



**Pioneers
Raise Funds
for Little
Ruby**

NEWS P7



**Operation
Herrick
17**

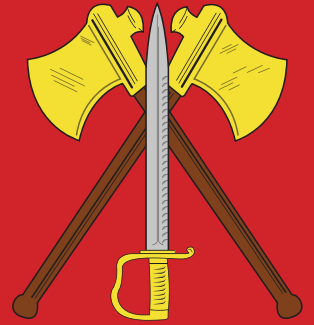
**NEWS
P17 & P39**



**Steve
Blenman's
African
Adventure**

STORY P21

the **Pioneer**



April 2013





**Join us at the
Cenotaph this
November**


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**PLEASE
SUPPORT THE
DERBY
DRAW**
Full details
on Page 4




WO2 Charles Henry Wood
23 Pioneer Regiment


Cpl Andrew Roberts
23 Pioneer Regiment


Pte Ratu Silibaravi
23 Pioneer Regiment

CASUALTIES OF AFGHANISTAN

Plot 108, Field of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey, Nov 2012



STOP PRESS

STOP PRESS

STOP PRESS

STOP PRESS



WO1 (RSM) Wayne Fuller was dined out of the SGTs Mess on 22th Mar 12. We must thank him for his support to the Association during his tenure and wish him and his family all the best for the future. (in that other Mess!) We congratulate WO1 (RSM) Reg Lane on his

promotion and appointment of RSM of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. It is pleasing that the last RSM of the Regiment is a Pioneer. The Hanson-Church suite has now been officially opened in the WO's & Sgts' Mess.



Front Cover
Cenotaph Parade, London, 2012
Picture: Paul Brown



Back Cover
Labour Corps Print
Picture: Edgar Lander

EDITORIAL

ENCLOSED with this Newsletter is a booking form for this year's Pioneer Reunion Weekend, this must be received at HQ RPC Association by 27 June 2013. As can be seen it was necessary to change the date of the Weekend from 5/6 July 2013 to 12/13 July 2013 as the earlier date clashed with the RLC Open Day at Deepcut.

Although planning for this year's Reunion has just started it looks as if it is going to be the largest yet. The Saturday is also going to be the Regiment's Open/Families Day so there should be enough events/displays (and beer tents!) to keep everyone happy and entertained. I look forward to seeing as many Association members as possible attending, according to Facebook entries 380 have already indicated that they will be coming! A few have also indicated that this will be their first Reunion since the old Northampton days! It must be pointed out to them that once you attend it becomes compulsive!

We will do our best to accommodate all, however, some will (as usual) have to be accommodated in St George's Barracks but transport will be provided to ferry personnel to and from – no excuse for drink driving! Ground floor accommodation for disabled personnel is at a premium please do not

request this unless it is absolutely necessary.

It was thought that this year's Reunion would be the last to be held at Bicester, however, the CO of 23 Pioneer Regt RLC recently announced that the Regiment would be able to host a Reunion in 2014 although it will probably not be as large as this year's.

Also enclosed with the Newsletter are Derby Draw tickets (unless you have already indicated that you cannot sell them and therefore do not wish to have them), please give this draw your fullest support. This is one of the few ways of raising money for the Association and helps to pay the cost of producing this Newsletter and the exorbitant cost of postage. If you are purchasing the tickets yourself, instead of writing your full name and address simply put the code number which is above your name on the envelope in which you received the Newsletter. If you can sell additional tickets please let me know and they will be sent to you.

The last issue resulted in forty eight Newsletters being returned "Gone Away" with one returned with the comment "Has not lived here for 27 years". That house would have received 54 Newsletters in that time; it is a pity that they did not inform us earlier! If

you have moved or about to move please let us know as early as possible.

Once again in this Newsletter we have tried to make the content as varied as possible but we welcome contributions, have you a story to tell? Do not worry about grammar or spelling we will gladly edit your story for you; come on tell us of your experiences in the Corps. Many of you can be found reminiscing and telling your stories at the Reunion so let us have them for publication.

The Association Council recently established two sub-committees, the first to decide where the Association property would be located after the disbandment of 23 Pioneer Regiment and the second to report on the future Strategy of the Association (venues for future Reunions etc). We will endeavour to keep all members informed of the outcome in future Newsletters. Following disbandment of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC members of the Association can be assured that the Association will continue as long as you, the members, wish it to.

In the last few months the membership of the Association has continued to grow, many ex Pioneers are being found through the medium of Facebook. Many have commented that they thought the Association had ceased

to exist when we amalgamated into the RLC. If you know an ex Pioneer who does not receive the Newsletter please pass on his details.

The Association has decided to commission a painting to reflect the work of the Pioneers throughout the years. This is being led by Maj 'Taff' Teague, or I should say Maj (Retd) as by the time this Newsletter is distributed he will have retired. Prints of this painting will be available for sale on its completion.

This year we have been allocated additional tickets for the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall, if you wish to attend please let me know. Last year we had a good mention by both the BBC and Sky and we certainly looked good (if I say so myself) as we proudly marched down Whitehall.

If you have missed the last few years' Newsletters they can be viewed on our website www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk

New to our 'Association Shop' are five different car stickers - these can be viewed on page 62. They do look good on the car, why not order some today.

Once again it is my sad duty to publish details of members who we have lost since the last issue, our condolences are extended to their families.

Norman Brown



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23

Registered Charity Number
1024036

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KG GCMG

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Can you spot the Mouse?

No-one correctly identified the Cuneo Mouse in the October edition of the Newsletter. The mouse was on page 47, bottom photograph, fourth window from the right.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse in this edition. 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 this page or 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 11th July 2013.



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PAST EVENTS



■ THE 66th Past and Present Dinner was held on Friday 20 Oct 2012, with 72 Past and Serving Pioneer Officers attending.

The principal guest was Col Simon Whelton a former Commanding Officer 23 Pioneer Regiment.

The CO's of both 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiment gave an update on their Regiments and Brigadier HJ Hickman, who presided on the evening, read the loyal greetings from HM The Queen and the HRH Duke of Gloucester.

■ THE WOs and SNCOs reunion club held its annual Ladies/Generation Dinner on Saturday 21 Oct 2012 and 92 members sat down for a well prepared meal.

The evening was also a chance to say goodbye to members of the club who had been selected/volunteered for Phase 2 redundancy. These included two stalwarts of the Club SSgt Scottie Ringer and Sgt Turkish Taylor, both are settling in the North East and both have joined 168 Regt so we will probably see them quite often! We wish them good luck in civvie street.

■ ONCE AGAIN there was a good attendance on 8 Nov 2012 at the Field of Remembrance at the Corps Plot at Westminster Abbey.

Some travelled many miles to attend. Once again our In Pensioner Micky Hull fronted the Plot together with Sgt Chris Strange from 23 Pioneer Regiment.

Together with our regular attenders this year we had some new faces which is refreshing, we hope to see you all again next year.

■ AS HAS become normal practice a London Lunch was held on 8 Nov 2012 following the Field of Remembrance.

This was held in the Marquis of Westminster Public House in Warwick Way (near Victoria Railway Station). Following the lunch a number of attenders decided to make sure our In Pensioner made it back home to the Royal Hospital Chelsea and decided to accompany him. Although the chance to visit the Club at the Hospital might have been a contributing factor.

Capt Garth Williams, Sgt Chris Strange and Mr Norman Brown then accompanied our In Pensioner to 9 Supply Regiment for a night of boxing when 9, 23 and 17 Port and Maritime Regiments were having an inter-Regimental boxing tournament.

Unfortunately 23 Pioneer Regiment won only 3 bouts.

■ 29 MEMBERS marched in the Royal Pioneer Corps column at the Cenotaph in London on 11 Nov 2012.

As with the Field of Remembrance we had quite a few new attendees, I hope they enjoyed themselves and attend this year. We also received a good coverage on the BBC and Sky News both in the commentary and also a good view of us marching proudly down Whitehall.

Following the Parade most of the Pioneer contingent went to the Civil Service Club in Old Scotland Yard for a meal, a drink and a chat.

Once again a mini-bus had travelled from Northampton and it is hoped to repeat this in November.

We have been allocated 54 tickets this year so if we can get 54 attenders this will be the largest contingent event!

Parade at Roade

Fallout by the parade marshal Maj Pat Fleming



■ Remembrance Parade at Roade, Northamptonshire

Pictures: Kevin Young / RPC Nostalgia Group

ONCE AGAIN members of the Nostalgia Group gathered at Northampton, the spiritual home of the Corps, to attend the Remembrance Parade at Roade which is organised by the Royal British Legion.

Among the many new faces this year were Steve Stainton (and his daughter Crystal), Steve Williams and George 'Brummie' Whitson.

Unfortunately Allan and Liz Sutcliffe were unable to attend because of Liz being poorly.

Most attendees "RV'd" at Kevin Young's house on the Friday evening and spent the weekend reminiscing (and having a few 'soft' drinks!)

On the Sunday morning the scene

resembled that of the minutes before a Pass Out Parade, with everyone ensuing that medals and boots were shiny before setting off to attend the church service which precedes the parade.

After the service everyone was formed up and we marched through the village to the small war memorial.

A service was conducted at the memorial and the traditional two minutes silence was held and reveille played.

We then marched back through the village where we were fell out by the Parade Marshal, a fellow Pioneer, Maj Pat Fleming.

Mat Pat Fleming thanked us for our attendance and hoped to see us all next year.



■ Little Ruby Hodgson and family being presented with a cheque from the Clarendon Hotel, Redcar

Pictures: Kevin Young / Pioneer Nostalgia Group

Pioneers raise funds for Ruby

The RPC Nostalgia Group helped to raise over £600 towards the fund

AS MANY will know the RPC Nostalgia Group has its annual reunion at the Clarendon Hotel, Redcar, where Russ Clark and his staff had heard of little Ruby Hodgson, a three year old child also from Redcar who had been diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Little Ruby was very poorly at the time and Russ and his staff had set about raising the sum of £5000 to send Ruby and her family to Disneyland on a trip of a lifetime.

On the Friday of our reunion Russ pulled Allan and Kevin aside and told them all about little Ruby and her illness and his plans to raise funds for her adding they would be raising funds for her that night in the Clarendon Hotel.

Kevin and Allan informed members about little Ruby and asked if they would like to help, it was decided that all funds raised from auctions and tombola during our 2012 reunion should be donated to what we have come to fondly refer to as the little Ruby fund.

With generous donations of auction gifts and tombola prizes from our members the Nostalgia Group raised over £600 towards the fund over the weekend.

Such is the bravery of little Ruby who

never seemed to be without a big smile on her face even though she was so poorly.

She touched all our hearts so much so that Derrick Shaw, from the Nostalgia Group, his staff, customers and clients in Cardiff also raised the sum of £1700, so a very big thank you to them from all of us too.

At the end of our fundraising night during the reunion weekend the Landlord of the Clarendon Hotel Russ Clark was presented with the monies we had raised.

Russ once again told all members present all about little Ruby and between both his and Kevin Digger Young's speeches about her there was not a dry eye in the place.

We have since learned that little Ruby's cancer is in remission and she is getting better by the day.

We would like to thank everyone who helped by donating to the auction and the tombola. We would also like to thank the members friends and families for digging deep to raise money for this worthy cause.

The Royal Pioneer Corps Nostalgia Group is hosting it's reunion this year at the Clarendon Hotel, Redcar on 3rd to the 4th of May 2013.



PAST EVENTS



■ ON THE 4th June 2012 a young girl was tragically injured when she saved the life of a friend who had got into difficulty in the sea in Eyemouth Berwickshire.

Now needing to have things altered in and around the house Katie-Lou's parents, family, friends and the locals are trying to raise money to have these done, so C troop 100 Pioneer Squadron (TA) stepped up to do their bit by organising fund raising events.

The first was to brave the cold North Sea on Boxing Day 2012, when members did a sponsored dip hoping to raise approx £300 for this event alone with more throughout the coming year.

The members led by Sgt Derries, Cpl Aitchison, Cpl Munroe (organiser), LCpl Chambers, LCpl Short, Pte Hutton and Recruit Hunter took a dip into the cold water with Cpl Aitchison carrying the Pioneer flag on the way back onto the beach. Well done to all involved.

Details of the full story of Katie-Lou can be found on the internet by going to caring for katie-lou or follow the link www.careforkatielou.co.uk

■ LT COL John Starling and Mr Norman Brown attended a book launch on 28 Jan 13 held at the Jewish Cultural Centre, Golders Green.

The book entitled "The M Room" and written by Helen Fry describes how the Intelligence Services bugged and listened to German POWs during WW2.

The last two "Listeners", both ex Pioneer Corps, were in attendance. Also in attendance was the actor Roger Lloyd-Pack whose uncle was a secret listener and his cousin comedian Jessica Pulay whose father was a secret listener, both read passages from the book.

■ THE FAMILY of Cpl Roberts who was killed in Afghanistan were honoured at a ceremony in the Sergeants Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Bicester on 31 Jan 13.

The Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll recognises the bereaved families of soldiers killed on operations, or as a result of terrorist actions since 1948.

Cpl Roberts was a section commander and joined the Army in 1998. He had previously served on operations in Bosnia and Iraq and was on his second tour of Afghanistan.

He died alongside Pte Ratu Silibaravi when a mortar round hit their operating base in the northern part of the Nahr-e Saraj district.

They had been attached to 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh Battlegroup.

■ 23 PIONEER Regiment once again took part in the Commando Speed March at the WW2 Commando Training Centre at Achnacarry, Scotland on Sat 9 March 2013.

Having won the event for the last two years they were hoping for a hat trick, unfortunately it was not to be, they were closely beaten into second place by 7 Regiment RHA.

They did, however, manage to win the individual prize when LCpl Beadle came well ahead of the other 249 competitors. SSgt Clark came fifth and they also had 13th and 20th place but this was still not good enough for the team trophy.

Next year will probably be the last time 23 (Pioneer) Regiment RLC will enter this prestigious tournament and they hope to go out with a bang!

News from 23

Latest news from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC



■ Regimental Training Day

Picture: 23 Pioneer Regiment

THROUGHOUT the history of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC and its predecessor, one constant factor has been the Regiments ability to change, adapt and evolve to the situation it finds its self in.

From transport tasks in Northern Ireland, ground holding operations in Iraq and more recently Search and MA in Afghanistan, including everything in between. The latest shift in the Regiments direction, and without doubt it's most challenging, is the preparation for its disbandment.

Without shying away from the task at hand, 144 HQ Sqn has seen this as an opportunity to give its soldiers the best possible chance of either remaining in service in another trade or branch of the Army; taking redundancy with the correct credentials and attitude for life outside the wire and for a lucky few to remain as Pioneers within the ARTD world.

The bulk of this work has been the responsibility of the new Outreach Dept who have proactively searched for and found 'Skills for Logistic' placements. These allow soldiers within Tranche 2 and

3 redundancy brackets to work in civilian placements to gain a better understanding of civilian employment. Career advice sessions have been set up, where the best direction for each redundee to take is explored as well as the task of turning military qualifications into "Civi-speak". Alongside these bespoke activities have been numerous Trade Transfer Fairs and guest lectures informing the Pioneer soldier on each step of his journey.

In amongst the Regimental efforts to provide the best future possible for Pioneers, 144 HQ Sqn has not forgotten the attached elements of the Regiment and has continued to invest in the future of other Cap-badged soldiers. Not content to simply "go quietly into that goodnight" 144 Sqn has provided a bulk of the sportsmen to Regimental teams, such as the Corps Cross Country where we retained the title of Major Units Champions for the 3rd year running and won the inter-regimental Assault Course.

187 (Tancred) Squadron

With the Regiment still reeling from the news of its disbandment and the



Regimental Training Day, London.

On Monday 3 Mar 13 the Officers and SNCOs of the Regiment travelled to London for a training day, this included a personal tour of the Tower of London and watching the Ceremony of the Keys.

Personnel were divided into Syndicates and during the day had specific tasks to perform, the winners by a clear margin were Syndicate 2.

It is rumoured that Capt Hynard had prepared the way during his various visits to London as the 'Out Reach' Officer.

Regimental Training Day

Picture: 23 Pioneer Regiment

uncertainty of redundancy, some could have thought the Sqn's taskings might slow or drop away; however, this was not to be the case. 187 (Tancred) Sqn has been as busy as ever, the tasks of normalisation, planning for the future and current Operations has kept the soldiers, and the chain of command engaged and focused over the last 10 months.

During this time a growing priority has emerged - the training for and future transition to civilian life as a result of redundancy. With everything from work placements, to Career advice being given. The Sqn and Regiment are pulling together in true Pioneer style to ensure that every soldier is given the best possible opportunity.

The focus has not all been about Redundancy; with 187 Sqn gaining the last 20 Pioneer soldiers fresh from basic training, a good old fashioned Sqn battle camp was planned in sunny Wales. Its aim; to ensure that the Sqn's Infantry tactics were up to the highest standards before Ex COMPLETE PIONEER, the Regimental exercise in Otterburn during November. 2Lt Charters fresh from his Platoon Commanders Battle Course and on a high after leading the Regimental team to a Cambrian Patrol silver medal, demonstrated his skills during a wet and snowy week in the field.

With heads held high and full of confidence, 187 Sqn immersed themselves in the second part of the exercise, quite literary in some cases, during the field firing and Assault Pioneer tasks.

Post Christmas, Cpl Harris led a section on a classic Artisan task supporting the Defence School of Transport in Leconfield. His task was to build an Afghan style village over two weeks in return for the opportunity to gain some valuable driving qualifications.

It's not all work, Capt Taylor and SSgt Archer successfully took the Regimental Nordic/Biathlon ski team to the Divisional championships, with true Pioneer grit they managed to qualify for the Army and British championships in Ruhpolding, Germany.

The group, led by the Sqn OC Maj Pelan, are training for an ambitious expedition to climb several snowy peaks in the Indian Himalaya later this year.

Operations have still dominated the main effort. 187 Sqn have been the lead Sqn and biggest man power provider to Op Herrick 18. SSgt Patrickson is currently deployed as the Troop commander of the last Search Troop, whilst we also have a number of soldiers deployed in the Protective Mobility roll.

Looking to the future; a team of 8 Pioneer soldiers headed up by Lt Scarfe of 187 Sqn are preparing to deploy as a part of the Theatre Redeployment Pool during Op Herrick 18. They will be attached to 9 Theatre Logistic Regiment in a classic Pioneer task. They will be deployed to assist with the backload of kit and the breakdown of Forward Operating Bases and Patrol Bases across Helmand province. This surge force will deploy for between 4 and 7 months as part of the theatre drawdown as Combat Operations

draw to a close.

518 (Pioneer) Squadron


At the dawning of the New Year, 2013 sees 518 Sqn continuing where it ended 2012 - as heavily committed as ever. The Sqn has continued to provide support to the conflict in Afghanistan with four Advanced Search Teams deployed with the Counter Improvised Explosive Device Task Force - a demanding and arduous IED search role. The Sqn continues to provide support to contingency training with the deployment of an early entry headquarters in support of JTFHQ, building on the success of Ex SOUTHERN MERCURY to Qatar last year. The diversity of the Sqn's taskings can be seen with personnel operating in the Falklands Islands, Canada and across the UK.

Alongside its aforementioned commitments, the saddening news that 23 Pioneer Regiment is to disband, 518 Sqn has catalysed a period of comprehensive investment in its personnel; training them either for transfer to another branch of military service or transition to civilian employment. Despite the forthcoming disbandment, the Sqn remains an operationally deployable unit and as such participated in Ex COMPLETE PIONEER, an abrupt return to contingency operations for the Sqn after the unrelenting Op HERRICK PDT cycle.

The proud contribution of 518 Sqn to regimental sports has not dwindled, with numerous members from within the Sqn representing the Regiment at football and rugby.



OP HERRICK 17
BRIMSTONE 31



SSM CHEUNG CHEUNG
CPL PETE BUINIMASI
CPL GOODIE GOODBOURN
LCPL WELSH WELSH
PTE JOCK TAYLOR
PTE JOHNNY RICKETTS
PTE KAR KING
LCPL RACH MATHERS QMELK

Brimstone 31

Op Herrick 17

■ Ptes Ricketts, King, Taylor, LCpl Welsh, SSM Cheung, LCpl Mather, Omelk, Cpls Goodbourn & Buinimasi. LKG AO. Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Cpl Buinimasi, Pte Taylor & WIS Bloke. LKG AO

Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung

THE FIRST of the Pioneer Advanced Search Teams to deploy on Op HERRICK 17 was BRIMSTONE 31, commanded by WO2 SSM KW Cheung formally SSM 206 Sqn, the team consisted of Cpl 'Big' Pete Buinimasi, Cpl 'Goody' Goodbourn, LCpl 'Karl' Welsh, Pte 'KBR' King, Pte 'Plank' Ricketts, Pte 'Jock' Taylor and last but not least our dog handler LCpl 'Rach' Mathers and Qmelk.

As we arrived to a brilliant sunrise at about 0530hrs local time we were greeted with some fantastic news.....RSOI starts in two hours, the blokes were chuffed to bits with that news! A week of RSOI soon passed and the team were granted CAT3 status, basically the Army was saying we had their 'authority' to cut around Helmand with the infantry, no great shakes there as it was where we anticipated doing the lions share of the work! After a day's admin we then moved onto Role Specific Training and thankfully Lt Leigh Rickards and his search team set about passing all the very best advice that they had learned the hard way onto our team. The package consisted of a whole host of high assurance search tasks, ensuring that the team was 'ready' and lessons learned in Jordan were still fresh.

As soon as the RST package was over it was time to get ready for forward mounting, kit was packed and vehicles acquired and within 48hrs we found ourselves off to Patrol Base ATTAL in the Lash-Kar-Gar AO. On arrival we were greeted by the outgoing team and given the good news that we were going to be conducting a 1600m route search in a

week or so.....baptism of fire was on the way! The planning rounds and rehearsals kicked in straight away, our first task was to clear a route that had been out of bounds to ISAF and no locals had walked on it for months, still that was the job we had trained for and secretly I think that the blokes were quite keen to get on with the job. The job started and we made steady progress, the team was responsible for finding 5 IEDs on the route and once cleared a vital GLOC was opened and the infantry multiples finally got the resupply that they had been waiting for. We spent approx another 6 weeks at ATTAL, tasks were regular and varied and kept the blokes busy enough to keep boredom well and truly at bay.

Our next move was to Forward Operating Base OUELLETTE, and the memories of Cpl 'Ginge' Roberts and Pte 'Sili' Silibaravi came flooding back, as soon as the RSM 1SG had given us his welcome brief we located the monument to the fallen and every man said a silent prayer for our Pioneer brothers. Life with the Scots Guards was brilliant, we were busy as hell and out most days but the support was amazing, on almost every job the 'Right Flank' would provide enough firepower to smash the enemy if he decided to have a go! FOB routine was also brilliant, the Bn had things well and truly sewn up and treated us as their own, Pte 'Jock' Taylor was especially happy as almost everyone knew exactly who 'Ken' was!!! The jobs were varied and at times incredibly annoying as we didn't get many chances to recharge the

batteries, that said the team should be rightly proud of what they achieved whilst with the Guards as we ensured that their Main Effort was a success.

As soon as the team returned from a very welcome R&R we were farmed straight back out to the PB line, this time it was to Patrol Base WAHID in NAD-E-ALI with the men of the 1st Bn Royal Gurkha Rifles who made us instantly at home. The only problem was that the weather reminded us of home as it honked down every day and it was freezing! Life was pretty miserable as the weather meant that there were few patrols going out and we found ourselves climbing the walls for a week or two, welcome relief came with the odd visit to SHAWQUAT to sample the delights of the NAAFI!! The best thing about WAHID was the combined gym/swimming pool.....ever been to a gym and needed waders? Try WAHID in the winter and you will find it a welcome treat! All in though the Gurkhas looked after us brilliantly, amazing curries on every night and the chance to give them some welcome training ensuring that their skills were fresh and they were 'ready'. Unfortunately our time there was cut short with the news that we were going back to BASTION and assuming the role of HRF.

The HRF tasking meant that the team would be based at BASTION for about 3 weeks or so, a good result as it meant the lads were in relative comfort for the Christmas and New Year period, a few carols were sung and the odd mince pie

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **HI GUYS**, I am running the total warrior 2013 10km race to raise money for a charity very close to my heart - NAPAC.

Many of you will not of heard of them. They are the National Association for adults abused as children.

I served with 187 Coy RPC and 187 Sqn RLC and many might remember me as not being the best Pioneer but I had many problems that were undealt with.

I was abused whilst at a boarding school called Crookham Court School in the mid to late 80's and only broke the silence 5 years ago and this year in February I saw my abuser go to prison.

In those 5 years NAPAC have been helping me get through and face my demons and I now at the stage i can confidently look at the future once more. I ask people to help me raise as much as possible for this great cause my visiting my just giving page and donating. The race website is www.totalwarrior.co.uk/10k.php

I have changed a lot since I left the corps and my one big regret was I wasn't good enough for the corps in my eyes but they were and still are a part of life I am proud of. Andy Hudson

■ **THE RLC Open Day** is to be held on 6 July at Deepcut and takes place from 1100-1700 hours on Dettingen Fields.

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

■ **THE PAST & Present Officers' Dinner** will be held on Friday 18 October 2013 in the Officers' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Bicester.

Past and serving officers wishing to attend should inform the Secretary by 4 October 2013.

■ **THE WOs & SNCOs Pioneer Reunion Club** will be holding a Ladies/ Generation Dinner in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Bicester on Saturday 19 October 2013.

A Newsletter will be forwarded to members in August 2013. If you would like to join the Club please notify the Secretary RPC Association.

■ **THE FIELD of Remembrance** will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 7 November 2013.

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

■ **WE WILL**, once again, be holding the London Lunch on 7 November 2013.

This follows the Field of Remembrance and will be in the Marquis of Westminster Public House, Warwick Way, London (Near Victoria Station).

■ **THE CENOTAPH Parade** is to be held at Whitehall on Sunday 10 November 2013.

This year we have been allocated an additional 24 tickets (total of 54) and these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association (22 have already been allocated). Personnel must be on Horse Guards Parade by 1010 hrs.

Northampton Branch of the Association will once again be hiring a mini-bus from Northampton Town Centre, if you wish to travel on this please inform the Secretary.



■ **LCpl Welsh and Omelk LKG AO**

Picture: WO2 SSM KW Cheung

scooped on Christmas day but alas it wasn't to last and we were soon off to our old stomping ground PB ATTAL.

Our second visit to ATTAL was pretty much the same as the first with the exception of Pte 'Tia' Caddick and Fanta as new additions, the main difference being that we were now with the 1LANCS BG and again they were brilliant, the jobs were varied and we had some excellent results, apart from going out and about with the LANCS we also managed to deploy with the WART-HOGS and experience life in a washing machine far to often, tab across half of LASH and work with the (great) Danes that strangely resembled Vikings..... Once again we were relatively busy but that's better than being bored!

