked over the ground where we were to work. He called us and we followed him through several trenches, there was good moonlight. Mouton found himself on the earth. "Here ten stretchers", he called. We climbed over the parapet as quickly as we could, there were a dozen bodies. My partner was a half pint and he'd lost a leg. "Quick, Quick", he said, "Hurry up".

Just then a red flare went up, there we were standing upright in front of the Boche. "Heaven help us" said Mouton, "They'll attack".

I was back in the trench in two bounds, and at that moment there was a hail of shells all around us. I wanted to rescue those left behind, but wasn't sure what to do. I took the trench facing me, but had only gone fifty metres when I found the sides had caved in and I couldn't get by. Then I saw there was a little hole at the side of the trench, partly blocked by sandbags. I saw salvation and went head first as flat as I could and slid inside.

How long it went on! Would it ever end! What a bombardment, what on earth was happening? I could hear the explosions behind in front, at the sides, I thought I was done for, but the day broke and the firing stopped.

I realised that straight in front of me there was another hole just like mine. I saw someone looking at me, at length he recognised me, and came over, there was a bond between us as he too was a cobbler (his name was Galland). We were badly off in the hole, there was barely room for one man. He was half mad and didn't want to leave. So I pushed off, but he followed me. I badly needed someone to guide me. I went back along the trench where we had left the stretchers, abandoning the bodies. I found I was at the cavalry trench. We went on to the edge of the road to Bethune and found Huguenin there. "But which way are you heading. You're on the wrong side of the road, look at those signal wires and which way they run, it's the opposite direction. He managed to convince us and we ran. We got to the front line where there was a company of Chasseurs (Light Infantry) with their packs on their backs

'Every other day we had the painful task of clearing our area of bodies'

and with bayonets fixed.

A sergeant asked what we were doing there. He told us the Boche had taken part of their trench and they were preparing a counterattack. "Don't hang about", he said, "Get back to the farm at Berrhonval.

We did an about turn at high speed, but had to take refuge as the Germans were shelling behind us. The men from the work party came down the steps of the ladder into the shelter. "If you are going to Berthonval stay in the trenches all the way, don't go into the open, make no mistake the road to Bethune is being shelled".

We left taking the route we'd been told to follow. We had to stay in the trenches because in front of us a battery of 75s were firing hammer and tongs. They were well camouflaged but the Boches had spotted them, because after each salvo we could see baulks of timber four metres long flying through the air for fifty metres.

Eventually we got to the farm, where they were counting those who had got back. At supper at ten o'clock we were five short and there was one wounded. He had been caught in the open, and stayed close to his stretcher, he'd got shot in the back and was evacuated. After supper a corporal and a soldier went off to find out what had happened to those missing, but didn't discover anything. During the night the missing ones appeared at the farm. They had been trapped between two points where the trench wall had collapsed. They weren't able to get out in daylight and had to wait for nightfall.

The following day we went back to look for our stretchers. We carried on at our grisly task for several days until heavy rain stopped us again. Once again we were to be given different work to do. On one day the whole company worked at the cemetery. In the field beside it there were four hundred corpses, what a sight!

Another day we were again put under the Genie. We had to carry all sorts of stuff to the line. We were at the supply dump on the road to Bethune when the shelling started. It was the first day our lieutenant had been with us. The staff sergeant of the Genie turned to him and said "I think they're aiming at us".

The first party went off with duckboards. The lieutenant told them to stick to the road as the trenches were flooded. A mate asked me if I could carry an iron reinforcing grill with him. "That's fine with me", I replied, "But only if we stick to the trenches, I'd rather get wet feet than be killed on the road". "Me too", said the mate and we went off with our grid. We were among the last to go, we got to the road and had just set foot in our trench when a salvo of 105 shells hit the road a hundred metres away right on the work party. There were three killed and several wounded. One of those killed was a father with three kids.

The two of us dropped our grid and dived for shelter each going to his own hole. The work party had vanished like magic. Now the boche was firing 77 shrapnel, then it stopped. We weren't leaving our holes for anything. We saw the lieutenant go by waving his cane wildly. He called out to the NCO in charge of the work party. The NCO was in a hole too, and kept quiet and after the lieutenant went off, he got us together in a big crater near the road. "We'll wait here for the main party", he said, "And then we'll go back together, there's no point in getting killed

for some grids.

The lieutenant would have done better to stay in his cellar, at his fireside, smoking like the others. What happened was entirely his fault, making the work party take this route in broad daylight right out in the open showed a remarkable lack of intelligence.

The rain continued to fall continuously and it was awful to see it falling on the lines we had to relieve. We had to walk on great mounds of mud.

It was about a month since Glandus had asked me to write a letter to the secretary of the socialist party at Nanterre, where he was a member asking him to take up his case. He had had a polite letter back saying it was a serious case and the deputy was taking it up on his behalf, soon he would be transferred to the rear. Glandus kept asking me about it.

One day I said to him "Look, old boy, if you think you can count on people like that, you are going to have to wait a long time. Your deputy doesn't have much interest in you, he's like the others, he's busy enough pulling strings for the shirkers of all shades, friends, parents, mere acquaintances. "You're a misery", he said. "But bear in mind the day you leave here won't have anything to do with them", I replied.

The weather changed and there was a frost. We left on the work party to recover bodies once more. Now we had to look for and recover the bodies that had been buried by the debris thrown up by the shellfire. When we came back we had to have a load every time so we resorted to cheating. We picked up a couple of legs, two arms, a cap, a helmet, and arranged them on the stretcher. When we passed the sergeant on the road to Bethune (they never came with us) they saw blue uniform and were satisfied.

One day Mouton and I brought back six bodies that had been there since May, on others we could only find fragments of bone, a few bits and pieces and papers and identity tags. Some days we found nothing. We then went to the territorials' zone.

One day we were told the work was done and the company would be dissolved. Next day we were told we would be going back to our respective regiments immediately. We left the same day, Glandus, Huguein and I and a number of others rejoined the 279th.

In the Line at Artois

We went back to Fervent-Capelle on the army train. The regiment was still in the line so we put up near the area hospital.

We spent the night in a wooden barrack hut and had to sleep on the ground without any straw. It was so cold Glandus was convinced his feet were frostbitten. That's to say he wanted to be evacuated, but after we had helped him with a massage of alcohol everything was much better and he decided to come along after all.

After our stew we went off on another army train to Cambigneuf. There we had to clean out a barrack hut and were given clean straw. I came across a friend from the same part of France, we had been together at the depot. He had a tale of woe, his wife had left their three children, and he hadn't a clue where she had gone. Luckily his own parents were looking after the lads, but they weren't young any more. "At least I've had a bit of luck here", he said, "I saw the Chaplain of the division one day and told him my problem, and asked him if he

could do something for me, perhaps have a word with the Colonel, Well it worked, I've been moved to be a driver for the machine gun company."

The 279th Infantry Regiment went into the lines in the night. Next day we were paraded outside the barrack hut, Captain Carlin the commandant of the rear unit assigned us to the companies. Beforehand he asked us if we had any preferences. Glandus and I opted for the 20th, Huguein asked for the 22nd. The Captain went to check the list when he saw no-one had asked for the 18th. "I don't see why", he said, "It's a good company with a fine Captain". Two hands went up, however he needed four men, so chose two others. They were long servers, who had said they wouldn't join the 18th.

Five of us rejoined the 20th at Camblin-Abbe, where we found the 5th battalion camped. We were made welcome at the office and the captain was relieved to see three old hands. Glandus explained his position, "You haven't come here as a reinforcement," said the Captain, "Sergeant-Major, make a note, he is not to go to the front line, put him in the cookhouse".

We were assigned to the 2nd section of the 7th squad as we wanted to be with our Corporal instructor and he back with our friends. The six rest days went very quickly, then the battalion was to go back in the lines for four days, but not the front line.

We went off in the afternoon, making a stop at Mont-St-Eloi where we ate. Then we left our packs at the farm between Mont-St-Eloi and Berthonval. We went directly towards the road to Bethune where we bedded down in a big shelter under the road. It was an old first aid post. Now we were to use it as a base for the work parties.

In the night that followed there was a tremendous storm, and the water built up on the road to such an extent that it poured into our shelter and flooded half of it. What a frightful night crammed in together jammed shoulder to shoulder.

Next day it was everyone on a working party. This was our work. We were to go to the metalled track at Becauville, which crossed the road. The carts had been pulled by horses, but it was too dangerous for them so they were to be replaced by men! Several of us were put to each wagon and we pushed them to Souchez. But it needed care, the track was riddled with shell holes and we had to hang on to the wagons so as not to fall in them. They were full of water and none of us wanted a dunking. Twice during the crossing I slipped into a hole in water up to my waist.

Eventually we got back to the shelter, and the next morning we were woken by a boche bombardment showering our batteries of 75s. Some of the shells contained tear gas. It made us weep too as we weren't far off and the wind blew it in our direction. It reminded me of peeling onions and shallots.

For three nights we went out on all sorts of work, then we were relieved on the fourth and went to camp at Chatel. We arrived after midnight and our section had to sleep in a sheep pen with no windows. I was astonished to see the old hands show their dissatisfaction by bleating like sheep. The NCO told them to stop, but they carried on even more "Bas. Baa. We are sheep..baa.." Eventually we were housed elsewhere in an old barn full of leaks where we were woken next morning by streams of water trickling on our faces.

We left Gamelin-Labbe for six days in the trenches. We knew we would be going to our usual sector. Leaving at midday we

'Shells hit the road 100 metres away killing three and wounding several'

arrived at St Eloe at 4p.m. where we stopped at a farm without a name. We were reaching the danger zone where we could cop a packet from some heavy shelling.

When we go to the road to Bethune we were told we would first be going into the second line. We followed the main supply trench which at first seemed pretty clear, but after a kilometre we could not go on. It was mud and water up to our knees. Once we were in it we had to hang onto ropes to pull ourselves out. We walked in single file each one on the heels of the other and we held our rifles by the butt for something to lean on. Several of the squad fell into deep holes that were concealed by the water. Fortunately we weren't shelled, and with some difficulty we made the fifth line. We spent a day and two nights there. The section had to make the best of it. It was at a place where the trenches crossed and all the sides had fallen in, any shelter there had been had collapsed. No-one passed the night without discomfort. Some platforms had been built at the bottom of the trenches at knee level and braziers had been put in the open air, but when it poured with rain nobody wanted to get close to them. It seemed to fall as slush.

The stew arrived. It was hot when it came, but by the time we ate it each mouthful was cold. Some of the lads had found a bit of shelter, but there was only space for ten packed tightly. Others built a makeshift cover on a ledge with a couple of pieces of wood and a bit of tent canvas, but the ground was so saturated their backs and buttocks were soon soaked. Again we were lucky not to be shelled. But Captain Fontaine snored like an engine.

As for me, I found a tiny refuge in the command post. There was a heck of a draught and a fine rain fell incessantly. I wrapped my tent canvas round me for protection. I was hardly able to sleep a wink, I was frozen stiff and had to slap myself to stay warm.

About two in the morning the stretcher bearers brought in a man from the front line – frozen solid. He had to go into the command post which doubled up as the first aid one. I took advantage of the commotion to slide down the ladder about twenty rungs. There were the Commandant and the company officers ten metres underground. It was OK down three, no fear from the shelling. I still couldn't sleep, it was damp down there and I was numb in the backside, I was better off outside.

At six in the morning everyone was on the working party, we had a grog, a mix of rubbishy spirit and cheap wine, and we all left carrying a spade. We were to clear the main supply trench from the front line to the fifth one back. In order to do it we had to go up to the open ground as the trench was full of water.

It was hard work, the rain fell without stopping and the side of the trenches kept caving into the trench, sometimes revealing corpses concealed in the muck. Here there might be a head sticking out with a bullet wound in the forehead there a couple of feet sticking out, over there an arm hanging on a ledge. I couldn't help shuddering. One of the lads asked the NCO if it was alright to leave corpses like that. "Yes", was the reply as he moved on.

At ten we stopped work to go to lunch, some lunch, last night's stew heated up and a little camembere to share between six. The meal didn't take long, and at noon we started work again and kept at it till nightfall. The stew was the same as the day before. In the early hours I was able to slip down the ladder to the command post, but

I wasn't there long as these gentlemen kept coming and going and weren't very pleased to see me there.

At half past eleven I was sent off on an errand to get some coal and flares. And in consequence I was excused working party the next day.

Next day the same work as the day before. I'd been excused because of the work the night before, but there was no point in hanging about. I was able to find refuge in a munition shelter with two other lads who had been excused duty by the major. I had just got my eyes shut when the captain, commandant of the battalion, came in. "What are you doing here? Get along to the place of work". One of the lads gave as good as he got, "We've been excused work and our section heads know it". "Don't shout at me, I'm not deaf", said the Captain. "Do as I say and get along". Farewell sleep!

At ten o'clock we were warned to get ready, we were to be at the front line in an hour and a half. We left carrying our rifles under our arms, because if we had them on our shoulders the Germans would sport the barrels sticking up above the parapet and start shelling. My half section was put in two listening posts thirty metres apart and ten metres forward of the line.

Our Corporal left us, he was a replacement for the furrier who was on leave. That left four at the post, two youngsters of class 14, a man of forty and me. We had to pass back word about anything we saw. "Don't fire", we were told, "There has been no exchange of fire for a couple of days as the boche hasn't fired at us". They reassured us by showing us they could walk on the open ground.

I looked around as I settled in as it was the first time I had been in a trench on the front line. The newspapers had been full of all the comforts. It was nothing but mud and water. The parapet was just sandbags without any bullet protection.

The officers went by as we worked bailing out the water which became more and more difficult as it was gaining on us all the time. While one was on lookout, the others bailed. Some of the others tried to fix some sort of shelter with bits of wood and canvas, but it was virtually useless in these conditions.

Ahead of us we could see a big boche who waved at us. His mates were working standing on the edge of the trench while we were doing the same on our side.

At nightfall the sky was lit up by flares. Our ones went off with a loud noise, and shot high in the sky lighting up everything in an instant. They lasted much longer than the boche's as they hung on a parachute. The boche ones took us by surprise, they were alight as they came out of the trenches, and they were brighter than ours so lit up the ground better.

The stew arrived. We took it in turn to change guard. I had three hours ahead of me. I sat down on a box of explosive half asleep. I was frozen and it was still raining. I could hear the slopping of the bailing all around me, the same noise coming from the boche. One of them was coughing and spitting the whole night.

From time to time there were bursts of gunfire, which passed over our heads as both sides fires at each other. To the right rifle and mortar fire raged, but to the left beyond our company, there wasn't a single shot, just as we had been told.

At dawn the officers came round. "Keep a good lookout this is the danger hour

when the boches like to attack." But there was no need for it, as a few moments later four boches got up on their parapet and waived a big container at us. We watched carefully, they were about thirty five metres away. A boche pointed at it and said in French, "It's filthy weather, messieurs, we've got some hot coffee and cakes". "You're lucky", replied one of us, "Our coffee is cold and we haven't any cakes!" "Why did you shoot in the night?" "We didn't fire it was another regiment", was the reply.

The officers turned up again and we got back to work, making the most of the fact that the boche was quiet. The officers realised what work it was when they slipped in the mud. About noon some Austrian 88 shells went over our heads by two to three metres, and burst on the second line. If the boche were frightened of our 75s we were just as frightened of their 88s which were faster, and they arrived before you could hear the whistle of the shell.

In the afternoon I asked the Sergeant if I could have a bit of time to make a shelter with some stones and a bit of tent canvas big enough for two. Three nights running now I had had no sleep, and I really needed to get some now to recover. Dusk came and I was pleased to have my normal tent. The rain redoubled and was matched by the wind. Big pockets of water formed in the folds of the canvas, and every time we touched one of them with our helmets we got a trickle of water down our backs.

After dark, we tried to sleep. One fellow already asleep, fell head first into a pool of water at the bottom of the trench. He too had been sitting on a case of explosives, his head lolled and dragged his whole body down. He had had enough and left us to move further away. The night dragged on and dawn came, I had slept a bit or dozed, but the dawn was stronger than me and I woke. It was like a nightmare, a voice

beside me said, "In five minutes there will be fifty-nine rounds of heavy gunfire, that will make it up to the four hundred rounds the boche fire in twenty four hours. It was our Corporal

who had been on observation duties and had come to see how we were.

As I got up my head touched a pocket of water which ran all the way down my back. I was so cold I was almost paralysed. I had difficulty in dressing and felt anger getting the better of me. Then I calmed down and banged my arms round my body to warm up, and went to see some pals.

At six o'clock we went back to the same work as the day before. As light came the boches walked about in the open. We waved good morning to each other and went about our respective work. At ten o'clock I had some breakfast with a mate. In the afternoon another fellow came to see us. "Wow!" he exclaimed, "I've come to see the boches", and got as near to them as he could. He spoke to a boche who could understand him and who told him he would like a photograph of the two of them together. Our mate agreed and the boche called to one of his chums, who climbed over the parapet and took the photo from a distance.

That afternoon we were told we would be relieved. Strict orders had arrived. It had been learnt at a high level the Boches and Frenchmen had been talking and the order was to shoot on sight. But the lookouts never fired, no-one saw a thing. Moreover the boche had to understand that because of the stand off between us and them we were to be withdrawn precipitately to be

'Three nights running I had had no sleep'

replaced by other troops.

In due course we were relieved and went back to the third line some three kilometres back. There we found a big shelter for the section. To get to it we had to cross open ground as the trench was flooded. The shelter was damp with water running down the walls but at least it was shelter and we were able to sleep the two nights we were there.

Some candles were brought in, we had to pay for them ourselves. We each liked for a corner to settle in in the hope of sleeping better. Despite the damp we were glad to be able to sleep after four nights of going without it. It was great to be able to stretch out on the ground with a sheepskin under one and a blanket on top.

When the stew came it was hotter than it had been in the front line.

We ate quickly. Then some got out the cards, others tried to find their lice. They stripped off at the start of the hunt and what a bag! In a moment as they squeezed the lice their fingers were red with blood, and they were killed by the hundred.

One Corporal was so pleased at being able to stretch out that he initiated a gramophone. He'd got it off to a tee. Some of the others who were farmers talked about their fields and factory workers workers about their machines. Family photographs were taken out of envelopes. "She's good looking your wife, and a couple of fine boys", the father was flattered and talked about his plans when he got back home. One voice stood out in the group, "Say if I return, because few of you will be lucky enough to go back. You have seen enough of what is going on. It only takes one bullet to be curtains for you". "Alright, alright", was the response but a damper had been put on the group. They filled their lungs and said nothing as nearly everyone was married with children.

One lad was reading 'Le Petit Parisien' newspaper. "Here's an article by Henry Beranger and it's rubbish", he said in a loud voice. The writer had visited the front and been in the trenches where he saw all levels of French society pulling together in complete harmony. He was so cross that when he finished reading it he tore up the paper. It's always understood. It's us who are condemned to death, it's the bourgeoisie who get away with it. Look at it, count the professionals among us, where are the landlords, the barristers, the notaries, the solicitors? No, it's farmers, workmen, factory hands etc.

The conversation drifted on to politics, religion, the war, the Boche, the English. Everyone wanted a say but they all wanted peace. Some chatted sitting down, others sprawled out hunting their fleas. I told them they looked like a veritable band of bandits from the Sierra! Those who heard me burst out laughing and that brought the evening to an end. Only four smokers were still up, about to play their trump cards, and I fell off into a deep sleep.

At six o'clock next morning a section of twelve men was detailed for a working party to go to the second line and clear the mud and water from the trench. I was glad I wasn't on it as I was still exhausted and even tired than the day before. My relief didn't last long. The Lieutenant arrived in a rage and ordered everyone to go to join the working party to repair the trenches. We went off straight away carrying shovels on our shoulders, and got to work.

The weather had cleared, and about ten o'clock planes from both sides appeared.

Two of ours flew over the front line and the boche machine guns and artillery opened fire. One of ours seemed to be hit and lost height heading for the rear. A Boche plane headed for our lines and followed the line of the supply trench we were in. It made a signal and dropped a smoke trail. Our artillery let off everything, and it wasn't a place for us to be. Shell cases and clods of earth were falling at our feet.

"We can't stay here", said the Sergeant, "Let's get out of it". But further down the supply trench we came across the Lieutenant who was in an evil mood. He told us to carry on working until half past ten, and to be back at noon sharp. Someone wondered about his ability. We knew that both the Corporal and the Sergeant were about thirty-nine or forty, but the Lieutenant was only twenty seven.

At half past ten we went off for our stew. We ran across the open ground to get to our little encampment. We did well to make it as just then a boche bombardment started. There was no doubt it followed the flight of the

boche plane over our trenches. We saw heavy shelling fall on the second line and them move rapidly in our direction. They lengthened their fire as the last of our mates got in. A big shell landed about thirty metres away, but luckily it did not explode.

While we were eating the bombardment was furious, and our lot was returning it. We went back to work at noon, several big shells landed not far from us but they were fewer and spread out. At night we went back to our base for the stew, always the same mashed potatoes and beef. Soon afterwards pretty well everyone stretched out and went to sleep. Only a few smokers and those making bangles were left with their faces close to the candles.

The following morning, up at six o'clock, we were allocated to our working parties. Once more a section of twelve men were needed to shore up the walls of the trenches on the second line. It wasn't the same group as the day before and this time I was one of them. Some of the lads had bailers and the others shovels. We made it to the place of work, up to where yesterday's gang had finished, but we couldn't go any further as the water was up to our chests. The only thing was to go on the open ground under the noses of the boche. It was unbelievable no shots were exchanged. They were doing the same work as us, in fact it was the same everywhere.