As the tour ended it was time to reflect on what we had achieved, every man had found bombs and with that they had changed countless lives, every member of BRIMSTONE 31 should rightly be very proud of themselves for their actions, from the first bomb found we went on to deal with many more, caches had been found and denied and we had delivered the goods with the infantry ensuring they had freedom of movement and demonstrating that they were in charge.

A special thanks to all the kind people that sent the lads welfare parcels as it made a real difference, and finally Pete, Goody, Welshy, Johnny, Jock and Kingy it's been an absolute honour.

WO2 K Cheung

(Ed Note: More photos on Page 39)



■ 168 Pioneer Regiment ready to ski!

Picture: 168 Regiment

168 Pioneer Regiment News

Achievements in the sporting arena and the greener operational context

WHILST THE last six months have been filled with uncertainties abound, what can be seen are some monumental achievements both in the sporting arena and the greener operational context.

2013 was greeted in a positive style with the Regiment winning the RLC TA Cross Country Championships; no mean feat given the average age of the competing teams and the quality of the opposition, indeed some of the 'Silver Shadows' deployed by the Regiment in the competition had a longer service record than many of the other competitors!

Close on the heels of the Cross Country, 168 deployed a well honed and driven team of athletes to Germany to participate in the RLC Skiing Championships. Given that the Regiment finished last in its previous competition, the undisputed 'kings of the snow' The Scottish Transport Regiment were hardly quaking on their ski's....how wrong they were! With focused training (aided by half a foot of snow in Grantham) the team led by the veteran skiing star Capt Steve Hesketh surpassed themselves both individually and collectively, finishing second in the

RLC TA competition (chasing hard at the heels of the eventual winners the Scottish Transport Regiment) and eighth overall, no mean feat given the amount of 'snow time' many of the competition have had! Equally impressive was the bridges built with the local community by members of the Regt; with many of the races being watched by the secretary of the newly formed 168 Pioneer Regiment Skiing Support's Club (Germany); Mandy a striking 6ft3 local girl equally impressive at both cheering on 'her team' and seeing off remarkable quantities of local brew!

Away from the heroics of the sporting arena, the Regiment has worked hard over the past 6 months to continue with the development of Shal Aki' Kalay village on the Akritiri peninsula of Cyprus.

Little over twelve months ago this 'training village' constituted of nothing more than a couple of disjointed compounds and a dilapidated 'FOB' in the loosest possible sense (built by some people perhaps bearing 'fat badges'). Now, Cyprus has a training village including three FOB's, five compounds, in excess of 10 market stall, a mosque and 800 metres of solid road surfaces.....demonstrating perfectly what

little more than 30 pioneers can achieve in two weeks! On completion in Mar 2013, those units lucky enough to use Sjal Aki' Kalay, I'm sure will agree that this asset will prove extremely valuable in training for both current operations and the uncertainty of future deployments.

A significant amount of resources have also been invested over the past 6 months on the development of the Regts soldiers; with Maj Cooper running an extremely successful JNCO Cadre in the near-arctic conditions of Swynnerton Training Camp, testing not only the soldiers potential to lead and command soldiers but equally their ability to avoid frost bite. Not to be left out, the Officers and Warrant Officers took part in Ex WINTER BEAVER at the beginning of March, where they received a number of interesting briefs culminating in a most enjoyable dinner night. Having been mentally taxed for the majority of the day with some complex doctrinal topics, Capt Hesketh took the opportunity during the course of the dinner night to catch up on some much needed rest...unfortunate given the amount of snow that was deposited in his vicinity.

Looking to the future, over the course of the next 4 months the diary remains full

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **RESULTS** from the RPC Association Christmas Draw 2012. Well done !

1st Prize £1,000 *K Richardson, Lisburn*
Ticket No 15002

2nd Prize £500 *G Southard, Elloughton*
Ticket No 20098

3rd Prize £200 *J Seabrook, Preston*
Ticket No 03861

4th Prize £100 *F A Peart, Isle of Wight*
Ticket No 21100

5th Prize £50 *SA Barron*, Bishops Stortford*
Ticket No 43067
**Donated prize to RPC Association*

■ **SINCE 2009** the UK Armed Forces Day has been marked annually with events large and small throughout the UK, and this year the celebrations will fall on Saturday 29 June, with a major national event being held in the City of Nottingham.

Last year over 200 events took place in all parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

They included Armed Forces Day tea parties, civil war military re-enactments and live and static demonstrations; all designed to enable people to come along and show their support for the men and women of the Armed Forces family.

As Armed Forces Day approaches and the country gears up to show its support for Armed Forces personnel, families and veterans, don't forget to show your support by claiming your free Armed Forces Day window sticker by signing up to the monthly Armed Forces Day E-Newsletter, and make sure you stay up to date with all the latest news on the day itself.

A spectacular programme of events and activities is being planned in the run up to Armed Forces Day in Nottingham on 29 June that the whole family can enjoy, including parades, live demonstrations by the three Services, interactive exhibitions, and live entertainment.

To make sure you receive all the latest news sign up for the Armed Forces Day E-Newsletter at: www.armedforcesday.org.uk/supporting/keep_in_touch.aspx

■ **VETERANS ADVISORY & Pensions Committees (VA&PC)** exist to serve and support ex-servicemen and women, their widows or widowers and their immediate family members.

So whenever or wherever you have served, whether in the Second World War or Afghanistan, they are here to help. They are an independent voice and can act as a bridge to:

Advise and guide you, listen to complaints and assist you in obtaining help from the appropriate ex-service charity or government department. If you would like to be put in touch with your local VAPC,

Please contact from the UK: 0800 169 2277 From Overseas: +44 1253 866043

Email: veterans.help@spva.gsi.gov.uk

■ **IN THE** last edition of the newsletter on page 3, we printed a quote by Taff Powell, this was incorrect, the quote was actually originally submitted on facebook by Neil Taylor.

Our apologies to both concerned.



■ **Capt Hesketh proudly presenting the team after their fine performance**

Picture: 168 Regiment



■ **In order to hide the dated nature of Capt Hesketh's initial kit issue, he positively encouraged a medieval fancy dress theme**

Picture: 168 Regiment

for 168, with four beat-up exercises planned in preparation for the Regimental 'Lion Sun-esk Exercise in Cyprus in September; which will include both sea and air assets as well as a final attack into a challenging semi-urban environment.

There is also a Warrant Officers development weekend including a visit to the Royal Armouries as well as a presentation from high profile guest speakers; which will offer not only overt educational development but equally a solid opportunity to bond!

The Regiment would also like to take the opportunity to welcome several new members to its fold: Major Peter Callen-Organ the new Training Major having recently returned from OP HERRICK, Capt

David Harrison the new Adjutant having recently been posted from 11 EOD Regt, Capt Steve Hesketh double hating as the RCMO and OC 101 Sqn having recently returned 'to green' following a sabbatical teaching and WO2 Rushbrook who is arriving from RSU in April.

Additionally, the Commanding Officer would also like to take the time to say farewell to several members of the Regt; with Maj Stuart receiving a posting on return from OP HERRICK and WO2 Lane posting on promotion to take up the appointment of RSM 23 Pioneer Regiment; both have worked tirelessly during their tenure with 168 Pioneer Regiment and will accordingly, be sadly missed.



■ Dusty Bryant, Steve Williams, Bernard Fox, Stephen Moore, Philip Jacobs (main pic) Steve Williams and Joseph Borda (bottom right) Pictures: Paul Brown

Corps of Drums reformed

The Royal Pioneer Corps of Drums have currently had 2 practices so far

THE CORPS of drums reborn started about 12 months ago when unbeknown to me Bob Hislop who had been living in Bicester since leaving the army 25 years ago joined facebook and we became in contact again.

We very soon decided that we need to meet after not seeing each other for almost 30 years Bob came to my house in Northampton.

The next Saturday night. Bob brought a drum and bugle with him and we very soon learned that we could both still play. We then talked about the possibility of tracking down some of the old lads, it was a couple of weeks later at the Northampton Branch Reunion at Bob Barfield's rugby club.

Again Bob brought his drum along in the boot of his car for the ride and after a few drinks it was decided that the drum needed to come in and I needed to play it.

It was at this point. That myself and Bob Hyslop mentioned to Bob Barfield, Bob Fox and Peter Thomas of our plan to reform the Corps of Drums for this year's reunion. They all thought it was a great idea and showed much support. After gaining support from the Association via Norman Brown, a plan was made and

Bob Barfield would sort out a possible training day at his rugby club. I set about trying to track down drummers and Bob (the QM) Hyslop started work finding instruments for us to play.

I contacted Norman Brown to try and track down some of our old drummers. He contacted several on our behalf and left messages for them to contact me. It soon became obvious that everyone concerned thought this was a fantastic idea.

Bob Barfield then confirmed the availability of the rugby club for us to have a practice session and I posted the details on facebook.

At this point I emailed Dusty Bryant to ask if he would consider being our Drum Major again, and contacted everyone who had an interest.

As you know the first practice was a great success. The second practice at Claire Street was organised by myself and Pete Thomas. And the rest as they say is history.

If anybody reading this has any details of any ex drummers who would like to take part please get them to contact us.

We are also trying to raise £500 to buy a new glockenspiel.





■ Last year's Pioneer Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown

Pioneer Reunion Weekend

The Pioneer Reunion Weekend is going to be held on 12/14 July 2013

THE PIONEER Reunion Weekend is to be held on 12/14 July 2013, please note change of date from that published in the last Newsletter as the date clashed with the RLC Open Day at Deepcut (5/6 July).

It was thought that this year would be the last one to be held at Bicester because of the disbandment of 23 Pioneer Regiment, the Commanding Officer, however, has stated that the Regiment could host the weekend in 2014 as well. However, this year will probably be the last large (very large!) Reunion.

The 13th July is also to be the Regimental Open Day where families together with civilians from Bicester will be invited. A number of activities together with numerous stalls are to be held on the sports day to keep all amused.

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' & SNCOs' Pnr Reunion Club - WOs' & Sgts' Mess (Members only)

1030 hrs - Form up for Church Service (outside Scully Hall). It is hoped that the newly re-formed Corps of Drums will provide the music for the veterans to march to the Corps War Memorial.

1100 hrs - Church Service at Corps War Memorial

1120 hrs - March Past, outside RHQ - Commanding Officers' 23 & 168 Regts together with Chairman RPC Association to take salute.

1130 hrs - Group Photograph - steps of Officers Mess. Photographs can be ordered on the day or pre-ordered on the booking form enclosed with this Newsletter.

1150 hrs - Tea/Coffee in the WOs & Sgts Mess.

1200 hrs - Association AGM - WOs' & Sgts' Mess - points for inclusion on Agenda should be forwarded to the Secretary by 20 Jun 12.

1300 hrs - Lunch, unless a member of a Mess this must be taken in Scully Club.

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!) There will be a variety of stalls (including the Association Shop!) together with food and beer tents. (Polite note: please keep the field tidy and deposit litter in the bins provided).

1800 hrs - Evening entertainment (including BBQ/or curry). A booking form is included with this newsletter, this should be returned to the Secretary by 27 Jun 13.

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.

Scouse Thomas published the following on Facebook - in true Pioneer Style:

"I am attending the reunion on the new date much to the delight/disgust of my partner!! We had arranged to get married on the 12th July, honeymoon on the 17th. So the original date would have made a brill stag weekend. But we are still doing the honeymoon but no wedding, will set another date later on.

Red and green all the way"



War Service of Frank Shepley

A fascinating account of life in the Pioneer Corps in World War 2, told by Frank Shepley

Report: Frank Shepley
Picture: Frank Shepley

I WAS born into the slum area of Liverpool Docks on the 28th November 1925. To be honest I don't remember very much before starting school; that came as a great shock. I was forced to sit in a room among a lot of boys I did not know.

I remember a lady standing at the front shouting, telling me to read the book she's put in front of me. I didn't know what a book was, let alone read it. I made my first mistake then and there, I punched the boy sat next to me, he was laughing at me and nobody gets away with that.

I was taken to see a man called the Headmaster, he was a big tall man, in a big room. I recall he kept taking my hand trying to hit it with a stick. I kept taking it away, he got very mad at me and ordered me home instructing me to return with my mother. Mum was not pleased. I kept saying I didn't like school and that I didn't want to go anymore. Next day, crying and held tight my mum, I was marched into school and mum was soon having words with the Headmaster. I did not understand why he was looking at me. He then gave me a sheet of paper and said read anything you like. I hadn't a clue, mum explained to the headmaster that I had never had comics to which he replied that all boys like them.

I was sent back to class, a lady at the front said her name was Miss Day and I was told to sit at the desk in front of her, I still remember a big blue box on the seat beside me, it was filled with picture books. Then it started C A T cat, D O G dog, days came and went and time passed. I must say, I skipped school once or twice, mum got mad and I got hit – life went on.

One day on the way to school I bumped into Johnny Kelly, it turned out he was in the same class as myself, but in the back row. However, we hit it off, and became good friends. It worked out well, if one of us got picked on during play-time we would single one out and on the way home he got a right thumping. This went on for a while, I'd go home with blood on my face, mum would go mad, I would tell dad he was bigger than me, we were soon left alone; the younger lads would come to us for protection.

Time passed and I still had difficulty with reading and spelling came harder. Time came to move up a class, not that I had won the weekly exam but I was now too old for the class standard I was in. My new

teacher was to be Mr Marsden, I took to him straight away. He did not ridicule me for being slightly backward but helped me a lot. I was with him until I left school at the age of 13 1/2. I was two classes behind Johnny. The reason for leaving school was that my dad was a steel erector by trade and his job would take him away for the next two years or so, of course mum and I had to go.

The place we were going to was called Frampton Mansell, just outside of Stroud in Gloucestershire. We were in luck and found lodgings on a farm; mum and I worked for our keep, dad's firm paid for his. I fell in love with the farm, I had my own room and fields and fields of cows and all kinds of livestock. Gran as I called her taught me how to milk the cows, make butter and feed the hens and I was paid. I was made – and no school! I learned to swim in a brook which ran through one of the fields and soon picked up the art of tickling out trout, Gran loved them.

Tuesdays was market day in Stroud, my first job was to catch the pony, he did not like the cart or the harness, but I did win him over with a few apples. I spend hours in his field, he got to running down to meet me when I came into his field, he knew I would have something for him. Tuesdays were now a lot easier as I could ride him bare back around the field. One day I left the gate open and he got out and walked down into the farmyard. Mum and Gran looked on as I rode him, gran said that nobody had ever got that close to him, we became good friends. I would load the cart with milk, eggs and butter and get Gran into the cart and off to the market square in Stroud to sell the goods, by the late afternoon all would have been sold.

Then one day my world came to an end, when Dad came home and told Gran we would soon have to move as his job was coming to an end. I ran out into the fields, it took Dad ages before he found me. Gran pleaded to let me stay with her, and I wanted to stay so much but Gran lost the battle. I recall as we left Gran turned to Dad and said that he was taking the boy away from the farm but he would never take the farm out of the boy. How right she turned out to be.

I have now moved on to 1947, I have had my war although I am still in the Army and find myself in Plymouth closing German Prisoner of War camps. It's here that my life picks up, I have met a lovely girl and we will marry on the 7th April

1947. Lillian is not long out of the Royal Air Force having been demobbed after six years on a bomber station. I will leave the Army very soon. I have told Lil all about Frampton Mansell and it was agreed that we will visit the first chance we get. First we had to set ourselves up, we both went to work and took a one bedroom flat to start. We saved our money and soon moved into a three bedroomed house, we continued to work until one day in 1953, when Lil gave me the marvellous news that she was pregnant, that was our year. The joy was mind blowing, it took ages to settle down. During this period I wrote to the folks at Frampton Mansell with the news, the reply I received was to bring her up for a few months before the birth and she would get spoilt rotten. About three weeks before the birth Lil needed a rest so off we went.

When we arrived, Frampton was still just as I remembered it from the early days. I rang the doorbell and stood waiting for it to open. Hilda appeared, I stood looking at her face which lit up and she then hugged both of us, she called out for Ernie and Gran. It took Gran a little time to explain about Puck Mill farm, she had grown too old to run the place and Hilda and Ernie had as much as they could handle with their own farm. All too soon it was time to go home, Lil was a lot better and fit to travel.

The big day arrived, the 17th August 1953, an a.m. birth. It was a boy, Lil had had a hard time in labour but recovered quickly and a few days later was home with the baby, we were a complete family. He was baptised Thomas Joseph. Tom was a big lad and grew up fast and it was not long before plans were made for a visit to Frampton. Tom loved his holidays there and spent many weeks with his Mum among the animals and hay making.

The years shot by fast, sadly dear old Ernie dies, Hilda is not long behind him. They are buried with dear Gran who had passed away some years earlier. A great number of years go past before we drive by the house where we had years of fun and joy. It looked as it always had, except there were no animals. Memories live on.

Now back to my story. In December 1942 I was 17 years old and living in Liverpool when I decided to volunteer for the Royal Navy. I took a tram-car to Liverpool City Centre where the recruitment hall was located. I said that I was 18 years old and despite this lie, I was passed A1 for the Royal Navy. In the

middle of January 1943, I received my call-up papers, not for the Navy but for the Army. I was to report to Durren Hill barracks in Carlisle, home of the Border Regiment for six weeks basic training.

I arrived very late at the barracks and was sent straight to hut 23 where I found Jack Rich, Ginger Betts, John Kelly and Chuckie along with 25 other recruits. Early the next morning, the process of documentation and the drawing of kit together with inoculations began. Then the hard work commenced, we had to double march all daylight hours and tackle the assault course at least once a day. We would march with the Company Band some times, other days we would march up and down the parade square. Then came the big day, wearing our full kit we paraded on the square, the officer in charge gave his farewell message, as did all the NCOs'. The Company Band began to play as we fell in behind and marched off to the railway station.

We now found ourselves in Prestatyn, North Wales. We had been posted to a holding unit, here the better you worked, the quicker you would be posted to a Company. During the next few weeks, more route marches, fitness tests, weapon training and gas courses. Over this period Jack and I had become good friends, by now most of hut 23 had passed out and been posted. Jack and I received a posting to Sandwich in Kent.

We were now a part of 824 (Smoke) Company, this was a special unit which we learned could black out a town in 30 minutes. Jack and I made sure we got together in a team and after a lot of hard work we passed out, on what was called Smoke Unit 7. Comprising a three ton lorry fitted with two 50 gallon tanks, one for water the other for crude oil, a trailer carrying a Lister engine and a big machine with a chimney. Together this unit produced a very thick black smoke, this work was carried out at night. We would parade at 2000 hrs, then drive for an hour into the Sandwich Marshes where we took up generator position until 0500 hrs. Once back at base the days were free of duty. After approximately six months we received orders to move to Weymouth in Dorset and from just outside the town to as far as Portland Bill we set up generator posts. We requisitioned a mansion and Jack and I shared a very big room – the best billet ever!

During this time Jack's wife and two sons came to live in a house a mile down the road, this gave them an opportunity to get a rest from the bombing in London. Jack slept out for a time, duties were in hills outside of Weymouth. I was sent with a small platoon of men to fortify the Breakwater, thus covering the approaches to Weymouth anchorages. We spent two weeks on and one week off duty. This duty continued for a long time, until we reported back to the Company, we now began a stock build up for D Day. This would have an effect on the entire Company. At first my platoon was sent to stock out Chesil Beach, all 16 miles of it. We arrived to find the Americans on the Beach, with Jeeps and trailers full of equipment in one straight line to the start point. As they were not staying long they did not need any cover, we said our farewells and left returning to base our arms full of cigarettes. Shortly after our return came the big blow, the company was to be disbanded. All pre-war tradesmen were to report to company office. They were all posted to Egypt. I lost

my best mate, as Jack was among them. He had been an engineer before the war. I felt very sad as I watched them march off towards the railway station.

I was not looking forward to joining my new unit, as I reported back to Central Group Headquarters once again; it was to be another holding Company in the town of Warrington. It was a large walled barracks dating back to the First World War, it housed many units all waiting for their next posting.

I reported to the Orderly Sergeant on our arrival, he took us straight into the Company Commander and I handed him my movement orders. He stood me at ease and began to read, he introduced himself as Major Bishop. It took him some time to read all 21 files; he looked up and asked if I was the senior of this intake. I replied that I was. Good, he said, you will stay in charge. You will now take them to hut H3 located at the top end of the parade ground, once you are settled, get yourselves a meal. Tomorrow at 0900 hrs you will report to the Company Office. I arrived on time and was shown into the office of the Orderly Sergeant, he was Sergeant Butcher.

He gave me the run down on the working order of the camp and then asked if I had seen the Part One Orders Board. Yes, I replied and he then gave me a notice to pin up on my way out. He shook my hand; confused I turned and went to do as he had asked. I stood looking at the notice for a long time, it read that from 0900 hrs 220 Pte Shepley is promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal. I turned to the office and saw Sgt Butcher giving me the thumbs up sign and I came to attention and walked off to find the stores to collect my stripes then to the tailors shop to have them sewn on. As I walked into hut H3 the lads said that I was mad, among other things. As the NAAFI was open I paid for tea and buns.

After reveille next morning we started work and soon settled down to barrack life and got plenty of it, we were a unit once again. There were no signs of a posting, days came and went then one day I went to read daily orders only to see my name. I was to report to the Quartermaster's office at 1400 hrs which I did. I knocked on his door and entered and he informed me that I had the job of ration Corporal starting immediately. I'd been in the army long enough to know you did not say no to the QM. All turned out well, after I got used to the size of the store and the amount of paper work, the QM was very helpful. To help myself I put Chuckie in charge of Hut 3, no one would give him any trouble and should I need any help Hut 3 was on tap. So there I was, up and running at my disposal a 15 cwt truck, and a driver, who I called on from the motor pool. I soon learned how to keep the QM happy, life was good. Time passed, but like all good things they come to an end.

The war was not going well at this time, men were being sent in droves, only to be replaced with new recruits, a full training programme went on day after day. One day as I was walking around the Company Office I noticed a large group of men gathered round the notice board. On joining them I saw that the notice was for volunteers to be made up into units and become part of the 6th Airborne Division. I could not see any of my lads so I went round to Hut 3 to fine them. They were all waiting for me and with one voice said, "Well Corps?" We were still a unit of the Pioneer Corps so fell in outside and

marched down to the Company Office and volunteered on mass.

It was not long before we were marching out of the barracks heading for Warrington Railway Station. We were still Pioneer's but very proud to be wearing the red flash of "Pegasus". We were attached to the Royal Army Service Corps who formed part of the 17th Division of the 6th Airborne stationed at Lytham St Anne's.

We spent a short time in camp but were soon issued with our kit and made up to full platoon strength, with a Sergeant called Spud Thompson in charge. I was made up to full Corporal and Miggings a Lance Corporal. We had become part of the 155 DID (Detail Issue Depot) Company RASC, temporary site Antwerp. It was a forward food depot responsible for bulk distribution to forward positions. This was without doubt the hardest job I had ever encountered, none stop day and night. It led to short tempers, the loss of trucks and comrades.

It is here that I am jumping a year and a half, I remember all, but I don't wish to recall or go into details. However, our route was Bruges, Gent, Brussels, Lunenburg, Hannover, Celle and many other placed on the way purposely excluded. It was at Lunenburg when my war was about to change. We were guided in and round the city by MPs who led street by street. There was very little damage as the city had been declared an OPEN city. We turned into a road with houses on both sides, at the end of which were a pair of large gates. It was the largest food depot we had ever seen, it had housed a large number of Nazis (long gone). The place was now the Headquarters of 155 DID, it was the first time we had met our HQ and they were glad to see us. The trucks were soon unloaded and stored away. We had time to have a meal and a look round this place, it was huge. Just outside there were three empty houses which became our billets, it was great.

Here life was different, the companies up front came to the depot and arrived with an indent, this showed their entitlement. Our working area was a long platform similar to a railway station, some 500 feet long with six separate bays, different items in each. The bay I drew was tinned fruit, this became very popular especially with the Canadians. Often cases of fruit were exchanged for a case of cigarettes; they loved fruit but not our English cigs! Of course I did not know anything about this – but it was funny that I always had plenty of cigs in my locker!

The depot continued month after month, the war was now moving at a great rate, we slowed down a lot and still issued daily but the volume was a lot less. Then one day the Orderly Sergeant called me to the office saying that a Lieutenant Carrol White wished to talk to me. In his room I was asked to sit down and have a cigarette, he went on to talk about my platoon. Were they happy living in the houses. I replied that they were the best we had ever had. He then went on to say the CO sent his thanks for a job well done. I stopped him, I felt uneasy, and asked if we were being posted. Not just yet and certainly not before his concert, but you are to lose Spud, he is to become a Sergeant Major and will be posted to Hannover. I was sorry to lose him as we had become good friends and worked well together. Carrol, as I was to call him off parade, asked if any of the lads could sing, tell jokes, act or paint scenery and that he had heard that I could do a good impression of Donald Duck. I did my version of Donald's "Daisy, Daisy give me your answer do". "well", he said,

'The hardest job I had ever done'

jumping from his chair, "Come with me". We went to the Company Office and he stood me on a chair and I had to repeat the song, when I finished the roof came off, they clapped, stamped their feet and asked to talk to them and get mad like Donald does. I could not get away, I had always been good at it, it had made many a pint. I was still able to please an audience after leaving the Service. Carrol White set about organising his concert. He first got permission to take over an empty theatre in town and we moved all our gear in and rehearsals started. Within three weeks we had a cast of twenty and the show ran for three hours and every night for two weeks. The Army press team gave us top marks. A show by soldiers for soldiers was the theme, each man was given a present of six full plate photographs of scenes from the show – I still have mine. Yet once again all good things come to an end.

Sadly we were to change our red arm flash, our time with the RASC was about to end. A parade was called next day and 155 were lined up to face us, again as Senior NCO I had the job to bring the boys to attention when the CO and Carrol came out of the office. The CO thanked us for all the work done, he said that we were a credit to our Regiment. Carrol White added his thanks and said they were sorry to see us go and as we were at alert, I asked permission to move off. I saluted and turned the boys to the right and marched to our billets, we still had packing to do.

Next day found us loading two three ton trucks and we set off for Hannover. We drove right through the city and stopped a mile outside. The Corporal in charge of transport called for a brew and sat alongside me, we had sandwiches and tea whilst having a fag. He said he knew my Group had moved on and in fact were at Celle, but his orders were to drop us here and return ASP. He reckoned it was a day's walk.