I put my bailer into a bivouac hidden by mud and water, there were several barrels in it but as fast as we chucked the water over the ledge it trickled back. We tried to make some channels to carry the water away. At half past nine we broke for something to eat. We had to climb out onto the ground to get back to the supply trench. One of the lads called out, "You see where we are, we could be in the next work in two minutes, those machine guns are trained on us! But like us they have better things to do. Look how they're working". In a group of boche one chap was furious with his spade which would not come out of the ground, he looked as though he would like to break it he was so mad.

Just as we got back to our camp our lot let off a volley at the boche who promptly replied.

After we had eaten there was precious little to do. We simply waited to be relieved in the evening. About noon some of the fellows who had been trying to brush

off the mud from their uniforms called out to us, "Look what's falling on the front lines". The boche bombardment was intense over a wide front. Wherever the working parties on the parapets had been they had disappeared as if by magic. The light infantry from the 44th who were pushing a small cart along the track to Decauville were safe. All sizes of shell from 77s to 210s. The firing continued to spread, and this was no place to be. We got back to our den where we could still hear it all. Then our guns opened up making a tremendous noise which drew to an end about three o'clock, when it became quiet once more. Then we saw the stretcher bearers going off. They came back a bit later with one dead and several wounded.

Two hours after nightfall we were given the order to leave. We had to leave our packs in case we were cut off in the supply trench. If that happened, rendezvous at the farm without a name where we would find our packs waiting. From there we left for Maingoval for six days rest and recuperation.

There, faithfully recorded, my first six days in the trenches at Artois

Written at Artois December 1915

Start of second notebook

It was midnight by the time we got to Maingoval. My section bedded down in a thatched sheep pen near the centre of the place. We were badly off, the walls were full of holes, it was not more than a hotel for draughts. We had to bed down on over a metre of old straw that had not been changed for at least a year. Goodness knows what vermin were in it. After a couple of days we had a visit from a General and a Colonel. Naturally they thought it wasn't perfect and talked about getting in some canvas sheets to improve the place. They never came.

Our Captain was taken ill and evacuated, the older hands were sorry as he tried to look after us. Now he's been given the Legion d'Honneur he's leaving. Our Corporal told us that the day he had been given it he called all the Company together and said to them, "I told the people that were pinning this on my chest that it is to you that I owe it and it is you who have won it for me".

It was hard to wash our clothes. There wasn't much water as the wells were deep and we had to queue up to get a bucket of water. A few of the lads offered to do it in their rest time to get a few sous. They had to boil the water to kill the fleas, and often gave it back to us without rinsing, but we weren't demanding.

One day, one of the lads said to me, "I'm fed up with all this, I'm going to get myself evacuated tomorrow and you can too if you like". He gave me a cigar, "Smoke it, it's been soaked in oil for a week and then dried slowly". "No", I said to him "I'm not going to do it and I don't smoke". He gave it to one of the others and they both smoked. The next day after parade he was evacuated with a temperature of 40 degrees. The other was sent back that evening because he had no fever.

Our six rest days were soon over and we were back in the front line for three days as reserve. We made it to the trench without incident. The main supply trench was a bit better but still full of mud and water.

I wasn't in the same place this time. I was only thirty-five metres from the boche and right at the crest of the ridge. The strong wind chilled us. We had been given some cloths soaked in something or other to wrap round ourselves if the boche let off gas. Each section had also been given a

'They came back with one dead and several wounded'

bugle to sound the alarm and Piacosqui was chosen as bugler.

Dufour was beside me, he never stopped complaining at the icy wind. Our only shelter was a few sandbags and we were forbidden to take refuge behind them, as any moment the lieutenant or an NCO was likely to come up. "Keep a good lookout, this is serious, keep watching for gas". It seems it had already been used on the English who had had seven thousand men put out of action. We were taking precautions.

Two hours after daybreak the Corporal came looking for me to show me Paupere asleep on the firing sill. He had wrapped himself up in a canvas sheet and blanket and slowly sunk into the mud until he was almost covered. We had a good laugh at him, but the Corporal had to wake him up as any moment no-one would be able to see him any more. He was woken, frozen stiff, and it took the two of us to heave him out.

The Colonel came round on a visit that morning. He had oilcloth overshoes over his lace up boots, and he carried a cane which he put against the side of the trench to stop himself from slipping. "Look," he boasted, "Don't you envy these, they stand me in good stead, they're really splendid".

After the Colonel had left, our Sergeant told a man to pick up the metal pieces and dump them in a disused trench fifty metres away. The fellow did the job and came back. "But you haven't finished" said the Sergeant. "That's as may be", said the lad, "I'm not the only one here, there are plenty of others around, and I've done my bit". "So what", said the Sergeant, "Finish it off". "I can't do it", answered the lad. "Are you refusing?" "No, I just can't do it". They could each have got a prize for stubbornness. The Sergeant went off to find the Lieutenant in charge of the Company, and the chap stood his ground. The Lieutenant took out a booklet of army regulations, and read a passage. "Do you persist". "Yes" replied the man. "Well here's my decision, court martial".

We were all upset by the incident. We put all of the blame on the Sergeant who wasn't up to the job. He was a real swine from the class of '96. It was back to work then and there was no lack of it. We had to get up on the parapets to putback the sandbags which kept tumbling into the trenches. The boche were busy doing the same thing.

That night I was detailed to get the stew with Carrere. There were two of us for each half section. Carrere liked the job. He volunteered every evening to stand in for someone else. We went off to the soup kitchen four kilometres away almost on the road to Bethune. We got there early and while we waited for it to arrive we sheltered in a trench beside the road. "Hey, look at those rat droppings they know what time it is", said Carrere. Wow, hundreds of big rats had appeared from all sides running along the road. He said, "You can see they're coming for the stew too, they'll pick up anything that has been dropped after we have gone".

The soup kitchen came up, and we each got on with our business. It was all done in the gloom. We grabbed meat, vegetables, bread, wine, coffee and grog and left. I had two big containers of rice to carry and walked at the head of the group. In places in the supply trench there were duckboards where there was the most water. One of them slipped under my feet and I ended up in fifty centimetres of water. I got up straight away, but I was drenched. We were amazed how much water there was in this

supply trench, but a bit further on we found out why. Water had been diverted from another trench to drain it and it had cascaded into this one.

We arrived back and the Corporals divided it out, and we all went back to our spots. The wind was as strong as ever and just as cold. It was the strangest night we had had yet. I didn't drop off till nearly midnight and when sleep came it was fitful, especially with that wind.

Poor Dufour was next to me, he'd gone half mad and I wasn't much better. He wanted to get the whole world together, all the governments from Kaiser William to the King of England and the President of the Republic, get all those responsible for the war and have them cursed by their countries who could not understand it.

As dawn broke a boche shouted, "Vive Montmartre", it was his 'good morning' every day.

We got an order to stay quiet and not to move. About twenty metres away beside a machine gun I could see a man from the Genie. He put a flat plate on the ground connected to two rubber tubes which he put in his ears. Then he left. I went over to the Corporal in charge of the machine gun and asked him about it. Several times they had heard noises from under the ground and they thought the boche were shoring up a mine gallery.

An old hand from the class of '14 Mezin said, "It's as though we are on a volcano, we are bound to be mined and we are going to have to jump to it one day or another. Especially if the boche warn us in time which they did with the Chasseurs. A boche got up from the trench and yelled 'Save yourselves Frenchmen, the trench is mined'. They all escaped except the Captain who took it for a ruse. The trench went up in the air but the Company was saved".

While we were talking we were distracted by the arrival of a Commandant from Headquarters. He questioned the Lieutenant on all sorts of things. Then he turned to one of the men. He asked "You talk to the boche. What have you found out?" "Look over there, Sir, at those four arranging their packs". He was too scared to stick his head over the parapet and asked for a periscope which someone brought him. It took him five minutes to spot them, he was so frightened of putting his head up. "You ought to be firing at them", he said to the Lieutenant as he left.

I was surprised to see seven bodies lying on the ground in front of us between the two lines. Mezin explained they had been there since the eleventh of October at the end of an attack by a regiment that had been bungled. "You're here at a good time", he told me, "They're not launching attacks like that now". Now the major attacks had to be planned in advance. It seems there had been questions in parliament, because the troops in it never had a chance. Then the attacks had been by battalion, or company or even a section. They just said, "First platoon over you go", then the second platoon. We all lived in a constant state of fear, whatever use was it to get men killed with nothing to show for it.

At noon the boches showed us big sausages. They cut them up and wrapped them in paper attached a stone and lobbed them at us. Sadly they dropped between the lines in the entanglement of barbed wire.

We all laughed together at it. Then we

got the order to get right down in the trenches, as the light mortars were about to open fire, but like us the boche had disappeared and there was no-one to be seen. "Look", said Mezin, "From the Castelnau trench in the rear you can see the mortar bombs being launched and watch them all the way until they land". The trench had been named after the son of General Castelnau who had commanded the mortar battery and was killed in that trench. Anyway we could hear the mortar bombs being fired and follow their trajectory until they hit the ground. They all landed on the same spot. Our Corporal remarked on each time they landed it was the same spot again and it was the entrance to the gallery they had been tunnelling to mine underneath, and headquarters knew very well what they were up to.

Night fell, and we had the stew. Midnight, two a.m., that was the worst time from then until dawn. It was always coldest at sunrise. Our feet were frozen from being constantly in the water. As the sun rose the boche in front of us called out "Vive Montmartre", and we drank cold juice and grog. At eight o'clock we were relieved.

We were now back at the fifth line. It was our section that was sheltering. Funny sort of shelter, we didn't think it would stand up to a 105 landing on it. It would have crumpled up, but it was better than being outside. There wasn't room to lie down, we had to get what rest we could sitting up. That still didn't stop us from sleeping, as we were completely whacked.

At nightfall, after our stew, it was back to the same task again on the second line the Cheuler trench. It was clearing it out again but to no great extent as the mud stuck to the shovels. The Lieutenant and NCOs had several goes, but the weight of the mud took the shovel with it when they tried to throw it. "That's enough", said the Lieutenant, "We'll come back when it's light".

In the morning we went back and added a bit of water to the mud and at least we could see what we were doing. While we were working an artillery officer and NCO went over the parapet with a map in their hand. We could hear them talking about the boche positions, while the boche were only a hundred metres away on their parapets.

At the end of the shift we uncovered the head of a man at the junction of a couple of trenches. One of the lads thought he recognised him as being from the 18th Regiment. The fellow had been on a working party in the front line and had been killed or bogged down and no-one knew what had happened to him.

The following day was quiet enough, we worked until ten at night before we were relieved, and the relief went without incident. Once more we were on the road to Maingoval where we arrived at midnight just in time for the New Year. That morning we were sent a really good meal by Headquarters, beef stew and a bottle of champagne between four, and felt much better after it.

Our platoon was allocated a sheep pen, full of rats but not too cold. After we had eaten our Sergeant offered to buy coffee for half the Platoon to mark the New Year. Only the Corporal refused. "You can go", he said, "But I'm not going to take a drink from a superior who has sent some of his men to court martial. He is old enough to

'Keep a good lookout, this is serious, keep watching for gas'

know better and exercise a bit of humanity!"

The next day we had to parade for the Colonel go give out some Croix de Guerre.

After we had eaten we were warned to be ready to move with all our kit at midnight. We were to go to Bethonsard and change place with the 6th Battalion who would take our place. The whole company was billeted at one farm. The first and second platoons were lodged in a sheep pen with cob walls full of holes. We stuffed the holes with wads of straw and old rags, but it was still cold. The third and fourth platoons were put in a stable. Between us was a barn which we used as kitchen, dining room, barber's shop and workroom for the bangles during the day.

We carried on settling in the next night. What we were short of was water. There was only one well, and it was a deep one. It was bitterly cold in the night and we slept badly. Next morning we were off on exercises after our coffee, then back for lunch and had the afternoon free.

There were more than enough of us for the barn. We always talked about the same thing, the war. We had two Corporals with us. One was an evangelist, who wanted to convert us, and the other, a postman, had been a delegate at union meetings and was a bit of a revolutionary.

According to the postman it was a law passed three years ago and the build up of weapons that made William (the Kaiser) declare war on the first pretext as soon as he was ready. The Corporal of our squad said to him, "But you've fought against the arms build up for the last three years. You made out your precious 'Internationale' was strong enough to stop a war, and it's been a fiasco. The boche unions have all done what they've been told". "Yes", said the other, "But we did fight against the weapons build up on humanitarian grounds, we wanted the money spent on social reform, instead of giving it to the arms manufacturers. We couldn't believe the governments could be so barbaric as to unleash such a frightful thing. It's all very well you believing in God, this is the same God for everyone, both the boche and the French. He's 'Our Father to everyone'.

What sort of God sends his children to fight? Is that good, what sort of peace is it? What's God doing about it? What's his representative the Pope doing? Nothing, they're waiting to see which side comes our better to further their own interests".

The conversation then moved on to the unions and it turned into a real argy bargy. Bernard, who had worked for Peugeot before the war said, "You are all a smart lot, I tell you the boss can pay the worker what he wants, it's his business to do what he likes".

"It's just like talking about the shirkers and the rich who aren't in the war, again you are not so smart. If you kill off the rich factory owners and big farmers where is there going to be work for those who get back after the war? You would soon see the stupidity of all you politics".

"You eat bread Bernard", said one of the lads, "You know I'm a peasant, I've got a donkey that lives on straw, good stuff he doesn't like it if someone beats him with a stick, he'll kick out at them. I think you're sillier than my donkey, you ought to be eating straw. And I'm sure that if Monsieur Peugeot gave you a beating you would offer him your behind and say 'What an honour you do me please carry on'. A roar of laughter brought the discussion to an

end.

We lit our candles and had our stew and all went to the bar on the other side of the road. It was as cold as anything in our sheep pen and we were in no hurry to get back. The room soon filled up and almost the whole Company was here. We stayed until nine o'clock drinking small coffees at ten centimes a cup.

We were in the warm and it was good in there. We were surprised that only Sergeant Maddounier was there and he hadn't eaten with us during the day. At that moment our Warrant Officer turned up. One of them went up to the Sergeant and tapped him on the shoulder, "Why didn't you share our meal", he asked in a loud voice. "I'll tell you", replied the Sergeant in a voice everyone could hear, "I don't want to eat with the WOs because I don't want to eat the mens' rations". There wasn't a word said between the Warrant Officers but his reply went down well with the poilus.

There was an awkward moment, but it didn't last long as Dudule, our live wire got up on a bench and broke into song. "Bells of silver, bells of bronze singing night and day!"

The refrain, and several took up the chorus. Then the cooks did their turn and Corporal Spert sung his pience. The cooks, Denis and Francourt had to sing as well as Corporal Denis and several others. They all got a round of applause, even those who were out of tune. It turned into a good party full of fun, but at nine o'clock the landlord had to close.

At six next morning we had the order to get ready to go in the line. We left at noon, stopped for some stew at Mont-St-Eloi, and went straight to the front line without any incident. We spent two days there, which were just like the earlier ones. The boche were still facing us and still Bavarians, but we didn't get the normal greeting of "Vive Montmartre".

Then we were back at line five again in a cul de sac that was a command post off the supply trench. We got some stakes and old tarpaulins and made a cover which gave us some protection and was better than being outside. The Sergeant was taken ill and evacuated, which pleased us all.

We were able to rest until midnight, then left for our work at the Cheuler trench. Our Company had started the job, and the order was we had to finish it and get it done before we were due to be relieved in four day's time.

We were given an extra job of making a shelter for a platoon and half our platoon was detailed for that. When we arrived to do the work we found a load of stakes and metal grids that had been taken there by the territorials. That gave us a start, but we had to shore up the sides of the trench over almost the whole of a length of two metres.

We were given a hand as our NCO Navier in charge of the platoon worked with us without a helmet on. We banged in the stakes with great mauls (long handled mallet with a wooden head, a metal head would split the tops of the stakes and then fixed the grids. Any gaps in between were filled with earth. We worked until midnight.

Siebel said to me, "It's strange working on these trenches, but I can see why. It won't be long before the first line goes over the top, and I hope we are not around that day. You know we not usually making shelters along a four kilometre length of trench". He wasn't the only one thinking that the working parties and reserves

caught in a bombardment would end up buried in the mud.

Here everyone pretends that we would be in Lens or Berlin in a few days, but in reality we were stuck in the mud.

"Hey, come with me, I'll show you the work that the boche does, bring a candle". A hundred metres away we went into a disused trench, with its walls half tumbled in. He pointed out a small awning that we ducked under. We went down at least twenty-five steps, that were shored up all round. "Keep your head down," he said, "There isn't room to stand up. We are in a shelter for a squad, the vaulted roof is wood and it is supported by those enormous heavy beams. See the sort of construction it is, there's no doubt it would stand up to an immense bombardment".

"There are several of them nearby. Over there to the left there's an even bigger one. But sure enough all the entrances face the boche and we dare not use them as they are right in their line of fire.

"Now come and see something else". In another trench he showed me the entrance to a shelter. "Don't go into that one, there is no framework to strengthen it so it's dangerous". A bit further along he showed me a hollow in the side of the trench. It was a shelter identical to the one before. Four lads couldn't go without a smoke, so they took shelter in there and lit up. A fifth joined them and as he got in a salvo of 105s landed about two metres away. The shelter collapsed and we had to dig them out but all there was, was five corpses.

When we got back Paupere cried out, "Why here are those two chaps from Montmartre coming back from their tour just like the Grand Dukes." Sibel answered, "Don't go looking for trouble or we'll make you sweat for it". Paupere replied, "No, they're not from Montmartre, they're a couple of gypsies", and thumped him. "Listen", said Sibel, "You may have glasses, but I'll thump you so hard between the eyes you'll look as though you've got a bicycle on your dirty nose". After that he didn't bother Sibel anymore. He went over to the Corporal who gave him a shove, and he fell on Piacosqui who was looking for fleas with his candle. The latter had an evil temper, and said angrily, Paupere, I'll box your ears, and I mean it." Then it was all over and calm descended, the only sound was cards being played.

We were up early the next day and our work was going well. About nine o'clock we got a salvo of 105s. Their range was too long so we laughed at it, but the next one was nearer and so were the following ones. It began to get pretty unpleasant and we stopped laughing. We were getting clods of earth round our heads and the shells were whistling about us. We were all curled up at the bottom of the trench. The Corporal was next to me stuck against a grid. He was pretty uncomfortable. Dufour, not far away was cursing. "The stinkers, the shits! If those cowards in the rear got a pasting like this they'd know there's a war on".

Then the 105s stopped and 77s took over falling between us and the front line. Then they lengthened the fire so it skimmed the top of the trench, then it was over. The Corporal straightened out and said, "What about that! The Pope, the socialists, I lump them all together. It's shameful to let this horror continue". I quietly pointed out he'd changed his tune.

The WO Navier hadn't stopped working despite the shelling. "They'd undo all our good work", he said, but I thought it was going a bit far. At ten o'clock we went off for some food at the fifth line. As we passed the shelter the WO in the lead

'It will not be long before the first line goes over the top'

stopped at the shelter we had made and laughed. "Who put up this woodwork?" "It was me, said the Sergeant in charge of the group. "Congratulations", said the WO, "What a bodged job". "Look", said the Sergeant, "I'm a clicker (cutter for shoes), you're the carpenter". "Everyone stick to their last!", said Paupere, "and the cows will be well housed".

"You see", said Sibel, "There are only three carpenters in the Company, the Warrant Officer, the liaison agent and me. No wonder we've got our work cut out, but that's the army. Once you've got the stripes you know how to do all the jobs".

On the way back for something to eat we passed a whole headquarters. The Divisional General with his staff including the Captain commanding the Company of the Genie, were standing in front of one of the half finished shelters. The General stopped the Sergeant and said, "That's well made, you're doing a good job". One of the lads behind me muttered, "You're easily pleased", and another, "You try living in it for a week and you'd find out".

It was a strange little shelter. It was only two metres deep, five long, and two and a half wide. On each side at the bottom a banquette about forty centimetres above the floor had been left as a seat. Some heavy beams made the roof frame, and on top of them were some sheets of corrugated iron covered with thirty centimetres of earth. In the unlucky event of a 105 falling on the shelter, it would have gone through the lot and killed all the occupants.

At noon when we arrived back at our work, one of the Corporals of the fourth platoon let the Sergeant know that one of his men had not turned up to eat at ten o'clock, and no-one had seen him since. He had been the last man to leave the trench. Half way along the trench we found a severed hand beside a grid, and assumed it belonged to the missing man, however, there was no sign of the rest of the body. He must have been blown apart by the shell and tossed in the air.

We carried on with our work, but the worst was still to come. We had to put a barbed wire entanglement in front of the trenches. It was a task that could only be done in the dark. We had to be split into groups, one with the stakes, the other with the wire. We all had to be ready in position to place each section. As night fell we knew we could only have an hour before we were spotted, and that would go quickly. The stakes had to be driven in with the mauls, and once they were firm the barbed wire fixed to them. Everyone understood only too well how dangerous it would be, that we would be out in the open, entirely at the mercy of the machine guns. One volley would do for the lot of us.

Thank goodness it went off all right. Nobody ducked out and we fixed the two rows of wire in an hour. We were to do it again the next night.

We were back again the next morning to see our Colonel arrive with the Brigade General who was wearing a leather jacket with his helmet, so people would know him. They stopped and the General said, "You've got a fine trench, it's been well done". He stood up on the firing shelf and said to Sibel, "You have an excellent field of fire in all directions with no obstructions". "Yes", replied Sibel, "But we could do with some central hearing". The Colonel laughed, and the General took a couple of packets of tobacco and two pipes made out of cherry wood, which he gave to Sibel, "Here's your fire, but share it with your mates."

That night our work was almost over. We put the two rows of coiled wire in place. We were lucky to have good weather which was pretty rare. The following day we had a bit more to do, what Paupere described as the finishing touches. We were getting ready to leave when the Lieutenant found another couple of places that meant going back on the open ground. It would take a couple of hours, but we would not be back in the afternoon.

About eleven o'clock the boche sent us a volley of 105s, followed by some more. I yelled out, I had seen a 105 pass overhead against the sun. The others didn't want to believe me, and the Warrant Officer pretended it wasn't possible.

"Fathead", said Paupere, "You might see a 220 but never a 105". The Lieutenant came up and I explained that against a sunbeam I have seen something like a big cigar. "He's right", said the Lieutenant, "He saw it thanks to the sunbeam". We finished at midday and left. That night we were on the road to Bethonsard once more.

Rest

When we had a chance to rest, once I had cleaned my kit and rifle, I had got into the habit of writing some notes about the main events that had happened when we were in the lines. It was unusual for Paupere not to come over and give me a nudge or shove on the arm, which made me shut my notebook before I'd finished writing.

That morning he had left me in peace, and I had just finished, when I saw him heading for me with a big grin and started plugging me. "What are you up to always writing in there. You're bonkers if you're keeping a war diary. Don't you realise that one day you'll be taken prisoner and with that you'd get shot for being rude about the boche. Who do you think you are a 'Zevaco' (Corsican journalist, novelist and film director 1860-1918), an Alexandre Dumas? Tear it up, you're only from the Auvergne, I think you've crawled out of the Morvan forests, and that's coming from someone who makes out he's from Montmartre, it makes me laugh".

"Ever since you started writing, I've been wondering what's in it. Why don't you read a bit that would clear the air?" "Listen Paupere, I'm happy to read you a bit". "Are you really?" And with that he shouted out, "Come round lads, hear the reading by our great writer from the Morvan".

Once people had gathered round, I began in a loud voice pretending to read, "Among the fellows in my squad, there is one who is rather difficult to describe. So far as his physique goes he is short and chubby and wears glasses, he's got a turned up nose, his face is cunning and deceitful with a droopy moustache, it makes him look like a funny moneybox, it's always too long. And then judge from his name! This chubby little fellow is called Paupere, and he only thinks of three things:

1. Filling his belly, he's been seen to guzzle two whole pans of rice.

2. Sleeping, one morning he was found fast asleep in the mud in the front line, and unless his pals had found him he would have been covered by it and suffocated.

3. When he thinks it's safe, he's always complaining about his comrades, you can't write or make a bangle without upsetting him. You can't stop his clatter. He'll talk about the artists of Montmartre or the

cabarets, where he's never set foot. He calls himself an interior decorator to these artists. I don't believe a word of it. He would produce a load of dung and call it a bolt of chiffon as he can't see well enough to tell the difference. When he's not plaguing me, it's the Corporal. However the latter is a teacher and knows how to deal with children, and how to box his ears of kick him up the backside!"

The other lads started to laugh. Dufour shouted, "It's true Paupere". He was dumbfounded. P picked up my notebook and slid it in my pocket. I made a quick exit and took two containers as I was on the working party to get the stew. I heard a shout follow me, "I'll get you, you swine, you'll pay for this".

'We were getting clods of earth round our heads and the shells were whistling around us'

After we had eaten the Corporal asked me if I would like to go with him and Sibel to Aubigny about three kilometres away. As we left Paupere joined us. "If you come with us I'll strangle you in the middle of the fields. We don't need you with us, you're such a menace", said the Corporal. "Well I need some

paper to write to my wife", replied Paupere. It didn't take us long to get to Aubigny.

There were several shops selling army souvenirs, bangles, towel holders, etc. They were the sort of things we had copied. Other shops sold hats, thick scarves, balaclavas, things one needs in a war. There were plenty of officers about and at one cross roads, there was a nice looking cafe, which we would have liked to go in, but it was full of officers. "We could well go in", said Sibel, "But it wouldn't do us any good, oil and water don't mix".

I was able to replace my oil and vinegar at a grocer, and we brought a few other things, but we didn't spend three francs between the four of us. We went back across the fields to Bethonsard and I picked dandelion leaves to make a salad. Some of the lads had been digging for mushrooms, but you don't get mushrooms by digging for them.

Next evening after we had eaten we were over to the little bar again for coffee. One fellow told us that before the war in this area they used little cups like these for bistouille, coffee with an eau de vie poured in. There was always hot coffee on the stove and people drank several cups a day.

"There you are", I put in, "It was the same in our part of the country. There are two classes the rich and poor". "True, added Dufour, "The ones that receive loads of cheques all stick together and keep each other well off. They can afford to pay for booze while the poor like us get coffee at ten centimes a cup".

Trucho, put in, "You've got it wrong, there are three classes. The officers have linen in their tents and a bed to sleep on. The WOs mess together on the supplies for the men, and us, the men who get the bones to gnaw on. There are those way back from the front line who do alright for food. I don't know how the rations add up, but I imagine a General counts for ten men, a Colonel six, a Commandant four".

"It's never right", said Dufour, "It might have done in peacetime, but we're fighting for France. Everyone ought to eat the same, no-one should have to pay to eat, neither in the rear or at the front. Everyone should be treated the same by the state so we win the war. It should be the same in all countries then there wouldn't be any more wars".

We left at nine o'clock after a few songs. It was always the same old ones, but it passed the time. Our six rest days went

very quickly and we were soon back on the road to St Eloi. The Major told me, "You are one of two who can have four days' leave. The other fellow is in the fourth platoon. Where do you want to go?" "Paris". "Very well, I'll make out your pass and get the rations officer to get it to you in the line".

We spent the next three days in the front line. It poured with rain the whole time, and the supply trench was in a real mess. Our three days were without incident and as ever we were always covered in mud and chilled to the bone.

Leave

We were back at the fifth line by the fourth day. The other fellow who was getting leave told me in the morning that we would be going off at midday at the latest, but we wouldn't know what would happen from one moment to another. The officer gave us our passes, and I remarked to my companion we would be taking mud and lice with us. "No", he said, "Get rid of them here".

At half past one we got to St Eloi and it was quiet along the road to Aubigny. Our train was due to leave at six o'clock so we had plenty of time. We stopped for something to eat at a little bar and by five o'clock we were in the train. At last six o'clock came and the train moved off. My companion tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Now we are really on leave". The train rolled through the night and the following morning stopped at St Just, where we were able to have a wash. We split up there as my companion was heading for Angouleme.

When I got to the rue d'Orsel my first job was to change clothes, have a bath and put on my shirt, vest, socks and pants to boil as they were swarming with fleas. Everyone was fine in the house.

Each morning I looked at the news of the war in the paper. On the fourth day I read that near the 140th the Germans had exploded a series of mines. These were the famous mines in our sector but my pals had been at rest and weren't there.

The leave went too quickly, but I was able to pay for an extra twenty-four hours, which didn't do my funds much good.

The Return

I got back to Aubigny in the dark. I went straight to Maingoval, and signed in. I looked out the Sergeant Major and handed in my leave pass. I was the only one there. He told me there had been an alert and the Regiment had been sent to the trenches. As for the mine it hadn't done too much harm because the explosion had come between our first and second line, but the boche had taken our first line and were occupying it. The 360th were now in the line. He told me to stay where I was as there was no point in me going forward as I would be there in a day or two.

The following night the Battalion arrived back, and I was reunited with my companions. The Corporal told me they had been really scared. They thought they would be sent over the top in an attack. Some of the Company would have been alright they were pretty high, as they'd drunk the neighbourhood dry.

Then a wild rumour went round. The whole Corps was to be relieved for a period of rest. No one knew where it had started, or who cooked it up, but it went round.

After we had been there four days, one

of the lads came back from Maingoval with the news that a major reinforcement had arrived to join the Company. There were forty men, a Lieutenant with two pips, A WO and a Sergeant.

We badly needed the reinforcements, because over a time all the metal workers above a certain age had been sent off to munitions factories. None of them left without saying, "I won't forget you chums, as soon as I get my first pay packet I'll send something off for you". Some days later we'd got a card saying, "I'm fine, I won't forget you". And that was it no more news. A number of the men in the Company had fallen ill as well and been evacuated and needed to be replaced.

We got eight of the new intake in our Platoon. Two of them joined our squad, they were both young called up in 1915. They were Arvillon and Pejau. Then our new Sergeant appeared replacing the one who had been evacuated. He was a young Corsican, Sergeant Philipi. He gave the impression he meant business. He asked a Corporal who was in charge as the place wasn't clean. The Corporal replied that apart from a few working parties and a small exercise we were all there resting, and like the 140th we'd been on duty day and night.

A voice came from inside the sheep pen, "I tell you all, I'm a fishmonger, and if I ever get out of here that's what I'll be again", and the voice got louder, "It's just landed, it's fresh, they're fine my herrings, my fresh herrings." Everyone burst out laughing and the Sergeant was puzzled at this reception.

Later in the evening we had a visit from the new WO to the Company. He was an old WO dug out of retirement. Paupere reckoned he had run the tobacconist in his village.

Few of the new arrivals had been to the front before. There was one loudmouth who said he wasn't frightened of shells, he was used to them having been in the camp at Mailly for a long time. On the morning of the sixth day we got the order to get ready. As usual we would be leaving at midnight.

Our Six Days in the Line

As usual we had our stew at Mont-St-Eloi and left our packs at the farm without a name. We were told we would be going straight to the front line. There was light rain, enough to get us thoroughly wet and cold. The centre of the supply trench was full of water. At each step it was hard to pull the other foot out of the mud.

At last we made it. We had been supposed to turn right into the Cheuler trench, but we turned left to our surprise. We were relieving a Company of the 42nd Chasseurs who weren't part of our Division and we were now in their sector. It was an awful night, the rain never stopped. As the light came, Arvillon who was beside me said, "There are some funny sights round here, look how we're dressed. Look over there by that big piece of wood, you'd say that was an old country woman! He was pointing at Dufour who was wearing everything he had, his sheepskin, two blankets, a canvas cover, a huge scarf, a balaclava and his helmet. When he moved it looks like a bale of cloth! And over there like a monk with glasses, it's Paupere". He had heard us talking about him and could see us laughing. He called out, "Oh fine fellow, that's a beautiful scarf you're wearing, its superb with its four colours, I

suppose your girlfriend knitted it for you". "Yes", said Arvillon, "And she's a lovely girl, prettier than yours because you're a pest".

While all this was going on an order came to get ready to leave. We were being relieved by a Company of the 42nd Chasseurs. They were all youngsters, and deathly pale. Where had they come from? Why leave? It was no good looking for an answer, that's how it was!

We took the main supply trench to the ledge of the Zouaves (Regiment of soldiers raised in Algeria) close to the Colonel's Command Post. We were in a deep enough ravine. On the boche side it was almost vertical. At the bottom of our hole there were several shelters covered in corrugated iron. There were the post for the Colonel, a first aid post and two shelters for the Companies. We were safe there as there was no way the boche shells could get us, but we were packed so tight we were almost sitting on top of one another.

In the September offensive it was the Zouaves who had had to attack here with fierce fighting and they had a lot of casualties. That had given the place its name. The runners never stopped coming and going. They never had more than a couple of words to say. We ask them "What" and they responded "What" there was never time to finish a sentence, but we all understood because of the din that day over the whole sector. The English were extending their front and would be relieving us soon.

We had been asleep barely a couple of hours when we were woken by a frightening bombardment. We went outside to see, it was all falling on the front line. Our artillery joined in adding to the racket. It was an astonishing bombardment, I'd never heard anything like it.

We were all dazed by it. WO Navier asked the fellow who had made out he wasn't scared of shellfire what he thought of it. He was so pale he could hardly get out a reply, "I've never heard anything like it". The Colonel came out of his shelter and said to our Lieutenant, "It's curious, I hadn't been warned about this. There's been no message over the telephone. It's not for us, it's going over, it's all on the left of our Division".

We all got ready with all our kit and arms. All the batteries were firing at the same time and the noise was horrendous, shells were whistling over us just above our heads. It went on for a good half an hour then stopped. Then it all went quiet.

The news started arriving. The boche had attacked our front line, the Cheuler trench, which had been completely wrecked, and had taken it but had been seen off by grenade attacks. The telephone wires had been cut which explained why our command post hadn't heard anything.

Now it was all over and we took off our kit. The wounded started arriving at the first aid post, the bodies put down in our clearing.

We went off that night with everyone carrying a tool, either a pick or shovel. We were to do what we could with the remains of the Cheuler trench. When we got to the trench the first group had started work, and didn't want to move on. We got cross with them and called them all sorts of names. One of the first fellows to start work had scooped up a boche grenade in his shovel. As the dirt hit the ground over the parapet it exploded, killing him and wounding the next chap in the back. There was a rush to the bottom of the trench.

Lieutenant Foquet arrived and moved us to where we should have been to relieve the 18th Company. One platoon was put

'We had been asleep barely a couple of hours but were woken by a frightening bombardment'

behind the other and all of us were working at the same time. Each squad did the same and I was in the seventh squad which was the best placed as almost all of it was out of sight. I was next to Mezin and we were worried about getting back as the lookouts were still watching us. On the whole length of the line no-one fired, let off mortars or grenades, it was all very dismal.

We had only just started work when Mezin unearthed a whole arm still bleeding, the next blow of his pick brought up a 105 shell which hadn't exploded. We had a lucky escape. Mezin was nervous and didn't want to go on working and quarrelled with a Corporal from the 18th who called over a WO. The latter was so cross with Mezin he stuck a revolver under his nose and said, "If you're not going to work I'll blow your head off". Mezin grabbed a rifle with a fixed bayonet and held it in front of the WO's face. He disappeared down the trench and we didn't see him again.

We worked almost all night in our trench which had been in good condition, but was now wrecked. You could no longer walk side by side but by the early morning it was better. We went back to our shelter with everyone worn out and all slept.

The following evening we got the order to work on earth moving. We headed off to the depot to get picks and shovels. Abnormally our Corporal took a shovel. He needn't have to as this rank in the Infantry gave the orders and didn't work. Our Corporal was the only one in the Company who ever worked with us.

We headed down the main supply trench and turned right then left and then into another towards the front line. It was a dark night and we had no idea where we were.

"Halt". We came up on the ground in single file where there was a Sergeant from the Genie. He explained what we had to do to the head of our Platoon. Where we were to start, and where to stop, we had no idea. Then on the ground was a big white tape set out by the Genie which we could see clearly. Each platoon had to spread out along the tape and work out even bits for teams of two, who had to dig a ditch three metres long, a metre wide and two metres deep. The Sergeant from the Genie left with his four men.

I was paired with Avrillon.

We had only just started work when a salvo of 105s went over our heads and burst about a hundred metres away. It wasn't too good for us to be in the open, and it speeded our work. We could do nearly all the work with a spade, and I was very pleased to be with Avrillon, what a digger. The Corporal who was close to me leant his shovel from time to time, and we soon had a hollow deep enough to protect us from the shells. Several times we ducked down but the bursts were too short or went beyond us.

Once Avrillon and I had finished our bit we gave a hand to the blokes on each side of us. We were there when Lieutenant Guimes came by, and told us as we had finished to go to help the men in his Platoon. We replied, "It's us that have got on with it, the others haven't worked at it". "Alright", he said, "Stay here till it's all finished". The WO Navier in charge of our Platoon came to ask us to help some of the others to get the work done. Four of us went along and found a job half finished. There were a young Parisian and two brothers, both dandies. One of them was a lawyer's clerk and the other secretary at the

town hall. "We don't know how to wield a pick", they said. "I understand", said their Lieutenant, "They've never done any labouring, unlike you". "So what", I said to him, "I'm a cobbler but that hasn't stopped me from doing my bit, but these two are lazy". When all the work was over Avrillon told me his shirt was soaked with sweat.

We were given the order to leave, but it wasn't easy to get out of the deep trench. Our Corporal stuck his shovel between the sides which we used to launch ourselves and then ran to the supply trench. We passed back the order that everyone had to bring back their tools. It was Lieutenant Foquet who was last out using the shovel. On our return to the depot we were told that the person who had left their shovel behind must go back for it. "Don't say a word", said our Corporal. We did a check platoon by platoon and all the tools were handed in. Nothing was found to be missing and Lieutenant Foquet did not have to go back.

Not long after we got into our shelter everyone was snoring. The next night we spent several hours cleaning the supply trench. The following day after ten o'clock we went into the front line to relieve the 18th and were there two days.

In front of our squad was a crater made by a mine, and the sides went up as high as a house. The boche had built a rampart above it and we could see the butts of their rifles over the edge from time to time. The fellows from the 18th told us not to take chances, as they overlooked us and would fire on us, or even on our shadows if there was any sun. Their bullets hit the side of the trench behind us. We were badly off and the trench was full of water. Sergeant Bionet was next to me. He had finished his service and been recalled, and was pleased with us. On the other side were Avrillon and Carrere.

That afternoon some shells from our 75s behind us, went over grazing the edge of the trench, and landed in front of us without exploding. Then some more followed a bit shorter just ahead of us and started to smoke. Carrere was terror struck and he fled past the Lieutenant thinking we'd all be killed. When he came back he started to explain when another 75 landed on the parapet throwing up a great heap of

mud which covered him from head to foot. He was crying like a child and wanted to get to safety further off. The mud was so thick on him he wasn't able to see and kept banging into the side of the trench and we couldn't help laughing. While we were helping him to clean off some of the mud

the Lieutenant had a telephone call and told us it was a new battery making its ranging shots with smoke shells.

It was a quiet night, but it rained and we wrapped everything round us.

Next morning we had a visit from the Colonel. He handed out big cigars from Madagascar. As he came towards me he stopped, and I went to move to him. He told me to get down and keep to the side of the trench. I asked him why? "Cast an eye on your crater and look where the boche rifles are pointing", he said. He passed me in two steps and gave me a cigar which I took for Avrillon, who was sitting beside me in a niche. Sergeant Bionet was asleep with his feet in water up to his ankles. The Colonel looked at him "Asleep he must be worn out. Take a cigar for him", and continued on his round.

Night came and we had to wait a long

time to be relieved. It was late as the supply trench was full of mud. It wore everybody out and it took a long time to get to the front line. The relief confirmed that new troops had arrived at the rear and the whole Army Corps was to be rested. We handed over and left.

It was difficult to make any progress and we were given the farm without a name as the assembly point for those staying in the rear for one reason or another. We made it to the Zouaves' patch and left the supply trench so we could walk more easily out of the mud and water. We had gone about five hundred metres when a burst from some 105s landed near us. We scattered. The ones in the lead started to run, the last slid into the supply trench, and I was one of them. I was in water up to my calves, no matter it was better that way. Under the water was the mud awful sticky stuff, it was difficult to get myself out.

The lads managed to get out of the trench and started to run. We were all mixed up together. Every now and then a shell would land nearby. At last we made the road to Bethune where it was safer. I called out to Avrillon and Sibel, and got an answer from Mezin. "I don't know where they are", he said. We walked along side by side. "I'm ruined", he said, "I think I'd rather be dead than live like this. You won't know it, but there is a good cave at St Eloi where we could sleep the rest of the night and go to Bethonsard tomorrow". I said, "I'm happy to do that, I'm done for".

We were amongst the last to get to the farm without a name. We picked up our packs, the Company went off to St Eloi, and Mezin and I slipped away, and Mezin took me to his famous cave. The walls were running with water and it was icy cold. "Oh! We'll go to Gambelin-Labbe instead, I know a good barn there that will do us well. We'll go off there", he said. I told him I thought we would do better to join the Company. "That won't do", he said. We found his barn and lit a candle. It was full of sleeping soldiers stretched out on the straw. I got near enough to one of the sleepers to see that they were the 96th. We wove our way through them and found a place, and went straight to sleep.

When I woke up in the morning I found a group of Poilus looking at me in amazement as they hadn't heard us come in. Several of them had the accent from the midi, which reminded me of one of the tenants in the rue d'Orsel. That was Planes, perhaps he was in this Regiment. I asked if anyone knew him. One of them said, "Yes, he's in the machine gun company, I'll take you over". We had a barrage of questions. They could see how dirty we were and wondered which sector they would be sent to.

Mezin left me as he wanted to get back quickly. I found Planes, still asleep on the straw. He was astonished to see me. We hadn't met since mobilisation. We went off to get something to eat at a grocery shop with a counter. I was frequently stopped in the street by officers who asked me about the sector. I heard them say, "See, things are going well, we hope to see you later, who knows?"

When I got to Bethonsard, nobody had bothered about me. All I had to do was to get clean which I did with the greatest of pleasure.

We were there for three days during which we could see we were getting ready for something. We left in a motor truck soon after we had eaten one morning.

Each one had to check their belongings, and not forget anything. I spread out a towel on the ground and put everything I

'We went off with everyone carrying a tool, either a pick or shovel'

had to take on it; pencil, writing paper, pants, linen, saw, needle, leather punch, thread, two aluminium tubes for rings, cobblers rasp, emery cloth, darning needles, a couple of bits of shell casing to make a paper knife. ...all the worldly goods of a poilu!

Then I put these last words in my notebook: "It's the end for Artois – Bethonsard, February 1916"

16 Days at Verdun

The complete Corps had been relieved from Artois. We had been at rest for five days at Le Park in the Pas de Calais (department in Northern France close to the Belgian border) when the major offensive at Verdun took us by surprise on the 21st of February (1916). We weren't in any doubt that our rest period which had been due to be for two weeks was bound to be cut short.