It had been a long time since we had done a long walk with full kit, small pack, large pack, heavy coat, rifle and webbing but we made it. After finding shelter we had bully beef and a sleep. We arrived mid morning at the outskirts of Celle and were stopped by a road block and the tallest MP I had ever seen. His ranks was Sergeant and he checked our movement order. I asked where Thirty Corps was, he stood like a mountain over us, turning and looking towards town and said, "From here Corporal your men will parade march, straight on, with safety catches on, turn left into the barracks. Celle was also an open city. As we turned left I saw it was the best part of a mile. There in front was the biggest army barracks we had ever seen, big iron gates swung open as we approached, they had to be twelve feet high, the guard snapped to attention as we were marching and I gave the salute eyes right. The Company flag was at full mast. We carried on to the huge parade ground, outside the Company Office and came to a halt. I stood the men at ease but not easy, within seconds from the office came a Second Lieutenant (he had one pip) and he was followed by the RSM and a Sergeant. The Sergeant stopped at my side and a low voice he said bring them up to attention. He then asked my name and that of the Lance Corporal. Turning to the officer he shouted "Detachment from Luneburg, Corporal Shepley and Lance Corporal Miggins". We were stood at ease and the office walked along one rank and up the other, looking at me he asked how long we had been on the road. I replied three days, sir. He then turned to the Sergeant and

asked if he knew about this draft, yes was the reply. The officer jumped at him, transport should have been sent, we will talk later. We were taken to our billet and after a wash and brush up I was to go and draw what ever was required, we did not need to parade next day as we were on 24 hour excused duty. It was strange to be in a hut after so long and even stranger to hear gun fire – it was a long way off but noticeable. I must have dosed off because the next thing I knew was Miggins standing by my bed with a mug of tea in his hands. We sat talking about what the officer had to say to the Sergeant, we did not care less, it was a day off for us. The door opened and a Corporal from the next hut came in, he asked us to join his hut to go for breakfast together. The mess hall was some way away, with thanks we waited for the bugle call and fell in behind him. His name was Tugg, and he was right about the walk, but he forgot to say about the size of the barracks, it was massive.

The grounds were big enough to lay out 12 football pitches. We settled down to the daily routine, odd jobs, painting things white – the old cliché if it doesn't move paint it. We were looking forward to a change. We had come in one lunch time after spending the morning on fire drill, it was very nice and peaceful sitting on my bed, until the door burst open and a voice bellowed out, "Where are you, you Scouse git?" I jumped up to find Spud standing there waving a bottle in the air, all the lads joined us and the mugs were passed round, it was great but the best was to come. The good news was that from immediate effect our platoon was on his unit strength this suited us fine. However, looking at Spud I noticed the look drawn and his face was pale.

My first job was to go to the stores and draw some arm flashes as we were now in 30 Corps and by breakfast time we had them sewn on. On arrival at the mess hall for breakfast we were met by a Sergeant Baggett who informed us that he was second in command to CSM Thompson and was in charge of our platoon. I took an instant dislike to him, but he was in charge, so I did as I was told. The days went by and we were working with some other Groups on repairing runways at Celle airfield. It had been heavily bombed and planes were not able to land. We had to lay steel mats, these were six feet long and three feet wide and fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle. Once laid they were firm, it would be weeks before it was completed although I never did see it finished.

I was working on the far side of the runway with my section and woke in Hannover hospital, it was called Annarstiff (not sure about the spelling), I could not sit up and panicked but was pinned down by a hand, looking up I saw the face of Miggins whose whole arm was in bandages. We were lucky he informed me two had been killed and four wounded. A load of plates, as we called them, had topped over and landed on an undiscovered mine. I had taken the blast in the small of my back and shrapnel had entered in two places. The doctor said I must remain on my back to give the stitches time to settle, he went on to say that I would carry a small piece for life as it was too close to my spine to operate. It does not give any trouble but it seemed ages before I was up and about. Miggins went back to Celle, medicine and light duty we called it. Spud drove to see me, he

was way off-line but I was glad to see him and the cigarettes he brought, I had a smoke to his health.

I returned to the Company downgraded from A1 to A4, which meant light duties. The lads had been split around and thanks to Spud I was confined to doing whatever came up. New intakes got my services drilling and marching and whatever was needed. The war had left me behind.

Time passed very slowly, I had been given the job of recreation Corporal. I was also put in charge of the mess and was totally browned off. We were getting close to the end of hostilities and everything seemed at a standstill. One day I received a telephone call from Spud asking me to go to the HQ. Sgt Baggett was there but Spud sent him out and asked me to sit down. He said that I appeared fed up, this was putting it mildly. He went on to say that he had accepted an offer of £180 to sign on for twelve months and that he would keep his rank. I told him that I considered that to be a fair whack and he said that he was not finished he was to be posted home to a town called Moreton in the Marsh. I told him that I would miss him and he told me that I could do the same but my posting would be to a place called Plymton in Devon. The job was closing down Prisoner of War camps, he said I could do the job standing on my head and to think about it. I went back to my office to do just that and locked the door. I had no ties and my mother received half of my pay, this would continue, she knew that I would not be returning to Liverpool again. The £180 would also come in handy; it would go into my gratuity fund. I rang Spud and then went over and signed on, then sat back and waited.

Finally on the 9th August 1945 came the Company Orders we had been waiting for, all BLA contingent (British Liberation Army) was to muster on the square ready to move off at 0900 hrs. When I arrived I was surprised to see that I was the only NCO out of twenty other ranks. As we were outside the Company Office I got them fell in just in time as Spud and the RSM came down the steps. The RSM did his little piece then Spud took over. He turned us right and marched us off to the railway station which was 10 minutes down the road. The journey home went well and we finally

arrived at Stanley Hospital, Blackpool. However, on our arrival it was clear that we were not expected for at least another week.

It was the Chief Medical Officer who arrived and informed us that he was aware we were due but the huts we were to occupy had

not yet arrived and would arrive either tomorrow or the day after. In fact it was two days later before three huts arrived in kit form, after being off loaded the trucks were gone. We had no help to erect them and got stuck in and got one up and doors on and then piled in without any lights. The kitchen staff gave us a meal in our mess tins and later that day a chap came and rigged up a couple of lights. We settled down to a routine of light work and some gardening, it was quite pleasant. Those personnel who need treatment were looked after. One day Spud was called to reception and received a telephone call from the Army Pay Corps at Preston, a Captain was to visit us the next day. Spud had us lined up on the grass outside long before his arrival, he looked as if he had just left Sandhurst. He took a good look at us and then went to see the Chief Medical Officer.

'It was strange to live in a hut, even stranger to hear gun-fire'

Spud instructed me to collect up all pay books and be ready to meet him in the anti-room with books in hand. Spud's was on top and mine next, the rest were in alphabetical order. We handed them over and waited, his face went pink. He looked at us both, what's all this he asked and before we could answer he burst out that none of us had drawn any pay for ages and that he could not pay out this amount. Spud explained that we had been on the move and had no contact with any Pay Office.

He asked me how I survived for money, I explained that my mother automatically receives half of my pay and that since returning to UK I had sold cigarettes which I had bought back (a large stock from Germany). He sat there looking at both of us and then picked up all the paper-work, stood up saying that he would be back.

When he had gone we fell over laughing, he never came back. In his place came an elderly Sergeant from the Pay Corps, he was one of us and told us that the officer had said that we had given him a hard time. We gave him a tea and he paid out, we left with pockets full.

We were all now passed fit and ready for duty. Spud had received travel warrants, I was to report to 137 German Prisoner of War Company, Chaddlewood House, Plympton in Devon.

This was the Headquarters for all prisoner of war camps in Devon. We were just about sober from the night before when I caught my train to Plymouth and Spud caught his to Gloucester. Both of us filled up, we had been together for a long time. We promised to keep in touch but we knew it was the last time we would probably meet, we had a few tears, a hug and then on our way.

I arrived at Plymouth station with my small group to find no transport, the station porter helped me to get the telephone number for the camp which I rang and transport arrived after a while. The driver said that we had a half hour ride to Chaddlewood House. The house was very lovely, the old mansion housed all the staff and behind the compound holding the inmates. I reported to the office and was taken down a long corridor, told to knock and wait.

A voice called and I went in marched to the desk, saluted and passed over the documents. The officer looked at my records and then looked at me stating that he knew me and asked from where. I informed him that he had been my CO in charge of operations and he asked where.

Gent I informed him, he told me that it had been a bad do and left it at that.

He ascertained that I could speak enough German to get by which would help me and went on to inform me that within the Group there were thirteen camps spread out over a large area. My job was to learn the running of the camp as the other NCO is soon to leave the service. I was instructed to learn fast as it would not be long before we would start sending them home. He arranged for the office Sergeant to give me a quick rundown and then arrange transport to my new home, Little Fancy. This camp held 350 inmates who all went to work building pre-fabs for the city of Plymouth.

It was late afternoon when I arrived and the NCO was glad to see me.

The camp was well kept, clean and tidy. The kitchen was very big, it also had a tailors shop. When the POWs returned they were locked up for the night. The trucks remained in our compound and I had a nice bungalow to live in with plenty of space in the office and a telephone, I was going to enjoy this and settled down to duty.

Daily parade states were telephoned in by ten each day and after a time the inmates got used to seeing me around.

As my German was very good I could talk to them and I used to visit inside the huts without any trouble. It was not long before some chaps came looking for favours, could the space at the back of the camp be used for football, could I obtain some plywood to make toys with.

Approaching the Christmas of 1946 I knew most of them would soon be home and I already knew my next camp, it was in the village of Ivybridge.

The next part of my story changed my life forever. I was sitting at my desk when the telephone rang, a young ladies voice asked if I was the man in charge. I replied that I was, and she then asked for a favour. She explained that her best friend had a boyfriend who was in the Army and he had managed to obtain a 24 hour pass and wondered if I could put him up for the night, as he was in the Army I agreed.

He arrived and was a very nice chap but he had a problem, it was that his girl liked to dance and he could only take one, he asked if I would take the other one. I said that I didn't dance and never had. We agreed that the only option was for me to meet the other girl and take her to the pictures. It was arranged that I would meet Lillian at a shop which was near the camp. She was on time and as we talked the ice

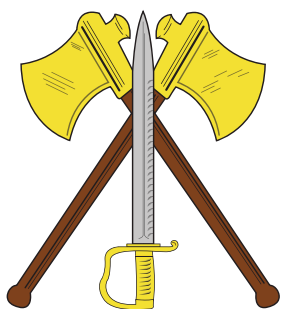
melted and by the time I said goodnight at her door I knew she was the girl she I was going to marry. The next day I rang the shop and invited her to come and see the camp, she was not very sure so her uncle drove her and said he would wait. I showed her all over the camp and we had tea and talked, her uncle was long gone. That was the start of a whirlwind courtship and we married on the 7th April 1947. Lill became very popular with the men so much so that the last of the men to go made her a ship in a bottle. The ship was named "LILLIAN" and today its sits on the dining room window still as good as ever. Lill and I are looking forward to our Diamond Wedding anniversary and will be spending it with our son Tom somewhere warm.

Footnote: *Dear old Spud Thompson and I never met again but I shall remember him forever. Joslin, we lost in Hannover, I never knew what happened to him. Geordie Shore was killed in Swolle and buried in Arnhem. Ginger Betts married a Dutch Red Cross worker he met in Celle. Chuckie Evans made Lance Corporal and was posted away. Jack Rich, my best friend, I located and his wife Kit and their two boys Dave and John. Unfortunately Dave was to die in his twenty's. We enjoyed many years of friendship but the years passed, we buried Kit and some year's later we lost Jack to a throat infection. The last we heard of John he was living somewhere in Plymouth. ■*



History of the Pioneer CEG

Have you served in the RLC Pioneer CEG between 1993 and 2012?



It is our intention to produce a History of the Pioneer CEG within the RLC prior to the demise of the trade. We are looking for anecdotes and memories of service to assist in the compilation of the record.

Please send any memories, photographs etc to the RPC Association in Bicester. If sending photos please name any personnel on the photo and date the

item. Photos will be returned after digital copying.

Records may also be sent electronically. Email: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

The more records received the better the record of our time in the RLC.

We wish to personalise the record rather than just copy entries from the Sustainer.



African Adventure

16 Troop's Exercise Argon Mercury / Operation Palliser

Report: Steve Blenman/Billy Dodds
Picture: RPCA Archive

THIS article was written by SSgt Steve Blenman (deceased) and I had the privilege to command him whilst serving as troop commander of 16 Troop, 522 Sqn, 23 Pioneer Regiment. SSgt (now WO1) Billy Dodds.

It was a drizzly morning of the Saturday 29th April 2000 when 16 Troop and 4 members of 13 troop plus 1 Radio Op set off from South Cerney, Africa bound. Up until that point no one could envisage the type of adventure the troop would actually undertake. However, the coming weeks would leave few in little doubt that the experience would have made a significant impression upon members of the troop.

It was a fairly long flight. Made even more tedious by the fact that it wasn't a luxury Virgin Atlantic aircraft with gorgeous stewardesses and gourmet food. Alas we had to settle for the hospitality of the RAF and a VC10 and incidentally no gourmet food.

Despite this sad state of affairs the RAF crew were superb and they made the flight as pleasant as possible.

It transpired that Pte Thirlaway had never flown before and according to some members of the troop he was making a very good impression of a frightened ghost. Poor lad!! 8 hours later 16 troop landed in Africa. Accra International Airport was the scene of extraordinary events.

It seems that our entourage was made up of daredevil bus drivers, police motorcycle escorts impersonating Evel Knivel and just about every man and his dog who came along for the ride. So off we set at a blistering pace to our new home for the next three weeks. This journey was by far the most unnerving experience. Not only did the police sirens and blue lights announce to all and sundry that we had arrived.

The drivers in oncoming vehicles knew it to! Any thought of quietly slipping into the country unannounced soon evaporated but then again this was Africa after all.

We arrived at the HQ and Officer Training School for the Ghanaian Forces and we were quite surprised at how tidy the place was. This was their equivalent to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in Camberley so we had to respect this fact and conduct ourselves accordingly. Saying that it didn't resemble anything like Sandhurst but more like Longmoor cut no ice. We duly moved into our accommodation and settled into a routine.

The Ghanaian People were very friendly

and we had ample opportunity to sample the delights of local life, but before this we had to start setting up the camp for the forthcoming exercise.

For those not privy to the workings of Charlie Troop. Our task is to provide defence, security and life support to the Signal Squadron that we were attached to. This included wiring, assault pioneer tasks and artisan tasks.

To conduct the various tasks, local resources would have to be purchased. This involved S/Sgt Dodd and Cpl Mc Gregor embarking upon a journey into town to try and establish suitable contacts. A task easier said than done.

When both Bill and Mac returned, they explained that they had found a wood yard after venturing to some of the roughest parts of the town (sooner them than me!). Where it transpired to the locals that here were some British Army personnel looking to purchase some wood and tools, then the old dollar signs rang up in their eyes.

A riot nearly erupted as all the various traders tried to cut deals with the soldiers. At one stage fighting did break out and people had to be calmed down before any dealing could be done.

You would be forgiven for thinking that we had somehow ended up in South Central Los Angeles rather than downtown Accra. We eventually got a delivery of wood and tools and set about constructing the various items that required building. This included a partition wall, screens and notice boards.

As for recreational facilities the troop also put up tentage and created a decent bar area. Sgt Blenman was also tasked to conduct Sqn PT.

This went down well with the pioneers but members of the Signal Squadron were dubious to say the least. Their worries proved to be unfounded as the PT sessions were not too strenuous due to the hot weather and that to push un-acclimatised people would be inviting disaster. So gentle jogs and team games were the order of the day.

The troop also constructed a volleyball court and football pitch, which were put to very good use by all members of the squadron. Things seem to be progressing very well and the OC was happy but on the horizon things were developing in a country 2 hours from Ghana.

Members of the troop had begun to enjoy the local life and were able to visit the Beach bar using the excellent pool and restaurant facilities. The Beach bar became a popular watering destination for Pioneer and Signaller alike. On one occasion a

fearsome storm developed and threatened to destroy everything in its path. Now at this point all the civilians had wisely vacated to a safer place. As for the servicemen well, not exactly willing to let a little storm disturb the drinking, they all stayed out there.

It became a battle of wills between Pioneers and the Signals as to who could stay out the longest. LCpl Jowett emerged as the victor over a member of 216 Para Sig although by dubious means.

The squadron also received a brief from the Military Liaison Officer who was a member of the BMATT. He outlined all the do's and don'ts but what struck a cord amongst the troops was the fact that from the purchase of goods to taxi rides you had to barter your way to a reasonable price. Now this was taken in earnest and the guys would barter like mad to secure good deals. Indeed the idea of bartering appealed to all.

Pity we couldn't do this in the local Comet we would run riot.

We were fortunate enough to have a chap called Joseph who did the washing of our kit, cleaned rooms and general runabout. All this for less than 50p a day (any chance getting him back to the Regiment!).

Sgt Blenman, Cpl McGregor and LCpl Jowett all celebrated their birthdays in Ghana but the events were marred by Cpl McGregor being robbed of some money at a bar. Cpl McGregor was at the time accompanied by a member of the Ghanaian Army who became incensed at what had happened. So much so that over a two-day period he pursued the perpetrators around Accra and eventually caught them.

The justice was swift and merciless. The two offenders were brought to camp for identification.

That complete, they were then beaten up. This was unacceptable to us so SSgt Dodd had to intervene to stop the prisoners from being put in hospital.

Stealing is not a good thing in Ghana as, like anywhere else in the world, and anybody caught doing it can expect no mercy from the authorities. This was a real eye opener to the Troop and the rest of the Squadron.

The CO of 30 Sig Regt visited the squadron and was introduced to the Pioneer Troop. He explained the importance of having the Pioneers attached to the Signal Sqn and also had an amusing story about 518 Sqn and roofs they built during their tour of C Tp.

It was also at this time that developments in Sierra Leone were beginning to be

shown on CNN.

The possibility of the Sqn being deployed to an operational environment was not beyond the realms of reason. With that the Sqn started a training package, which incorporated first aid and law of armed conflict.

However up until then it was just a contingency and no plans as yet existed for the deployment. This meant that the R and R package, which had been organised for a hotel downtown, could still go ahead. At this point S/Sgt Dodd and Cpl McGregor had managed to exchange 7 million cedi (£1,000).

This was yet another experience trying to get the best deal for the lads in down town Accra. On return to camp a pay parade was organised. That done the first group set out to explore the capital.

This was proved to be short lived for Cpl Cox who was called back to the barracks because the situation in Sierra Leone had deteriorated rapidly. However Sgt Blenman and his merry men managed to take full advantage of their overnight stay.

On their return they found that all defences had been taken down and were being packed in preparation for our next adventure.

SSgt Dodd had also managed to get a message to the CO 23 Pnr Regt to cancel his visit, just as he had been boarding a flight to Accra.

Reports were coming in that British troops had deployed to Sierra Leone. The transition from exercise to operations was stepped up and an advance party was sent out. Also at this stage weapons and equipment were being readied back in the UK.

The first stage of the operation was a short stay in Senegal (3 days) in a French army camp.

The troop was tasked to provide security for the Joint Tactical Forces HQ staff who had now begun to arrive from the UK.

The situation in Sierra Leone had now really begun to deteriorate and reports were coming in that members of the RUF were committing atrocities.

The OC was keen for the Squadron to receive more training. He wanted a package put together to include LOAC, weapon training, First Aid and Rules of Engagement.

Unfortunately this could not happen because personnel were being deployed to theatre within 24 hours. This included SSgt Dodd and the R1 element of the troop who went to Lungi Airport to set up the new location.

On arrival at Lungi Airport SSgt Dodd and his team conducted a search and secured the new location.

They began to set up the wire defences but were hampered by the interference of an officer from the Nigerian Army who had other ideas as to where they could set up. The original site had included the use of an entire car park hard standing. In the end the wire defences were erected and taken down a total of three times.

This had considerably reduced the working area for the JTFHQ and the Signal Squadron but nevertheless personnel got on with the task in hand. After the wire was set up the next crucial stage was to set up the life support which included cooking, shower and latrine facilities and also the accommodation. At this time the Nigerian Officer had put in another appearance. This time he complained about how far the

sangar had protruded into his compound and wanted it shifted back into our location. This was done and he seemed to be satisfied.

LCpl Jowett was placed in charge of the latrines and showers. Despite this job being very unpleasant at times LCpl Jowett and members of the Royal Signals cracked on with it and got them up and running.

The facility was also open to all members of the British forces based at Lungi Airport. This placed a great deal of pressure on the system and required considerable effort on the part of LCpl Jowett to keep them up and running.

The location was visited by OC Support Coy 1 Para who went around assessing the defences. He was very impressed by the high standard of the wire defences and stand to positions. He also indicated that if other units coming into theatre should visit this location and take the lead from the Pioneer Troop in how to construct their defences properly.

It wasn't long before defences not previously seen around the airport were beginning to spring up everywhere. Praise indeed!

Reports were coming in that an attack by the RUF on Lungi Airport was very likely to happen in the near future.

On one occasion intelligence sources indicated that a sizeable force had landed on the nearby beaches.

The troops were fully briefed by SSgt Dodd and stand to positions were reinforced with members of the Signal Squadron. The next two hours were quite a tense time.

All personnel were ready to fight and deal with whatever situation arose. The enemy did not materialise but security was stepped up and personnel became more aware that the situation was serious and that it was essential to adopt and maintain a professional standard.

Once everything had been set up the troop had moved into a routine, this involved setting up shift systems and making sure that personal drills were religiously carried out to a high standard daily.

The Assault Pioneers under the watchful eye of Cpl McGregor were tasked to build flooring for the tented accommodation within the location.

This was also provided for the Special Forces detachment located further up the road. Drainage ditches were also dug and duckboards laid down.

The large Joint Tactical Forces HQ tent also had some of its flooring raised and the outside sandbagged to hold it down during the storms.

Sgt Blenman was fortunate enough to be tasked as a "SSM" for the British High Commission and was detached to Freetown for 5

days. It was good opportunity to get members of the troop to go to Freetown to use the facilities that were there, including washing machines and the use of the swimming pool.

The Pioneers were also tasked to provide drivers and escorts to the British High Commission staff. This included on many occasions Pioneers solely in charge of protecting military and civilian staff whilst conducting any business in and around Freetown.

During this stage the medical branch

moved into our location and set up shop. The troop was also given the opportunity to go down to the beach where the Royal Engineers were located to conduct training on water purification.

It was also suitable for a spot of recreation (I wonder why!). The time soon came for the draw down of elements of the British Forces. First to go were elements of 1 Para. Joint Tactical Forces HQ staff also started to leave theatre.

The first to return to the UK was SSgt Dodd and Cpl McGregor with half the troop.

The remainder were left to drop the defences and set up at a new location further

along the airport. This was conducted by Cpl Cox with Pte O'Hare as his 2IC. Pte's Sarbutts and Spire were detached to Freetown to continue the task of providing escorts for the staff there. As we were dismantling the original location a number of local people had gathered around.

They had wanted to take anything we had left behind. Again a near riot situation developed and people had to be forcibly calmed down and the resources distributed fairly amongst them. It was an ugly situation but one that highlighted the sheer desperation that these people found themselves in.

16 troop and elements of 13 troop had now come to the end of a very enlightening and successful tour of West Africa, at times it had become very testing for individuals and the troop as a whole. But without a shadow of a doubt the experience left members of the troop more confident and able to face future challenges.

The African Adventure had indeed proved to be exactly what it was termed as. An Adventure!

Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002)

Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002)

The war began on 23 Mar 91 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with support from the special forces of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) intervened in Sierra Leone in an attempt to overthrow the government. The resulting civil war lasted 11 years, enveloped the country, and left over 50,000 dead.

In January 1999 world leaders intervened diplomatically to promote negotiations between the RUF and the government.

RUF compliance with the disarmament process was inconsistent and sluggish, and by May 2000, the rebels were advancing again upon Freetown.

In May 2000, the situation on the ground had deteriorated to such an extent that British Paratroopers were deployed in Operation Palliser to evacuate foreign nationals and establish order.

They stabilised the situation, and were the catalyst for a ceasefire that helped end the war. The British forces, under the command of Brigadier David Richards, expanded their original mandate which was limited to evacuating commonwealth citizens and now aimed to save UNAMSIL from the brink of collapse.

At the time of the British intervention in May 2000, half of the country remained under the RUF's control. The 1,200 man British ground force – supported by air and sea power – shifted the balance of power in favour of the government and the rebel forces were easily repelled from the areas beyond Freetown.

On 18 January 2002, President Kabbah declared the Sierra Leone Civil War officially over. ■

‘Pioneers would show other units how to construct defences’

‘Thanks to a Nigerian Army Officer the defences were erected and taken down three times!’

KRAKEL

TOP SECRET

The full story of Otto Hess is still classified to this day by MI6!

Report: Sylvia Skinner

I RECEIVED the following letter from Sylvia "Dear Norman, Frank Berry informs me that you would like to publish the story of my father Otto Hess in an edition of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association Newsletter but in order to do so you require my permission.

May I say thank you very much for such a kind offer, it would be lovely and a lasting memorial to him if you were able to do that. So I am more than happy to give my consent for you to do so.

In fact many years ago you helped me to trace some of my father's time in the Pioneers for which I was most grateful. As it happens, in Chapter One 'The Reason' you are one of those complete strangers that came along and helped me on my journey and here you are helping me again.

It is such a pity that my father's war life was such an enigma, if all the bits could be joined up it would make a great story but MI6 refuse to release his files even after all these years.

Once again Thank you,
Yours faithfully,
Sylvia Skinner"

CHAPTER ONE – THE REASON

When all those long years ago I decided it was time to find out about my late father, I had no idea that it would turn out the way it did.

I was in my mid 40's with a young son who was doing a project on World War 2 as part of his school work. Like all children he kept asking questions that could not be answered, so I decided to follow up what little I already knew about the man who had 'sired' me and who had been killed during the war.

Because I had been privately adopted at birth, it was not possible to ask questions of those who would know the answers.

Although my adopted Mother (who was a wonderful person) was very open with me from an early age and told me about the things she knew and gave me access to official papers, her knowledge was still very limited. She could tell me things about my biological mother and her family including her name but what we did not have was a name for my father. Unfortunately my adopted Mother died in 1971, so it was impossible to update any of the knowledge I already had, but it also meant that I was free to begin a search to find out who my father was without hurting anybody.

So, with what little I knew, I set out to find what I thought at the time would be relatively simple task. Firstly find a name, then a regiment and with luck the place of

death and burial, then if I was really lucky, hopefully a place of birth or abode.

But if you have read my first book "THE JOURNEY" which is the story of that long search, you will know that the outcome was far from simple, in fact it was amazing and so much has followed on since the completion of that journey it has led to this second book, which is the story of a very special man who gave his "ALL" for freedom and patriotism.

For those who have not read "THE JOURNEY", I will give you a brief outline of the story.

It was a long and eventful journey through uncharted waters without the aid of a compass or guide. For the first part I was out there on my own trying to navigate a course with just the minimal amount of information. Somehow, despite all the knock backs and dead ends and no sign of a safe landing, things started to happen. Complete strangers came to my aid and pointed me in the right direction, they gave me valuable information to help me on my journey. Bit by bit I was able to chart my way across this vast unknown expanse. Every time that it seemed I was lost and not knowing which way to turn next, yet another stranger would come along to assist me and show the way. It was as if someone was watching over me and sending these wonderful people to help at the precise moment of need. It happened so many times during this journey that it was impossible not to believe that everything that happened was meant to.