Indeed we were sent off by road and rail towards it. On leaving the little town of St Andre in the valley of the River Meuse I decided to write everything that would happen at Verdun day to day.

We spent a week at St Andre in very poor condition for the whole of the Company. There was only one little grocery shop which had nothing but the wine they could bottle each day, and they sold out within a couple of hours of our arrival.

The only good thing about the place was a pretty little stream that ran through the fields and was excellent for our washing. On the whole we were left alone with the exception of one exercise, to practice taking a trench by a battalion.

We had a new regimental commandant Colonel Chauffardet, who visited each Company. He asked one of the lads in our squad, "How do you find things here?" The lad replied, "From what point of view Colonel?" "Well, the food for example". "Dreadful Colonel". "Well, if it is so bad how do you survive?" "Colonel, I buy what I can when I have any money".

The Colonel turned to the Lieutenant and said, "We must look into this, you must get some decent food. How many compartments are there in your field kitchen, two or four?" The Lieutenant gazed at the sky not knowing what to say. We heard the Sergeant-Major behind him whisper, "Four, four". And he ended up answering, "Four Colonel".

What could we think of someone who had been in command of us for three months who didn't know the capacity of the field kitchen. It proved how little he cared about how we ate.

A couple of days before some of the lads had arranged a concert in a farmyard. There was a chap who had been a clown with the Circus Medrano, a gunner who had been a professional singer and the joker of the Company, Dudule.

We were all in a better frame of mind after the concert. A collection was made by the clown at the end of it saying, "We all know we're off to Verdun. Anyone who doesn't put a sou in the box will lose their skin there!"

"In my case", said Dudule, "I know I'll get killed there so I'll sing you my last song:

"At four in the morning get out of your beds

Prepare all you kit to visit the sick
Some soup at nine then a mystery tour in an army truck"

A lot reported sick including the

Corporal of our squad. They soon came back sheepishly, have been declared fit. Nevertheless our Corporal was declared sick and didn't come back, and the same thing happened to the Colonel – naturally!

To be treated as sick in our lot it was necessary to have some sort of fever, for others all that was required was a bout of fear, boredom or depression, and it would suffice.

At ten o'clock we left on foot and went three or four kilometres to the main road. A line of motor trucks was waiting for us, and we loaded by half platoon. The trucks were well fitted out with racks for our weapons. As we got in the driver said if you want any petrol for your cigarette lighters, pass me your containers, and you can have it.

"Where are you taking us?" asked one of the Corporals. "I don't know", was the reply, "There is an officer at the head of the column in a car that knows the way, the rest of us just follow." We went along pretty slowly crossing the vast flat fields. When we reach a ridge we could see lines of trucks in the distance. It was the 33rd Corps of the Army assembling.

We arrived at Fort de Regret, where we got out. There was a big parcel of sausages (observation balloons). They made a bundle in a field. We weren't allowed anywhere near them. All along the road were cars of the postal service of the Army Corps coming and going. We went up to some of the men in the postal service who told us that thousands of their Corps had been killed or wounded, and we would be going to replace them which we didn't find funny.

Eventually we were called to eat, then night fell. There was a distribution of tinned monkey (corned beef), small red coloured square cans, from America. One of the lads started to eat his and found a load of fish hooks in it. Immediately the order was given not to eat them. Then Colonel Vincendon, who had been our Colonel, but was now commanding an Infantry Division, came to see for himself what was happening.

At nightfall we left with our packs on our backs and followed a railway line for a long way. We weren't sorry to leave it as it

was awkward walking on the ballast in the dark. We got onto a main road and were surprised to find houses, some of which were quite big, and still under construction.

Had we arrived at Verdun? No, perhaps a suburb of it, as there were no more houses but pavements carried on. A quarter of an

hour later we marched into Verdun. A wild rumour spread that we were to stay in reserve here. We were now in the middle of the town, and in the street we were on, one of the houses had recently been shelled.

However, we left the town and went to Faubourg Pave where we stopped. We fell on the fountains to refill our water bottles, and we were off again. Then unwelcome news, we were to be the 5th Battalion in reserve for Fort de Souville.

We took the main road then left it for a smaller one on the left. All of a sudden we stopped. You could hear the whispers, "Where are we? Where are we going?"

After a while we went forward as heavy shells started whistling near us falling in a ravine. Then we had to halt again.

I found I was next to the Company barber, "Look old fellow, you're tired out and ill", I said to him, "If I were you I'd stay behind". "That's all very well", he said,

"But how will I find you later. I want to do all that I can to keep up with you. If only you knew how tired I am with this marching, carrying this big pack. You know I'm not a slacker and I'll be needed sometime." The poor old boy looked like a consumptive with his hollowed chest. Without his beard he would be emaciated.

We were off again, but not too quickly now. Each time we changed sector it was the same. When the boche and French barrages went over the ridge behind us we marched a bit quicker, but they didn't last for long. All of a sudden we stopped again. Once more, along the line you could hear the voices. "Where are we going? Where are they taking us?"

At last we went into a wood. There were two pieces of Rimailho (a quick firing howitzer of 155mm calibre with a range of 7000m invented by Col Rimailho in 1894, the range was shorter than that of the German equivalent which was 1,200m) firing incessantly. We went down into the wood and found a deep gulley perhaps 400 metres long. Then we had to climb up to the ridge, still in the same wood. This was to be our position.

There were a few shallow trenches made in a hurry, some coils of barbed wire, and a wooden cross marking the grave of someone from the 1st Chasseurs. As we climbed up to the ridge we were greeted by a salvo of 105s which fell round us. Everyone scattered looking for a hole. I found myself in a little hole in a clearing with two chums from my squad. Sibel, a pal from Monmartre from the 1900 intake, and Avrillon from the Vendee of the 1915 intake.

There was just enough room for three. It was only forty cms deep, and on the ground round it a dry stone wall about fifty centimetres high had been made. The top had been covered with oak branches and we had to crawl on all fours to get into it.

First Day

That night it was impossible to sleep. There was a violent bombardment, and the noise was made worse by the echo from the side of the ravine.

Then we had an order. No-one was to show themselves during the day except for the most urgent purposes. While we were being rested. Avrillon had asked me to make him a bangle to send to his girl friend. I had given it to him without finishing as it still needed polishing, "Would you finish it for me", he said, "I'll give it to you in an envelope and if I get killed you'll have something to remember me by".

"How on earth can you do a thing like that in this mess?" asked Sibel. But I was able to finish the work and gave it to Avrillon who slipped it in an envelope.

The whole of this time the boche didn't stop firing. They were trying to get the Rimailho guns, or was it us they were looking for hoping to wipe out the reserves? During the morning they lengthened their fire and the shells landed two hundred metres away from us in the ravine. At mid-day they fired a bit shorter, landing head on in the trees above the big wigs of the Company. One of the trees was hit and smashed and bits of it fell on a chap breaking his thigh and wounding three others.

The fatigue party going off for the stew weren't very happy. They said they had been under fire for the whole way. They were ready to take cover all the time. They had some news of the battle. The field hospital at Faubourg Pave had also been shelled.

'Our Corporal was declared sick and didn't come back, so was the Colonel - naturally!'

Second Day

We got a bit of sleep that night. Our accommodation was so tight we were jammed together. The bombardment didn't stop all night. In the morning there was a change and the shells started landing round us. A 105 burst several metres away moving the air and lifting the branches that made our cover. We were pelted with clods of earth and stones. Sibel hurriedly put his pack at the entrance to our little place with a rolled up blanket underneath it.

"We would have been done for", he said, "If we hadn't had that stone wall around our hole, all three of us would have been killed". The shelling got even heavier, another shell fell in the trees over the Company. We could hear the cries, it was all confusion as the wounded were counted. Zim-zim, that was his name, the medical orderly from the 19th, came to help our orderly.

"If we hadn't been in the clearing with no trees above us we would have had it", said Avrillon. We could feel the movement of the air at every salvo that went over us. We hoped they wouldn't get any lower.

That afternoon the runner from the battalion in the Company came by and flattened himself to the ground as some shells went over. "It's going badly lads, What a job I've got. I've flattened myself to the ground all the time. I've just come from Fort de Souville. It's the command post for the Battalion. Captain Maupoil of the 6th has taken command because our Captain is ill".

"You won't be staying, I've got some orders. You've already got several killed and wounded without firing a shot. It's the same over at the 19th. They've sent a half platoon to support the artillery. I've never seen that before. When we didn't get any news from them, two runners were sent off, David and Cincenau, to find out what had happened. When they got there they found half of them killed. They were lucky to get back themselves, they had to crawl from one shell hole to another all the way. I tell you we're going to lose our skins here". He left at a run.

We got the order to get our packs ready. "Get ready to leave" shouted a WO and we hurried down the slope to the ravine. It wasn't easy to walk in the ravine, it was steep and all the platoons were mixed up. Eventually we got out of the danger zone, and got back into the woods. We went back past the Rimaihlos, and veered to the left. We got to the top of the undulating ground and stopped. There was a trench, and it was our new base.

We stayed there for several days, It was well made. The trench was covered by wooden beams with a covering of earth so the boche planes would not see it. Again we weren't to go out in daylight.

There was a roll call by platoons. In the fourth the barber was missing, no-one had seen him. In the last place he had been alone in a hole. His Corporal and another man were sent off to see what had become of him. They came back an hour later. They had found him dead alone in the hole with no apparent injury. We were all saddened at that he was always obliging, friendly and ready to work.

After nightfall the fatigue party went off for the stew and came back without harm. You have to eat when you have to work.

We left later at the run with all ranks coming with us. As we got near Fort de Souville a fully equipped soldier asked the way to the fort. We told him to run with us. "I can't", he said, "I've just left the medical centre and I want to get back to my Company, the 19th, which is supposed to

be in the fort".

As we got to the vaulted entrance of the fort shells fell all around. The guns of the fort fired back. It was only the noise of the detonations and clods of earth flying around but we were still pretty terrified. Above it all a voice could be heard "In God's name don't be scared, it's your Commandant talking".

That calmed everyone and we were shown which way to go to a yard to a pile of picks and shovels. We all ran out of the fort with picks and shovels on our shoulders. In the middle of the road, lying dead, was the man from the 19th who had asked us the way.

We went through the wood and took a path to the right. We didn't know where we were heading. We went about five hundred metres further and came across a sight I shall never forget. What we saw on each side of the road was nothing but wrecked cars, burnt out trucks, horses killed, shells, coils of barbed wire, and stakes, containers, bodies of men, here one without a leg, there missing a head.

At Artois I had been on the burial party, I had carried plenty of bodies, but I had never seen the like of this. It's true just the name of Verdun is enough to send us half round the bend. We marched quickly because shells were bursting to the right of us and getting nearer. They must be aiming at the road. We were almost at the run and all of a sudden there was a whistle overhead and everyone threw themselves to the ground. I'd made it to a ditch in water up to my knees. I got hit in the face by a lump of mud. The shell had bust to the right quite close to us. Then, like one man, everyone got up and ran like mad.

We made it to a crossroads, and went to the left. It was Fleury. We were made to go into the entrance of a trench, where we were all packed in together. There was hardly room for two platoons.

As we had left the fort we had been told "No smoking, no lighters". Now we were in a trench Sid took out his pipe and lit up his lighter. Before he had time to light his pipe a WO shouted, "Put it out. Who is it? Where are you?"

No-one answered. "Idiot", he said, "Do you want to get us killed? The boche can see everything".

We left the trench and assembled in a field behind a barn. There was another Company there, the 17th. We had come to work together and were due to meet some Pioneers from the Headquarters Unit, but something had gone wrong and no-one turned up. Some of the NCOs went searching for them. They found territorials, gunners, chasseurs, but no Pioneers. We were still there at two next morning. The officers conferred together, and we were off once more. We left big gaps between the Companies, but what a retreat! We made it back to our wood without any losses.

Third Day

The boches weren't disturbed today. We did our best to get organised, but it was impossible to do anything in the soaked ground and continual rain. It was perishing cold in our trench too and it was difficult to sleep it was so wet.

I was on the fatigue to get the stew. That went off with no incident. We ate hurriedly, as there was work to do. We headed off to Fort de Sourville, always as fast as we could. Now we knew where we were. A WO from the Genie showed us our job.

We had to dig out a supply trench from the fort entrance to the road to Fleury, in an area subject to heavy shelling. No smoking!

As usual a thick white tape had been laid on the ground setting out the line of the trench. We were told to dig a metre and a half by three metres and waist deep in teams of two. I looked for Avrillon. I would have liked to be with him, but I could not find him. Then I felt a touch on the back, "Hey, Lafrichoud, shall we work together?" It was Trucho, a nice bloke, but not strong and not much good at this sort of work.

"If you want, but you take your metre and leave me mine". I looked for somewhere to start. There was no shortage of shell holes but none where I wanted one. No point in grumbling, but there was no point staying there. I moved three metres along the tape, and found a hole big enough to take a cart and two oxen. It must have been made by a 420 at least, but that didn't matter.

"Come on Trucho, do you see that hole over there? If there's any shelling, dive into that". "Understood", he said and we got to work. We had dug down to the depth of our knees when a fresh order came round. Dig down to thirty centimetres, and complete the whole length of the tape to that depth. Nearly all of us had an eye on a hole in case we needed one. People were grumbling because there could be a load of shells falling where we were working any minute. Now we were working half heartedly. After four hundred metres we said in one voice to the Lieutenant, "The more we do the more they want".

Then rain poured down and we took shelter behind a small fort. While we were sheltering there, several shells went overhead and fell two to three hundred metres away. The rain eased and the Lieutenant was impatient. He wanted us to hurry up and finish the job, and go. We spread out along the length of the tape so everyone had their bit to do. Some blokes only dug down twenty centimetres, it was nothing like an even depth, but it didn't matter, you could see we had been at work. At last we got to the end of the string, and with our shovels over our shoulders we went back to our damp trench.

Fourth Day

The day was uneventful. It was chilly in the trench. "We could use some central heating", said Dudule, but no one raised a laugh.

After our stew we went back to the same work. An icy rain fell mixed with snow, and it was bitter.

Trucho had stuck with me, and we hurried to get to our hole, but we were told to go further along. It was to be only thirty centimetres deep, and by now we were almost getting to the road to Fleury.

It was still raining steadily, but we really didn't mind it as we'd noticed that the guns stopped firing in the rain. Then several shells went over and burst five hundred metres away. The rain got even heavier and the Lieutenant told us to pack it in, and we were relieved to go back to the trench.

Fifth Day

Day for us is almost night. We have to try to illuminate our damp dungeon as best we can. Calm, like yesterday the battery of Rimailho is still just in front of us. They haven't been in use today, luckily for us. They are well camouflaged, and can only be seen from above.

Time for our stew, then with picks and

'We saw wrecked cars, burnt out trucks, horses killed and bodies of men'

shovels over our shoulders, we went off to work. It was a fine day, with no rain, and it was back to making the supply trench towards the road to Fleury.

A Sergeant went by and said, "The boche will have seen your work last night, no doubt about that. With this good weather we're bound to get a pasting, get digging as fast as you can".

I was wielding the pick, and Trucho shovelling out the earth. We were lucky and hit a seam of sand which was easy going and quick. I had a nasty feeling things were going to get bad.

We got our bit done, a two metre length as deep as our waists. Inevitably the metre between us and the next section was only thirty centimetres deep. The fellow doing the next bit started arguing with us, "You're not stupid", he said, "It's an evacuation trench we're digging, when the stretcher bearers come along, they'll fall into your hole." "Half wit", replied Trucho, "It's not yet finished".

The words were hardly out of his mouth, and we heard a whistle. I chucked away my pick and threw myself flat on the bottom of the trench. Trucho fell on top of me, and the bloke who had been arguing followed. The shell burst almost on top of us, but that wasn't it. It was followed by another, and another. I was almost suffocating at the bottom of the trench under the weight of my companions, they were pretty heavy, but the firing didn't stop. Then the range lengthened. Who were we going to find killed or wounded? At last it ceased and they moved, and I was able to breathe once more.

It was a miracle, no-one had been hurt. The trench would have been cleared by an enfilade (a line of fire from the end of the trench that would sweep along its length) but not a shell falling on it. We got the order to leave which we did at high speed.

Sixth Day

That night when we got back from work, I took a small bottle of cognac out of my pack. It had been sent to me by someone in the country. I shared it with Avrillon and we felt better after such an awful day. It was a great improvement on the army grog and at least the boche wouldn't get it. After nightfall a fatigue party went off for the stew. Another party was organised to take the picks and shovels back to Fort de Souville as we were to leave that night.

The rumour started. We were going to Verdun to replace the unit held in reserve there. The fatigue party with the stew returned and we ate.

"Get your packs, don't leave anything behind!"

We went off sure enough heading in the direction of Verdun, but not for long. We turned right at the road to Fleury. We had barely gone two hundred metres when we stopped. The officers talked together, we were waiting for the Company Commander, who was due to meet us with another Lieutenant from the fort. Something had gone wrong, or the Captain had misunderstood the orders, no doubt he was going off to find out, but nobody said that. In the meantime we were waiting on a bit of road likely to be shelled and people started to mutter.

At last they came back and we went off at a brisk pace. The road had been cleared, and all that was left was a few burnt out cars all shoved to the same side.

We heard that every night a group of territorials came along the road to recover the dead and move anything blocking it.

When we got to the edge of Fleury we left the road and took a small track going

off on the left. It led us down to the plain. Avrillon gripped my arm, "Look at that corpse on the right". The whole body was buried, just two legs left sticking in the air. A bit further on we passed the edge of a huge crater, the edges were as high as a house it must have been a 420 shell that burst there.

We got to a railway line. This must have been where the shells were falling. The track was completely destroyed. There were a lot of dead mules about, it must have been a machine-gun company that caught that. Going away from the railway, we followed what passed for a trench. It was only thirty centimetres deep, but for several hundred metres it was at the foot of a bank. Further ahead in the direction we were going 210s were falling with a tremendous noise.

We were now in a deep gully which had been wooded with huge trees on both sides. All that was left now was the trunks.

We came to a sudden stop. The officers had to find something, but things weren't going well. We were hanging about in a dangerous place. We were being made to wait against the bank where a Company of the 19th in our Battalion had been wiped out, and the same could happen to us. We didn't move for a long time. Then we edged forward as the boche fire went further off. A 210 landed behind the Company wounding several of the fourth platoon including the butcher attached to the kitchen who wasn't normally in the line. He called for a medical orderly. One of his mates went to help him and asked where he was hurt. He didn't answer and wanted a hole to hide in. Another of the wounded was crying like a baby, and was asked where the injury was, "On the bum", he replied. "You never!" said his chums "You do have a big wound".

Shells were still falling behind us when there was a loud cry. A shell had fallen on one of the last of the Company. There was one dead and several wounded. In the m  le the platoons had got mixed up, and there weren't enough officers and NCOs. Where were they? Had anyone seen them? Then some voices were heard from a trench to the right. The entrance was steep and slippery and it was so narrow you couldn't get in with a pack on your back.

Now we got a torrent of orders. Keep heading straight along the trench. Don't panic. "Bloody hell, load of idiots, I can't get past anyone. You make me shit", muttered the Sergeant in front of me.

One louder voice made itself heard over the others. "Listen to me, it's Captain Bertrand talking. I can understand you are frightened. You are bound to be nervous. Your officers have taken the wrong turning getting into this trench. Keep straight on, you will find yourselves at the Bois de la Caillette. There we will relieve a Company of the 226th. We carried on along the trench which was bigger and deeper now. It went up a bit, and we saw some half ruined houses at the edge of the ridge. A stench we knew only too well hit us. "Civilisation!" said one of the lads.

We passed the outer fortifications of Fort Douaumont and turned to the right and found ourselves in a wood. The platoons formed up, and everyone in our squad was there. Then we went forward in turn, our first platoon replacing their first platoon and so on.

As we relieved them the lads from the 226th gave us some tips. "Be careful, don't

show yourselves during the day, we're at risk from an enfilade. We don't know where the boche are, we never see them. The barrages have been going over us, and landing behind. The gulch at the back of us is heavily shelled and the clods of earth that get thrown up land round here. While we've been here, the trench hasn't been shelled, but take great care not to be seen by the planes".

Soon after we had settled in our officers arrived with Captain Maupoil the Battalion Commander. He wanted to know how far we were from the boche. Volunteers for a patrol were sought. A Sergeant and a soldier came forward. They set off without their rifles, but each had a pistol. What became of them? We never saw them again.

Seventh Day

At dawn we had cold coffee and grog. Then we tried to work out where we were, because we hadn't the chance to do it the night before, or get any idea of our position. On my left was Sergeant Biuoner, usually he was in charge of the mail. Beyond him was Mezin, quite a youngster from the 1914 intake. Further off was our second squad Paupere, Cariere, etc. To my right was Sibel, but there was some bullet protection between us, and we had to go four or five metres to see each other. Beyond him was Trucho, Pejau and Corporal Fontaine. The trench then went off to the left. There was a machine gun at the bend. The other side of that there were a few men from our platoon which ended there. The third and fourth platoons followed which liaised with the Chasseurs of the 42nd.

We couldn't see past Corporal Fontaine to the right. Ahead of us we could see no further than thirty or forty metres. The wood was nothing but a mess of broken trees and branches. The few trees that were still standing were as bare as telegraph poles. At the back of us was a steep slope going down to a deep ravine. This was the Caillette Ravine.