With all the help and guidance that I was given over the long years of that journey and all the amazing and wonderful things that happened along the way, I eventually found the distant island that I had been searching for, but it was not quite the island I had expected to find. It was so amazing and fantastic that I needed to explore it further, what was just in front of me was not enough, there was a lot more to discover and I would not be able to rest until every inch had been covered, even if it took years to complete.

This time I did have a compass though the map in my hand was far from serviceable, I set out on the task to discover all that was possible about this beautiful island. Once again one by one a wonderful stranger would come along to show me the way and set me on the right path, sometimes someone from an authority would come along but they would mostly be unhelpful and send me down the wrong path and try to get me lost. Time would be wasted but my heroes who had once been helpful strangers would always come to my rescue just in time to set me once again on the right path. As the years passed and I

discovered more and more about this island, its heart, beauty and history, it became obvious to me that the whole story should be told.

The island of course was my father, the strangers were those who knew him as a young man or knew of him, even people of his home town who never met him came to my aid. The years of hard work in finding who my father was were now over, but I was not going to be able to sit back and relax. Now the real work would have to begin because there was an outstanding story to be told.

As you read this book you will see that it would not have been possible but for all the input and information so generously given by those who knew him (even for a short time), by the wonderful officials in his home town who searched the archives to find family papers and the curator of the museum who did so much research on my behalf, and last but not least Klaus my co-author of this book who has put in a lot of effort by the way of research and public relations.

Since the surprise result of my original search and picking up on the snippets of information coming my way, I decided to do some more in depth research into the background of my father's life. This time I had the advantage of the internet, my husband had bought a computer a few years earlier. It was a great help in many ways but also a great cause of frustration.

Having found out that my father was a German Jewish refugee, the first task was to contact the organisation who dealt with Jewish refugees. So I contacted the Association of Jewish Refugees and the Jewish Chronicle. Both responded but the Chronicle was more positive and placed an item in its publication about my search. From that came many letters and e-mails from elderly gentlemen who had either known my father while serving in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps or later when training as a Commando in 3 Troop 10 Commando. I even had an e-mail from the widow of his best friend.

All these people have stayed in contact and we exchange mail and information along with the occasional telephone call. Sadly, due to their great age and the time it has taken to get this story out, some have passed away. They will be greatly missed, not just by their own families but also by me. Each one of them was a gem and in truth they all had an interesting story about their own lives.

Among these the three people who have helped me the most to learn about my father and enable me to be in touch with him as a person and bring him closer to me were Paul 'Yogi' Mayer his youth group

leader before the war and friend of the family in Germany, Dr Freddie Morgan who knew him when serving with the Pioneers in North Devon and who came from the area where he had gone to college in 1936 and Ann Bender widow of my father's best friend Edgar.

Ann found among her possession my father's published book of poems, a letter from him to Edgar and the letter confirming his death, all of which she kindly sent to me to keep, along with other snippets of information which have been invaluable. But you will read all about these further on in the book.

Apart from all the information I was getting about his life in this country as a "British Soldier", I was also beginning to learn about some of his life in Germany. His friends were telling me about life in Germany before the Nazi's took power and Klaus was working with the archives departments in Germany on my behalf, finding out as much as possible about his family and their background. Armed now with masses of pieces of information the next logical step was for me to go to Germany and visit the archives and speak to and thank those who had been so helpful. It would also be a chance to see the family home. I would also be able to see and have translated the official papers. Originally we were due to go to Germany in 2004 but circumstances made it impossible, however, in March 2005 we were able to make our visit, but it was not going to be just any old visit.....

In order for me to get the most out of my visit and to promote "THE JOURNEY" along with this book, Klaus thought it would be a great idea if we held a press conference; it might also bring forth more information. It was decided that this should be held in the museums library. To this end he worked very hard and liaised closely with Frau Dr Streich of the "Stadtrachiv" and Frau Lottmann-Keaseler of the Aktives Museum in Wiesbaden. Both these ladies had already achieved a great deal of information on my behalf and continued to do so.

Frau Lottmann-Keaseler had also arranged for there to be an exhibition about Otto's life as a display within her museum, and we all worked hard in order to put the display together, even to the extent of Steve (Otto's nephew in America) sending the valuable old pre-war family photo album over to me in order to copy some photo's for the exhibition.

Choosing the appropriate photo's and copying them was a precarious job, not only because of their importance and fragility, it was also important not to damage either the photos or the album itself. They had survived eighty years and been lovingly cared for, I remembered how honoured and humble I felt the first time this album was placed in my hands by Steve a few years before when he had brought it over on a visit, and I did not want to be the person who caused damage to them. It was quite a relief when I was able to securely pack them up and post them back to Steve in America. It has to be said that I did not rest easy until I received an e-mail from him to say that they had arrived safe and sound.

WIESBADEN – 2005

All the hard work in preparing for this visit was now complete, all arrangements had been finalised, rooms booked and transport decided upon. We had decided to make the journey by rail using the Eurostar

to Brussels then German railways to Wiesbaden. So on a very cold early March morning with snow covering large areas of Northern Europe we set forth. Our arrival time at Wiesbaden clashed with the evening rush hour but the instructions given to us by Klaus for the taxi rank were spot on and we quickly found our way on a rainy night to our accommodation, a large workers' hostel/conference building on the top of a hill in the area of the city known as "Unter den Eichen" which translated means "Under the Oaks" and it was a very wooded area.

We were surprised to be shown into an apartment rather than a double room with en-suite, but we were tired and hungry and accepted what we had been given. It was cold and wet outside and the dining room was closed until morning, we looked outside but there appeared to be no eating places close by so we sat in the lounge of our apartment and shared out our emergency rations – two small Cadbury's chocolate bars and a bottle of beer and a bottle of spring water from the vending machine in the entrance hall.

Come morning we were ready for and enjoyed a large breakfast with plentiful cups of tea. With help from the lady in the dining room we were able to find out which bus to get for the city centre and from which stop. Then we set off on our mini adventure.

Our first task of the day was to find the Aktives Museum at Spiegelgasse and to hand over to Frau Lottmann-Keaseler the medals, beret, cap badge and book of poetry along with a few extra items for the exhibition, also to give her a hand setting things up if she so desired. However, when we eventually found the museum, she and her assistant had almost completed everything and it was really looking good. We handed over the items and she gave us a quick tour of our special exhibition. They really had done a fabulous job. Frau L-K then asked if we had been to the Stadtrachiv to speak to Dr Streich yet, we told her no and she insisted that we get a taxi there straight away as Dr Steich had some papers for me and was expecting me that morning.

So off we went again, found a taxi outside the building and headed for the Stadtrachiv, it's just as well we did because we would never have found the place on our own. We were let in and taken to Dr Streich's office where we were given another warm welcome, like Frau L-K her English was perfect, which is more than can be said of my German.

She had on her desk a large quantity of papers, all relating to the Hess family, some relating to the Nazi period, others the outcome of post war research and birth and death certification. We went through them one by one updating one another as we did so with any further information we had about members of the family.

When it was time for us to leave, I was amazed to discover that she had done a photocopy of each document for me to take away for my personal records. Not only that, she had also phoned and spoken to the archivist at the larger archives office and arranged that they would see us and have documents ready for me to see after lunch. We shook hands and I thanked her for all the kind work she had done on my behalf, including it would seem, booking our rooms at the workers' hostel.

We caught a bus back down to the railway station where we enjoyed a typical German lunch snack at one of the many

bistro/snack bars. Then we walked the half mile or so to the other archives office, when we said who we were within seconds a gentleman appeared, took us to the locker room to store our coats and bags then took us to a large reading room. He sat us at a large table and disappeared only to return a few minutes later with several thick files all relating to the Hess family, he also left us an English/German translation book and a notepad. He then showed me where the photocopier was and told me that I could copy any of the documents at a minimum cost, then he went off to help another person. The cost of photocopying was a great deal cheaper than it is in the UK.

We spent several hours pouring over the documents, translating as best I could and at the same time those that seemed to have more relevance than others I copied, others I copied in case they held anything of importance. I also did copies for Klaus and Steve. Every now and then the gentleman would return to our table to see how we were getting on and to clarify the odd query. I also discovered relations on my grandfather's side living in India that I knew nothing about.

The most important document for me amongst all these was a copy of the declaration Maria Hess (my grandmother) gave in 1957 in Kansas City to the German Consulate. This gave the families history in a nutshell, from that it was possible to widen the search for more in depth details. It also gave me an insight into the type of person my grandmother was and for the first time I felt I knew the women and why Otto had felt so close to her.

By the time we gathered our bags and coats and left the archive it was once again the rush hour. After last night's meagre meal, we decided to walk into town and find somewhere to eat. We found the main area which was very busy and most of the shops were still open, it was mainly pedestrianised and full of life, in the end we found a small cafe that specialised in fish meals, so we had a fish and chip supper then we caught the bus back to our abode.

It had been a long and eventful day, we had learned a great deal and met some very friendly and generous people, now it all had to be co-ordinated and written up in my journey diary. We were both feeling the cold weather and by now very tired as well. Tomorrow was going to be an even busier day, as that was the day of the press conference at the museum and we would be meeting Klaus for the first time.

Another brisk cold March day but it was dry. After another good breakfast we caught the bus down to the city, by now we are getting quite good at this. We arrived at the museum about half an hour earlier than we should have done so Frau L-K took us round to the other part of the museum where there was a display beautifully done by her, which showed the arrests and deportation of the Jews of Wiesbaden by the Nazi's. There were long lists on the walls with the names of those taken to the death camps, among them several members of the Hess family. These had been on my grandfather's side of the family. It was a very moving experience and one felt it would be wrong to speak other than in a whisper whilst in these sad rooms.

We were then asked to come down and meet Klaus and his friend Matteus who had just arrived from Nurnberg along with a piper in full Scottish regalia who had travelled from Frankfurt to play a lament on his pipes in honour of Otto and his association with Scotland. A surprise laid

'This gave the family's history in a nutshell'

on by Klaus.

After the introductions we returned to the library of the museum which had been nicely set up ready for the press conference. I was surprised to see Dr Streich there, but she said she wished to be included because she was very interested in Otto's story. Klaus and Frau L-K worked out how the meeting with the press would proceed and shortly afterwards they began to arrive. About six in all with a couple of photographers. It all went very smoothly and Matteus read one of Otto's poems. It was the first time I'd heard one read in the native German it had been written in, as he spoke I could feel the goose bumps on my scalp and a strange tingling sensation work its way through my body, it was a surreal experience which can only happen once in my lifetime.

When it was all over Frau L-K took us all round the corner to an Italian restaurant where she treated us all to a very enjoyable lunch in pleasant company, after which everyone went their separate ways. Klaus, John and I had to make our way to the plaza in Friedrich Strasse where we were to meet the cameraman that had been arranged by Frau L-K who would be joining us again shortly. The idea being that he would film us finding the home of my father and walking down the street taking photos of it. Then we would go to the cemetery to visit the family grave and film there also and do a short interview. This would be for the museums records and a copy would be sent to me.

We met the cameraman who was a jovial chap with a good sense of humour; he had us walking up and down half a dozen times until he was satisfied, then the five of us in two cars set off for the cemetery. Klaus went with Frau L-K and we went with the cameraman. On the way he stopped off to show us the magnificent Russian Orthodox Church which sat at the top of a hill and was a famous landmark. The cemetery was in the same area as our accommodation and there was a lot of snow around. It was a huge cemetery and the Jewish section was in a separate part to the Christian and others. Luckily Klaus and his wife Elizabeth with the help of documents from Dr Streich, had visited the place some weeks previously and found the exact graves, this saved us a lot of time and we were able to go straight to the correct place. As it was getting late in the afternoon and the daylight was fading, it was just as well. We were filmed looking at the grave and taking notes of the names and dates, and then Frau L-K interviewed me on camera twice for a few minutes before we packed up and left. Before doing so I remembered the Jewish custom and left a pebble on the grave. Klaus was also booked into the same place as us, so we went back to our apartment for a rest and debrief. After freshening up we all set out for an evening meal, this time using Klaus's car as transport. We had decided we would go for the first eating place we came across. We had not gone very far almost walking distance, when we saw an Italian Eatery. Although we had already eaten Italian that day, we stuck to our plans and went in. It was a family run business and a popular one. The host found us a table and we had a most enjoyable meal in a great and friendly atmosphere. We found out later that Dr Streich lived just a few doors from there.

Day three, another special day, when I was to be wined and dined by the Protocol Department of the City but not until lunchtime. So with the morning free, Klaus drove us across the bridge to the other side

of the River Rhine to Mainz, the town in which Otto was born and lived for the first two years of his life. The plan was to go to the street where he was born and spent those years. We found it quite easily; Uferstrasse a short road that ran alongside the banks of the river, on one side was a linear park on the other a mixture of tall Victorian style houses which appeared to be apartment blocks. Number 19 was almost at the end. Which of the flats had once been home to the Hess family? There was no way of telling but every flat had a wonderful view of the river. We stayed there for about half an hour, took a few pictures and headed for the town centre. There were a great many new modern post war buildings so it was hard to visualise what it would have looked like in Otto's days. Time was also running out for us as we had to get back to Wiesbaden for lunch. When we got back, Klaus parked his car in the casino car park and we walked the short distance to the area of town where we were to meet the others for lunch.

This all came about during the time of all the research being done on my behalf. At some stage someone spoke to the City Hall about me, my father and the search for his family background within that city and of his war service. It was then decided by someone that I was deemed to be "A FIRST CLASS RELATIVE" and something should be done in recognition of my visit; hence this semi official lunch.

We arrived outside the restaurant at the appointed hour and within seconds the others arrived. Monika Heilhecker-Winkler from the cities protocol department and her assistant introduced themselves to us and were quickly followed by Frau L-K and Dr Streich. The restaurant had a charming traditional German ambiance and served excellent food. We all sat around a large round table in one corner and the conversation was of all that had been happening over the past few days.

Monika sent her assistant out to buy some newspapers, and we found that two of them carried pictures and the interview from the press conference. Frau L-K had traced some old photos in an album at the museum of Otto and his friends at their youth camps, and then Monika explained why the city had decided to honour me with this lunch. Afterwards she made a presentation of a lapel pin which was the equivalent of the citizens gold medal and a beautifully wrapped book full of coloured photos of the city. Later back at our abode I received a delivery by hand of two bottles of local wine.

It had been a lovely meal and I was feeling very honoured by the attention I was getting from everyone, they could not have been kinder or more welcoming. Unfortunately all good things come to an end and we all had to go about the rest of our day's duties. Frau L-K wanted to show us something at the Town Hall and asked us to meet her there in a short while. When we came out of the restaurant it was pouring with rain, so we made a mad dash across the square to the Town Hall. There was a huge open space on the ground floor and at the far end was an exhibition about the last Synagogue of Wiesbaden that had been destroyed before the war. With her first class knowledge and encouragement she had managed to get the art and design students at the local college to put together this exceptional display of what the building looked like, how it was built inside as well as out. This is what she had wanted us to see.

That was it, all my official duties had been done. The exhibition about Otto would remain open to the public until the August after which time all the items belonging to myself or Klaus would be returned, the rest would be kept by the museum. The one extra piece of news that Frau L-K had for me before we said our goodbyes, was that she had received a telephone call from an elderly gentleman in Dortmund who had been at school with Otto and had some old school photographs to send me along with an article about Otto in the school paper the year he left. So the press conference had paid off.

The next two days we would use a holiday, Klaus had invited us to Nurnberg to meet his wife and to see some of his town. As he only had a small flat he had booked us into a modern hotel not far from his home.

We packed everything into his car and set off on the long drive to his home, passing Frankfurt Airport en-route. When we arrived at Klaus's home his wife Elizabeth had prepared a very nice afternoon tea for us all, we sat and chatted like old friends and Klaus showed us his British military regalia which he enjoyed collecting. He then drove us to our hotel so that we could clean up and relax prior to his picking us up later to return to his home for dinner.

Nurnberg was a lot colder than Wiesbaden had been and there was a great deal of snow on the ground and the lakes were frozen solid enough to walk across. After settling in we decided to take a walk in the park outside, it turned out that our hotel was set in part of the area Hitler had built for his Nurnberg Rallies. The park was part of that complex and many of the buildings remained some as ruins, others still in use. We were dumbfounded by the size of the whole thing; we had no idea that it was so vast and contained so many different sections. After fifteen minutes we decided it was far too cold and we'd had enough fresh air for the time being, so we went back inside the hotel for a hot drink.

We had a pleasant evening with Klaus and Elizabeth and their daughter Carolin. During the evening we made plans for the next day, Elisabeth would have to go to work but, it was decided that we would collect Matteus and visit the old medieval part of the city. This we duly did, even though the snow was still quite thick on the

ground and one had to tread carefully, we ventured around the old medieval area, went into the churches, saw the "CROSS OF NAILS" made from nails taken from the old Coventry Cathedral, hanging on a wall in St Sebalds with the Litany of Reconciliation hanging below it.

After all this walking in the snow, we were ready for a hot lunch and found a mini brewery where we all had a traditional German meal to warm us up. Afterwards Matt had to return home, but we braved an icy climb up to the castle and viewed the town from there. Then Klaus suggested that we drive back to the "Rally" site to visit the Documentation Centre, this is a museum about the rise and fall of Hitler and his Nazi Party, set in one of the "Rally" buildings.

So off we went to visit this museum, it would at least be warm in there. It was far more than that, we had a handset that gave us information in English, so that we could understand each display or recording. It was one of the most evocative, awe inspiring, well put together exhibitions I

'We saw the "Cross of Nails" from Coventry Cathedral'

had ever seen in a museum. We spent three hours in there and learned a very important and salutary lesson. Like the Litany of Reconciliation and the Cross of Nails, this Documentation Centre should be a compulsory part of every person's education throughout the World. If we cannot learn a lesson from these three things alone, then there is not hope for man ever living in peace, wars will continue and the innocent suffer as usual.

When we came back out into today's world, we also came out into a raging blizzard; the snow was heavy and being swirled about by a very cold wind. With our collar's up and our heads down against the onslaught, we made our way back to the car as quickly as we could, three white figures fell into Klaus's car and quickly shut the doors behind them in order to keep out the elements. The drive back to our hotel was not pleasant but Klaus got us there safely.

As it was our last day, we wanted to take Klaus and Lizbeth out for a meal so that we could thank them properly, so later that evening they picked us up and we all went into town to a Greek family run restaurant known to them, and had a great evening. Later back at the hotel we said our goodbyes and they went off home.

The next morning, we ordered a taxi to take us to the railway station and began the long journey home. It had been a hectic week but an interesting and informative one. We had met some lovely and friendly people and put faces to names we'd only known on letters. I had seen the two homes where my father had lived and grown up and walked the streets that he had known. I had been able to visit the graves of my grandfather and great grandparents as well as that of an uncle's. I could now feel a part of my families past and better understand myself.

I am now ready to tell the story of OTTO HESS as we know it and as far as authority will allow.

DESCRIPTION OF OTTO

Otto was a very handsome young man, he was about 5'10" tall, slim build weighing around 140 lbs. He had a fresh complexion and brown wavy hair, his eyes too were brown and when you looked into them you could see the kindness within. He exuded a charisma and charm and was loved by all those who knew him.

As someone who enjoyed rock climbing and the outdoors, he was also a very fit young man and alert to his surroundings. He held very strong principals and was a great believer in freedom and justice. And yet there was a quiet gentle side to him. He enjoyed painting, sketching and writing poetry, and he was extremely fond of his mother.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of the twenty members of 3 Troop 10 Commando (IA) who were killed in action and to all those brave young men who served in that troop.

Each and every one of them was exceptional, and each one has his own brave story to tell.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY DAYS IN MAINZ AND WIESBADEN

The story begins in the middle of the "Great War" of 1914-18, when in 1916 Maria Hahn a well established tailoress in the town of Mainz married Leopold Hess also of Mainz who was running his families long established business "Nathen Hess" art and antique dealers, which was situated

at 16 Wilhelmstrasse in Wiesbaden, a beautiful spa town on the opposite side of the river Rhine. It is also the capital of the Hessian Region of Germany. At this time the Hess family were well known and respected in the business and commerce life of the area.

Maria had been born in Mainz in December 1879 of a Lutheran family and Leopold was born in Mainz in March 1870 to a Jewish family. His family was Simon Hess and his mother was Anna Rothschild. Leopold had entered the family business and worked with another member of his family Max Hess, whether he was his brother or cousin it has not been possible to establish due to lack of documentation.

Unfortunately very little is known about Maria's family. We know from Maria herself that she trained as a tailoress as soon as she left school and in 1908 was employed in a responsible position in a textile business. Whether she had any Jewish connections within her family prior to her marriage is not known, nor is it known how she and Leopold met. But meet they did. Neither were young starry eyed lovers when they married, Leopold was 46 years old and Maria was 37.

After the wedding they both continued to run their respective businesses. They set up home in what was (and still is) a nicely appointed apartment building at 19 Uferstrasse along the banks of the river Rhine looking across to Wiesbaden. Outside between the apartment and the river was an attractive linear park where people could walk or just sit to relax and admire the view and enjoy the fresh air. It was into this scene in 1919 that their first son Werner was born, he was a delicate looking child with a quiet nature. Then on the 2nd January 1921 their second and last son Otto was born. He was different to Werner in that he had dark curly hair and an inquisitive nature. Having worked hard all their lives and running successful businesses, Leopold and Maria were now enjoying the pleasures of parenthood. For them their lives were probably now complete.

The years of the "Great War" had been traumatic for everyone across Europe and the World. So many lives had been lost and a way of life had come to an end. The days of class and servitude would come to an end, women would play a greater part outside their own homes, Europe would never be the same again. Then came the great influenza pandemic that wrought havoc across the World and killed more people than the war had done.

For those such as Maria and Leopold who had lived through those awful years, it surely must have felt as if Armageddon had arrived. But somehow the Hess family had survived the nightmare and were now looking forward to a better and happier future. They had two beautiful sons and hoped for them to grow into men in a secure and peaceful world.

Sometime during 1924 Leopold's health took a turn for the worse and the family moved from Mainz to an apartment at 14 Friedrichstrasse in Wiesbaden where they settled down to live. It was well situated in the heart of the beautiful spa town. This enabled Leopold to continue working at the family business without the hassle of the long commute each day. Maria kept her workshop in Mainz for a further few years until she too moved her work to premises in Wiesbaden.

During the next few years the boys grew up in a happy and extended family, summer holidays were taken at the seaside where swimming and sandcastle building were high on the list of activities, along with donkey rides and family pranks. In the winter trips to the mountains and winter sports were very popular. Otto loved the mountains and walking and rock climbing were his first loves, that remained with him all his life.

The decade of 1920 started off with great hope, during the first part people were happy to have survived the war and influenza, Europe was rebuilding itself and

her people were enjoying the new found peace. The air was filled with hope, it showed in the music of the day and the way in which people spent their free time, the future was bright. But then the brightness began to dim.....

Towards the end of that decade things began to go wrong, there was a worldwide depression as the financial markets of the world crashed. Thousands of businesses went broke and closed down leaving millions of people out of work, for a great many of these poor souls it meant real hardship, no money, no food and in a lot of cases the loss of their homes. They were very hard and difficult times for millions of people across the world.

Things were also beginning to go wrong for the Hess family. We do not know how badly they had been effected by the world depression as nothing on those lines have been recorded in family documents, but things were going wrong in other ways. In 1928 Leopold suffered a stroke which left him paralysed on one side of his body, this was a great shock to the family and very upsetting for Werner and Otto who adored their father, it also meant a lot of extra work for Maria. By now both boys were at school, in order that they could work for a second grade degree they had been sent to the "Oberrealschule" in Wiesbaden. This was an education that had to be paid for by the family, but the education of the boys was important so they continued to pay the fees. This was until in 1929 due to his infirmity after having the major stroke, Leopold was no longer able to cope and had to give up his business. This brought with it a serious financial problem as the family capital was dwindling quite badly, so Maria had to keep the family afloat using her income only. Whatever the costs she was determined that the boys education should not suffer and they would stay at school.

Maria was working long hours at her workshop and employed some help, but she still had her domestic commitments, looking after Leopold and the boys. Both Werner and Otto were very good and spent a great deal of time with their father and would go with him to the park for short walks, one each side of him for support.

For relaxation both boys had joined a youth group (very popular things in those days) called "Schwarzes Fahnlein" or in English "The Black Penent", which was a Jewish youth group run by a Paul Yogi Mayer. Like most youth groups of that period a lot of their time was spent outdoors camping, hiking and rock climbing. According to Yogi, Werner was never very enthusiastic about some of the activities but Otto loved the life, his favourite was the rock climbing at which he was very good and quite fast, it was during this period of his life that he obtained the nickname KRAXEL, bestowed upon him by

'Things were starting to go wrong for the Hess family'

Yogi Mayer, a colloquial term referring to his enthusiasm for rock climbing and his proficiency at the task, and which I have chosen for the name of this book about his life.

It would seem that Otto was a popular boy who made friends easily, his best friend at this time was Werner Buchdahl whose family lived and had a business in the same street where Otto lived, in fact only a few doors away. Otto had an active social life and lived life to the full. He also appeared to enjoy school and was a studious pupil, though he could be rebellious at times. A normal healthy child of his era. How could one imagine the change that would come in just a few short years....

Although it was usual for ones Jewishness to come via the mother, it was decided from the beginning that the boys would be brought up within the Jewish faith following their fathers side of the family. They followed all the main Jewish religious days such as Seder (Passover), Chanukah and so forth. They would attend the Wiesbaden Synagogue from time to time with their father and both had their Bar Mitzvah's at the Synagogue. Unfortunately the Synagogue was raised to the ground by the Nazi's and has never been rebuilt.

Life was going on for the Hess family regardless of all its problems and upheavals, but they were together giving one another support and living life as best they could. Sadly, despite all the love and care bestowed upon him by his loving family for many years, Leopold's illness took its toll and in September 1933 he died aged 63. He was buried in the family grave in the Wiesbaden cemetery, alongside his mother and father and two other relatives. His death was reported to the registrar by Max Hess, which leads us to believe that he was a close and important relative, as in those days only a male relation of that standing was allowed to take on that task.

Max also have a grave within that cemetery but not with the other members of the Hess family. Maybe the family grave by that time was full, hence his being elsewhere. The death of their father was a very sad time for Werner and Otto who thought the world of him, they would miss him greatly, Werner a young 14 and Otto just 12 years old. How things had changed for them in such a short space of time.

What had once been a happy, active family with a reasonable income, to a sick parent, a hard working mother and limited income, to a one parent family struggling to make ends meet. Quite a lot for a couple of sensitive children to come to terms with and still maintain a normal existence. Hopefully help from an extended family would assist them to cope emotionally to come through it all.