The whistling or more often the constant racket of shells was continuously overhead, and every now and then a 105 fell into the ravine. Each time they went over and fell in the ravine the Sergeant said, "It's all right

for us now, but if they shorten their fire, it will be bad for us".

While we were trying to get our bearings, a Sergeant from the fourth platoon came up. The whole lot of us had nicknamed him 'Sergeant Politic', since whatever the subject he could turn it into a political discussion. "Well", he said, "What do you think of our position, do you think

it is any good?" Sergeant Bionet replied, "And you, what do you think of it?"

"We are very badly placed", he said, "I know this area, I did my military service here before the war. I had a chat last night with a Lieutenant, who knows what's going on about the major offensive which is going to be launched from here. You know the attack will start from the Caures Wood, where Colonel Driant was killed and all the Chasseurs killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The boche had found there was only a line of territorials and unmanned forts in front of them. Then took the fort of Douaumont was only manned by eleven territorial gunners when it was taken. What do you make of that? Our fine headquarters. It's all very well to chuck brick bats at a left wing government. Is it

'There were a lot of dead mules about, it must have been a machine-gun Company'

their fault that we haven't enough heavy guns? And look at it chums, in your training was there anything other than the 75s and a bayonet? Our headquarters had a hobby horse and that was it. Now we have had a year and a half of war, and they don't understand a thing. Here the headquarters say 'Oh, they won't attack here, the ground's not suitable', and nothing's done, no defences. Look along the ridge, Fleury, the slope at Souville, they all need good defences, decent trenches with good barbed wire entanglements, but how the hell can we do it under the fire of their guns".

"You know there are 1,800 guns and 250,000 men ready to attack us. Our batteries are as badly off as us, no shelter at all, the positions have been spotted or if not already are as soon as our guns open fire".

"Look behind us, half way up the ridge there's a platoon of the 19th, then the strong point on the other slope is held by the 17th and 18th. But what's going to happen if they need reinforcing? Where would that put us? Shelled without cover, out in the open? We were seen here last night for sure. If we move during the day we'll be spotted immediately because they're looking down on us from higher ground all around".

"Don't you realise our Corps is in the most dangerous part of the front after the farm at Thiaumont? If only we had the fort at Douaumont it would all be different".

"Well now you know just what I think of it. I'm not trying to discourage you, because I know you are all good Frenchmen, and you'll put your hearts into it, I'm sure of that". He went off, but was back a moment later, having got hold of a can of water. "I'm running a temperature, I'm always thirsty", he said as he went off to join his platoon.

We set to work to improve our trench, as it wasn't deep enough. Each of us tried to make a hole where we would be able to stretch out and even sleep if possible. The day went off without anything happening.

At nightfall the fatigue party to get the stew was chosen. "I hope you'll be all right, I really do", said the Sergeant, "The only thing I want is that you all get back safely". This fatigue was the most dangerous of all. We had to go six or seven kilometres to get to the mobile kitchen and ten kilometres of our round journey was likely to be shelled.

In the first platoon a man had offered another a hundred francs if someone would take his place. As we set off we were guided by a Corporal. It was snowing. We made good progress as we knew the way. After the supply trench, it was the railway line, then veer off to the left, on to the plain, past the deep shell hole where the chap had been buried head first. Luckily the shells fell after we had passed, and there was the canteen.

The Corporal in charge there told us they had nearly been killed. A shell had passed through a window skimming the ceiling of the room where the Sergeant-Major was working, but didn't explode. It had made the cooks realise that they were exposed.

At length it was our turn to be served. We took the wine in containers, there was no thought of carrying pails, then grog, meat, coffee and bread. We dared not think what would happen to the stew and vegetables if we had to throw ourselves flat on the ground, which we might have to do.

We set off with me carrying a sack of bread which was heavy, and made marching difficult. We went as quickly as we could. When we got to Fleury several of

the lads wanted a rest before we took the track. I was one of them, as I was tired and sweat was running down my back. "We'll go on until we get to the big crater made by the 420 where we'll have protection from the shelling", said the Corporal.

That was accepted and we hurried on until we got there. I let my sack fall to the ground with relief. We were well protected by the great mound of earth. However, it was only a couple of minutes before some of the others wanted to press on. The Corporal decided that we should. I asked to rest a bit longer or for someone else to take my sack, but no-one was prepared to do it. We talked about it for several minutes and went on. I had got the sack on my back and got about a hundred metres along the track, when an almighty bombardment started. It was a dreadful racket, the plain seemed to be on fire, and we ran to get the shelter of our mound. Eventually the shells stopped falling and we set off again like crazy. "You saved our lives", said the Corporal, "If I hadn't stopped to listen to you we would have been right in the path of that lot, and we'd all have been killed".

We got to the railway line and I slipped and fell, dropping the sack which rolled a couple of metres away. I gathered it up quickly and ran to catch the others. In other circumstances I could never have done it being so tired. We made it to the ravine, and then to the wood passing the fortifications I got entangled in a telephone wire and slipped again. This time I fell in the water that had built up in the bottom of the supply trench.

It was just after midnight when we arrived at our trench. The lads were pleased to see us back and everyone started to eat. The stew turned out to be full of earth as the container had had no cover and going through the narrow supply trench it had fallen in as we brushed the sides.

So everyone had to eat at their post as we had to watch out for the boche.

Eighth Day

The night passed without anything happening in our sector of the trench. What we feared was day break when there was most likely to be an attack, but nothing happened and it was full daylight. "That's it", said the Sergeant, "They won't attack this morning. We drank grog and cold juice.

No-one had shut an eye all night. We were watching anxiously. We hadn't been bothered by the officers, there was no sign of them. The Sergeants and Corporals were watching like the rest of us. "Look at it", said Sergeant Bionet, "That's where an attack would come, straight in front of us along this little valley, and we're there to greet them. Do you want to see Paris again?" "Indeed I do", I replied, "La Chapell and my wife and two daughters".

He said all this in a halting voice dragging out the words, and I could see a glint in his eye. "Listen", he said, "You must understand me. I was thinking about it in the night. The troops we relieved were here six days during which the boche didn't attack. We are going to be here for six days. The boche are not going for twelve days without launching an attack. They know we are bringing up fresh troops every day and our heavy guns are being reinforced. It must be the moment to hit hard for them. I'm convinced there will be

an attack before our six days are out and we must be better prepared".

"Take a pick, you too Mezin, I'll take a shovel, let's get to work. We must make a fire cell. We found a rifle in the trench, loaded it with nine rounds. Then found two sandbags containing new cartridges, which we put close by. Mezin had twenty-five grenades in front of him (horrid things!). They were the sort of grenade where the primer was released by a string. We reckoned we were ready to defend ourselves.

"Now what bothers me", said Bionet, "Is those three trees in front of us two metres away. If a shell gets one of those we'll have had it".

Two stretchers were carried past us. It was two wounded from the third platoon. The bombardment never stopped. From time to time there was a noise like an express train overhead. It was the biggest shells that made a terrible noise and stunned us.

Night came and the fatigue for the stew was chosen. The Corporal leading it took away letters for us and brought us the fresh ones, we had no complaint over that. The fatigue party went off, leaving only a few of us in the line, as some were away working. We had to make a support trench several metres behind halfway up the slope of the ravine I was on the working party. It was hard ground and we didn't make much progress. It seemed to be nothing but rock and we were worn out.

The stew arrived at midnight. They had had problems along the way, but everyone was alright. We left off working to have something to eat. That was it for the night, and we went back to our places in the line.

The remainder of the night was normal. We got ready for the boche at dawn, but there was

nothing again that morning. When the light had come up the Sergeant shouted, "Grog up".

Ninth Day

We drank our grog and coffee, which was no hotter than other days. I was whacked and wanted to report sick. The orderly came to get six of us. We made our way to the top of the first platoon. He said, "Do exactly what I do to get across here". We clambered along what seemed to be no more than a crater with a few bodies, then all of a sudden we were inside the fortifications. Was this the first aid post? We got into a room that was crammed with bandsmen (as in the British Army, bandsmen double as medical orderlies in action) stretcher bearers, orderlies.

The doctor was sitting down with a candle beside him. It was gloomy as no-one had opened the windows. I was three metres from him when he called out "'Lafrichoud". "What's the matter with you?" "I'm all in Major, I can hardly stand, and I've got a raging temperature". "Right I can see you're not well, stick out your tongue" (he's still three metres away, with only a candle for light!). "Hmm, excused work tonight. That's the best I can do for you, because if I send you to Verdun you'll probably be killed on the way there. And if you get there and they then decide you're not sufficiently ill, they'll send you back here and you're just as likely to be killed on the way back. You're better off staying here". All six of us had the same treatment. On the way back to the line we followed

'A shell had passed through a window skimming the ceiling of the room where the Sergeant Major was working'

the supply trench, there was time to do that.

That afternoon the boche seemed to be very nervous. The Sergeant kept saying, "Things are looking bad". From time to time, I went over to have a word with Sibel when we wanted to talk. I had to go round the bullet screens, and sometimes I went as far as the machine gun post. Manning the gun was a real anti-boche, a youngster wearing an armoured suit, "I'm not frightened of the boche, not me". "Nor am I", I told him, "But I am frightened of their shells, grenades and bullets". Trucho had been inventive in his trench. He had dug himself an arm chair where he could sit or stretch out, with a good twenty centimetres of earth over his head.

Next to Pajau, Corporal Fontaine was always asleep. In the evening there was a heavy bombardment. Though it was short, some of the fourth platoon were wounded. All of us were very nervous, no-one could say anything without swearing, in terms I can't write. Not a soul from the third or fourth platoon who kept coming and going for water, wasn't as white as a sheet, with a heavy tread. We were always thirsty. Everyone seemed to be feverish, and it wasn't the quarter litre of wine which refreshed us. When it snowed or rained we took the covers of our packs, and made a little channel on the parapet to catch the water, or snow. It was always mixed with dirt because the shells coming over were continually sending up clods of earth and pebbles.

That night the fatigue for the stew went off, and Sibel and Mezin were working. Excused work I stayed on watch with the Sergeant. "I'm pleased you're here", he said, "Time doesn't drag so much when there's someone to talk to". Near midnight he said to me, "I'm frozen, oh my feet, my feet. You can't imagine. Think of those who sent us to war, who read the news bulletins by their fire, and ask why are they making a fuss at the front, it'll all be over quickly. They are the ones I'd like to put here, just one night standing around in the snow and the rain".

It was half past midnight when the party with the stew returned, but they weren't all together. Some of them had fallen behind, as there had been a lot of shelling on the way back near the railway line. They had had to take cover and been separated a number of times. The Corporal was mad. After an hour the others turned up, but they were still one short, he must be wounded or killed, but at last there he was with his containers.

We all ate then went back to our places.

Tenth Day

Day break. "Keep your eyes skinned", said the Sergeant, but nothing happened. Then as usual we had grog and coffee, it would have been better hot!

Like the day before we were under heavy fire, that hadn't eased all night. We could see flames coming from Fleury. "Heavens", said Sibel, "Look what's falling on the plain, they've got a lot to swallow this morning". As it was we could see nothing but smoke.

Suddenly there was a tremendous din that smote our ears. Sibel leapt back to his side, and I threw myself flat on the ground. Then we looked up nervously, right between us was a great hole. We took a pick and unearthed the cap of a 210 which had fallen straight between the two of us. It weighed several kilos and had shaved both of us. We had no idea where it had come

from it might have been a kilometre away. That night an enormous clod of earth landed with a great thump on our firing sill, it must have weighed over a pound. "The third one will be alright", I said. "Are you superstitious?" asked Mezin. "No, old boy, I just said it to give us something to laugh about".

A lot of shells were falling in the ravine. "What are they aiming for?" asked Sibel. "I can tell you", I replied, "Yesterday, when we were split up, and I found myself looking into it, so I had a good look round. Several metres below the ledge we were on I saw a trench running along the bottom. That's where the boche think we are and that is why it is being shelled so heavily". About ten o'clock there was some coming and going in the trench. The lads in the 226th had told us not to show ourselves during the day, but how could we manage that? A Corporal from the fourth platoon went past and said, "Hey! You gossips, you've left your tenants at the door last night". Like me, he had been a concierge in Paris, rue La Bruyere. He was a good bloke. I asked him if he was looking for water, because there was hardly any left. So much had been taken from the well it wasn't able to fill more than a can or two at once. "Oh", he said, "We've been heavily shelled, and we're all pretty frightened, it makes a change to walk about, and it's an excuse to leave the trench".

About mid-day we could see shells falling behind us on some of the other units of the Company, the 17th and 18th of the Battalion the other side of the fortifications, when we heard the most enormous explosion. "That was no shell", said the Sergeant, "That was a trench mortar". (weapon that could be fired from a trench, and thus concealed, which lobbed a bomb with a high trajectory at the enemy).

Over to our right there was total confusion in the first platoon. Out of it came one of our lads Carrere. "Look up into the sky". We saw a great tube going up in the air over there above the first platoon. Where on earth would it land? It made a slight turn to the right and fell squarely on a Platoon of the 19th Company, where there was also a machine gun position. It fell a few metres short of the gun and rolled towards the parapet of the trench where it exploded. From where we were we could see the sandbags being

thrown a hundred metres in the air, and men running in the trench. We felt sorry for them, and we were frightened as well, because a weapon like that was demoralising, there was no telling where the next bomb would land. If they changed their aim it could be on us.

Carrere was almost deranged. He ran up and down the trench, and twisted his moustache shouting, "I'll warn you", every time he saw someone. We could hear him shouting, "Another one, not for us". Another bomb fell every ten minutes or so, and there must have been casualties, as the whole trench was flattened.

It took a long time, but our own trench mortars began to reply. We could follow the trajectories of the bombs from the place where they were fired to the point where we saw the body of a boche thrown high in the air right up to the treetops. Then the boche stopped firing. Their mortar must have been destroyed. Our lot sent of twenty-two bombs, it was all they had. We heard that there was only one killed in the Platoon. All that was left of him was a foot. The young machine gunner had come to

no harm.

After dark the fatigue party went off for the stew, and the rest of us went to work, but we couldn't get much done. Bang on eleven o'clock when everyone was asleep at the work, a great lump of earth from a shell fell on the helve (correct term for the shaft of a pick) of my pick making a notch in it. (It was the third, but I was alright). Lieutenant Foquet came to see how the work was getting on. He found everyone asleep. He said to Sergeant Philipi who was asleep, "How come everybody is so tired?" It was alright for him, he had a horse at his disposal. The Sergeant woke up and made excuses, "Get on with it", the Lieutenant said, "And don't fall asleep at your posts, keep a good look out, it's critical".

Eleventh Day

The night passed like all the others. The Sergeant said to me, "One more night gone and we should be relieved today, but it won't be before midnight".

"There, the light's coming up, keep a good look out if we want to save our skins". A moment later he tapped me on the shoulder, "Old chap, they're not going to attack this morning, have a drink on it". He put out his hand, and we drank our grog. We had just finished our drink when there was an almighty explosion shaking the ground under our feet. The boche had tried to mine the fortification, but the mine hadn't been effective, and all those in the fort escaped safely.

In an instant Mezin let our a cry, "The Boche". The Sergeant and I leapt for the gun, Mezin for his grenades. The boche were coming towards us in the hollow in single file thirty metres away. They were advancing slowly because of the heaps of broken branches from the trees.

As quick as a flash, our three magazines were emptied at them. Just as quickly they flattened themselves to the ground, and crawled on their hands. We didn't let up with our fire and Mezin threw his grenades. His aim was poor because he was nervous. Then he shouted, "On the right, fire, fire".

At that moment there were branches in the way of my eyes, then I saw them crawling towards me ten metres from the trench. The moment they stood up, I aimed at the one in the lead, I fired. He fell dead. The others flattened themselves and retreated crawling away. Right in front of me, one of them got upright behind a tree. I fired, but missed him. My round hit a stump close to his head and he flattened himself to the ground.

At the machine gun at the corner of the trench they had seen the advance, and were firing too, but the slope of the ground and all the tree trunks were such that it wasn't doing much good. Over to the right we could hear the clatter of our machine guns and the sound of grenades going off in front of the third and fourth Platoons and the 42nd Chasseurs.

They had bungled their attack, and withdrew leaping into a shell crater. Sibel hadn't seen a thing, nor Pejau or Trucho. Although we were all together in the first platoon the lie of the land was such that they couldn't see more than four metres ahead of them.

Sibel came over to us, "Look behind, the boche are attacking with a flamethrower. It's the first time I've seen one, it's frightful".

Two flamethrowers were in action accompanied by grenadiers who were throwing their bombs. One of the Companies had to evacuate their trench, but not for very long. One of the flamethrowers was hit and his appliance caught fire. The man was charred to a

cinder. The other was so unbalanced on the slope that he fell in the trench. They said he was battered to death. The Company regained the trench with grenades and it cost the aggressor dearly.

All along the line the boche were repulsed. They retreated jumping into shell holes to escape our fire, and the whole thing was over in a quarter of an hour. Now six flares were fired into the air to ask for an artillery barrage from our 75s and 105s to finish off the boche, but nothing happened. "What's happened to our gunners" asked Mezin, "Are they all dead?"

A whistle came over our heads. It was the first shell from our 75s, and it fell right on our first platoon, (because we could be enfiladed by both lots of artillery). There was a lot of shouting, several injured and one killed. There was a voice from the back, "The swine, I knew very well I'd get killed here". It was Dudule, one of those who had been injured. He had had a lot of clods and stones full in the face. He was as black as a sweep and covered in blood. "But you're not dead", the WO told him, "Stop grumbling".

Further off a French 155 had fallen on the command post of the 17th Company. We heard the Captain had been badly wounded, and the runners killed. Several 75s fell in front of us and a few 155s, but not for long. There had been complaints to the artillery, which produced a WP and two Sergeants to visit us. Some of those amongst us would have gladly give them a hiding. They wore a pained air, "It's not our fault", they said, "It's the shells we get. Some of them are not properly charged, and that's why they fell short." They went to see for themselves where the shells had fallen.

Now the third and fourth platoons, and some of the other Companies were finishing off the boche from their shell holes. They had to stick their heads over the parapet to do that, which resulted in a number killed and wounded. The stretcher bearers went to their work, and when they came back I saw on a stretcher the Corporal from the fourth platoon, who had always had a kind word, but he was dead. I was upset at that and the clown Medrano had been killed.

It was brilliant sun that afternoon. It was the first of April. Nionet grabbed me by the arm, "Look at the boche up there!" Right over our heads was a plane circling, and then dropped a flare. At the same moment we heard a noise "Couf, vouf, vouf". "It's for us", said the Sergeant. The words weren't out of his mouth before we were thrown over by an explosion. It was a 210 which had fallen to the right. We were covered in debris, stones, earth, great lumps of all sorts. I didn't dare to stand up, and I thought of the chums covered by it, Sibel and Trucho.

We could hear them shouting, "Quick lads, shovels, picks, Trucho's buried", called Pejau. They rushed up from all sides. The shell had fallen two metres from him, beside a big tree root that had fallen on top of him, and was trapping him. Pejau had climbed on the mound. "He should have stayed in his arm chair", he said. "Forget the picks, leave it to me". He clawed away at the earth, as he did a second shell landed, "Vouf, vouf". We all threw ourselves on our stomachs. It fell near the machine gun, then another, but it fell further off. Pejau was still scrapping at the earth. "There, I've found his hair", he called. He scraped away the earth as fast as he could with his bare hands, and was in time, he was still breathing. The picks and shovels were brought into use. The root was

so big we couldn't move it, but had to dig round it. Trucho chatted, he complained about his leg. The minute he was released everyone started to laugh. He told us "When I heard the shell I dived into my hole, but did not have time to get right in, that leg was sticking out". The stretcher bearers had turned up, but he didn't need to be evacuated.

Before dusk Captain Maupoil and the Company Commander came round. WO Navier told them, "Here are the three men who stopped the attack and killed the boche right there". "Well done, let me have their names", replied the Captain.

That night we searched the dead man for his papers. He was a twenty-eight year old reservist, who had just got permission to go on leave. We found a packet of photographs on him and a letter from his sister, which said she was sending the pictures and hoped he'd get his leave pass. It ended, "My dear brother I only hope for one thing, that you are not at Verdun".

The men for the stew fatigue were picked. I was one of them, so were Sibel and Piacosqui of our squad. We would get our orders where to go to the place allotted while we were in reserve. An old Corporal from the 1897 intake who was useless was in charge of the party. He had been with the regimental transport before, and knew nothing about the trenches. We didn't like it and would have preferred someone more resourceful.

We heard a terrible racket going on to the left as we were about to set off. There was the sound of grenades all round us, from both sides French and boche. Everyone leapt for their rifles and there was a fusillade from the whole Company, with the rat-a-tat of the machine guns (Grand Pere William uses the slang 'coffee grinder') joining in. Lots of flares were being sent up by both sides and it was almost as light as day. It was all about nothing. When the boche that had been sheltering in the shell craters tried to get back to their lines in the dark they were mistaken for a French attack and were on the receiving end of grenades from their own side. That's what set off the whole bombardment.

At last we set off despite being all worn out. I had two containers. We didn't get far before we had to split up. When we got to the railway track we had to wait for the ones that had fallen behind, before we went off on the road to Fleury.

When we wanted to get on to the track, there was nothing there. The whole place was shell holes. The Corporal didn't know where he was, and everyone chipped in with their own idea. We were lost in the plain, the night was as dark as anything, but we were in luck as the boche wasn't firing in this direction.