Although she no longer had the worry of nursing her sick husband, Maria's life from now on was not going to be any easier, she had lost her lifelong partner and was now a single parent with two fast growing young boys to get through school and further education, feed and house.

Just to make matters worse, it was at this point in Germany's history that Hitler and the National Socialists were gaining power. Things were starting to get very unpleasant especially for the Jewish population. Many hoped it was a passing "Fad" and would soon go away and things would get back to normal. But history shows how wrong they were.

It was around this time that the

Oberrealschule that the boys attended was put in the directorship of a Nazi. The school continued to run as it always had done, though over a period of time after Hitler came to power, all Jewish children were refused an education by decree, yet both Werner and Otto managed to remain at the school to complete their education up to the age of 15.

Werner left school in 1934 but due to the Nazi influence Maria found it impossible to find him an apprenticeship within the local area and eventually had to pay for him to attend an apprentice course in Frankfurt. Exactly what he trained for is not known, Otto was able to stay on at the school until 1936, whether the fact that his mother was "Lutheran" and he now had no father disguised his Jewishness, we will never know, but stay he did. During his last term at the school he had one of his rebellious periods. It started with the "Sutterlin Script" which rather niggled him, so he sent in an essay to his teacher signing his name Hess with two "rounded s". This really angered the teacher who reprimanded him and told him that he MUST NOT use the round "S" in this way ever again. Otto's response to this was to ignore the teacher and write in the way he wanted. According to an old school friend Otto had very strong principals about certain things and would not back down over them..... Otto one, teacher nil.

We know of this incident because it was written up in the school newspaper, a copy of which was sent to me by one of his old school friends. His time at the Oberrealschule was over, he was 15 years old and about to enter another phase of his life.

As with Werner, Maria found it quite impossible to find Otto an apprentice vacancy anywhere in their locality. So she sent him to a special further education school that taught technology, it was the "Technische Lehranstalt" in Tetschen-Bodenback, a small town on the banks of the Elbe not far from Ausigg. This meant that for the first time in his life he would have to leave home and board at the school. It also meant a greater financial outlay for Maria, but as usual regardless of the costs she would be allowed to continue their education to a high standard. So once again she dipped into her savings to pay for it.

It must have felt very strange at first for Maria now that both her fledglings had left the nest, to say nothing of how young Otto must have felt being this far away from home and his beloved mother for the first time. As he was good at making friends it was probably not long before he was surrounded by a new social group and getting on. Also for a keen rock climber like Otto to be so close to the Elbe Mountains where he could spend his free time doing what he loved best, must have seemed like heaven. The Elbe Mountains would have a lasting effect on him because he wrote about them in his poetry some years later.

Because he did so well at this school after his first year exams, Maria was able to transfer him to another technical school nearer to home. So in 1937 he went to the "Technische Schule" in Weimer (which is still there today) where they teach technical handcrafts and tradesmen. Unfortunately in November 1938 Maria thought it wise to remove him from the school and bring him home.

It all started when in November 1938

Werner and his cousin Fritx Neumann, (who married Lisbeth Hess) came home for a visit. As they arrived at Wiesbaden railway station, they were met by gangs of Nazi's rounding up and arresting all male Jews, unfortunately Werner and Fritz found themselves among them. They never got home that day, instead they found themselves being taken to a KZ known as Buchenwald where they remained for the next four months as slave labour on starvation rations in nightmare conditions. Many of those who were taken to such camps at this time did not survive, even though they were not officially "Death Camps" as we came to know them later.

If an inmate was able to get sponsorship to live or work outside of Germany, they would be given a visa to leave Germany and released from the camps. It was only because they were offered safety in another country that they were able to escape the nightmares of the KZ known as Buchenwald.

On hearing what had happened to Werner, Maria became very concerned for Otto, as the school in Weimar was not far from Buchenwald and she was worried that he also might end up in there and at the time she had no way of knowing if once in there they would ever come out alive. She had to get him home and if possible out of Germany, his education would have to wait, his life was more important. From now on her efforts would be put to the task of securing a safe passage out of the country for both her sons. As if this poor woman had not been through enough already, she now had this worry to contend with.

Werner had been lucky enough to be given sponsorship to go to America by a Ludwig and Anne Isenberg, who were friends of Yogi Mayer, he would then work for them in their business in Kansas City. But firstly he would have to travel to England in order to do this he also had to have a guarantor and once again he was lucky. A Mr A Jonas who lived in Holne Chase, London stood as his guarantor and found him temporary accommodation at Eton Rise, a large block of flats in NW London. So in March 1939 with his Reisepass complete with Nazi police rubber stamp in triplicate over the first two pages and the word "Israel" written on it, (all Jewish men had to have "Israel" on their ID's) he set sail for England, arriving in Harwich on the 7th on a temporary visa. At last he was free of the tyranny going on in his own land and the "Labour Camps", he now had a chance of a future in a free land. His only worry now was that his Mother and young brother were still in Germany facing an unknown future, he just hoped that they too would be able to get the right papers to enable them to follow him to safety.

Getting Werner out of Germany had cost Maria quite a bit financially as she had to pay his fare both to England and America, she was also obliged to give him spending money as he would not be allowed to work until he reached the USA. She was already working long hours in her tailoring business and her health was beginning to suffer, she still employed two women to help in the workshop but despite that her financial situation was not good. She still had to find a guarantor for Otto so that she could get him to safety in England along with his brother.

It was not easy for her but, eventually she got to know a woman abroad who would stand surety for Otto, but first Maria would have to travel to London in order to receive the required permit, causing her

'In his last term at school he had a rebellious period'

more expense. Having been successful she returned to Germany and Otto, he would not be able to join his brother in London but he would not be able to join his brother in America.

By now the financial situation for Maria had become critical and she had to cash in her life insurance to cover all the ongoing expenses, her own health was such that after the boys' departure she had to undergo medical treatment for a long time. She remained in Germany throughout the whole war. Why she never took the opportunity to leave when she got the boys out will never be known. Did she rely on being a Lutheran for safety, or did she merely need to keep her business running in order to keep things together for what she hoped would be an end to Nazism and a safe return of her sons?

Otto's guarantor was a lady from Switzerland who resided at the Oberland Hotel in Interlaken, her name was Mrs Joan Wicht. Whether she actually came to England at this time we do not know, but thanks to her, Otto was able to escape the Nazi tyranny at home and join his brother. His first address was in Maresfield Gardens then at Downside Crescent, both in NW3, just a brisk ten minute walk from where Werner was residing. We don't know if Joan Wicht owned the house where Otto stayed, but it is known that several houses in Downside at that time were owned by Swiss nationals.

Otto arrived in Harwich on the 20th August 1939 to start his new life in freedom, but it would be a hollow freedom knowing that his beloved mother was still there in Germany under the heels of such an infamous tyranny and dictatorship as the Nazi's and Hitler. Their only hope for their mothers safety and survival would be that as a Lutheran the powers that be would leave her alone.

How the lives of these two young lads had changed in just a few short years. Due to illness, religion, politics and hatred, theirs had gone from a happy middle class family with a reasonable income to worry, poverty and exile. What happened to that bright new future that their parents had for them just two short decades ago?

CHAPTER TWO LONDON 1939-1940

During this time of exile in London, several of their close friends from Wiesbaden also managed to escape to freedom, some were like Werner due to travel on to further lands. Fritz Neumann was one of the many who went on to India, others to Israel, Canada and all over the world. A great many like Otto decided to stay in England and be ready to fight when the time came. As it turned out, many of those who travelled further afield ended up when war came, joining the armies of their host countries and fighting. Otto's brother Werner joined the American army and fought in Burma.

All these young men had very strong opinions about what was going on in Europe and could see events expanding further across the World. They believed in freedom of thought and religion, of one man one vote, they hated with a passion the horrors that they had witnessed and suffered from in their own country, fearing that if leaders of the free World did not take note of the situation, it would not be long before the whole of Europe and the World found themselves under the heel of Nazism, suffering as their own country had done. To this end they were determined to

join an army preferable the British, so that they could fight this evil force.

Those few months in London must have been strange ones for these young men so far from home and family. As the British Government would not permit these refugees to work or attend further education establishments, though some were registered with the "Agriculture Board" (Otto being one) and having very little money there was very little they could do to occupy their minds.

Like all young men with strong opinions they probably met and spent a lot of time in each others company putting the world to rights and remembering the good times at home and their families, and knowing that before too long some of them would be parting company maybe for the last time. What an extremely emotional time it must have been for all of them including Otto and Werner who knew they would soon be parting company as Werner was due to sail for America.

What was going through their minds during this period? Apart from wondering what lay in store for them and whether they would see one another again, one of the main concerns they would have discussed together would be the welfare of their beloved mother and what would become of her and would they ever see her again. These concerns obviously had a strong effect on Otto, because he wrote many poems dedicated to his "Beloved Mother" and memories of the times they spent together. He also wrote some very strong poems about the "National Socialists" and a "Question for Germany" and "The Real Crusade".

The part of London where these lads resided had a large Jewish community (and still does), so they would be able to attend Synagogue, speak to a Rabbi and get moral support and guidance from the older population who already lived there. Although minor, such comforts would surely have been of great benefit to these young refugees, some may already have had friends or family living and working in England prior to their own exile.

A great many of these refugees began their lives on arrival in England by being placed in the "Kitchener Camps" at Richborough in Kent. There is more about this elsewhere in the book.

In September 1939 when the German Reich did not respond to the British Governments ultimatum over Poland and England declared war on Germany, thousands of German speaking refugees from Germany, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia volunteered to join the British army. This was the chance that they had all been waiting for, but it was not be, at least for now. Some like Otto were already registered with the "Agriculture Committee", but a great many of these refugees, male and female were at the outset of "hostilities" with Germany, declared "Enemy Aliens" and sent to holding camps. These were all over the place, the Isle of Man, Canada, Australia and other parts of the UK. Some of those that were shipped overseas had a very rough time of it, just because they were German speaking they were placed in with actual Nazi's and their guards and crews on some of the ships treated them all as if they were Nazi's. The fact that these people had already been to hell and back never entered the heads of those in charge, and yet these people, these poor ill treated refugees still wanted to join the British

army and fight the enemy.

Though at times it must have been difficult to distinguish exactly who the enemy was. Whether or not Otto was ever sent to an internment camp is not known, it has been impossible to trace any documentation about him during this period. However, we do know that a great many of those who were sent to these internment camps did eventually join the army. Some were allowed to remain in the country that they had been sent to, once the authorities had checked that they were genuine and not the much feared fifth columnists that the newspapers were so fond of talking about.

Those early days of the war known as the "Phoney War" as nothing much really happened, were very strange for everyone. People were expecting bombs to drip from above and a great invasion by paratroopers, or a mass landing from across the channel but nothing happened, it was still all reasonably quiet.

It was during this time that Werner's exit permit for America came through and on the 17th December 1939 he set sail from Southampton for his new life in America. Although we do not know for certain because of security at the ports at that time, I think we can assume that if it was possible, then Otto would have travelled to Southampton to see his brother off on his new adventure. Failing this, then their last goodbye would probably have been at Waterloo railway station. Either way, it would surely have been a very sad and emotional parting, not knowing if they would ever meet again or what lay ahead of them. They knew the horrors of the German Reich and all it entailed and that it had now reached the shores of France and was hovering close to England. It Otto was able to join the army, would he survive the war would their mother survive the war, how long would it all last?

Would this be the last few moments together that they would ever have?

It is far too painful to try and imagine what the thoughts of these two sensitive brothers were on this fateful day in their lives. They had already suffered a great deal in their short lives and yet the suffering continued. Did they let each other know that they were concerned about their situation or did they laugh and joke and make light of it as they waved one another goodbye? The answer to these questions we will never know the answer to.

For the next few months Otto was to remain in London at Downside Crescent, whether or not any of his friends were still around or in internment camps is not known. The Christian festival of Christmas and the Jewish festival of Chanukah, were now in full swing. Otto who in happier times back home would have been celebrating them with his family was now alone, it must have been a very poignant time for him, maybe he shed a tear or two remembering how it used to be and thinking so much of his beloved mother that he was unable to speak or write to and his brother on board ship on the dangerous crossing to America.

Once the seasonal festivities were over, Otto had hoped to join the army, but was temporally turned down. He now had to find something to do to occupy his time. We know that he already had a good command of the English language and spoke it very well, perhaps speaking with English people allowed him to improve it even more. There were no mountains or high peaks in London for him to climb, so maybe he spent some time writing his poetry and sketching, he might even have

‘Several of his friends had also managed to escape’

managed a bit of sightseeing. What he really wanted to do now was to join the British army and fight back at the enemy who had ruined his family's life and his country. As far as he was concerned that day could not come quick enough.

It was to be another four months of waiting before the great day dawned and he would be allowed to enlist.

(1940 would see a whole new chapter opening in Otto's life, one that would last long after his death).

CHAPTER THREE THE AUXILIARY MILITARY PIONEER CORPS

On 29th April 1940 Otto walked into the army recruitment centre in Euston London to enlist in the British army, probably at that time one of the proudest days of his young life. His fight against his enemy could now begin. At long last the War Office had relented about German speakers being allowed to join the army, but there was to be a sting in the tail. They were not to be permitted to join any of the armed fighting units, the only regiment open to them was the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. At first this seemed a bit like a slap in the face, but at least they would be doing something for the war effort.

It is a little known fact but there were around 10,000 German speakers who enlisted in the Corps during that period of 1940. Otto was just one of the great many refugees who wanted to their part for the war effort against Hitler.

After a short while Otto was sent to No 3 Centre which was at Richborough near Sandwich in Kent, it was part of the old "Kitchener Camp" which some of the refugees first went to on their arrival in England only the year before. This was to be the main camp where all the refugee members of the Pioneer Corps did their initial training. Within five months Otto had been promoted to Lance Corporal and posted to 165 Company, and found himself in North Devon.

To begin with he was at Westward Ho! and Illfracombe, it was during this time that he met and made some new friends, like Edgar Bender (who remained his best friend) and Rudi Edler, then there were two fellow refugee brothers, who had escaped from Brun, a town in Czechoslovakia which had been overrun by the Nazi's, it was also not far from where Otto had gone to technical school. Yet despite the fact that they only met the once, Otto had such a profound effect on these two men that 60 years later they still had fond memories of him. They describe him as having great charm, charisma and personality, with deep expressive eyes that could mesmerise you by just being in his presence. There was something about him that made him special and unforgettable. These were Dr Freddie Morgan's words to me about Otto. Freddie (that's his adopted English name) was one of those brothers.

Most of the work being carried out by the AMPC was building anti-tank landing traps and digging up large open spaces to stop parachutists from landing. There were pill boxes and other defences to be built, airfields for the Royal Air Force and accommodation huts, even mundane jobs like delivering the coal to the camps. Otto lived and worked in this part of Devon for some time until he was posted down the road to work at the Hoarse Quarry at Wilminstone near Tavistock, along with his

two friends Edgar and Rudi. Edgar's family owned a soup factory in London, Rudi who was a bit older than the others was a barrister before the war.

Exactly what their work was at the quarry is not known, in fact very little is known about the work done by Otto during this period, only what was being done by the Corps in general.

It was at this time that Otto's life took another major turn. The three men met and were befriended by the wife of a local farmer and mother of two young children. She would invite them to visit the family farm for some relaxation and to meet the family. They would regularly visit the farm and became great friends with the family and soon started to repay the kindness shown to them by helping out and doing chores around the farm. On occasions they would saddle up and ride the families pony named Puffin. He was called Puffin because if he was not in the frame of mind to be ridden, he would puff himself up so that the girth strap could not be tightened, then once the rider had mounted the saddle, he would let out the air causing the girth strap to become loose so that the saddle would roll under causing the rider to fall off. This story about the pony was told to me by Anne Bender (Edgar's widow), in later years. She also told me that Edgar and Otto bought themselves an old motorbike so that they could get out and about, to go to the pictures and dances in their spare time. It would also enable them to visit the farm more easily.

Dorothy and John Giles the owners of "Tavy Dale" the farm in Mary Tavy, made the boys very welcome on their visits. The two children Norrie the son who was about 10 years old and Rosemary who was about 8 at the time, were very fond of the lads who came from so far away, but Otto was their favourite. Norrie told me that he looked upon Otto like a big brother and I have the feeling that Otto was very fond of the family.

Norrie remembers Otto as being a very good horseman and when he was reported killed he was given his riding boots, watch and coat. Unfortunately Norrie no longer has them and can't remember what happened to them, it was such a long time ago. I think that we can safely say that the time Otto spent on the farm in the company of the Giles family were among the happiest he spent in England. He was obviously very fond of them and they of him because when it came to changing his name for an English one, the family quasi adopted him and he took the name Peter Giles.

They became his family in England until his death and he spent as much time as possible in their company. He was so important to them that he is mentioned in the "Family History" with great fondness. They were all broken hearted on hearing of his death.

We now come to a mystery regarding Otto's time in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. For his MOD record states that he enlisted on the 29th April 1940 yet he was not posted to No 3 Centre until 14th August 1940. Where was he during those intervening months? His army record does not tell us. But an old friend of his from Wiesbaden told me some years ago, that he met Otto in France at the time of Dunkirk and again in England shortly afterwards when he too was in the AMPC.

As "Operation Dynamo", the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk took place during May and June of that year and some

Pioneers were sent at that time to assist, is it possible that he was there? Unfortunately we will never know the answer. Yet another mystery in the short life of Otto, though there are those who believe that certain facts throughout his service point to his having been attached secretly to the War Office from day one, or shortly after enlistment.

What we do know for certain is that he spent twenty months with the AMPC, a great many of them in the county of Devon, during which time he worked hard helping build towards the defence of Great Britain, along with many lads like himself. He made lasting friendships and enjoyed his spare time. He met and became a part of the Giles family who to this day still take a keen interest in anything relating to his life. The year 1941 was drawing to its close and the approaching new year would offer Otto the chance to embark on a new phase of his life, and he would grab it with both hands.

CHAPTER FOUR 1942 – THE FORMATION OF 10 COMMANDO (IA)

This was the year that the British war government allowed an idea it is said, made by Lord Mountbatten and with the full support of His Majesty the King and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, to form a commando unit made up of recruits who had come to England to escape the Nazi's who occupied their countries. Most of these men were already serving in other branches of the armed and non armed forces, but Mountbatten felt that their knowledge and abilities could be put to a better use. So 10 Commando (Inter Allied) was born. It consisted of Dutch, French, Norwegians, Yugoslavs, Austrians, Hungarians and Germans. Each nationality was put into its own troop but the German speakers were all put in a troop together, this was first known as X Troop, X being the unknown factor, but later having proved themselves it became known as 3 Troop.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill is alleged to have said, "Because they will be unknown warriors, they must perforce be considered an unknown quantity". Nor were they granted British citizenship until after the war and then it was only granted to those who had survived.

There is an extremely good book about 10 Commando written by Ian Dear, "Ten Commando 1942 to 1945". It tells all about this unit and some of the things they got up to and the wonderful men who joined it. Unfortunately I do not have the space in this book to delve deeper but you will find this book a worthwhile read. What I can tell you is that 3 Troop was an exclusive sub-unit of handpicked men from "Alien" Companies, second to none in the British Army and the whole outfit was extremely "Hush, Hush", out of 350 applicants only 86 made the grade.

Captain Bryan Hilton Jones, who had been chosen to command 3 Troop, picked his men very carefully, the first intake consisting of only eight men, one of whom was Otto. Five of these went on the Dieppe Raid separately from the main force; their objective was the town hall to capture official documents. Only two returned. It was in January 1942 that Otto left the Pioneer Corps and transferred to 3 Troop of 10 Commando. It is thought that Hilton Jones picked him because he had already been working with Military Intelligence for the War Office whilst still in the Pioneer Corps.

At first he was with the other members of 3 Troop sent up to Achnacarry in Scotland,

‘The only Regiment open to him was the AMPC where he spent 20 months’

where the British Commando's did their training on land owned by the Duke of Argyll, who was allowing parts of his estate to be used for special training. It was here where they commenced their initial training as Commando's under the watchful eye of the British (Welsh) Commanding Officer.

After initial training in Scotland, Hilton Jones took his men to a beautiful little town on the Cardigan Bay in Wales called Aberdovey. The fact that they were there had to be kept secret from the outside world and tight security was enforced. There were no barrack blocks or camps in the area so all the men were billeted with local families in their homes. Otto was placed at the home of a baker/cafe owner and his wife, A Mr and Mrs Jones. It had the lovely name of "Glan Aber", also billeted there with Otto was Paul Streeton, who originally came from Vienna and they became great friends. It was Paul who in later years would write such wonderful things about Otto and whose old address book would lead to so much information that made it possible to write Otto's story.

This Commando Troop was like no other because of the nationality and religion of most of its members. When they joined they were told of the risks to them personally if they were captured while on a mission, because for them it would mean the firing squad or at worse a concentration camp. Yet none of these brave young men declined the chance to be a member of this special fighting force. They had to sign a document stating "I understand the risk", for their Jewishness meant they would be at far greater risk than other soldiers.

Because of sensitivity at this time these men could not keep their own names and had to be referred to as the "English Troop" therefore having to take on British names and identities, they also had to find a reason for their accents. They were very imaginative and came up with all sorts of "friendly" places from whence they hailed.

Otto took the name Peter Giles from the family down in Devon who quasi adopted him during his time in the Pioneer Corps, and he gave them as his next of kin. When asked by strangers where he came from, he told them Scotland. This was true to a point as he had come from Scotland after his initial training.

It was at this time when these young men were joining 3 Troop and having to take on English sounding names in order to appear to be of an English background, that another part of the deception came into play. Each man was given a cover Regiment plus a new regimental number, then transferred from that Regiment to 3 Troop 10 Commando. This enabled the War Office to keep its paperwork in order while at the same time keeping the men's true identities secret.

The Regiments that were used were the Royal Sussex, The Hampshire's (Bufs) and the Queen's Own Royal West Kent's. Otto's cover Regiment was the QORWK's. Each man wore the relevant regimental cap badge on their green beret, though in actual fact none of them had been anywhere near those Regiments, but it was essential that the true identities of these men were never known.

It is because of all this subterfuge, the hiding of their true identities and the fact that theirs had to be a secret war that makes this Troop so special. For security reasons nobody outside the select few were to know that such a troop existed within the British Army.

The training that was undertaken in Wales was very strenuous, they had to

climb Snowden and Cader Idris at night time as well as day time, march for miles around the streets and countryside, they would have to plunge into the sea up to their necks still wearing full kit. They learned how to make bombs and to interrogate prisoners, there were night manoeuvres and guard duties to be undertaken as well as usual army routines.

During their stay in Aberdovey these young men became very popular with the local people who took them into their homes and into their hearts. These men in turn also became very attached to the people and a lasting friendship began which lasts to this day. There is even a Monument in memory to the men of 3 Troop who were warmly welcomed to Aberdovey during 1942 and 1943 and the 20 who were killed in action.

Because of the secrecy surrounding this troop there are no names of the fallen, but they are remembered every year at a special service. On some occasions old members of the Troop and their families join the locals and stand around the Monument in Penhelig Park, on the shores of Cardigan Bay, remembering old and lost pals.

People who lived during that time say they remember all too vividly seeing these young men turning out of their billets in the mornings and running to be on time for first parade of the day, pulling on their green berets as they went, the sound of hobnail boots as they ran along the cobbled paths and narrow roads. One of these locals was a young 15 year old schoolgirl at the time. Her name today is Dilys Jordan, she lived almost next door to the house where Otto stayed and says she remembers him so well. In her opinion he was by far the most handsome of all the young soldiers and had quite a schoolgirl crush on him, she describes him as "Tall and slim with dark brown wavy hair and the most beautiful eyes". She was very upset when after the war she heard of his death. On seeing his photo sixty years later, it brought tears to her eyes.

Like everyone else in the little town at that time, she recalls watching the young soldiers parade up and down when on sentry duty, seeing them having to run straight into the sea in full kit after being in the mountains of Snowdonia all day. Sometimes some of them had to go straight onto guard duty after emerging from the sea.

These men were being trained to a high degree of fitness, for they all had a difficult war to come. The chances were that they could well find themselves behind enemy lines, on their own, they had to be able to endure possibly weeks of rough terrain, lack of shelter and food, they would need to blend into the country around them, they would have to rely on their own survival skills to stay alive and undetected. For these men were going to be sent on covert operations behind enemy lines on intelligence gathering missions or such missions as required someone who spoke fluent German and knew and understood the uniforms and ranks of the German Army. Sometimes the mission would take only hours to complete others, days. Yet for all intense and purposes these men did not exist, if they were captured the British government would deny all knowledge of them.

They were fighting for and in the name of the British Crown, yet those who died in that service were never recognised or

granted British citizenship. Yet knowing the dangers that they faced once behind enemy lines not one man asked for a transfer.

A great many of them were later attached to other regiments for "D" Day and helped in the capture and interrogation of German prisoners of war and distinguished themselves in battle. One Ian Harris won the Military Medal for his bravery.

During their time in Aberdovey there were a couple of weddings, despite the fact

that the CO, Hilton Jones, was opposed to his men getting married (due to the situation), he himself married and there is a lovely picture of him and his bride surrounded by his men. The other member of the troop who got married at this time

was Max Laddy (Max Lewinsky), who married a local girl. They had a daughter Patricia, who is still alive, but Max was killed on "D" Day when his landing craft took a direct hit.

As the second intake of 3 Troopers arrived in Aberdovey for their training, Otto (now known as Peter) was leaving, it is rumoured he had volunteered for "special duties", other than those carried out by the Commando's, so he had to travel to London for interviews with the War Office and was then attached permanently to the War Office, and served as a member of SIS (Special Intelligence Service), later to become MI6.

However, as it has already been suggested that Otto might well have been employed by the War Office earlier in the war to carry out special duties, how much of the rumour that went around 3 Troop at that time was a smoke screen? Was Otto in fact still directly under the War Office the whole time he was a member of 3 Troop? Once again due to all the secrecy surrounding Otto's war we will never know the truth behind these questions.

From this point Otto's life becomes very secret and difficult to trace completely, because of the secrecy that continued to this day surrounding his places of training and his missions, but what is known after a great deal of hard research can be told here.

CHAPTER 5 A VERY SECRET LIFE BEGINS

Since they both walked into the Euston Road Recruitment Centre in London on the 29th April 1940 Otto and Edgar had been the best of friends. During the time since Otto had left Devon and the Pioneer Corps in 1942 he had stayed in touch with his friend Edgar via the Giles family at Tavy Dale, as Edgar had also moved on from the Pioneers. As both men were never sure of where they would be, using the Giles family address as a conduit for their mail seemed the most sensible thing to do, not only that but the family still thought of them as "their boys".