"Lafrichoud", Sibel muttered to me, "Follow me, the big crater made by that 420 is over to the left. Once we picked that up and went on, we rejoined the road and were only three hundred metres from the others. We went on to where the roads met like the footprint of a goose. That was where the road to Fleury crossed with those to the Fort de Vaux.

We could just make out some big mounds in the pitch dark, they were piles of corpses of horses and men. We stopped for a moment, as someone was lagging behind. There was a shout, "Stinkers, rotters, swine, aren't you going to wait for me?" It was Piacosqui.

Now the fatigue was complete with our

old dim-wit at the tail. Piacosqui asked to rest. "Rest if you want", said Sible, "I'm going, come after me if you want, but I don't want to get killed here". We all knew our way to the soup kitchen.

He went off in the lead and everyone followed. The way was nothing but holes and mounds. Some of the lads took out their shovels, but put them back quickly. We passed a Company of Chasseurs that might have been the 44th going to relieve the 42nd. Just before we got to the wood we saw a ditch on the left. It was full of rainwater. There might well have been a few bodies too, but that didn't fuss us, we were thirsty and took our our mugs to quench it.

We turned right and were safe. We were under the big bank which protected the road. All sorts of supplies were on it. We stopped for a moment. Piacosqui put his feet up on a bundle of barbed wire. Sibel looking for somewhere to sit trod on his foot. My word! What a shouting match broke out. "Stinker, cretin, I'll shove my bayonet in your chest", yelled Piacosqui. We had to separate them to stop them coming to

blows.

We arrived at the soup kitchen. The Sergeant-Major was there. He told us to go to Fort de Souville and wait for the Company there. This time I had to carry vegetables, how could I do it? The lad who had to carry the sack of bread couldn't manage his rifle as well. (Usually we didn't carry our weapons when going for the food, but we had had to today).

Sibel was to carry the bread, so I took his rifle with my two containers of rice. We had to make a lot of stops. We got into the danger zone, nothing was going on, but we stopped anyway. The boche were keeping up a steady fire, but it was falling too short to bother us. As we turned into the passage to the fort there were great craters from 420s full of bodies. We put on a burst of effort, it was the funk that spurred us, and we made it into the safety of the fort with a sigh of relief and stopped to rest.

They showed us where to go, we were on the ground floor, but we had to go down a stairway. There was a wide corridor, that was it. Candles were stuck in lunch bags, so we looked around. The floor was bitumen with no covering. At the end of the corridor there was a pile of sandbags, there might have been a thousand. A huge armoured door gave on to the courtyard. We were still at ground level but at the front of the fort facing the enemy.

At two in the morning the rest of the Company arrived, and we were able to ear. We all stretched on the bitumen, it was good to feel safe.

Twelfth Day

Today we were allowed to rest. During the day Sergeant Bionet came to have a word with me. "Old fellow, we're all right here, but I'd rather be a hundred kilometres away. We'll be alerted if things go badly in the line, and you can see we'll be in a fix."

That evening two runners were picked, Mezin and Avrillon. They were to take messages to the Commandant of the artillery battery as the telephone was not working. It was always getting cut in the bombardment.

After dark the fatigue for the stew went off. We ate as soon as they got back. We had only just finished when a Lieutenant came in with a pack on his back.

'We could just make out some big mounds, they were piles of corpses of horses and men'

"Warning, the boche have attacked, the Chasseurs have had to retreat and the Bois de Caillette has been taken". Things were going badly. We were ready when the Sergeant in charge came in. "You are to go to a trench in front of the fort, you and the 19th Company. The 17th and 18th are to reassemble." No-one knew where. There was an argument about it. The Captain of the 19th was resisting it. It was the 19th who had been in the lead at Artois, it was the turn of the 17th and 18th to take it.

We left the fort at the run heading to the left along a ditch for a hundred metres, then we were in the trench. The platoons were all mixed up. I was beside a man from the fourth platoon. "Here", he said, "Have a bite of sausage". I was exhausted. I asked him where he had been able to get it. "It's from my penfriend during the war, who sent me a parcel", he said. He was fully thirty-five.

Nothing happened during the night, and we ran back to the fort next day. When we got to the entrance our hearts froze. There must have been almost a whole battalion of territorials sitting in the shell holes. "You're badly placed there", said one of the WOs. "What are you waiting for?" "Nobody knows!" "But you're in an extremely dangerous place". We heard afterwards that a shell had fallen on them and killed seventeen.

'We heard that a shell had fallen on them and killed seventeen'

Thirteenth Day

We rolled out some blankets and tried to sleep on the bitumen. At ten o'clock we had some breakfast. Then an enormous shell fell on the fort and all the candles went out.

Every now and then the heavy door was opened to let the runners through. During the afternoon Mezin came up with his water bottle in his hand. He opened a door and disappeared. He had just gone out when a large shell fell on a corner of the fort. We heard that he had a fractured shoulder from a big chunk of flying stone. Another runner was detailed. It was Piacosgui. What a fuss he made! "But I can't walk any more. It's my rheumatism", he complained. "That's nothing to do with it, you're a runner", Sergeant Philipy told him. He had to go off with the other runners. It's true it was a bad choice, he was from the 1899 intake, and there were plenty of younger and fitter ones among us.

In the evening there was news of the two Companies that had gone into the line. There were heavy losses in the 17th but the 18th seemed to have fared better.

The fatigue for the stew was chosen, and I was on it again. We had had so many losses I was now on it every other day. We left and ran as far as the bank. We made it there and back without incident. We ate, and waited, if only it could be as quiet as this!

Fourteenth Day

I slept badly. I was ill and clapped out. I went sick. There was a lot there, including the Lieutenant of the Company who had an abscess on his neck and was evacuated. No-one in the Company was sorry. There were two from my squad, the other was Paupere who came from Montmartre. It was the head doctor with three bars (bars on the shoulder, like pips or a crown for a British officer) who examined us. He was no push over. Paupere was in front of me, he had torn off a nail – excused work.

It was my turn. "What's the matter with

you?" "I've got a temperature, and I'm done for, I can't go any further". "You must push yourself, the Division is going to be relieved any day". I looked him straight in the eye. "Sir, you haven't seen me here before, if I'm here, it's because I'm ill, look at my tongue". I was so angry I turned back on him and went away without waiting for a reply.

Back in our corridor that afternoon, we had a bit of fun with two young officers. When we had arrived at the fort we were told to watch out for spies wearing French uniforms, and if there was any doubt raise the alarm or hold them. They were walking up and down the corridors, talking about how the fort was built, when the youngsters of the Company decided to follow them with their bayonets fixed to their guns. The doctors took fright and shut themselves in their office, shouting, "We are doctors from the Division, go and get Monsieur Untel".

The two lads stayed outside the door shouting. "They're spies!" A lieutenant came round, "Open up messieurs, don't be frightened". We saw the two of them come out, who hadn't been laughing a moment earlier. Night fell and the fatigue went off for the stew, which we ate as soon as they got back. Soon after WO Naviev came in with an order, then the Sergeant read out a list of names, without mine. I asked the sergeant why, "Excused work Paupere and Laffrichoud".

The others went off. About two in the morning Pejau came in on his own and stretched out next to me. "You were lucky not to be sent with us. Sibel was so nearly killed. Oh, old friend, oh old friend! There must have been about two hundred of us set off from here. Some were carrying flares, or sacks of cartridges, and others had rolls of barbed wire and all sorts of stores. We were going to Fort de Vaux. It didn't start off too badly, but when we got to the railway line, we had such a barrage, heaven knows what was falling all round us. We ran for it, people were dropping bundles, and the tubes of flares were broken. Anyway, not everyone made it to the fort. On the way back, it was worse going along the railway track. I don't know how he did it but Sibel got his boot caught in the rails. It was a tall-lace up one and I knelt down to undo it for him. He was able to get his foot out and then release the boot. At that moment there was another hail of shells. It was incredible! I got lost. I'd no idea where I was, and it was only by luck that I met up with the others. Later several more arrived. Sibel was with them. I was frightened, I thought I was done for but we had to do that crossing once more".

Fifteenth Day

At dawn we had our cold coffee and grog. A chum, one of the messengers, gave us some news about the two Companies coming into the line as reinforcements. He told us that on the second of April, the boche had attacked over the whole length of the line. On the ridge at Thiaumont the ground had been held, but the Chasseurs of the 44th had been outflanked at Caillette, leaving them without any machine guns. One had been hit by a 150 and the crew killed, and the other had been captured and its crew taken prisoner. There had been enormous losses with those killed, wounded or taken prisoner. Our two companies had arrived just in time to halt the boches. It was said that there were only thirty men left in the 17th Company. Yesterday the 74th came to their help with

a grenade attack, and regained the position but suffered heavy losses.

We were told to get ready to leave on a work party. We assembled at the entrance to the fort under the big arch. We were split into teams, each with a Sergeant in charge of three men, we all carried a sack of cartridges on our backs. We set off at five minute intervals. The last group was two stretcher bearers and a WO. We set off to the left along the length of the big ditch at the foot of the fort, and made a slight turn to the right. We had to jump over the trench we had been in a couple of nights ago and follow a line to the right. We clambered down a slope to a road, went past a wood, then a big mound and into a quarry. We put down our sacks and waited for the others, then left to go back to the fort, again in groups of three.

We had something to eat when we got back, and then set off again. We had another trip to make. This time there were no stretcher bearers, they were considered not necessary. I was in the last group. At the edge of the fort I slipped and fell. When I got up I could see the others in the distance. Shells were falling behind them, I was seized with fright, and ran to the edge of the trench. I was going to jump in but there were already men crouched in the bottom (they weren't part of our Division). I ran a bit further, but all the way were men crouched down. I ended up by jumping the trench and taking a diagonal line to catch up with the others. The ground was plastered with the holes of shells that had been aimed at the fort and had neither hit their target nor exploded.

I had run so much that when I got to the others I could not get my breath back I threw my pack down on a hump and it rolled off nearly hitting the back of Colonel Vincendon, who was sitting in the open by his command post. He laughed, and I wanted to apologise, but I was so out of breath I only gasped. "Sit down, and take a rest", he said. Then he advised us to go in pairs over spaces of any length. "Otherwise they'll shoot at you", he told us. Two by two, we made our way back to the fort without incident. When we were under the shelter of the entrance a barrage hit the fort, and a shell fell in a yard setting fire to a supply of flares and killing two men from the Genie who were peeling potatoes. After dark we were told we would be relieved. We would still have to go to get our stew because no-one knew what time we would be leaving.

I was part of the fatigue with Pejau and Dufour, but they both said they were sick. Martin one of the messengers volunteered. "I'll go with you", he said and the two of us left together. Before we left the fort I told him we would have to run to the shelter of the bank as he had not been on that fatigue before. "Why do that to fall in the craters?" he asked. "Well", I said, "I'm going to scamper". I set off at a run. When I got to the edge of the wood I heard explosions, a heavy barrage had started a real flattener. I could see the shells falling a hundred metres behind me. In my mind, I could see Martin killed. I was relieved to see him fifty metres from me covered in mud and grit. He picked up his containers and ran to join me. "I had a narrow escape", he said, "Luckily I had started to run to catch you up".

We could not carry everything between the two of us. We left the soup and took the wine, coffee and the bread and meat. We got back with no problems. After we had eaten we were told there would be one more working party to take cartridges. Most people voted with their feet, and

hardly anyone went off for it. I went to the runners to hide and stayed there until the work was over.

At eleven we were told to get ready for the relief which was coming slowly. Lieutenant Floquet was now the Company Commander, and we gathered round him. "Listen carefully", he said, "You all know, better than me, getting out of the fort is dangerous. You're all very tired, and I know it. We've got to have one more go at it, and getting out of the fort isn't the end of it. Everyone is to rendezvous at the crossroads on the road to Verdun".

At one in the morning the relief arrived. We passed them on the stairway. A Lieutenant asked them which Division they belonged to. One replied, "The butcher's" (that was to say General Mangin's). "Oh", he said and didn't ask anything more. We all sat together under the shelter at the entrance. There wasn't much of the Company, we were much diminished. WO Navier shouted, "En route, this isn't any errand, no slowcoaches". We had to stop before we got to the road to Verdun. A Sergeant came out of the ranks to two men who were held a third by the arms, who was crying like a child. "I'm a French Officer, you don't know what you're doing". "Well we'll see about that", said Lieutenant Floquet and told four men with fixed bayonets to surround them.

Shortly after we had passed the wood a man that we couldn't see very well, because it was so dark, joined in with the third platoon, and started to question the three men, "Are you from the 279th? Have you had a lot of losses? Where have you come from? Were you short of artillery? There were two Rimailhos and a 155 in the wood by the fort, are they still there?"

A Sergeant was listening, and kept an eye on them, and warned the Lieutenant who was at the head of the Company. When we got to Faubourg Pave, our Lieutenant handed him over to the post of the Gendermerie. "You've done the wrong thing", he said to the Lieutenant. "I'm an Artillery officer, and I have the honour to be part of the French Army". "We'll see about that", said the WO in charge. "It's not the first, I get one every day, he assured he won't get away". Now we were in the town. People in the doorways shouted out, "What Regiment?" "Fire Brigade" said someone. "Gas Company" added Sibel.

We left Faubourg Pave and had Verdun on our right. We passed houses for a while and then were in open country. We came to a big camp, and went in. It was our new billet in a big barn.

We stretched out on the ground, strewn with rubbish, jam jars, broken bottles, we weren't choosy. They didn't wake us till ten o'clock to have something to eat. The whole of the Battalion was there, or what was left of it. It was said there had to be seventy per cent losses before a unit was relieved.

Sixteenth Day

I saw some of the 17th. I had a friend there, we had met up at the depot, so I asked for Billau. I was told he had been taken prisoner. Then I saw another friend also a cobbler, and, as I had been a former Secretary of the Leather and Skin workers of St -Etienne. He was a good chap, honest and polite. There were a lot of people round him and I went to shake hands. I said to him "I'm shaking hands with a survivor". "We are all survivors", he replied, "When our two Companies arrived the boche had flattened the mound in front of the trench at La Caillette. That cost us many casualties. At one stage I was the

only man in the trench, all those around me were wither dead or buried. And when the youngsters from the 74th arrived, it was just in time. They attacked with grenades, and the first wave was successful, but the second was caught by the boche machine-guns. I've no idea how many were cut to the ground. All night long I heard cries of 'mother, mother! It was terrible and despite our critical position it cut through to my heart".

The boche hadn't taken many prisoners from our Company, less than the 18th. The first aid post was captured, the doctor, the orderlies, sixteen bandsmen stretcher bearers, and the divisional mortar battery were all taken prisoner. The boche were able to set up one of the mortars and part of the other. They had a Sergeant Gilet who had an amusing story. He had been taken prisoner with several comrades. A German Sergeant said to him in French, "Get a move on. Your 75s are bound to shell us. Follow this supply trench until it joins another, then take the right hand one and keep straight on". He made a mistake and turned left, after running for a while with no idea where he was he found himself back in the middle of the Company!

Then we heard some bad news. The Company of territorials of the Division that had been camped in a flour-mill in Verdun had been shelled and the mill had caught fire. Two or three hundred men had perished, burnt or drowned as there were no ways out. A lot had jumped out of the windows and fallen into the Meuse where they had drowned. I had a good friend among them. Now everyone was asking the same question. Are we going back in the line when there are reinforcements, and where would it be?

Part of the camp that we were in had been made into a hospital, no doubt to look after the most badly wounded. We spent the afternoon watching the dead being buried in a plot alongside. Some territorials were digging the graves, and others were filling them in. There was an endless flow of stretcher bearers. We spent another night in the barn and the following morning, after we had had our coffee, we were off again.

After several kilometres we came to a crossroads where a line of lorries was waiting for us. We got in and set off! No-one knew where we were going! We travelled for about two hours, and went through Bar-le-Duc, then Ligny-en-Barrois, and stopped. This was where we were to camp. We were quite well off in a barn with a garden which had a little stream running through it. We could wash, and we needed to.

We washed our clothes. We were able to boil them to kill the lice and we put everything in. The sun came out in the afternoon which dried our washing quickly. A few handed over their clothes to be washed. Pejau had a heavy woollen waistcoat which he gave to a woman to wash, as, he had been told she was good. He said to give it a good boil, "Don't worry it'll be done". She gave it back to him two hours still dripping, and he hung it on a line in the garden in the sun. An hour afterwards Avrillon called out, "Hey Pejeau, come and look at your waistcoat". Everyone went to have a look and they all burst out laughing. There must have been over a hundred lice hopping about on his waistcoat in the warmth of the sun. Avrillon said, "I can't count them all, but they must be grandfathers. They've all

got the Iron Cross".

Of course Pejau was as mad as anything. He ran over to the wash house and ranted at the washerwoman. "Haven't we suffered enough, and now you want to rob us", he said. In the morning two days after our arrival a lot of people reported sick. Corporal Fontaine was one of them. His face was swollen and everyone had been laughing at him. We soon learnt he had been evacuated dangerously ill. He had been ill for some time with a kidney disease, but hadn't said anything. We had continually teased him and called him 'sleepy', now we were sorry.

Nobody went out that day, we had enough to do getting clean. We went to bed early that night. It was good to stretch out on a good bed of straw and feel safe. Next morning I was called to the Company office with seven others. A note from the Colonel had asked for eight men to be picked who had distinguished themselves at Verdun. I was one of them and we paraded in a yard in front of the Colonel's office. All the ranks from the base were there, among them a Lieutenant of the Pioneers, who explained why we were there.

At Verdun some Pioneers had been misbehaving. Sixteen had been killed or sent away. The Lieutenant was telling us the tale from the gendarmes. They had been looking for wine or more likely gut rot. It was forbidden to go into Verdun. The inhabitants had fled and understandably they had left everything. There were goods of every sort for the taking, liqueurs, wines, charcuterie, conserves, the lot.

The doors of some shops were guarded by gendarmes as there had been some break-ins. In any event, it had been difficult to find out who had been responsible, whether it was people from the base or others.

The Lieutenant came along the ranks and asked us our trades. When I said cobbler he replied, "You shouldn't be in the Pioneers". After we had eaten at ten o'clock we went into the village. It didn't take us long to look round. That evening there was a concert given by amateurs in the cinema.

One of the performers was a gunner who had been a singer, but we missed Dudile and Medrano, the clown.

Our Sergeant 'Politic' had been reduced to the ranks, and sent to the 17th. A Captain had found him asleep when he was on guard duty outside the main police post. On the third day the reinforcements arrived. They were for all ranks.

Clothes were distributed because we had to pass in revue for General Joffre (was Commander in Chief of the Armies of the North and North East. Won a decisive victory with the Battle of the Marne, and launched the Somme offensive. He was replaced by General Nivelle in December 1916 and promoted to Field Marshall). Next morning after coffee, we got ready and went several kilometres along the edge of a main road.

The whole Division was there. It was the normal ceremony. The General pinned on the decorations himself. Medailes Militaires, Legion d'Honneur etc. Then the whole Division paraded in front of him. We went back to the camp, where Sergeant said to me, "I've heard a rumour, Verdun's finished".

The next morning we set off towards the Vosges.

Ligny-en-Barrois, April 1916 ■

'The whole of the Battalion was there, or what was left of it'

Reminiscences 1955-1959

John Young has only just joined the Association. Thankyou for your article John.

Report: Pte John M Young
23180740

WHAT a surprise after 56 years to see the National Service number of a deceased comrade from the 1956 to 1959 period.

I am referring to the obituary of David William Henry (23486740). The similarity in the numbers is obvious, the 23 at the beginning and the 740 at the end. I have wracked my mind but am unable to recall the name. The following memories may be suitable for publication. Where there is some doubt as to detail I have used the words (not verified). Those memories were real but I have never been able to find anyone I knew to check the details.

It may have been possible to contact some ex-service men if I had realised this magazine was around earlier. I left my private school at Canterbury in July 1955 with a moderate classical education and absolutely no knowledge or experience of the world outside the private school system into which I was dumped in 1947.

My attempts to find work were not encouraging. Three weeks into my new life a small buff coloured envelope from HM's Defence Office arrived and on 23 September 1955 I found, along with a group of fellow travellers, myself standing on the platform of Nottingham Station destined for Wrexham in North Wales.

I almost did not make it. The examining medical officer classed me as unfit for service being 2 stone under weight, misshapen right foot, rotten teeth and a back full of suppurating boils. After a long discussion he finally relented and made me Med 3, no overseas service and if I should want to become a regular then a visit to Chester Military Hospital would be mandatory to fix some problems and get me down to Med 2 and to serve in the Royal Pioneer Corps.

The journey to Wrexham was not a pleasant time for all. None that I remember wanted to be on the train and their sullen and uncooperative manner was self-evident. I mention this because the Sergeant at the departure point gave me the records to hold and to be the groups orderly as I was the only one with any military experience (cadets). An older man supported me, around 24 to 26 years of age, a solicitor also being sent to Wrexham. He disappeared within a week and became a Second Lieutenant.

Our arrival in Wrexham was a wonder with orders being barked at a rapid rate. Now embossed on TCV's we hurtled through the countryside finally swinging wildly to our left, past a large gatehouse and down a slope onto a flat area between the mess hall and the parade ground. These were the ground of the former Horsley Hall.

As we shambled around leaderless, temporarily, and were ultimately put into platoons (4 of). We were then marched back up the hill to the gatehouse, for the mandatory haircut. I will mention one unfortunate's experience. He was about 22 and an example of sartorial elegance. Wearing a maroon suit with maroon satin lapels, cut square just above the knees, drainpipe trousers and large shoes, a diamond stickpin in his tie and a

magnificent head of Elvis Prestley style hair. Without any delay the barber drew the shears from front to back leaving him with a number 2 cut.