Edgar heard that Otto had joined the Commando and had volunteered for "Special Duties" and wished that he too could join him in such special work, but it was not to be. He wrote on many occasions to the Undersecretary of State for War over a great many months asking to be allowed to join a fighting force and was eventually rewarded in 1942 with a transfer to the Royal Armoured Corps, after training he served with the King's Royal Irish Hussars as a tank driver/mechanic. He saw action and in September 1944 drove his tank through Belgium into Germany, then he became an interpreter and interrogated suspected German war criminals. He

'He had to sign a document I understand the risk'

married Anna in 1944 prior to going overseas, after the war they lived on in England and raised a family, Edgar died in 2000.

Because of the secrecy surrounding the training that Otto now had to undertake, it is very difficult to give a full story of what happened at this time. We know he was moved around England to various "Special Training" centres, these more often as not were old country houses and estates which were out of sight of the general public, places that had large grounds where furtive training could take place in complete secrecy. Some of the properties used at this time were owned by friends of the Prime Minister Winston Churchill and loaned out for the war effort, others were owned by the National Trust and some were large estates of earls, dukes and lords wishing to do their bit to help the war effort.

From this point in the war Otto's whereabouts become a complete mystery to those who had known him, he seems to have become a complete "non-person" and apart from the odd sighting later in his training, nobody knew where he was. Rumour among his previous army pals, had it that he had volunteered for "extra special duties" and most never saw him again. Though none of them ever forgot him.

A great many of these training places were to be found along and near to the South Coast, there were quite a few in Dorset. He must have been at one of those during the early months of 1943, quite possibly Sandbanks near Poole, as that is the time when he met my mother who lived in Poole. They knew one another for several months before he was posted elsewhere. Once again he had been moved on at short notice, leaving those behind with no knowledge of his whereabouts. During the whole time that my mother was friends with Otto, she knew him only as Peter Giles and thought he was just an ordinary soldier who came from Scotland. His new identity had done what it was supposed to do, that is make him appear to be a British National.

Although it has been suggested that Otto had worked for the intelligence services of the War Office right from the early days of his recruitment into the Pioneer Corps, his time spent in 10 Commando would have given a very good basic training for what he was now about to undertake.

He was and always had been a physically fit young man and had always enjoyed outdoor life. Hiking, camping, rock climbing and skiing. The Commando's had taught him stamina, endurance, survival and discipline. He would now learn more about self defence, how to kill silently, Morse and how to operate the radios. He would have to take on another new identity and have to learn his story by heart, he would also have to learn about subterfuge, explosives and how to use them and all manner of other important facts and details. Last but not least he would also have to learn how to parachute out of an aircraft safely.

All these things took time and some "safe" training centres specialised in one particular subject, hence Otto's travels around England during this period. The only two surviving letters written by Otto at this time give us a small insight to his life. In September 1942 a letter arrived at "Tavy Dale" for Rosemary Giles from Otto (signed Peter) it is just one small piece of paper with eight lines of writing on. He has obviously asked her a question in the past

and she has responded, because he thanks her for the information. He also apologises for not being able to write for some time and to the lack of mail he actually receives.

But, what 's strange about this letter is the address and its postmark. There is no doubt that Otto wrote it, but the address at the top of his letter was: P.G., PO Box 555, P.O. PARL, Str. SW1, yet the postmark on the envelope is Brighton & Hove. The other strange thing is the fact that he signed it Peter, as the family knew him first as Otto and he was very attached to his birth name, why did he not sign it Otto?

So, yet another question arises over Otto's whereabouts. Did he actually spend some more time in the Brighton area in the Autumn of 1943 or was he elsewhere and the letter posted by someone else from SIS in order to throw a false scent? The London address was, we now know, a collecting area for mail addressed to members of the Special Intelligence Services and SOE.

The other letter was written in the Spring of 1944 to his friend Edgar Bender, whom he addresses as "Jacky" (his nickname for him). In it he is apologising to Edgar for the fact that no one has been able to contact him for some considerable time and explains that it is because he has been sent around the country for special training and that he was not being difficult, (i.e. deliberately not making contact). Also that his "new name" meant that people who did not know his "own name" would not know his whereabouts, and that he could only collect his mail every two weeks, even his landlady did not know where he was. He goes on to tell Edgar that he has just spent two weeks in the Hempstead General Hospital and that he was now spending seven days R and R at T.D. (meaning Tavy Dale) where D (Dorothy) had shown him Edgars letter to the family, telling of his engagement to Anna. It then goes on to congratulate them on their engagement and wish them every happiness, and that he always thought that Anna was the right girl for him. He talks of his intentions to phone Edgar's parents (who lived in London) and the hope that they would all be able to get together again before the SF starts.

But we do not know what the SF was an abbreviation of. Could it be the Seasonal Festivities such as Christmas and Chanukah, which fall around the same time for both Christians and Jews? Or did it mean something quite different?

We know that Otto in his poems recalls the happy times the family had around the "Christmas Tree" when he was a child. Was he looking forward to a similar happy time among his friends, enjoying seasonal festivities if all went well on his forthcoming mission? Another little mystery in the life of Otto that we will never know the answer to.

Knowing full well that in due course he would be going behind enemy lines, probably not for the first time, and that such a mission would have great dangers for him and if things went wrong he would not return, must surely cause a great deal of mixed emotion, thereby making everything one does that bit more important and memorable. During his youth he had loved rock climbing and would have climbed to many a peak, even as part of his training in Snowdonia with 10 Commando, but he could never have been on such a peak as he was now. The emotions that this brave young man would have been going through cannot be described, so I won't even attempt to. The nearest I will come is from a comment

made by my son (Otto's grandson), who was nearly killed in a serious car crash, "You have to see death to appreciate life. Life is for living and I intend to live it".

Otto might well have had that same attitude, knowing what lies ahead of him.

What we will never know is the meaning of those two letters "SF". Unfortunately what we do know, is that Otto never lived to see that Christmas and Chanukah of 1944.

It is Otto's letter to Edgar that throws up another question about what was happening at that time. Why was he in the hospital in the first place? He does not say or give any clue for his being there. (I have asked the hospital archives but they cannot or will not tell me), but the three possibilities that come to mind are: Had he suffered an injury during training, he had already been on a mission and returned injured, as we know he probably went on more than one mission from the time he was recorded as being attached to the War Office and his death in 1944 or was it purely an everyday surgical reason? Whatever the reason for his two weeks in the hospital, it earned him a weeks leave with the family in Devon.

What we do know is that the Hempstead Hospital was the local hospital for the area of London where he resided before joining the army and it is probable that he was able to keep that address as a place to stay when visiting the City. Maybe the landlady that he refers to in his letter was in fact Mrs Joan Wicht.

It seems that between 1943 and 1944 during his training period with SIS/SOE Otto was all over the place, one of those places was Ringway Airfield near Manchester. It was here that the "Parachute Training School" was based, it was run by the Royal Air Force and every member of the armed forces who would be required to jump from an aircraft came here to do their parachute training, including all SOE/SIS operatives. Because they had to be kept separate from the regular forces, they were billeted at large secluded country houses near to the airfield. The two names I've been given are Dunham Massey Hall (NT) and Dunham House, a privately owned property. It was a large Edwardian house on the edge of a deer park, which was known to have been used during the war as a safe house for the billeting and training of those who were about to go on secret missions behind enemy lines.

Another well known house and estate which was used at that time was Tatton Park (NT). Because it was such a large estate it was put to many uses, apart from having fighting airfields, part was used as a decoy as Manchester to divert enemy bombers. Another use was as the drop zone for those doing parachute training at Ringway.

We know that Otto was up there doing his parachute training in the latter part of 1943 from a letter that I received from an HA Geiser who had served in 3 Troop 10 Commando with him in the early days of 1942. He says that he bumped into Otto on the tarmac at Ringway Airfield up in the Midlands in late 1943 while on a parachute training course. He said, "He spoke to Otto for a short time and Otto told him that he was no longer with the Commando's but staying at a large house not far from the airfield, he was also on parachute training, but could not tell him more". That was the last time this gentleman saw Otto but he remembers it well. How long Otto was there we do not know, however I have been told that most only stayed there for a few weeks.

'His new identity had made him appear British'

Two queries arise from this meeting at Ringway. The first is where was Otto between his stay in this area in late 1943 and his stay in hospital in London in early 1944? The second is regarding his parachutist qualification badge. It would appear that unlike the regular parachutist's qualification badge which is composed of a parachute between two wings, Otto's was that of a parachute only worked on a background of Khaki. These were issued as early as 1941 for "Non-regular parachute trained personnel". Another mystery in Otto's short life because no-one and no government department will give us an answer.

Apart from his final leave at Tavy Dale, this is the last known sighting of Otto prior to his final mission.

With so little information to go on during this period of his life, it makes it very difficult to tell the whole story of his training, the places he went to, the people he met, the way he spent his free time, his feelings and emotions. Was he ever able to write to or receive letters from his brother Werner, now living in America?

It is a year in his life that has so many gaps and unanswered questions in it and yet, in some ways it was the most important year in his young life, from 1943 to late 1944 would be his last. He was getting ready to fight his enemy, to put his life on the line in order to achieve that goal to uphold his principles. Yet despite all that, the authorities will not answer the questions or fill in the gaps. We know that the files are still with the MOD and MI6 because they are not at the National Archives in Kew.

Research at Tatton Park has produced some further insight into the parachuting activities that went on there. It was routine for all those training to do at least three live parachute drops, one from a static balloon known as "BESSIE" which was not popular with those taking part. The rest were taken from Whitley bombers, in the early days, via a special platform in the rear gunners turret. Some were dropped via a hole cut into the floor of a Hudson aircraft. Both of these methods required nerve and the ability to follow your instructor's orders to the letter, or you could suffer a nasty injury.

The other interesting thing discovered at Tatton Park was that a record was kept of everyone who parachuted into the "Drop Zone" there. It contained their name, regimental number, date and time of the jump, also on that list were a series of dates and times of people who had dropped but where there should have been a name there was just an "X". These were the "secret agents", to this day no one knows who jumped when.

One of the nice things that happened to Otto during this period in 1943 of chaos and moving around was that he managed to get thirteen of his poems published by a firm in London. They were dedicated to his Mother and printed in German, which was a surprise as it was war time. The booklet of poems was titled "GEDICHTE EINS VERTRIEBENEN", Meiner Mutter. I wonder if his beloved mother ever got to see and read those poems before she died?

Maria had remained in Germany throughout the war, although she survived possibly because she was a "non-Jew", she sadly saw her late husbands remaining relatives rounded up and deported to the "Death Camps" in 1942. Her own health suffered badly and she was ill for a long time, probably brought about by all the

stress and strain she had been under for the past ten years. But eventually her remaining son Werner managed to get her permission to enter America and she arrived in New York in February 1947, physically and mentally ill, her only possessions 150 pounds of luggage and ten German Marks.

LAST LEAVE

The time for Otto's mission must have been very close when he went to Tavy Dale for that much needed leave. Because Norrie the son of John and Dorothy Giles remembers that visit very well, as mentioned earlier in this story, he remembered Otto going into the local town of Tavistock and returning with a present each for himself and his sister Rosemary, and he remembered how Otto had acted as if he would not be coming back. As if he knew this could be his last visit with the family.

It could not have been easy for him because we know that he was a sensitive and caring man, he had seen the breakup of his own close family due to the war and now he was on the eve of seeing the loss of his quasi adopted family, again due to the war. He knew that at the end of his leave he would soon be setting out on a dangerous mission behind enemy lines, for security reasons he could not discuss this or any worries he might have about its outcome with these people he cared about.

What were his private thoughts during that emotional period? What long and deep discussions went on between himself and John and Dorothy as they sat in the warmth and homeliness of that family farm house deep in the heart of Devon all those hundreds of miles from his beloved mother and broken Homeland.

Otto must have wanted so much, deep down in his heart to be able to speak to his mother, to assure her that he was fighting in his own way to help liberate her and occupied Europe from the tyranny it was under. Even if it could mean his own death.

The area around Mary Tavy consists of some really beautiful countryside, the small village sits in a deep valley with the river Tavy weaving its way through like a silver thread between the green rolling hills. It is no wonder that Otto loved this place so much and would spend as much time there as he was allowed, and what better place to be to gather one's thoughts before going into a battle zone. To be surrounded by such beauty and love.

Norrie speaks of Otto as being an excellent horseman, so it is quite possible that he could have taken Puffin the family pony for rides out into the beautiful countryside

around the farm where he could relax and maybe compose a few poems or sketch the scenery around him and give himself time for quiet contemplation. For this young man had so much to remember and yet at the same time so much to forget.

Despite his youth, Otto was a young man with strong principals even to the extent that in his final year at school he refused to write his name in the new "Suetterlin Script" but to spell Hess with two round 'S' S's. This got him into considerable trouble with his teacher and a place in the school magazine.

He loved life and believed in the freedom of all men and in free speech, he hated Nazism and was determined to see it destroyed.

Because of all this he had not only joined the British army in order to fight the evil that was Nazism, he had taken it one

step further and volunteered for special duties, which meant a secret and dangerous war behind enemy lines. This meant that he was unable to share his war with anyone, unlike most regular soldiers; everything he did was strictly hush hush.

Now after a year or more of special and secret training, of having to be a non person to anyone outside his own "section", he was now considered ready to go on his "mission" and had been granted embarkation leave. For a short while he had been able to relax with those he loved and to use his adopted name of Peter Giles, or even Otto once again.

It must have offered him a wonderful sense of normality and freedom, if only for a short time and it probably sustained him during those final dark days in Yugoslavia. However, like all leaves it had come to an end and it was time to make his fond farewells to his adopted family. Tears were doubtless shed and deep down in their hearts they were all hoping for a reunion in the near future, a reunion which sadly never happened.

But we can be sure that from the love that this family had for Otto, his last leave would have been an enjoyable one.

From the moment that he walked through that garden gate and started up the lane towards the main road and the railway station Otto's life as a secret agent began. He would no longer be able to carry photos or letters of loved ones, he would have to deny any family in England or Germany. He was another person with a special mission and all his training, knowledge and life skills were all that he would now have to concentrate upon if he was to survive the dangerous mission that lay before him.

CHAPTER SIX YUGOSLAVIA

We now come to Otto's final mission. It has been extremely difficult to get any information from MI6, again because the details have not yet been released into the public domain. However, what little has been forthcoming can be told here. The emphasis being on "Very Little", as MI6 are still not divulging the whole truth about Otto's mission or the reason for it. Because of its final outcome it was thought by many of his friends that Otto had been sent to Yugoslavia to join Tito's Partisans and this was the line of enquiry that I followed for many years and had great difficulty getting answers to. At one stage in the inquiry it was thought that he might have been a part of the same mission as Randolph Churchill and Evelyn Waugh, as they were all in the same area at the same time and their mission also failed. However, after a great deal of research it was impossible to prove it one way or the other.

The Allied forces were making progress, the Germans were in slow retreat and the Partisans and Cossacks were playing one side off against the other with the help of the German Gestapo, and the British government. So it was not the best of places to find oneself in the Autumn of 1944.

After badgering MI6 they eventually sent me some details of Otto's time in Yugoslavia and the area he was in at the time of his death. This was great information but not enough to lay the ghosts, I wanted to know more and the truth behind his mission. After a few more months and letters, they eventually gave me the code name of his mission but nothing else. It was becoming obvious that they did not want me or anyone else to know the truth. So I held back for a while,

‘His final leave at Tavy Dale was his last known sighting’

just in case the “spooks” came to get me!

In the meantime I tried desperately via books, the internet and any means possible to find out what I could about Yugoslavia during WW2, even to the extent of being given help by the most unlikely people such as a nurse at our local hospital who had connections with Croatia and put me in touch with their President. But to no avail. There was a lot going on at that time but nothing that would explain what Otto’s mission might have entailed.

So, having left a decent period since last contacting them I once again wrote to MI6. Thanking them for their kind assistance in the past and allowing for the fact that 60 plus years had passed since my father’s mission, would they please let me have the truth. I was not expecting them to tell me much more than they already had, what with them being so secretive, but it was worth a go. However, a few weeks later a letter arrived that quite surprised me. It did not tell the whole story but it opened up a new can of worms. Despite trying to get them to go further, MI6 would not say more. So what follows is the outcome of all Otto’s special training, his enthusiasm and devotion to duty. His final mission behind enemy lines.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE LAST MISSION

The code name for the mission was “Operation Beech” its intention was for Otto to carry out an intelligence gathering mission of the Ruhr area of Germany. The Ruhr was a very important area, being the centre of Germany’s heavy industry and coal mining, an area that had been bombed many times including the famous “Dambusters Rail” in May 1943. About three quarters of the region was destroyed during months of bombing intended to slow down production and thereby disrupt the Nazi war machine and hopefully shorten the war.

Was Otto’s mission to assess the damage close up and to let Whitehall know exactly how effective the bombing had actually been, or was it to gather intelligence of another nature?

1943 had seen great success for the Allies in mainland Europe and the war was at last going their way with every hope of winning it. July saw the successful invasion of Sicily, quickly followed by the landings on mainland Italy in the September. Though these did not always go as planned and in some places the troops faced heavy fighting from the German army and found themselves pinned down by enemy fire for longer than the generals would have liked. In fact the first Allied troops did not reach Rome until 4th of June 1944 just two days before “D” Day.

In Northern Europe two invasion/landings were planned by Whitehall. One known as “Operation Market Garden” was to drop airborne divisions (a new concept in the British Army) into Holland. This began on the 17th of September 1944. The second was “Operation Overlord” to become known as “D” Day, the 6th of June 1944, which would be the start of the liberation of Northern France and onto Germany, pushing the German army back to their own lands.

Had Otto’s mission anything to do with “Market Garden”? Had he been sent to find out about German troop movements and numbers, so that the Allies knew what to expect once they had broken out of Holland? Or was it for completely different reasons?

It has been suggested to me that the

reason MI6 have sent out confused messages about his mission is because the whole thing is a smoke screen to hide the truth. That his true mission was so controversial and from the start his chances of survival were known to be nil. If this is the case, then did Otto know his was to be a suicide mission?

Either way we are never going to be told the truth.

With the few facts that MI6 have given me along with personal reflections from elderly gentlemen who served behind enemy lines, and from a great deal of successful research, we can put together some of the details of Otto’s last mission.

He was flown out, probably with another agent who would be his radio operator thought to be his friend Werner Buchdahl, in a Hudson aircraft in early to mid September 1944. The airfield they flew from was most likely “Tarrant Rushton” in Dorset, which was used exclusively for SOE/SIS operations and it is known by some of the pilots logs that flights to Austria went from there. In fact one is logged for around the time that Otto flew out.

The other airfield known to have been used by SOE/SIS was RAF Tangmere in Sussex, better known as a fighter station during the Battle of Britain, but Tarrant Rushton looks to be the most likely of these two to have been used for his mission. What is very strange about this mission is that he was parachuted into Austria which is to the South of Germany yet we are told that his mission was to gather intelligence in the Ruhr area which is in the North West of Germany close to Belgium and Holland. This is a very long way from his mission area so several questions have to be asked.

Was that a correct dropping zone and was he supposed to make his way north gathering intelligence as he went? In which case, why say his mission was to be in the Ruhr area of Germany. Was it a complete “cock-up” and he was dropped in completely the wrong place by the RAF? It seems strange to think that such a fundamental error could have occurred. Though many mishaps did occur during the war in respect of the Navy and the RAF getting Commando’s and agents to their correct landing zone. If so, this one would surely have been cast as monumental. Whatever the reason it has to be asked could it be because he was parachuted into Austria so far from the Ruhr that he was unable to fulfil his mission?

It has been brought to my attention recently that most SOE/SIS that were dropped into Austria failed in their missions. So Otto was just one of many whose long and expensive training was wasted and whose brave young lives were also wasted. It does beg the question, why, knowing that Austria was an unsuccessful drop zone, did they continue to use it? Could this be the reason why the official papers and most of Otto’s military records are still under lock and key and why MI6 refuse to tell us the truth about “Operation Beech” to this day, sixty nine years after the event?

Whatever the reason for his being unable to complete his mission, Otto either made his way to or found himself in the Kalnik area of Yugoslavia. On the 19th of September he managed to make contact with a unit of Tito’s Partisans and make himself known. After they had checked with London and had his authenticity confirmed, it was agreed that Otto should

be taken with an escort to the Partisans HQ in Croatia, whence it would be possible to evacuate him to Italy. At the time the Partisans HQ were in the Kladusa area but during the time that Otto and his escort were making their way there, it had to move to Topusko for safety reasons. This is where the idea arose about Otto’s mission being connected with that of Randolph Churchill and Evelyn Waugh, as they were in Topusko at the same time waiting to

make contact with someone who never arrived. This and inquisitive locals caused their mission to fail and they left the area. Luckily for them they made it back via Italy.

However, Otto and his escort never made it to their destinations. It was reported later that the party had been

ambushed by the German army at a place called Lekenik. As far as we know that was the end of his mission.

Since the war ended various stories about Otto have circulated among his service friends and have appeared in several memoirs of people who were a part of that theatre of war. In some cases it was thought that Otto was captured in the ambush, taken to the Gestapo HQ where he was tortured before being shot. With regards to the ambush, no one knows if it was a trap set after betrayal or just bad luck. As said before, this was a very volatile region. Another story that went around was that he had been captured and taken to the nearest “Death Camp”, or he might have been killed at the time of the ambush.

If he was captured and tortured by the Gestapo was he able to stand up against his enemy and tell him nothing? He hated them with such intensity, it is hard to think he would give in to their evil methods, but who can say. Let us hope for his sake that he was killed in the ambush.

Either way Otto has no known grave. He is commemorated on a plaque at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Groesbeek in Holland under his adopted name Peter Giles and his cover regiment The Queen’s Own Royal West Kent’s, and also on a copper plaque in the library of the Belsize Square Synagogue in London, in his own name Otto Hess.

Most agents wore a jump suit over their civilian clothes and carried a pistol when they went on a mission behind enemy lines. However, Yogi who worked in SIS and knew Otto better than most, has told me that the thinks Otto being proud of his British uniform wore it on his mission. He considered himself a British soldier and would fight as a soldier not a spy. Somehow I find it hard to imagine that he would be allowed to jump into enemy territory on a secret intelligence gathering mission wearing khaki, regardless of however proud he was of his uniform. Those commando’s who went behind enemy lines on “raiding parties” would defiantly have been in their British uniforms, unless their mission dictated otherwise. But those who served in SOE/SIS would without a doubt have gone into action wearing civilian clothes under their jump suits.

It would be nice to know what cover name and life history Otto had for this mission, as it is highly unlikely that he would have been permitted to use his own name. He was already registered on Nazi records from his days at school pre-war. They also would have a record to show that he left Germany for England in 1939. So to attempt to travel through Germany as Otto Hess would surely have been impossible.

‘The codename for his final mission was Op Beech’

Another strange thing that occurs in all mention of Otto's mission is that no one ever mentioned Werner Buchdahl, the only one to do so was Yogi.

What he wore, how he was killed and by whom and whether or not his friend Werner Buchdahl was with him on this mission we will never know. Once again Otto's life is a mystery. Looking back on his story, much of his life is a mystery; he is an enigma, perhaps that should be the title of this book, not Kraxel.

A few years ago I was sent a letter that had obviously been sent just after the war. The page containing the name and address of the sender is missing and there is no signature. But what is important about this letter is that it refers to Otto not returning, it says, "As Otto had been posted missing for some time and that nothing had been heard of him since his mission, it has to be assumed that he had been killed".

It is quite possible that this letter was sent by some one in SIS to Dorothy Giles as she had been named as Otto's next of kin. Somehow (maybe sent by Dorothy) this part of what was obviously a long letter had come into the possession of Edgar Bender and it was his widow Anna who sent it to me.

It is strange that this letter uses his birth name Otto and not his adopted English name Peter.

In 1946 Otto under his English name Peter Giles was posthumously awarded the Kings Commendation for Bravery, (recommended by "C" head of SIS) and mentioned in despatches. This along with his other medals were sent to his brother Werner living in America.

Otto was born in January 1921 and died in October 1944, yet in his short life he came to touch the hearts and memories of all those whom he met. It was only through the fond memories of such people that Otto's story could be told.

They remembered a handsome young man with deep expressive eyes and great charisma, a caring and sensitive person, not easily forgotten. A young man with strong principals who wrote beautiful poetry, enjoyed sketching and painting. Someone you'd be proud to call your friend, a loving person and a very brave young man.

All those who had known him and survived and gone on to live active lives and bring up families, everyone on hearing his name came forward after sixty plus years and spoke of their time with him as if it was yesterday. I don't know about you, but I think that is the greatest testimony any man can have.

Shalom Havelrim L'Hit Raot. Peace Friend Until We Meet Again.

WERNER HESS – FAMILY POSTSCRIPT

At some point during the war he managed to join the American Army and fought in the Pacific campaign and Burma. He continued to live in the USA, he married an attractive girl named Adrienne and had three children, Steve, David and a daughter Tina. He worked for a Stetson hat maker, an electric light company and his last job was for a maker of ladders. He died of cancer in 1974 aged 55, Adrienne died in 1997 aged 72 and his mother Maria died in 1970 aged 91. His family and their offspring are now first and second generation Americans.

WERNER BUCHDAHL – POSTSCRIPT

I have been trying for years to trace this man, from Jewish papers, veterans groups,

regimental archives, the MOD and National Archives, German archives and even the Australian Catholic church, where one person told me that he had become a Catholic priest. Even the CWGC have no record of him. There is no trace of him anywhere, it's as if he never existed, yet we know he did. There are childhood photo's of him at the Aktives Museum in Wiesbaden. Yogi Mayer knew him and his family, that he also lived in Friedrich Strasse before the war and that his parents had a furniture shop. More importantly we have the unanswered question, was he on that fatal mission with Otto, did he return and was he the one that reported what had happened? These questions need an answer but it is very unlikely to come.

(Ed note: We know from the RPC Association Records that Fritz Werner Buchdahl (date of birth 26 Oct 17) enlisted at Richborough and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 4 Apr 40 and was given the service number 13801956 and joined 165 Coy. He was discharged on 11 May 42 with a character assessment of GOOD)

KITCHENER CAMP, RICHBOROUGH, KENT

During the First World War, Richborough was a busy and thriving port used as a port for the troops going to and returning from France. During this time a camp was built on the marshland both sides of the River Stour, most of the work was done by the Royal Engineers. After the war the area ceased being used as a port and it silted up, the quay was deserted and the miles of camps lay derelict.

Some forms of industry did move into the area but the Richborough camp was not used. Then in late 1938 when German speaking Jewish and political refugees started to arrive in Sandwich after escaping from the Nazi persecution, the powers that be decided to re-open the camp as a holding area to house these refugees. This was a new and interesting period for the camp and those who were to be housed there.

For the next year all German speaking refugees arriving in England would be sent there until they had been assessed and then allowed to travel to their British Sponsor or assigned a destination.