One had to feel for him, the swagger had gone, the devised personality had gone and a very good soldier would come out of his experience. The 12 weeks of training at Horsley Hall passed all too quickly and we found ourselves temporarily posted to Hermitage Barracks in Wrexham – now a housing estate. My posting came through to 251 Coy at Kineton in Warwickshire.

There were eight of us (not verified), excited at this promotion to the regular army and its duties. Not that we had the slightest idea of the work we would be involved in. We arrived at Leamington Spa and a TCV of the RAOC drove us to the CAD. Our billets were WW2 Nissen huts with a pot-bellied stove for winter comfort. There were eight of us in each hut and a number were billeted in the new brick block.

I held a number of duties over the four years there, working in the sheds, Ration Storeman, pay clerk and finally WO Bryce's clerk and gopher. I also, after the arrival of some West Indian men captained a very fine cricket team for two years.

Several events are remembered mainly for their notoriety. The first was the apparent death of an airman who parachuted, at night, and landed in the CAD. Guard dogs do not like intruders. I was believed that he came from Gaydon Airfield. The second was the death of several men and dogs after I had provisioned them in 1958. A train moving rolling stock around, about fifteen minutes after leaving me, struck their vehicle

Thirdly in January 1956 on my first guard duty; it was bitterly cold and I had stood my one-hour watch at about 0200 hrs on a Saturday. A Military Policeman in an agitated state rudely brought us, who were trying to sleep, back to the real world. We were not told till a bit later but it would seem that a couple of men with accents had paperwork that would allow them onto the base; had broken into the armoury and absconded with the contents. Who they were was never publically established but the IRA got the blame and the guard commander must have got a rollicking.

After twelve months of pay at 7 shillings and 6 pence per week less NHS and tax, I decided to join as a regular with my pay increased to 3 guineas a week less NHS and tax. Before this could happen my records said a visit to Chester Military Hospital was mandatory. I spent a very pleasant three weeks there, acquired a tan, from an ultra light machine, had my back cured and made more natural in appearance, received some dental work and returned to duty.

On my return to base one Sunday after a leave period, I called into the guardroom at the main gate and was told there was a flap on in Cyprus and we would be seeing service overseas. On the Monday morning we were all lined up, hands on hips and given 2 shots in each arm. As I was not going to be sent anywhere I considered the inconvenience annoying.

I found myself with a small crew opening, checking, re-stencilling, re-boring, identifying and then packing the boxes of

40mm shells, into railway rolling stock. I sealed the wagons, five I think, with lead seals and waved them goodbye, I did wonder why they needed 40mm shells, generally used as anti-aircraft stock in Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios and Colonel Grivas had no planes!

It had its ending when I was sent to the same shed a year later to find a single wagon being left for work. I recognised the seal, opened the wagon and told the men to leave and wait at the smoke dugout. The boxes were rotting and there was exudation on most of the stock. Very unstable! We eventually, with RAOC oversight, wetted them down and they were then destroyed in the demolition pit.

At some point in 1957 the entire camp was lined up and several US Servicemen visited us, the walking wounded from fights in Banbury. The Army placed Banbury out of bounds to British serving personnel.

It was impossible for us to compete with an 18' car, 20-dollar bills and tales of fabulous wealth in the slums of New York or some other American major city. John Wayne seemed to be related to all US servicemen – if they were to be believed.

My life at Kineton was not always beer and skittles. I absented myself in order to deal with an ongoing domestic family situation for one week. My father reported me to the Military Police and I was unceremoniously returned to base and the wrath of Major Soden and WO2 Bryce. Two days in the brig, a severe rollicking and loss of privileges satisfied the legal aspects.

There were a large number of activities over the years at Kineton, most were monotonous however my last two days before being demobbed was marked by a single event that took me by surprise. We were settling for the night, for those three men leaving there was talk of the future and for them little love of the military life. The door was opened and two large men entered, demanding to know who was the Corporal. I identified myself and was promptly hauled off my bed, at arms length by a very large and strong man. He seemed intent upon having himself returned to military prison where he and his cohort had spent four years for striking officers and NCOs.

After a standoff, in which the men in the hut were offering to even up the situation, I managed to gain my release and dignity back. The men left the hut and I suggested that their interests would be better served by leaving the military. I knew of both men but had not expected such an explosive reaction at such a time in their lives. I never held a substantive rank mostly acting to cover such positions as Ration Store clerk, Cricket and WO's clerk. I left the service on 23 September 1959 and arrived in Australia on 15th January 1961. I have never returned to the UK.

I have served 6 years in the RAAF as a Corporal Armament Fitter servicing Sabres, Mirage and F111's and teaching in the TAFE system (Polytechnic). I am now a published author of two novels both on Amazon, with a third under construction. I am currently in my second year of a Masters degree in Writing. Australia has been very good to my family and myself. ■



Edinburgh Branch

Found this on one of my days off walking round Edinburgh

Report: Keith Paterson / Norman Brown
Picture: Keith Paterson

KEITH Paterson submitted the above photograph of a Standard on Facebook and stated: "Found this on one of my days off walking round Edinburgh"

This led to many comments and requests regarding the history of the Edinburgh and District Branch.

The Royal Pioneer Issue No 19 – June 1949

Edinburgh and District Branch - It is quite some time since this Branch sent in a report, but we have been having a difficult time finding quarters for our monthly meetings. However, through the efforts of our Chairman, Sir John Usher, we now have a regular monthly social and meeting at the "Royal Engineers Club", 78 Great King St, Edinburgh. The RE Club Officials have been most helpful and the RE Association with ex-Royal Engineers is very pleasant. The meetings are held the first Friday of every month. So, all Pioneers who happen to be in Edinburgh on that particular day are sure of a welcome if they will just come along and join us. The bar, by the way, is excellent.

Arrangements have now been completed for the Parade Service at St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, on Sunday 10th July 1949 when our Standard will be carried and installed in the Cathedral among the Standards of other illustrious Regiments and Corps. It is pleasant to picture visitors from all over the world visiting St Giles (as they now do) in 50, 60 or 100 years from now examining the Standard and reading in their guide books all about Scottish Royal Pioneers of the 1939-1945 War.

All our members have been notified and many other invitations are being sent out. The Standard Bearer, having rejoined the Corps, is luckily stationed not too far away and permission has been granted for him to carry out the duty of bearing the Standard. There will be a large contingent of serving Pioneers, and all ex-Pioneers whether members of the Association or not are cordially invited. Medals (or miniatures) are to be worn, and if in possession, Association badges. Altogether we are expecting a large turnout.

By the time this appears in print, our Annual General Meeting will be all over, as it is being held at the RE Club on Friday 27th May. A report of this meeting will be appearing in the next issue.

May we remind members also, that there will be a picnic for members, their wives and children at Sir John Ushers' Estate, on Saturday 23rd July 1949.

The Royal Pioneer Issue No 20 – September 1949

Edinburgh and East Scotland Branch
Corps Standard Laid up in St Giles'

Cathedral

The Royal Pioneer Corps has been signally honoured by Edinburgh. On the 10th July 1949 the Standard of the Edinburgh and East of Scotland Branch of The Royal Pioneer Corps Association was handed over for preservation in St Giles' Cathedral. Our Standard is in good company for the Cathedral is the repository of flags and banners of famous Scottish regiments, many of them tattered but honourable testimony to past campaigns and battles long ago.

It was a perfect summer's Sunday morning when members of the Branch of the Association paraded outside the Cathedral behind the Colour Party and supported by a good muster of serving Royal Pioneers from 13 Company under the command of Major CG Storey.

Lt Col Sir John Usher Bt OBE headed the parade and was supported by Brig HH Blanchard OBE the Director of Labour, Lt Col Jas E Adamson DSO OBE the Hon Secretary of the Association, Major H Kingham, the Hon Secretary East of Scotland Branch, Major H Martin MC and others.

There was a full congregation when the parade entered the Cathedral to take their places in the choir stalls. Special hymns were sung and prayers rendered. It was a solemn moment when the Colour Party consisting of escort left Capt WW Johnston, Standard Bearer Sgt J Fleming, Escort right CSM T Wright, moved down the length of the building with precision and dignity to offer the Standard to Lt Col Sir John Usher who presented it to the Very Rev Dr Charles L Warr for sanctification and preservation.

In the course of his sermon Dr Warr dealt at length with the service rendered by the Royal Pioneer Corps during the War. The Standard, he said, would commemorate the loyalty, self-sacrifice and endurance of innumerable devoted men of the Corps, toiling at hard and bitter tasks in the cold Northern latitudes and the burning heat of tropic suns during those years when the fate of our country hung in the balance.

"With the memories of those dark and anxious days still vivid in our minds," he said, "and profoundly conscious of the great price paid in human suffering for the preservation of those liberties we still enjoy, we will receive this standard not only with gratitude, but with respect and deep personal humility."

After the service the parade formed up outside the Cathedral and, headed by the pipes and drums of the Kirkliston Band under command of Pipe-Major Campbell, marched round the Castle Rock to the RA TA Barracks, Grindlay Street. There a cold luncheon and refreshments were provided, and Lt Col Sir John Usher was thanked for the great part he had played in arranging the ceremony.

It was an occasion which attracted much attention, and will be long remembered by the Old Comrades, and by the smart young serving Pioneers who were fortunate in being able to hear such a glowing account of their Corps' history given before such a distinguished assembly.

St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh where the Branch Standard rests, is a striking and historic building which has probably passed through more vicissitudes than any other Cathedral in the Kingdom and still survives in its full grandeur.

The building as it stands today is not the first one erected. As early as the ninth century it is believed there was a church in Edinburgh dedicated to St Giles, belonging to the monastery of Lindisfarne, Holy Island. On the site of this early church, King Alexander I of Scotland erected a massive structure of Norman design about 1120 - most of which was destroyed by order of Richard II of England in 1385. Rebuilding commenced two years later and great enlargements made. Some incidents in the history of St Giles' show that it has not always been used purely for worship:

1322-35 - Burned by the English invaders
1384 - Scottish Barons and French Knights met in St Giles' to plan a raid on England
1385 - Richard II of England destroyed the church

1470 - The Pope Controlled St Giles
1559 - John Knox preached for the first time in St Giles
1560 - Last Mass was celebrated in St Giles
1599 - Tower used as a prison
1633 - St Giles made a Cathedral by Royal Charter constituting Edinburgh a City
1650 - Cromwell's troops take possession
1745 - Magistrates of Edinburgh assembled to received message of Prince Charles Edward commanding them to surrender the City

1833 - Queen Victoria's visit
1903 - King Edward and Queen Alexandra visit
1911 - Inauguration of Chapel of the Order of the Thistle
1911 and 1914 - King George V and Queen Mary visit
1937 - King George VI, holds Installation of Most Ancient Order of The Thistle QM Queen Elizabeth and new Knights were installed members of the Order.

The above photograph taken near St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh on Sunday 10 July 1949, just before the Standard was carried into St Giles' to be permanently laid up. Hidden behind of the Escort of the Standard is Lt Col Sir John Usher Bt OBE Chairman of the Branch. Hidden behind the Standard Bearer is Brig HH Blanchard OBE Director of Labour. Right of front rank of Old Comrades is Lt Col JE Adamson, DSO OBE M Inst RA (Hon Gen Sec. RPCA), and behind him is Major K Hingham, Hon Secretary, Edinburgh and East of Scotland Branch RPC Association. ■

Blast from the Past

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



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 206 Company Long Marston around 1978/79

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Can you recognise anyone here?

Picture: RPCA Archive

New member at 92 !



■ 223 Coy SNCOs and Officers, taken at Billericay prior to Normandy, June 44

Picture: John Jenkins MBE

AN ARTICLE in Portsmouth's "The News" dated Saturday 6 August 2011 was written by a World War 2 Pioneer. At the age of 91 he is still the Boardroom Stewart at Portsmouth Football. I wrote to him via the club and asked if he would like to join the Association, this he did on 4 Sep 11. I also asked him if he would like to write an article for our Association. The following is his reply. (Note he served from 15 Aug 40 – 24 Aug 46)

Hi Norman,

I was surprised to hear that the article in "The News" had gone on the internet, I just thought it would be a local thing. Anyway I won't bore you with repeating any of that as you are probably more interested in my Pioneer Days.

On 15th August 1940 I arrived at Dingle Vale School with three other lads from Portsmouth. I well remember the tram terminus and the Overhead Docks Railway. Stuffing a mattress and pillow case with straw and finding a place to sleep. The first few days were a blur but once the training commenced it was not so bad as I had spent 4 years at sea, I was used to being away from home comforts.

Our three training Sergeants were Sergeants Lanning, Baxter and Jackson; due to Dunkirk weapons were in short supply and it was a few days before I had a rifle, a Canadian Ross.

Sgt Lanning seemed to be impressed with my drill and said you must have done it before, anyway I was moved to the Potential NCOs Squad, which I believe was the first rung up the ladder to a stripe which I eventually had. When we moved from Dingle I was a LCpl.

The move was by tram to Lime Street Station en route to Stranraer and then across the Irish Sea to Larne and then on to Ballyhalbert, County Down where a large airfield was under construction. We were blown out of our tented camp within a few days and were eventually billeted all over the village in what was to be our station for nearly two years. During this time I put in for several courses including one at the Army School of Physical Training in Victoria

Barracks, Belfast.

I became a member of the unit Concert Party which gained a name for itself all over Ulster. A well known member was Edward Evans who later became Mr Groves of TV fame. Tony Fielding and Sid Casey were other names I remember. Tony Fielding later ran a very successful club in Jersey and we did meet after the war, unfortunately he passed away several years ago.

In 1942 we moved to Scotland, Quarry Camp, Aberfoyle where we were busy with the RAOC on ammunition. The Trossachs being one vast Ammo Dump. We were eventually moved to Glasgow where the OC, Major Wood, asked me if I would like to go on a Potential Officers Course. I said yes I would and I went to Jordan Hall College in Glasgow on what was a very interesting course. On the final passing out day OCs' of all units attended and I was very please to come out top with a 'D'. Maj Wood was also please and he gave me four days leave.

I was eventually sent to a WOSB in Edinburgh which unfortunately I did not pass but I was told that Jordan Hall wanted me back as an instructor with the rank of Sergeant which was a great posting.

I enjoyed my time at Jordan Hall but with the invasion coming the school closed down and we were returned to our units. 223 Company were now in Billericay in Essex. I remember we did some route marches and took a course on aircraft recognition. We were locked in a camp near Tilbury and then moved to Newhaven where we boarded a landing craft for Arromaches, arriving the next morning. The battle for Caen was on at the time and we moved into the villages of Le-Manoir and linsemervieu, I can remember sleeping in a pig-sty (the Germans had ate the pigs!) and also the first day we had our first shower and change of underwear – great!

The Company's movement then were from Normandy to Lille and Ostend in Belgium. I had a number of very cold nights when Runstedt invaded the Ardennes, as my section had to patrol a section of the Jabeledee Motor Road; around

2 feet of snow and freezing cold.

Crossing the Rhine at Wesel in Germany. Osnabruch, Luneburg and then Twistringer.

You probably have read about my after war service. I joined the TA Royal Hampshire Regiment and served 19 years, 17 as CSM. In the Government cuts in 1969 our Hon Col Lord Mountbatten had us re-badged as the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Territorials.

We were unpaid and put cash in a kitty for petrol for our vehicles so that we could do training. I was CSM of a composite Company in Southampton. After just one camp we were again disbanded so at a loose end I went to HMS Vernon and joined the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service (RNAS), another voluntary unit. After two years I had a telephone call from Winchester to say that a new TA Battalion was forming, the 2nd Wessex, and would I be interested in raising a Company in Portsmouth. I said yes I would, but it was suddenly realised that when I came to sign I was over the age limit. I therefore put my age back 5 years and signed on. After 3 years with the 2nd Wessex I decided it was time to go; the Company was now 126 strong and doing well. I took my last parade and then was pulled out of the TA Centre on the bonnet of a Land Rover.

P.S. If you would like anymore information please let me know and please excuse the writing as at 92 I'm not so steady as I was!



John
Jenkins
MBE

Especially blast from the past...

WE WERE sorry to miss both Reunions, in July and September, but unfortunately we were abroad on holiday during both weekends.

Thank you for yet another excellent magazine - especially the Blast from the Past on Page 58. The last photo, which was 'unknown maybe 522 company', was actually the Regimental Police staff and Dog Section of 522 company CAD Kineton, which was run by myself, Sgt Paddy ('PJ') Tubridy, and my 2 I/C was Cpl Bill Ritchie. It was taken around June 1977 - a couple of weeks prior to my promotion to S/Sgt when I was then posted to Chilwell Nottingham as Detachment Commander.

The officer in the centre may have been Lt Snowdon (apologies if wrong) with me on his right and Bill on his left.

Some of the Dog Section lads were Tommy Townend, Bluey Joyce, Barry Dent, Scouse Hayward, Bill Appleby, Knockor Medhurst, Diddy Dunn, Gary Wright, Paul Jones, John Harvey ('Gentleman Jim'), Brian Farmer, Brummie Britton, Fred Loyed, John ('Hatty') Hatfield, Kev Thom, Geordie Crinson, Brummie Pritchard,

Do you have access to the old Royal Pioneer magazines - as, on pages 9 & 10 of the June 1977 (Vol 32 / No 131) issue you'll find the photo you printed in this month's magazine and an article on 522 Company.

Again - many thanks for yet another very interesting magazine. All the best **Paddy ('PJ') Tubridy**

Ed Note: Thanks Paddy, got all the Pioneer magazines will have a look.

Electrocute

I return the stubs for Xmas Draw and a cheque covering same. I received the famous Pioneer Newsletter and what can one say but - The Acme of Perfection.

My family have now realised exactly what Army life is like in 2011. My congratulations to the winners of the various sporting events which they took part. My only future wish is that the winter is better than the last one when I felt I was in the "wind swept trenches before Sevastopol in the Crimea". Once again you and your son Paul are the Tops. I have failed again to find the cuneo mouse I have decided that if I did find him I would include him in the picture at the left bottom of page 24 and electrocute him - no more bother in the future years. Bye for now and happy days to all

George Pringle

I offer £20

Thank you for the latest edition of The Pioneer, it arrived safely in sunny Portugal. Enclosed please find stubs for 2011 Xmas Draw together with cheque.

Further, I found a photograph on Blast from the Past page which reminded me that there was something missing! It would be unfair to indicate which photo, but in a reversal of the Cuneo mouse theme I offer £20 of Derby/Christmas Draw tickets to the first person to spot the missing item.

Thanks again with best regards

Colin Evans

(Ed note: I cannot find what is missing - can you?)

Pineapple Balls

I must say how much I enjoyed your magazine and look forward to it each issue.

I noticed the nick-names the Corp's was called Gravediggers and Chunkies (men with pineapple balls). While doing my National Service 1955-57 at Monkton Farley between Bath and Corsham on pay nights we would go to Bath for a few beers and see some of the lads from the RAOC who would call us Chunkies. This did not go down very well and resulted in a lot of punches being thrown. Next day we would be working side by side with the RAOC boys and be the best of mates!

Carry the good work into the future.

Phil Marks

Little Luck

Arfur Cole here, still clinging onto perch - we are both into our 90's now. Hope all is well with you and yours and hope all goes well with raffle and a little luck comes this way!

Best regards to all in Regiment. Trust that there are still some of my age comrades still about. Best Wishes

Arthur Cole

Real character

Thanks for the Pioneer - cracking job as ever and always a pleasure to read.

How sad though to read that Stevie Blenman has passed away so early in his life, he was a real character who so typically gave so much more than he ever took.

I gather too from a recent trip to Deepcut that changes are afoot in the Regiment's future role and composition. Given the scale of cuts on the table I guess it's not

surprising but it's all so galling to hear nonetheless.

On my part we've just got back from a brilliant month's holiday in Singapore/Australia and within a few days I'll be off again to Mogadishu/Somalia where I'm working as a "Logistic Mentor" to the newly formed National Army - very interesting and rewarding work.

All the best,
Nigel Smillie

I am deeply proud

I am proud to have served as a Chunkie, Trg Centre 16 Oct 62 to 22 Jan 63 and 522 Coy Kineton 22 Jan 63 to 7 Oct 63 then I transferred to the RAMC.

Whilst under training at 18 Coy RAMC, BMH Millbank, London, I had the privilege to nurse General Sir Frank Simpson (a small formidable Yorkshire man) whose name was given to the RPC Training Centre and who at the time was Governor of the Chelsea Hospital.

When Sir Frank discovered I too was an

ex-Chunkie, my life became, let's say, a little difficult with my Colonel (RAMC) and Matron (QARANC), hay ho!

Did I care, no! Here with two ex-chunkies looking out for each other (funny, I was posted shortly after as a combat Medic to Malaya for 3 yrs). General Sir Frank - always remembered.

I may have only served in the RPC for one year, but it was a year of which I am deeply proud.

Michael Guest

Comprehensive information

I have received some comprehensive information following up on my inquiry about my grandfather in the Great War.

I have personally responded to Lieutenant Colonel Starling, to convey my appreciation and thanks for his time and efforts regarding my inquiry.

I also want to convey my special thanks to you too for the manner and timeliness in dealing with my request. Colonel Starling's response provided me with some valuable

timelines, along with some indication of which of the Labour Companies that my grandfather would have joined after leaving his infantry battalion in 1918. You make a great team.

Your efforts in dealing with requests such as mine makes a difficult and frustrating task so much simpler. For that, Norman, I thank you most sincerely. Kind regards

Rod London
Australia

Fancy marching with us this year?



■ Association members at last year's Cenotaph Parade

Picture: Paul Brown

HI NORMAN, I was at the parade but got there late trouble parking and so on, and getting to the assembly point. I managed to get to the Cenotaph and managed to see you on the big screen with others.

I stayed until everyone had passed then managed to get back to the car appropriately a mile a way.

What's it like being the most

recognisable Pioneer in the Corps at this moment in time.

Until next time all the best,
Jimmy and Jane Fallon

Ed Note: Would you like to join us at the Cenotaph this year? If so contact me at the Association. The date of this year's Parade is actually on Remembrance day, 11 November 2012.

Still on ops in the Indian Ocean

EX SSgt Andy Bates sent the following email describing his current work:

Norman, I regret that I have not made the target for the next issue of the magazine.

We are still on Ops in the Indian Ocean and as such most of the things and places and jobs we are currently completing are very sensitive to the Government in nature and cannot be released and that was from the Press Officer.

As you can appreciate; being near Iran and Somalia and working with the SBS does have its restrictions.

A quick breakdown would be no interest to your readers as it is all I could say the moment is as follows:

I joined RFA Fort Victoria at the end of November 2011, in the Seychelles taking a post in the Supply and Transport Office (Navy) a small department of civil servants who are responsible for all stores and ammunition supplied to HMS ships at sea.

We have been in the Indian Ocean as part of the UK's Contribution to the NATO led task force on anti piracy for some time now, we have just finished Op Capri 2, and the score was 1 rescued ship and 23 pirates captured including a major boss and we are now in Dubai for our second port call, the last being New Year after visits to the Seychelles and Oman.

Apart from tangles with Iranian Jets, submarines and fast attack boats... life has been generally quiet and we have even managed to get some time off at various ports.

We will start our re-tasking again in March, when we become the Admirals Flagship and not sure where we will end up but looks to be staying in the Gulf Area for more of the same.

I will try and write something when I finish this job.

Regards
Andy Bates

the
Pioneer



■ HI Norman, nice to see you on the 'tele.
Tony Bloor
Ed note: Only on widescreen!

■ TRUST you to be at the front again, I think the camera seeks you out or the FBI are on to you! Hope to see you next year.
Derek Luker

■ THE Corps Magazine is a great read and it's good to see a few old faces so please carry on doing all that you do. Thank you from an old Pioneer
J Wharton

■ THE last edition of the Pioneer was exceptionally good – well done.

You had very good coverage at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday – you must have crossed the cameraman's palm with something!!!
Garry Cooper

■ MANY thanks for the latest newsletter just having a read through with my lunch. I will get the draw tickets in the post. Is the mouse on page 34 on the mess jacket of Dick Fitzimmons.
Terry Burden
Ed note: Wrong!



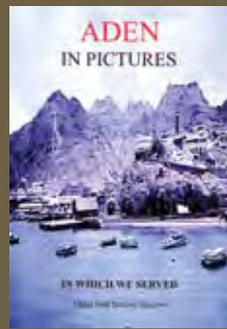
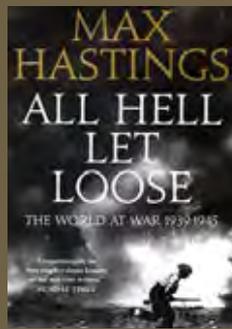
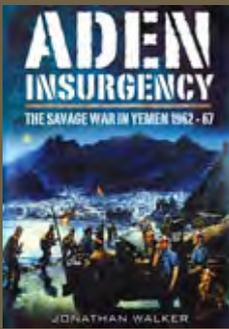
come on, send us a mail...

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



Aden Insurgency All hell let loose

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THE AFFAIRS in Aden, during the 1960s are something that I clearly remember.

Today it is rather a distant memory but this new book by Jonathan Walker brought them back to life, and added a lot more information to it as well. It fills the gaps that news stories leave out, and going back in time covers a web of interrelated people and events that were not as clear at the time. The book itself is split into 14 chapters to tell the story. It is about a changing time, when the British Empire was in retreat, and more countries were given their independence, including the jewel of the Empire, India. With India and other African territories which we were involved with, Aden was a port and airfield that made for an important staging post for Britain in journeys to and from these places around the world.

Britain had mounted successful operations against guerrilla fighters in the Far east, and in Africa against the Mau Mau in Kenya. South Arabia presented different problems though, and while some of the lessons could be applied,

whole new ones needed to be learnt as well. It was a time of the Cold War, of Russia wanting access to a Gulf port, or the USA wanting to take over the position of influence that Britain held in the region as it was now a hugely important area thanks to the oil business. Amidst that other Arab countries, in this case Egypt, had their sights set on the area. President Nasser committed large number of Egyptian troops into Yemen, though they did not have a great deal of success. The book includes the impact of the Arab-Israeli war on Egypt in particular and even Israeli 'advisors' supporting and supplying equipment to elements within Yemen. With Intelligence services involved, then even famous names such as Guy Burgess, Kim Philby and Sir Anthony Blunt were all involved at some point, all three of whom were part of a huge Russian spy scandal as well.

Throughout this intrigue and tribal feuds, often using politics as an excuse, the British Army managed to keep control of things right up until the final year, when mutiny among the Arab police force and terrorist attacks and assassinations in the famous 'Crater' district had

an effect. There was a successful operation into the interior of the country, dealt with in the chapter on the Radfan operations, and the early use of helicopters in supporting British Army operations. Most of the story revolves around Aden port itself, and the adjacent BP refinery. Army and Royal Marine units rotated through the region, and at the end the famous Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders went in, along with their famous colonel, 'Mad Mitch'.

The author has put an immense amount of research into this book, indicated by multiple pages of references given at the end of each chapter.

Illustrated by maps and a set of photos in the middle of the book it is a very readable book and one that tells of a time which is now slowly disappearing into history, a story perhaps overshadowed rather by events in Northern Ireland and the wars that have followed, in the Falklands and since then in the Gulf and Afghanistan.

ADEN INSURGENCY – THE SAVAGE WAR IN YEMEN 1962-1967
By Jonathan Walker
ISBN 9781 1 83884 548 0

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THIS IS a study of the greatest and most terrible event in history, which shows its impact upon hundreds of millions of people around the world – soldiers, sailors and airmen; British housewives and Indian peasants; SS killers and the citizens of Leningrad, some of whom resorted to cannibalism during the city's two-year siege; Japanese suicide pilots and American carrier crews.

All Hell Let Loose describes the course of events during the war, but focuses chiefly upon human experience, which varied immensely from campaign to campaign, continent to continent. Hastings emphasises the Russian front, where more than ninety per cent of all German soldiers who perished met their fate. He argues that, while Hitler's army often fought its battles brilliantly well, the Nazis conducted their war effort with 'stunning incompetence'. He suggests that the Royal Navy and US Navy were their countries' outstanding fighting services, while the industrial contribution of the United States was much more important to Allied victory than that of the US Army.

The book ranges from a vast canvas, from the agony of Poland amid the 1939 Nazi invasion, to the 1943 Bengal famine, in which at least a million people died under British rule – and British neglect. Among many vignettes, there are the RAF's legendary raid on the Ruhr dams, the horrors of Arctic convoys, desert tank combat, jungle clashes. Some of Hastings' insights and judgements will surprise students of the conflict. This is 'everyman's story'. It is an attempt to answer the question: "What was the Second World War like?", and also an overview of the big picture.

ALL HELL LET LOOSE - THE WORLD AT WAR 1939-1945
By Max Hastings
ISBN 978-0-00-733809-2

Aden in pictures

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THE AUTHOR writes: The book is in a A4 size with over 800 photographs mainly in colour and some black and white, with a few in full page size with the rest two per page.

These photos which in the main are my own with the rest supplied by all three services, I had thought about doing something for years but did not have the time or the knowledge what to do, talking to different members

I found a lot did not have any photos of their service in Aden at all.

This is the idea of the book to give all those who served in Aden a memory for themselves and their family.

So off I went so to speak, then found how costly it can be so I put it all together, had it checked over by a dozen or so Aden Vets, then had it converted to PDF by another member to take it direct to a local printer.

So far the comment has been excellent even sending a book to New Zealand. The book

appears to be rather dear, but this has been undertaken not for profit but to give us all something to remember and show we were there.

I hope this is enough, as Roy (ex Pioneer) and Josie Scott commented I (they were sure) there are a lot of your members who would be interested.

The book is supplied direct from myself to keep the costs down. Best Wishes Denis.

The cost is £29.50.plus P&P (UK) £5.

CONTACT:
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This page has
recommendations by
Pioneers for Pioneers...

If you have a business
or a recommendation
then **send it in!**

Long Lost Trails

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

V1 ROCKET SITE

Mr Trevor Kent is researching the site of a V1 site in Kent. 5 members of the Pioneer Corps were killed by the V1 bomb on 3 Aug 44. He would like to contact any of the families or anyone who knew them. We have managed so far to name 4 of the 5 Pioneers, they were:

- 13033321 Pte Gilbert George Boniface (DOB 6 Apr 13)
- 3132864 Cpl Ronald Watson Douglas (DOB 26 Mar 18)
- 13013496 Pte Lawrence Tidswell (DOB 6 Jan 94)
- 13118219 Ote Raymond Wortley (DOB 7 Apr 99)

Contact: trevor.bent@sky.com

NORRIS PITT

Norris served from 1967 - 1989 and would like to contact anyone who knew him. Contact c/o RPC Association.

BUGLERS

Kev Young sent in the following: I was asked on our group if I could get a bugle as one of our members wanted to play Last Post at Roade for us this year.

Well after I asked if any of our members had a bugle for him I had loads of them offered to me and I thought how many of the Corps of Drums have we got between us that could play and get together for a one off in Bicester in 2013 as this year is too soon. I am only asking as I think this would be great thing to do. Are you interested, if so send your details to RPC Association.

149 COY

Mr Peter Sturgeon is seeking anyone who served with his father Sgt Harold Sturgeon in

149 Coy. Contact petersturgeon@ntlworld.com

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

I attach a photograph of a soldier who, I believe, was in the Royal Pioneer Corps as a second lieutenant. This information I received today when I visited Europeana 1914-1918 Road Show in Dublin.

The original of this photograph was found in a wardrobe after my mother's death and as she was not inclined to keep things I have been trying to find out who this "Unknown Soldier" might be - or indeed any information at all which could be gleaned from looking at the uniform, etc. I have obviously asked all members of our family and no one is able to identify this person. If there is anything you

can add to my meagre information I would really appreciate it.

Mary Rose O'Shea
foxmros@hotmail.com



Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

HOWES TREVOR (24231974)

25 Oct 11, Barnet

Ex Pte. Aged 58.

CAVE SYDNEY (13022363)

25 Oct 11, Redditch.

Ex Pte, Aged 91. Served 18 Apr 40-3 Jun 46

HOLLEY RICHARD ARTHUR (14070865)

14 Nov 11, Biggin Hill

Ex Pte. Aged 84. Served Sep 45-48.

GOEDECKE RICHARD WALKER ERNEST (13096407) 25 Nov 11, Langley Slough

Pte. Served 17 Jan 41 - 10 Sep 46).

Marched with the RPC Contingent at the Cenotaph two weeks earlier.

OSBORNE REGINALD (13955703)

29 Dec 11, Northampton

Pte. Aged 93. Served 18 Jul 40 - 7 Jan 46.

TORDOFF WILLIE (13070957)

30 Aug 11, Brighouse, W Yorks

Cpl. Aged 91. Served in 24 Oct 40-24 Aug 42 then transferred to ACC but stayed with 233 Coy, served in Sicily, Italy, Normandy.

GASCOIGNE DEREK (22217252)

December 2011, Bicester

Aged 79. Former WO2 RPC Trg Centre.

BLUNDELL KEITH ALBERT (24378373)

12 March 2012, Braunston, Daventry

SSgt. Aged 59). Served in RPC as a Clerk 1975-1991 and AGC 1991-1993.

EVANS GEORGE SAMUEL FREEMAN (6287920) 13 Mar 12, Victoria, Australia

Sgt. Aged 87. He left the army on 1 Sep 61. His son writes: "In 1979 he emigrated to Australia to be with his family and is survived by his wife of almost 63 years, Violet and his family of three sons and one daughter. He was Sergeant Evans of 206 Company and competed successfully in the Royal Pioneer Corps Rifle Association during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

COLVILLE, MRS E

29 Sep 11 - Glen Parva, Leics

Widow of the late Major RS Colville

HARRIS IAN WALTER MM (13118601)

(formerly Hans Ludwig Hajor 13801533)

10 Mar 12, Reading.

Aged 92. Enlisted at Birmingham and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps on 19 Feb 40. Transferred to West Kent Regiment (in reality 10 Commando) on 16 Apr 43.

Ian Harris was an Austrian-born alien who distinguished himself fighting with the Allies in the Second World War. He was born in Vienna of mixed Jewish and Gentile parentage. He came to England aged 18 in the aftermath of the German Anschluss of Austria in March 1938. For two years he worked as a farmhand but in 1940 volunteered for the British Army and was posted with other former aliens to the Pioneer Corps for non-combatant duties. He trained as a commando and landed on Sword Beach in Normandy with 1st Special Service Brigade on the afternoon of D-Day, June 6, 1944. The family was not without military tradition. His father, Paul Hajos, had served as a captain with the Hungarian

Horse Artillery in the First World War and was decorated in the field. After completion of the rigorous training Harris was assigned to 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando's No 3 Troop entirely comprised of German-speaking refugees. They were to be dispersed among the commando units taking part in the Normandy invasion to act as interpreters, carry out the tactical questioning of prisoners.

The task of 1st Special Service Brigade was to reinforce the two parachute brigades of the 6th Airborne Division, dropped east of the River Orne to secure the extreme left flank of the Normandy beachhead. Harris crossed Pegasus Bridge over the Orne with 46 Commando, which took up positions around Saint Arnoult, south of Trouville. In the subsequent advance, while following immediately behind his commanding officer as ordered, Harris was wounded and evacuated to a field hospital in Bayeux, but not before he had taken prisoner a man he stumbled over in a shell hole who turned out to be a Pole conscripted into the German Army.

On recovery from his wound, Harris reported to 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando based at Eastbourne and was assigned to 45 (RM) Commando preparing to be shipped to Ostend in readiness for the Rhine crossing in March 1945. After that successful operation he continued to serve with 45 Commando during the capture of Osnabruck and the advance to the River Weser. The river crossing, using dinghies, met determined opposition from SS and Hitler Youth units dug in on the eastern bank. Seeing that the Commando's tactical headquarters group, including the commanding officer, was threatened by enemy concealed behind a hedge, Harris scaled the bank to one side and shot dead two of them with his Thompson machine carbine. Then, feeling a sense of revenge for having been driven out his his homeland by the Nazis - he took a Bren light machine gun from a companion to repel an attempted counter-attack.

This was successful; unfortunately he lost the sight of one eye when an enemy bullet smashed the Bren gun's flash-eliminator, sending fragments of metal into his head and face. He received the Military Medal for his gallantry and initiative on this occasion, the citation written by the commanding officer whose life had had save and endorsed by Field Marshall Montgomery. On recovering from his head wound, he joined the Allied Control Commission in Germany as an interpreter. While carrying out these duties in Brunswick, he was invited to take charge of 50 German ski instructors engaged to train British soldiers to ski at Winterberg. This was his last British Army assignment before demobilisation, after which he became the assistant to the former commander of the French Troop of 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando who was engaged in the recovery of paintings and other valuables looted from occupied France. He qualified as a chartered accountant in 1958 and subsequently worked in the American Express office in Zurich and on statistics for Price Waterhouse.





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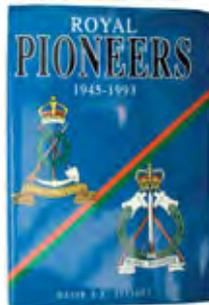
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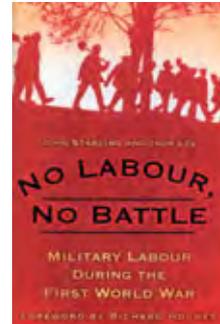
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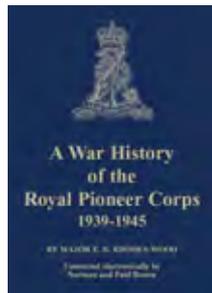
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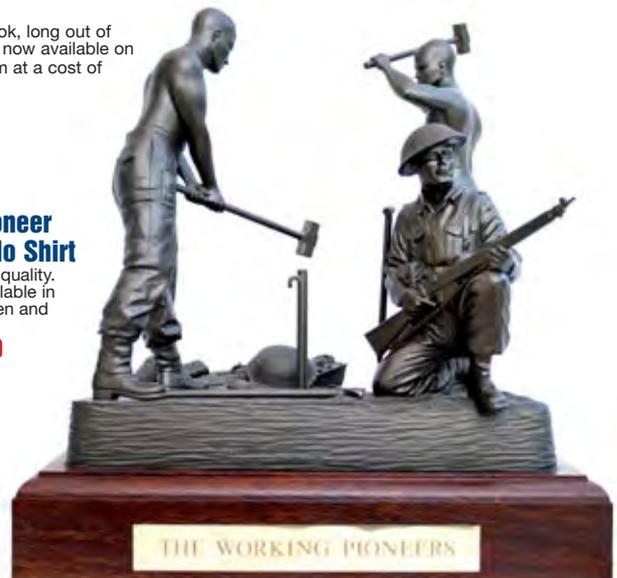


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And finally...

**Staff Sergeant Donaghue,
Sentry Duty, Private Smith
and flowers for the
Sergeant Major !**

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Paul Brown

STAFF SERGEANT Donaghue, who in 1941 had been posted as a deserter from 522 Company Pioneer Corps, presented himself at 12 Holding and Training Unit Pioneer Corps in 1944. He had not so much come to give himself up, he explained, as to describe what had happened to him. He was anxious to get back to work without delay.

Whilst on leave in Dublin he had been unwise enough to talk knowledgeably in a pub about his aptitude in the use of the Bren gun, the No 4 rifle, the 2-inch mortar and other contemporary weaponry. His expertise had provoked much admiration, which had been expressed in a practical form by the provision of constant refills for his glass. When he awoke he was in a strange room. He felt unwell and his hands were roped together behind his back.

It was pointed out to him that his trained skills with small arms would make him a valuable asset to the Irish Republican Army. He had been nominated as a weapon training instructor. All he had to do was to give lessons. Failure to cooperate would lead to the death of his old mother.

Donaghue cooperated for more than three years. He was at first kept under guard in an isolated cottage in the country.

Later, when it was clear that he was fully compromised and that he was so devoted to his mother that he would do anything to spare her from harm. He was let out on a sort of ticket of leave. He reported himself to his controllers at weekly intervals and from time to time was taken away blindfolded to an unidentifiable place to give his lessons. This regime had prevailed until the previous week when his mother had been run over by a tram. Donaghue had returned to regimental duty immediately after the funeral.

A court martial was mandatory. By the nature of Donaghue's misadventures, witnesses were sparse. His kidnappers were, to put it at its lowest, unlikely to offer evidence. The government of the Irish Free State, a neutral country, could hardly be asked for comment on the credibility of a statement made before a military tribunal covered by a belligerent power in whose armed forces an Irish citizen had voluntarily enlisted. Donaghue was acquitted of the charge of desertion. The court offered him its sympathies on the loss of his mother and spoke appreciatively of his resourcefulness and determination in rejoining his Company at the first reasonable opportunity. Donaghue became a minor hero. The Ministry of Information put out a short piece about him. Strangers bought him drinks.

At the following week's pay parade, Donaghue pointed out respectfully that there seemed to have been something of a mistake. He had been given one week's pay. As he understood it, because his long absence had been no fault of his and had been certified as involuntary by the verdict of the court martial, he had all the time been on the Company's books. His position was analogous to that of a prisoner-of-war. He was owed not one week's pay but three years and seven months' pay. The justice of this claim was indisputable. The mechanics of meeting it took a little while to arrange. 3 weeks later Donaghue was paid in full.

He deserted again the same night and bought a small farm in County Wicklow. His mother kept house for him. Possibly True!

ON SENTRY duty at the main gate was a new soldier. His orders were clear. No car was to enter unless it had a special sticker on the windshield.

A big Army car came up with a general seated in the back. The sentry said, "Halt, who goes there?"

The chauffeur, a corporal, says, "General Wheeler." "I'm sorry, I can't let you through. You've got to have a sticker on the windshield."

The general said, "Drive on!" The sentry said, "Hold it! You really can't come through. I have orders to shoot if you try driving in without a sticker."

The general repeated, "I'm telling you, son, drive on!"

The sentry walked up to the rear window and said, "General, I'm new at this. Do I shoot you or the driver?"

PPRIVATE SMITH was brought up before the unit Commanding Officer for some offence. "You can take your choice, private - one month's restriction or twenty day's pay," said the officer.

"All right, sir," said the bright soldier, "I'll take the money."

THE PTI was drilling a platoon of soldiers. "I want every man to lie on his back, put his legs in the air and move them as though he were riding a bicycle," he explained. "Now begin!"

After a few minutes, one of the men stopped.

"Why did you stop. Smith?" demanded the PTI. "If you please, sir," said Smith, "I'm freewheeling for a while."



Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Your Letters
- Photo Gallery
- News from 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments
- Report from Reunion Weekend
- Another unpublished Story
- Reviews
- And much more!



■ SSgt Scotty Flinger

Picture: Paul Brown



206 Disbandment Parade

22nd March 2012