Over the weeks and months that followed more and more refugees arrived on England's shores, thankful to have escaped the clutches of the Nazi regime, some had already suffered in the labour camps of Germany and Poland and many had seen friends and family die there. Now they were about to enter another type of camp, some of them must surely have felt some kind of apprehension, what would happen to them now?

It was usually of an evening when the refugees would arrive, struggling with their baggage along the churned up roadway between the long, low rows of huts, surrounded by bare marshy fields.

As the weeks went by, the early arrivals at the camp began to rebuild and renovate the huts and the other camp buildings, making it more like home and more comfortable, so the later arrivals had a much better first impression of the camp than those who arrived first.

With so many people in this enclosed area a community soon developed, there were so many different talents, trades and occupations among those there that it was possible to get most things done. The camp

Director a Jonas A May FIPS, was an excellent person and under his directorship the camp was a happy active place with a large variety of clubs, entertainment centres where plays and concerts would be put on, hairdressers and tailors workshops. They even had a Synagogue in the camp. Those who were able to speak good English would teach the others, those with technical qualifications would also help to pass on their expertise. There were medical facilities on the camp and they even had their own magazine to which people in the camp would write articles for or sketch pictures.

In one edition of the magazine there was an article about learning English. It said "Only talk in English, listen in English, think English and get to know the mentality of the English." You can understand why it was so important for them to be able to speak good English, most of them, especially the younger men wanted to be able to join the British army and fight the Nazi tyranny across the channel.

Despite being in the camp, the refugees were allowed to wonder in and out at will to visit the town and mix with local people. They also had a great many VIP visitors to the camp who all spoke very highly of it afterwards.

There was another activity going on during this time which did not get reported in the camp magazine. This was more Hush, Hush, and only those involved knew of it. There was a small team of intelligence officers from the War Office whose job it was to assess people entering the camp and to grade them according to their abilities, they also were to recruit people willing to serve as interpreters and be willing to gather intelligence behind enemy lines. It is highly probable that it was here that Otto originally volunteered for work with the War Office, and why he was seen at Dunkirk in 1940, as many men from the camp went there after joining the Pioneer Corps.

After the outbreak of war the camp closed, so in early September 1939 everyone still in the camp was moved further north. Others tried to join the army but were only allowed to serve in non armed units, so most of them ended up in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps.

After the refugees the camp was taken over by the Royal Marines.

Otto probably spent only a short time at Richborough as he had a sponsor and an address to reside at in London, he was also not yet old enough to join the army and would have to wait until the end of April 1940. However, the intelligence service at the War Office would have had his name and details on file, ready to call on him at anytime to train for a special mission.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS BOOK WHOSE HELP WAS INVALUABLE

Anne Bender – whose kindness and generosity in sending her letter from Otto and his poems meant so much.

Peter Masters – who sadly died before this book was finished but who gave me so much advice and practical help over many years.

Dr Freddie Morgan – who told me about Otto's life in Westward Ho and gave such a wonderful description of him.

Dorothee Lottmann-Kaeseler – Director of the Aktives Museum Spiegelgasse, in Wiesbaden who researched her own files and was able to give me much information, and who kindly put on an exhibition about Otto in her museum and who was so kind to me on my visit.

Dr Brigit Streich – of the Stadtarchiv,

Wiesbaden who researched the family files on my behalf and sent me so much information about the Hess family, and who did so much for me on my visit to Germany.

The Churchill family – who kindly looked into Randolph Churchill’s war diaries to see if there was a connection between him and Otto’s time in Yugoslavia.

The National Trust – who gave me the history of Tatton Park during the war years and of other properties in their ownership used by the War Office.

M16 – who eventually gave me an insight as to Otto’s mission if not the whole story.

Klaus Stubiger - without his hard work and tireless enthusiasm for the truth of Otto’s story to be told, this book would never have been completed.

Helen Fry – advancing the story by including a piece about Otto in her own book, “Jews in North Devon” and helping in other minor ways.

Timothy Carroll – who also asked to include a piece about in his book and also helped in other ways to get the full story told.

Dr Paul “Yugi” Mayer – for telling me all about Otto and the Hess family as he knew them in Wiesbaden before the war, who gave Otto the nickname KRAXEL.

We explained about SIS to me and how Otto would have operated as a member of that team and names of people to contact that might help me further my knowledge.

Finally a BIG thank you to all those people far too numerous to mention by name, who stepped in at crucial moments

to give me help and information that enabled me to give a fuller account of Otto’s life.

POST SCRIPT

Since completing “KRAXEL” I have received many more bits of information, mainly from Germany and some from people who served with him in the British Army.

The Jewish museum sent me letters Otto had written to a Youth Group friend as a boy of about 14 years, this gentleman’s papers had been left to the museum at the time of his death.

Another letter came describing the character of Otto.

I now know the SF was Second Front, also who wrote the poem “O.be missing” ■

Long Lost Trails

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

BUN WALTER SGT (13800008)

Sgt Bun enlisted into the Pioneer Corps in Nov 38 and was posted to 74 Coy, he served until 24 Feb 42 when he was discharged on medical grounds, sadly he died in 1945. His son Roy is trying to locate anyone who served with his father or the offspring of anyone who served in 74 Coy. Contact: roy.holland1@ntlworld.com



■ Taken in Vienna, Sep 1938 - used for his pass that allowed him to escape.



■ Rear of photo



■ Taken at 3 Centre AMPC



■ Parents marriage at Newport



■ A picture of Roy and his father together

CRAIG GODWIN (24553508)

Mark Britton is trying to locate Craig, last known to be living in Openshaw, Manchester. Contact: mark@lambrettaart.co.uk

149 COY

Mr Peter Sturgeon is seeking anyone who served with his father Sgt Harold Sturgeon in 149 Coy. Contact: petersturgeon@ntlworld.com

CAISTER CAMP 1939-40

Can anyone remember the heavy-weight boxer who was at Caister Camp in 39/40 with the Pioneers (he was PTI). I think he was born in either Jamaica or Trinidad. I was a newsboy taking papers in the mornings and I can remember giving him a newspaper - I was then about 9 years old. Contact: RH Symonds (Ex Pte 49/51), c/o RPC Association.

MR RAYMOND EDWARD WATSON 840 SMOKE COY 1944-1946

is trying to contact anyone with whom he served 1944-1946. (see article on pages 42-44).

He served in 840 (Smoke) Coy and 165 German Prisoner of War Camp, Springhaill, Blockley, Nr Moreton in the Marsh.

Contact through his son at grwson@hotmail.com

MALTA

The photos below were recently acquired. Photo 1 has the following on the reverse “The Batzzya Road nearing completion, built by Pioneer Corps personnel under the direction of the Italian Military Mission” and Photo 2 has “Members of Pioneer Corps on the Drill Square. Can any member supply further details of Pioneers in Malta. contact: RPC Association.





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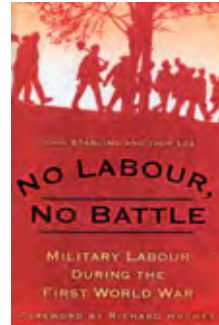


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The Post-War History of the Corps was written by Major Bill Elliott, who generously donated his work and rights entirely for the Association's benefit. It was published by Images, Malvern in May 1993 and is on sale in the book shops at **£24. £10**



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by Major E H Rhodes Wood

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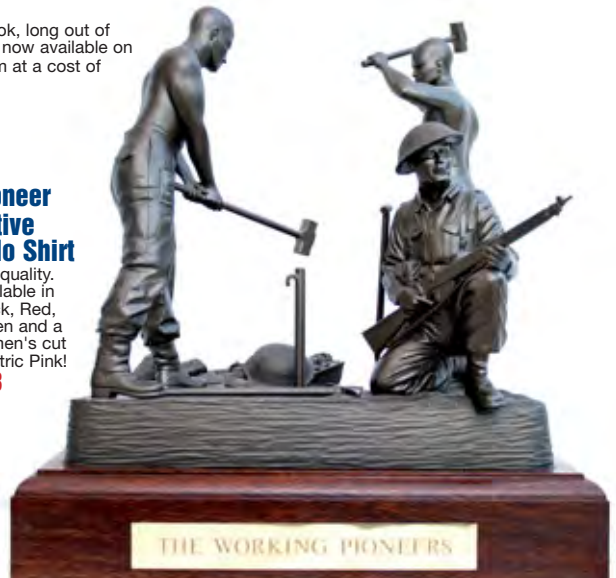


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THE WORKING PIONEERS



■ Mrs Roberts and family, Queen Elizabeth Cross Presentation Picture: Supplied



■ CO 23 Pioneer Regiment talks to the Roberts family Picture: Supplied



■ Officers to Sgts Mess Picture: Supplied



■ 2Lt Charters caught trying to sneak into the Sgts Mess Picture: Supplied



■ Helen Fry with 2 veterans, Eric Mark and Fritz Lustig. The M Room book is featured on the books page Picture: Supplied



■ Corps of Drum Members Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members at the Cenotaph Parade

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Plot at the Field of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ HRH Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneers proudly marching down Whitehall

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Civil Service Club after the parade

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Firing the cannon on Horseguards Parade

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Plot at the Field of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Plot at the Field of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Op Herrick 17 - Cpls Buinimasi & Goodbourn
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - Cpl Buinimasi, Kgn Marsh, LCpl Welsh, Ptes Ricketts & Taylor. LKG AO
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - LCpl Welsh & SSM Cheung apparently smiling! CP PANKLAY
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - Pte King, LCpl Welsh, Pte Taylor, Pte Ricketts, Cpl Goodbourn & Cpl Buinimasi
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - Pte Taylor, Cpl Buinimasi & Moral Boosting Lucy. CF BMA
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - Ptes Ricketts & Taylor. Time to reflect in an Afghan compound
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - SSM Cheung & Cpl Buinimasi. IVO CP DARA
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung



■ Op Herrick 17 - SSM Cheung. Apparently being nice!
Picture: W02 (SSM) KW Cheung

Pioneer Diaries

Ed note: I recently purchased 5 diaries which recorded a Pioneer Corps soldier's experiences in both North Africa (with 6 Coy) and Italy and Normandy (with 132 Coy) during the period Nov 1942 until January 1945. Unfortunately the name of the soldier is not shown in the diaries, he states in the diaries that he served nearly 3 years with 6 Coy prior to his posting to 132 Coy I have therefore decided to publish extracts from the war diaries from 1939 when this Company formed. I hope you find the story interesting. Part II will be in the next newsletter. It must also be remembered that details in wartime diaries could not contain details that would be beneficial to the enemy in case of capture. Extracts from the War Diaries are shown in italics.



BEFORE you read the Part I of the diaries (part II in next newsletter) I thought a brief resume of the North Africa and Italian campaigns would be beneficial to the reader:

Africa - The Desert War

In the beginning they were called "The Army of the Nile", a real Commonwealth force of some 30,000 men from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India. By the end they had become the most illustrious fighting unit of the war – the 8th Army. In 1940 the Italian army, more than 250,000 strong attacked Egypt from their colony of Libya. On 9 December 1940 the 8th under the CinC Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, hit back. By February 1941 they were clear across Libya and had captured Benghazi. Here Germany's most famous field commander, General Rommel, and his Afrika Korps, took over. Before Egypt the 8th stood and the line held. Once more they fought back, at Sidi Rezegh the New Zealand 6th Brigade Group under Brigadier Baraclough, fought an epic battle, and on 20 November, the 200 day siege of Tobruk was lifted. The 8th Army fought on to Benghazi which was recaptured on 24 December 1941. But Rommel's front held at El Agheila, the Afrika Korps was re-grouped, and on 21 January 1942, hit back. Tobruk fell, and by 8 June the 8th Army held a line at a place that was to rank with Agincourt and Crecy – El Alamein. The Germans controlled all Europe, and were only 60 miles from Alexandria. At this point General Sir Harold Alexander became CinC of the Middle East, and an almost unknown, whose name was to become a by-word, took over the 8th Army, Lt Gen BL Montgomery – "Monty". A New Zealand Division was rushed from Palestine, and on the night of 23 October, our artillery opened up a massive bombardment of the German lines. Next morning came the attack, the New Zealanders with United Kingdom armour struck through the North of the line, and on their right the Australians collected a handful of VCs as they fought some of the greatest battles in their history. Rommel was on the run, in 80 days the 8th smashed their way through Benghazi once more, and on to Tripoli. Meanwhile a British and American force had landed on the North African coast and began to push towards Tunis from the West. The 8th drove on from the East. On 16 May 1943, the war in North Africa was over, the Afrika Korps destroyed. A mobile column of the 8th was called the "Desert Rats", and the name stuck to the whole army.

Italy

The victories of the British army were very largely responsible for the unconditional surrender of the kingdom of Italy in September 1943.

British Airborne troops headed the invasion of Sicily on 9 Jul 43, less than two months after the conquest of Tunisia. The British Eighth Army (including a Canadian Division), together with the American Seventh Army, conquered the large island of Sicily in 39 days (9 Jul – 17 Aug 43). About 156,000 of the enemy were killed, wounded or taken prisoner in the Sicilian campaign. This included 24,000 Germans killed and 128,000 Italians captured. 500 enemy guns, 260 tanks and 1,100 grounded aircraft were further captured by the Anglo-American forces in Sicily. The enemy lost 1,691 aircraft in all between 10

Jul and 17 Aug 43.

The British Eighth Army led the assault upon the Fortress of Europe when they landed in Italy on 3 Sep 43. The landings of the Anglo-American Fifth Army at Salerno and later at Anzio, were at the time, considered to be the most daring amphibious operations ever launched upon a similar scale in war. On 11 May 44, General Alexander, C in C of all Allied Forces in Italy, launched the attack which broke through fortified German defence lines, and effected a junction of the main armies with the Anzio bridgehead forces. These brilliant moves and offensives which resulted in the liberation of Rome by forcing its abandonment by the enemy without any destructive fighting within the city itself, were part of General Alexander's daring and original strategy.

4 Sep 39 - 15 Docks Labour Coy formed at Berwick on Tweed

11 Sep 39 - Embarked on Ulster Monarch

12 Sep 39 - Disembarked at Cherbourg and moved to Nantes (Strength 3 Offrs & 328 OR's)

1 Dec 39 - Coy renamed as 6 Coy Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps

15 Jun 40 - Moved to Nozay and occupied defensive positions – no sign of the enemy

15 Jun 40 – 2000 hrs – conference called at BLAIN under Capt Fairbankes (Nantes Sub-area). Present CO 7 Group, OCs 12, 14 and 20 Coys.

Capt Fairbanks explained the whereabouts of the enemy was unknown and observation and defence lines were to be thrown out to cover the evacuation of Nantes sub area. An Observation Line was in front of the Blain Canal held by 6, 25 and 37 Coys and a Reserve Line held by 5, 12, 14 and 30 Coys. In the event of the Observation Line being pressed by the enemy they would retire through the Reserve Line which would be held at all costs under ordered by the Sub-Area to withdraw

17 Jun 40 – Enemy reported at Laval. All defences strengthened

1220 hrs – message 'You are to withdraw forthwith to Savernay. No demolition to take place. On arrival at Savernay proceed to Transit Camp and report to Col Heatley, OC Defences. You will occupy another position to cover embarkation.

1450 hrs – withdrawal to Savernay complete. Barricades and road blocks prepared and patrols out. No sign of enemy.

1530 hrs - ordered to retire to a line about 3 kms in front of Savernay. Linked with 6 Coys on our left but no troops in front or on right. Greatly handicapped by streams of refugees and had to divert all civil traffic away from St Nazaire. Held line until 0345 hrs on 18th.

18 Jun 40 – Orders received for withdrawal to St Nazaire and embarkation. Main body embarks on City of Lancaster at 0600 hrs 0430 hrs – following received from Nantes Sub-Area:

To: 6, 12, 14, 20, 25 and 37 Coys AMPC and 104 & 110 Coys RE

Situation believed fairly favourable. Withdrawal will be carried out as follows. 37 Coy AMPC with attached Anti-Tank rifles and 110 Coy RE at 0300 hrs to covering position facing North and West of St Nazaire on the roads St Nazaire-St Andre Des Eaux; St Nazaire-Escoublac; St Nazaire-Pornichet. All positions close to St Nazaire. 20 Coy AMPC with attached Anti-tank rifles 104 Coy RE at 0300 hrs to position covering St Nazaire from East at river bridge near cemetery. 5 and 25 Coys AMPC and attached RA at 0330 hrs to docks St Nazaire for embarkation.

20 Jun 40 – Arrived Plymouth. Moved to Clacton

1 Jul 40 – all reservists posted to their respective depots. Coy now 4 Offrs and 21 ORs

25 Jul 40 – Coy reformed with 4 Offrs and 281 ORs – entrains for Aberfoyle, Scotland for work at 25 ASD

30 Nov 41 – Coy moved to Port Ellen, Isle of Isley. Working laying Bitumen runway, roads, track laying and general aerodrome construction

12 May 42 – Coy moves from under command 30 Group to 21 Group PC

20 Aug 42 – Coy completed mobilisation

25 Aug 42 – Coy moves to Ashford, Kent and joins 14 Airfield Construction Group – training at laying Somerfelt track

19 Nov 42 – Embarked at Glasgow

Thu 17 Nov 42 – Whither bound? That was the question uppermost in everyone's mind a week ago as the train carrying all the personnel and equipment of 6 Coy Pioneer Corps sped on its way.

Although our ten weeks at Ashford, or rather Hochfield Common three miles from this town had been a great deal less comfortable than our previous station at Isley living as we were in tents during a period of very wet weather; nevertheless the fact that I was within easy reach of home greatly outweighed the disadvantages. I had been home nearly every week sometimes only for a few hours, but also for a couple of weekends, the last time was in fact the previous Saturday. At this time I was due for my leave but this had been cancelled owing to our impending move. The Coy was well aware of the likelihood of us going abroad in the near future as we were fully mobilised for overseas service. But we expected to get some embarkation leave before we went, and when I said goodbye to the family I assured them that I should be home again soon.

These hopes, however, were widely disappointed for the train went on its journey northwards, reached Edinburgh and continuing its course came presently to Glasgow. When it finally halted we knew our fate for we had been bought right to the docklands and we proceeded straight from the train up the gangway on to the boat.

I was detailed to a room on the promenade deck containing 112 bunks and with only the narrowest space between them. To see the ornate cornices there it was obvious that this had been converted from one of the staterooms or lounges, as indeed had a lot of the other sleeping accommodation. There were thousands of troops aboard and the crush at meal times was terrific. We were issued with meal cards of different colours corresponding to the various sitting and after a couple of days things became better organised. The size of the boat and its confusing corridors and decks made it very difficult to find ones way about at first.

One the Thursday morning the section I am in was detailed for fatigues in the holds. To reach them we descended a steep stairway which led right down into the bowels of the ship, her the heat and atmosphere were nauseating, but passing further down the corridor it became a little less oppressive. The storeman of the boat then took us through a hatch down some more stairs to the holds, and there he showed us what had to be done. On an average day 10 bags of brown flour each weighing 150 lbs and 15 bags of white flour 100 lbs apiece had to taken up three flights of stairs into the bakery. This was an aspect of the catering which gives one a

good idea of the organisation and planning to send one of these leviathans of sea on its journey to distant parts of the globe. It is veritably a floating worn and the needs of the community, and its luxurious too, have to be there ready and available for instant distribution where and when required. An extremely important item, of course, is the water supply, and the capacity of the tanks required to supply the thousands of individuals on board and sufficient running water for washing and drinking for days on end, must be enormous. In fact the variety and quantity of food taken on board prior to a voyage are just staggering and must entail a terrific amount of labour. I gathered some idea of this after the first morning's work – the perspiration simply steamed off us down in that close atmosphere. A break for tea and cakes made things considerably more tolerable, and we were given a couple of oranges apiece at the end of each morning's work, a rare treat in these days. An unpleasant feature was an insect called by the storeman a steam fly which he said breeds in the atmosphere of the engine room. On the outsides of the flour sacks of the larvae were to be seen, and we were careful to brush them off before hoisting them on our backs – even then we could not be sure that we had not transferred any to our persons.

On Thursday our boat steamed down the Clyde and joined some other ships which were to be in the convoy. We rode at anchor until Saturday when at about four in the afternoon we commenced the voyage.

The days that succeeded were firstly miserable and monotonous ones, and the vastness of the ship seemed to have diminished and become cramped; after the first day out when I was sick five times altogether. I was longing for dry land under my feet once more. The dreary wastes of water stretching on every side to the horizon did not tend to improve our spirits, and in our berths the air became hot and stifling which the electric fans kept going constantly did little to relieve.

Prompt rising in the morning was necessary to ensure a wash for the water is only turned on for half an hour from six to half past. Getting to the ablutions is a somewhat hazardous proceeding the dark and entails walking along the deck and descending some steep steps groping all the way. The water is on again in the afternoon from four thirty to five.

This is a Canadian Pacific liner, and all the catering is done by them, the army paying them an overall charge. A great deal of the produce is South African, but the flour is all Canadian.

On Friday evening land was sighted for the first time since our departure, and very welcome it was too. Presently we could see a cluster of lights which had the appearance of a golden necklace, it was strange to view it after becoming accustomed through these years of war to the blackout.

We passed through Gib during the night and no land was to be seen again. The weather during the past two or three days had become perceptibly warmer, and although November was more like our English September.

We have been issued with rations for forty eight hours, and these consist of "bully", cheese, dripping, dried tea, sugar and milk and other "goodies" all in tins, in addition a solidified meth heater made by Boot's.

Our sole contact with the outside world has of course been the wireless, and after the first day or so the BBC Empire and also the American news bulletins. Incidentally the wireless was only switched on for the news.

During Saturday we were out of sight of land again, but this was to be our last day at sea, for on the Sunday morning we anchored at Algeria. The view from the boat of the town was impressive, all the buildings were of a glaring whiteness and rose tier after tier up the cliff side. The

buildings along the front were quite definitely show places but were imposing nevertheless. We could see crowds of people thronging the streets, and the trams strung together in threes had a typically French appearance. A number of dark skinned natives and children were to be seen on

the quay, some of them selling oranges and others scrambling for coppers that the soldiers threw to them from the boat, but all without exception were pitifully clad – in fact their clothes which were of all colours were patched and patched again and were barely held together. And when an article of discarded clothing was thrown to them they pounced upon it and fought for possession.

It was late afternoon before we got off the boat. Our kitbags were left on the quay and we marched through the town for about a mile to a botanical gardens called the Jorsdin d'Essare which also had another section which was a zoological park. We were all pretty fagged after marching with full equipment, but soon we were allocated to a plot of ground to lie down on amongst the trees. We had nothing but a haversack meal since breakfast time, but our hunger was to go unsatisfied that evening. So we settled ourselves down as best we could to get some rest. I was just dozing when the most terrific noise of AA gunfire woke the stillness and Jerry started dropping his "eggs" uncomfortably close. The red tracers made quite a good pyrotechnic display but we hardly appreciated this reception of our arrival. And so it continued with brief respites throughout the night, and we were glad when dawn broke.

Our meals henceforward were to consist entirely of tinned foods but on the whole they are appetising and there is a fair amount of variety. It must be a great improvement on the last war for there are such innovations as sultana and marmalade puddings, rice and combined tea, sugar and milk in powder form, besides bacon, sausages etc.

Our only recreation during the first two days were short route marches in the town. The cosmopolitan nature of the population gave a colourful aspect to the streets, but the poverty which seems prevalent amongst the Arabs is pitiable. There seem to be a large number trekking whether a normal routine of their nomadic life or evacuations I was not certain. All kinds of conveyances were being used, go carts, donkeys, pack mules and women. Yes, the women padded along in bare feet with huge bundles on their backs, or baskets balanced on their heads, while the menfolk walked along carrying nothing more than a stick or an umbrella. Generally speaking the women are better dressed than the men the latter almost invariably in clothing patched in cloth of various colours and often hanging in tatters which gave them a rather garish appearance. There are also a good number of women dressed in white shoes religion it

is to cover their face, only their eyes being visible.

There is a very noticeable odour of garbage and other refuse, an all too evident sign of bad sanitation.

Monday night was again a nerve whacking one, and excellent moonlight no doubt helped the raiders a lot.

We were told that we had arrived in the rainy season and we had in fact already experienced it intermittently. The majority had built shelters from bamboo and palm leaves, and although they were commodious and attractive Sidney Lambe and I decided that they would only be proof against showers. Thereupon we got cracking on a bivouac of orthodox army style made from two ground sheets and utilising our capes to cover the ground.

How thankful we were on Tuesday night for this shelter. The most torrential rain came down, woke us up with its heavy drumming on the walls of our bivouac. Although a certain amount of water inevitably percolated in at the head, for the ends were of course open we kept perfectly dry otherwise. It was only about ten o'clock but a great stirring could be heard in the camp and judging from the colourful language the palm shelters were not standing up to it. Presently the hubbub began to subside although the rain continued to descent in torrents and was succeeded by an uncanny quiet as though the place was deserted. The two of us remained in our bivouac until seven o'clock the following morning and really had a good nights sleep. When we got up we found that we were among the very few who had kept dry. The majority had got absolutely drenched and presented a pretty bedraggled and dejected appearance, having paced the streets all night or found an odd corner to lie down in. It was obviously quite impossible for the company to spend another night there, so arrangements were made to transfer us to a sports stadium. The fortunate ones were allocated to the dressing rooms but the majority, including myself, were detailed to the grandstand and very exposed to the wind and the rain.

In the afternoon we were allowed out for a few hours and Davy and I spent quite an interesting time looking round the shops. Davy had broken his glasses so I enquired for an optician. We were agreeably surprised at the business like efficiency with which we were attended. The optician supplied a new frame and fitted the lenses in a few minutes for the modest sum of 80 Francs. Incidentally there are 300 Francs to the pound. I tried out my French and got on fairly well. Among other things he spoke of the difference in the discipline between the British and American Services and other Colonial army where even a Lance Corporal must be saluted under penalty of 4 days in the jug. Afterwards we went into a small restaurant for a meal, but we did not enjoy it very much.

The weather that night was simply foul and it was quite impossible to occupy my place at the back of the grandstand for the rain had simply poured in. I spent a most miserable time somewhere in the centre of the grandstand wedged between the seat and the stone floor. About 4 a.m. I was fitfully dozing when the order came through for us to pack ready for moving.

Altogether we were given about an hour to get our things together, soaking wet as they were, and soon after five we marched off to the gates.

We had previously noticed and jokingly commented on the carriage trucks labelled "Hommes 32040, Cheoaux 8", but we

'We were given two oranges each - a rare treat in those days'

were not quite so flippant when we found that we were to travel in them regardless.

The journey took some 24 hours and jolly uncomfortable it was too. Our meals were eaten en route, not least among the feats being to brew our tea on our little spirit burners while the train was lurching and swinging at 40 miles an hour. Cramped as the space was in the daytime, it was even worse at night when we composed ourselves for sleep – there was simply no room to stretch our legs and we were obliged to huddle ourselves together.

The journey finished abruptly Friday morning in the early hours and there was a confused scramble to get our kit together. We were at the town of Bougee, not our intended destination as we afterwards discovered. Damage to the line further along made it impossible for us to proceed further. The transit camp was about a couple of miles outside the town, it turned out to be a brick works, very dusty, but at least dry for which we were thankful.

The scenery passed on our journey from Algeria to Bougee was wild and mountainous and the line often passed through long tunnels cut in the rock. The countryside presented a acid appearance, evidence of the scorching powers of the sun in the summer time. The little grass that was to be seen was brown and withered and ugly cacti and yucca like plants were the outstanding flora. A river deep down in a valley had only just started to flow again but it was simply a mass of liquid mud. One or two rather fine suspension bridges were also to be noticed.

During the few days we were here I was only able to get to Bougee once and that was on Sunday afternoon. There was an amateur concert at the Municipal Theatre which passed quite a pleasant couple of hours. The theatre is rather fine, very modern with attractive concealed lighting. Afterwards we penetrated into the Arab quarter, and in one of the shops which exhaled an aroma of curry and spices bought some writing paper. Incidentally the BMA paper money with which we have been supplied will not always be accepted.

Each morning there have been vendors of oranges and mandarins and no doubt they have made big profits on them for these fruits grow in profusion here. I also sampled the rye bread made here and although it has a slightly sour taste it makes a welcome change from the biscuits.

ON Monday afternoon we left Bougee in the same "state coaches" and with the prospect of a three day journey in front of us spent under the same conditions as previously. We passed through a variety of country changing from arid and desert like tracts where camels are used for transport and the houses are the easiest hovels of mud and wattle to wooden and more fertile parts with orange groves and vineyards. The native children would always come running up when the train halted and clamour for biscuits and chocolate. The older ones sometimes wanted clothes and seemed to have plenty of money to pay for them. At a place called Duvivier which we reached on the Wednesday afternoon the train was taken over by an electric locomotive for the remaining part of the journey was steeply uphill. We soon noticed a drop in temperature for up to now the weather during the daytime at least had been warmer. At a station called Leeverdade we were 732 metres above sea level. About

eight in the evening we reach Soul Ahras and after a couple of hours wait marched to our billets which turned out to be a building actually used for wine making. By daylight I have seen the huge barrels or vats in which the wine is stored and also the wine press. None of us slept very well last night owing to the cold. We have not seen our kitbags since we came off the boat and as these contain our blanket our only covering at night is our overcoat.

2 Dec 42 – *Disembarked at Souk Ahras, Algeria*

17 Dec 42 – We stayed at Soul Ahras just under a week. During that time we did very little in the way of work, except one night to clean some wreckage and debris at the railway station where two trains had collided. Washing facilities were not very good but we are getting used to that now. There was a well which had a rotating arm the turning of which operated an endless chain of small buckets bringing the water to the top.

Outings on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon into Souk Ahras were our only diversions but there was very little of use to be obtained there.

On the Tuesday morning we moved again, this time by road. We were uncomfortably crowded into open lorries and to make matters worse it was raining. The road wound tortuously round the mountains, and was pretty badly surfaced in parts. We arrived at Lakiet Yoaseef about two in the afternoon. Our billets were in a little village three kms from Lakiet called El Khemis. There is a lead mine here and the community seems fairly prosperous. Our accommodation was in a "Oakke de Fite" which is quite the best billets we have had. Unfortunately the war had prevented it from being completed but at least it is dry and free from draughts.

I was put on a twenty four guard almost straight away. The drawback all along has been lack of lights of an evening compelling us to retire to bed at seven o'clock or thereabouts, but at least we have the comparative luxury of a blanket now. Also small lamps have been constructed from sweet tins giving a dim illumination but better than nothing. At the same time there is not much leisure for we are now working seven days a week on road repairs.

The country here seems more fertile than that we have seen previously and is well wooded. Land is ploughed in any part at all suitable often on the sides of quite steep hills. Mixed yokes of oxen and horses are often used as plough teams and work where tractors would be useless.

The weather now is quite cold, although the sun during the middle hours of the day has surprising warmth.

22 Dec 42 *Moved to Testour*

2 Sections under CRE 6 Armd Div

2 Sections under 5 Corps at Souk El

Khemis

2 Sections under 5 Corps 20 miles West of Bizerta

2 Sections under 6 Armd Div 6 miles

South-east of Souk El Khemis

23 Dec 42 – After exactly a fortnight at Lakiet during which time we had settled down and made ourselves fairly comfortable, we had our orders to move again and I am now situated in a stable in a good deal nearer the front.

Whilst engaged on road repairing I had the opportunity of speaking with a French farmer who had emigrated from Marseilles, spent his honeymoon at Algiers and settled down in Algeria where he Algeria where

he had quite a prosperous looking farm. He had quite a large acreage under cultivation mostly given over to the growing of corn and silage. Amongst his livestock there were white turkeys which I have not seen before in England. The oxen of which he had a good number were housed in a byre built directly to the house. There was his wife and two children, a boy and a girl and they seemed a very kindly and respectable family. One lunch time I was invited in for a cup of black coffee. Their home was quite well furnished, but the electric installation was not very satisfactory as it was generated by a fan and unless there was a strong wind blowing they did not get much light. I was rather surprised to hear from the farmer that there used to be lions and panthers in the forests not far from him, and are still some of the latter. The nearest I have seen to wild animal life are two lizards and a couple of particularly repulsive looking scorpions.

Sidney and I decided to try the café in the village one evening. Apparently we arrived after they were closed for we were told as much although it was only seven o'clock. The proprietor, however, let us in but there was not very much to drink. We each had a grenadine, insipid and sickly stuff, followed by a peppermint which was nearly as bad. The family in the meantime were having their evening meal and we felt a bit awkward. But upon offering him a pipe full of English tobacco he skewed towards us and one learned that he was a refugee from Paris and had become separated from his wife and child in Tunis where in fact they still were.

27 Dec 42 – *Sgt Cocking, Ptes Bear and Hedges killed and 13032638 LCpl Symes wounded during bombing at Souk El Khemis*

17 Jan 43 – We have been nearly a month in our present billets, the longest stay in any one place so far. Last night however, around about midnight there came a despatch telling us to be ready to move off in the morning. It is while we are waiting for transport to take us to our destination that I am writing these notes.

I will return to December 22nd to describe our journey from Lakiet to the farmhouse we have been occupying since. The journey, a matter of eighty to a hundred kms took much longer than anticipated due to last minute alterations to the arrangements. I should mention here that the company was now to be split up into several detachments and the one I was in which comprised sections four and eight beside my own, found ourselves dumped at an isolated farmhouse at about ten o'clock at night. No organised arrangements could be made for sleeping that night, and we each chose our places in which to make our beds. Some slept in a barn, the straw forming a comfortable mattress, although it was afterwards discovered that a donkey was an occupant of this barn. I myself slept in one of the rooms of the house.

The following day was occupied with getting things ship shape, and it was decreed that our section should sleep in the aforementioned barn. This necessitated clearing out all the straw and generally making the place habitable. Ian, Brian and myself found some boards which we raised off the floor on some bricks and had a little more give than the floor itself. Part of section eight departed this morning to re-join the headquarters detachment.

We started work on the following morning, which was Christmas Eve, under foul weather conditions for it rained all day. The work was similar to what we had been doing before, that is road repairing.

‘Our billets turned out to be a building used for wine making’

In the evening we had a visit from the Major. He regretted, he said the fact of the company being split up just before Christmas, particularly as a pig had been bought for the Christmas dinner. He added that Christmas day would not be a holiday and although it was not the Christmas intended, "We could still enjoy it working like hell!" As it was our fare merely consisted of the compositions with the addition of a bottle of beer and a couple of oranges.

We were only two or three days on this roadwork when we were transferred to a stone quarry. Here it was our job to load the lorries with stores, the actual road mending now being done by Res and Arabs. The men employed at the quarry excavating and crushing the stone were all natives. I soon became acquainted with the checker there, an Arab rather better educated than the labourers. I acted as interpreter when there was anything he wanted made known to our Sergeant or officers and he would address me as Monsieur Ernie. His name was Mouldi. I learned a few words of Arabic from him.

A fortnight ago we had our orders to move, but after waiting hours for the transport to arrive, the lorries that did eventually come could only take two of the sections, and it was understood that we should be picked up the following day. But the order was later countermanded and we remained behind. We now had the opportunity of moving into the house itself and apart from finding the stone floor very hard have been quite comfortable. The only snag now was that guards came round every third and fourth night. But on alternate guards we were on a day picquet too, and this gave us our opportunity to have a bath and wash our "smalls". It was unfortunate I was on guard last night for we received orders to move and today I would have been "off" that is with the exception of the two two hours spells of duty. As a matter of fact it is now well after eleven and nothing has transpired yet.

I should mention that there were several daylight raids by Jerry and his "eggs" at times dropped uncomfortably close. It is with regret that I record the deaths of three of our Company who were working two or three miles from us and were killed by a bomb.

There has been little enough to do of an evening, but I have been quite contented spending the evening reading. Usually we have retired to bed fairly early.

19 Jan 43 – Coy has suffered from shelling and dive bombing for the past 10 days.

13086760 Pte A Dennerley severely wounded. Unit equipment partially lost. Coy is now entirely supporting 6 Armd Div.

1 Feb 43 – 6 casualties suffered at Robaa following dive bombing on an ammunition lorry. Cpl Edwards, Ptes Lake and Norris subsequently died of wounds. 13022610 Pte HG Davenport, 3852640 Pte W Sharples & 924992 Pte AH Slade wounded.

5 Feb 43 – 1 Section under mortar fire at Bou Arada. Had to retire and leave the track to enemy forces – no casualties.

8 Feb 43 – Quite a long interval has elapsed since my last entry and there are a fair number of events to record. I left off at the stage where we were waiting for transport to move us. It did not arrive as a matter of fact till twelve o'clock. We now learned of our destination which was Souk Bou Arada a place we had already seen on our way from Souk El Khemis. We found

'There were several daylight raids by Jerry and he dropped his "eggs" very close'

when we got there that we were attached to another Pioneer Company and were to be in bivouacs. Syd Strancks and I shared one and were fairly comfortable in it. We found that the Company were on bulk rations and were really faring well. We had a hot dinner brought out on the job, consisting of meat and potato pie with whole potatoes in tins, followed by rice. This was certainly an improvement on the food we had been having, but the credit was due to the cooks and does not necessarily mean that we should have done so well from our own company.

We were only there a couple of days for it was a mistake that we were moved at all. During that time we worked at the station constructing a length of track. We had the opportunity of a Turkish bath in the town. It was a novel experience for most of us (I mean, of course, the fact that it was a Turkish bath!). The place had quite an oriental atmosphere. At the pay desk there were seated a coloured gentlemen resplendent in a bright robe and white turban who reminded one of some eastern potentate presiding over his court. We passed into a dressing room which was furnished with raffia mats of the most vivid colours. Having undressed we wrapped a striped towel around us and went through a door into the first room. Here an attendant whipped the towel of us and we passed through a series of rooms which got progressively hotter and more steamy. In the last room there was a square bath sunk in the floor in which you plunged enjoying the luxurious warmth of the water. Returning I was collared by the attendant and led to a low stone dais, where it appeared he did his best to break my neck and dislocate my arms. In fact I felt rather like the victim of an all in wrestling match. With a final grunted "OK" I judged that he had finished with me. In a small cubicle he now proceeded to lather me followed by douches of water, and that was my bath over.

We returned to our farm house near Souk El Khemis and took up our original places. But we were only here a few days and moved on the following Monday. It was to a place nearer the front, we reached it after dark and were obliged to sleep in the lorry that night. The following day I helped to erect a tent and this I am now sharing with six others. The work is much the same as we have been doing, that is training and mending the roads. The night before last after a long spell of dry sunny weather we had some very heavy rain which seeped into our tent. When we went out on the job we found a raging torrent in a river bed which looked previously as though it had not had water down for years, it was now rushing across the road, the sand having blocked up the pipes that had been constructed to take it. By the end of the day the level had subsided sufficiently to make the road passable at least until another such deluge occurred.

23 Feb 43 – Once more I am continuing these notes in different surroundings for we moved last Saturday and are now in bivouacs at a farm some few miles further up.

Last week I had a day off for the purpose of having a bath and doing my washing but things did not go according to plan. We had completed the odd jobs required of us in camp and had our water almost ready for the bath when our moving orders for the REs came through and the tent housing

us had to come down as it belonged to them. To make matters worse it began to rain after the dismantling had taken place and our kits were lying outside getting wet. As no arrangements seemed to be forthcoming regarding other accommodation we had perforce to look around for ourselves. Fortunately Davies or "Do" as we call him whilst out for a walk had come across a disused mine working some quarter of a mile away. We decided although it was rather far from the camp to move in and accordingly got all our stuff across and proceeded to make the place habitable. It consisted of a tunnel some ten yards in length with branches left and right which penetrated for a further short distance opening out at one end into a small chamber with a kind of seat cut out of the rock running round the wall and at the other end a ventilation shaft where we made a fire for boiling the water again for our baths. But we were not destined to remain here long for after tea we were told that we would have to move back again a tarpaulin having been promised to cover one of the small roofless cottages. As can be imagined we were none too pleased about having to shift all our gear back but when all was considered this cave was rather inconvenient for meals and parades and also rather dark, it would have been quite cosy at night for we could have had a fire going without it being visible.

Seven in one small room was rather a tight squeeze but by hanging all superfluous stuff on the walls we managed to sleep comfortably enough. We were fortunate in having three of this select company who were helping to make dummy tanks and who were able to make improvements such as a door and shelves etc. But alas we were only in there three or four days when we got the moving order which has transported us to this farm several miles beyond El Aroussa. I am now sharing a bivouac with Syd Avery and we put a lot of labour into improving it. We dug out the sit to a depth of a couple of feet sinking a channel down the middle, then forming two low platforms which with a patching of straw make admirable beds. At the same time we have sufficient head room to sit and write or read. Of course close regard must be paid to drainage as flooding would have disastrous results. Yesterday we had the day off for washing and were able to effect necessary repairs by shoring the sides with wood for the previous day's rain had found some weak spots.

Today there has been no work other than digging PAD trenches. The weather as yesterday has been simply grand, very warm and sunny.

26 Feb 43 – 7 Sections took up defensive positions east of El Aroussa and Near Bou Arada

27 Feb 43 – 7 Sections relieved by Guard Div and take up support positions

28 Feb 43 – Morale very good. All ranks are aware of the fact they have been 'front line troops' and are proud of the fact.

Weather very trying in the hills it has rained nearly every night and bivvys are not adequate protection. All sections returned to original harbours for rest and will continue work tomorrow.

1 Mar 43 – Last Monday we went out to work as usual but at about half past ten we were told to cease and report back to camp immediately. Owing to an attack launched by Jerry our position was not too healthy and we were given orders to withdraw a few miles back along the road. A patrol had as a matter of fact made a raid the previous night on a rest camp for infantry not a mile from our own camp,

killing the guards and taking ten prisoners; afterwards subjecting the rest to machine gun and mortar fire. So we headed back to our camp. On the lorry we were caught up in a stream of Churchill tanks which as it turned out were being rushed up to outflank Jerry.

Our departure was hurried (rather unnecessarily as it turned out afterwards) and we were told to leave our kitbags, blankets and valise behind. The farm we arrived at was some little distance from El Aroussa. The people in it numbered sixteen including children and was very overcrowded as they had been obliged to move out of their own place which was too near the firing line.

We spent a pretty miserable night going on guard at seven o'clock and not being relieved until one o'clock in the morning. It poured with rain most of the time which did not improve things.

The following day we erected our bivouacs here. Yesterday we went on to the long awaited bulk rations which include a great luxury to us now – white bread. The chocolate ration, however, is cut to ¾ of a bar per week instead of one a day.

I omitted to mention that the rest of the gear were brought by the remainder of the detachment late on the night we arrived here.

3 Mar 43 – *Whole Coy took up defensive positions on the El Aroussa – Bou Arada road*

9 Mar 43 – Events happen rather swiftly and it is rather difficult in these notes to keep pace with them.

Last Wednesday after pottering around on the roads in the morning we were told that once more we were moving. We got back to the farm in time to have our lunch. After which we got everything packed up. Our section was the last to move off and I had the opportunity of a talk with the people at the farm. They said that they were sorry to see us go as they could not be sure that the next lot to arrive would be as decent a crowd. One of the family, an elderly lady, who had travelled widely in her time, very kindly gave me a couple of French books – one of which was a translation from an English novel,

Our destination this time was an olive grove situated just outside Bou Arada, and as we very soon found out in front of our artillery. We set to work erecting our bivouacs not having much time to do anything elaborate with it as we were on guard that night. Soon after dark the barrage opened up; the din was terrific and you could hear the shells whizz overhead. It was a bitter cold night and the guard was a miserable one. We did not fancy our chances if Jerry had decided to send a patrol over for the place was very open.

We went out to work as usual the next day apparently the only reason for our move being to be nearer the job

Our sleep the next night was rudely disturbed by our being awoken at five thirty and told to be ready to move in half an hour – we were going back to the farm we had just left! Apparently the Yanks were moving up to occupy positions on the front and there was not room for us to remain. Actually this suited us quite well for the two nights we had been rather nerve racking and we were not sorry to leave the place.

Back once again at the farm we set about improving our bivouacs by excavating to a foot or so but had to parade for work at 9.30 and were not able to complete the job. For all the work there was to do we could have spent the day much more profitably in camp.

On Sunday I had the day off after another night on guard. I was able to have a bath and wash my clothes and also get a couple of letters written which passed a very pleasant day.

Today Tuesday we have spent loading lorries with gravel and have returned to camp early this afternoon with the intention of going to El Aroussa for a bath as there is a mobile bath unit there. It is now four o'clock and nothing has materialised yet.

15 Mar 43 – We did get our bath all right after all, but found the place a bit too crowded for comfort.

The weather continues to be very variable, blazing hot days alternating with decidedly chilly ones, and the talk about tropical kit being issued to us at the beginning of next month seems rather premature. Yesterday was quite the worst day we have had for a long time – it had been raining heavily during the previous night and continued throughout the day with scarcely a break. We went out to work and got thoroughly soaked, and the fact that we were just pottering around spreading gravel on a road did not improve our spirits – if we had been engaged on a job of vital importance we should have had less cause to grouse. As it was we packed up at dinner time for the day and today we are reaping some benefit for we have spent it in camp, and have had the opportunity of drying my clothes and effecting necessary improvements to the drainage of our tent which did not quite stand up to the deluge.

The day before yesterday our work of carrying stone to repair a road leading to our gun positions was abruptly terminated by Jerry pounding the aforementioned road pretty accurately with his artillery. We returned to camp early that day.

The coming of spring here is noticeable by the fruit trees in blossom and a profusion of daisies and marigolds along the wayside and in the fields, while the corn is now a foot high or more. Less pleasant signs are the increased activity of scorpions and centipedes. This country is the natural habitat for tortoises several of which have been encountered during our work with pick and shovel.

18 Mar 43 – *Came out of defensive line and started road work*

22 Mar 43 – The weather during the past week has been about the worst experienced since we arrived over here – it has rained every day. Yesterday after a morning of sunshine the sky suddenly became over cast and what appeared to be a cloudburst descended upon us. I was in camp at the time and had the side of the bivouac up to give it an airing whilst most of the gear was outside. I just had time to bundle the stuff inside and get the side down again when the storm burst. It came down with terrific violence for about half an hour, and a fine spray could be noticed through the canvas. I had grave doubts of our tent holding out, but apart from a few drops here and there everything was OK. Not so, however, with some of the other tents – they were simply flooded.

Last Tuesday I had the day of for washing, having a bath etc. In the evening Sgt Skarl told me that I was to represent the section by attending a course that was to be given by Mr Gibbs on malaria. It only lasted two days but I found the subject an interesting one, and one that is treated very seriously out here.

24 Mar 43 – *13061703 Pte S Bottomley – wounded in forearm by shellfire*

28 Mar 43 – *Coy HQ established at El Aroussa*

31 Mar 43 – *13093986 Pte T Kensall accidentally wounded in forearm by Tommy Gun*

March – We are not allowed to remain in any one place too long, and that seems to be the only reason for some of the moves that we have had, for futile they have often turned out to be. On Tuesday evening we moved to just outside Bou Arada, very near to the place we were at before but this time we occupied a farm which had formerly accommodated Paratroops. That night we slept in a not too clean barn, and spent a rather disturbed night in consequence of the bats which were scuttling about the place.

The following day we went out to work as usual and it was not until we returned that we were able to get cracking on our bivouac. It was quite dark by the time we had erected it to our satisfaction, and then I had to go on guard. The following day I had off and I spent the morning putting the finishing touches to the bivvy and getting my clothes washed etc. After lunch I relaxed with the satisfaction of a job well done and passed the afternoon sending and writing letters. It was Ian Brain who first of all disturbed my piece of mind by saying that there was a rumour of our moving. I did not take much notice of it as the time, but to my utter disgust it turned out to be true. We were given order to pack and be ready to move off by seven o'clock. It was pretty heartbreaking to have to leave our dug out after only one night and that a disturbed one due to being on guard.

The ride was a nightmare one over roads that were in some cases no more than cart tracks and in inky darkness so that at times the lorries veered completely off the road. By the main road the journey would have taken a matter of minutes, as it was we were obliged to make a quick detour due

apparently to convoys on the main road, but it was nearly 10 o'clock before we arrived. We could just dimly discern that we were in an orchard of some kind and informed that we would have to put up our bivouacs right away. It was a great stroke of luck that we stumbled across a hole that had originally been dug for this purpose and we erected our bivouac across it.

‘Our work was abruptly terminated by Jerry pounding the road with his artillery’

The reason that I heard for this latest move was the fact that the French had taken over this sector and it was no longer our responsibility. We have seen a number of Senegalese, jet black who come from West Africa whilst we were at the farm.

5 Apr 43 – Last Saturday we commenced a three days course of training. We were given the impression beforehand that it was to be in the nature of a change and a rest from the deadly monotonous routine of filling in holes each day. Certainly it started off quite well. We marched to the training ground a matter of a mile and a half along the road and then some distance further along a river valley. The SM told us that provided the “old man” did not show up as far as he was concerned he would see that we had an easy time. We did in fact spend a nice morning lazing in the sun and found the march back to camp for lunch the greatest exertion. The afternoon however was different – the old man did unfortunately turn up and set about organising a tactical exercise. The idea was that along the river valley there were

supposed to be enemy machine nests which it was our job to sort out. They were represented incidentally by the bottoms of petrol tins. We had to proceed in section skulking along and taking advantage of natural cover such as bushes, knolls etc. What with the weather being awful and the rough going it was pretty arduous work. After about a couple of hours of these and often having shot up the enemy so far as we had gone we were told that we had only completed about half the course but we were magnanimously let off the rest. During the afternoon we had quite a thrill when we saw a Jerry plane shot down in flames. The pilot baled out as the plane was spiralling to earth.

Yesterday morning we had a lecture and demonstration of hand grenades.

In the afternoon we did the same stuff again as it was not carried out to the Major's satisfaction yesterday. We had another thrill during this period. A plane was heard approaching and almost immediately it appeared flying very low. The engine was omitting a whining note (peculiar as I thought to the Spitfire) and I was just about to dismiss it as "one of ours" when I saw all too plainly nasty looking black crosses on it. It would have been too late to do anything but fortunately it flew straight on. The Major seemed to genuinely regret not having had the chance of a pot at it and told us to load in preparation for its coming back, which however it did not.

This morning we have walked down to El Aroussa for a bath and back in camp once more I am talking the opportunity of bringing these notes up to date before lunch. This afternoon we are going on another manoeuvre and our feelings are of relief that this is the last and we return to work tomorrow.

5 Apr 43 – Lt R Clegg and 1 section relieved the Northamptonshire Regt in the front line positions Northwest of Medjez. The position is to be a 'stop line' if the Northants attack fails or the enemy counter-attacks. Lt CW Gibbs and 2 sections are to relieve the Lancashire Fusiliers for a similar purpose at Medjez providing 4 men each night to patrol with the Grenadier Guards.

10 Apr 43 – Lt DM Davires and 2 Sections moved to a point near Oued Zarga under the command of 564 Field Coy RE to erect a bridge. Lt R Clegg and 1 section assisted in laying mines and recovering enemy mines.

11 Apr 43 – Lt CW Gibbs and 1 section holding a road block East of Madjez. They were dive bombed and suffered a direct hit on a slit trench suffering the following casualties: Ptes Stallard and Withall – killed. 276660 LCpl McAra, 1817142 Pte MT Kent and 252477 Pte CJ Powell – wounded.

13 Apr 43 – Pte RW Groombridge drowned whilst bathing. 4616721 Pte EW Blackburn recommended for gallantry in attempting to rescue the man at a risk to his own life

21 Apr 43 – 19 Mar saw us on the move again, and we are not encamped near the scene of former activity i.e. Souk El Khomis

But let me first continue from where I left off before and briefly recall one or two events that are worthy of recording.

By increasing the number doing guard the time has been cut down to 2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ hrs for each two men and we did this in one spell which meant less broken sleep. The guards since this arrangement have been coming round every six days but as the following day was free we were quite well

off. Last Friday we had orders to move, but when we arrived we discovered that it was just another blunder and the men were merely wanted for night work on a road. It was finished soon after midnight but we did not arrive back at camp till daybreak due to encountering heavy convoys on the road and also an ammunition lorry which was on fire.

And now the Company is altogether once more for the first time since leaving Algeria. This reunion is all right in as much as you meet fellows that you have not seen for a long time, but things are generally freer on detachment.

Already there are strong rumours that we are moving again and although a lot of labour has gone into making our bivouacs comfortable I am not altogether sorry, for it is a district notorious for malaria, besides which the ground is teaming with the most obnoxious insects – huge ants, earwigs, spiders and some fellow has even found a snake in his tent. I myself dug a scorpion up while we were excavating the site of our bivouac.

22 Apr 43 – Whole Coy moved to a farm adjoining Gare Las Mardja. Maintaining roads and aerodromes

30 April 43 – During our stay at this farm which only lasted three or four days, apart from a few muster parades and one for baths at Souk El Khemis there were no organised working parties. The Major in a speech told us that we would shortly be working on an aerodrome road as we were now back in No 14 (AC) Group. The evening before we left an impromptu concert was held at which three French girls from the farmhouse gave a very pretty rendered song.

It was I think on the Friday (Good Friday in fact) that we marched off and I mean literally that 8 or 9 miles of hard fast slogging in the early morning it was sultry and hot enough nevertheless. The place we arrived at is best designated by the little railway station called the Mardia which it is near. Of course these few miles have not taken us out of this malaria district and the move was ostensibly designed to bring us nearer the job although I suspect more comfortable quarters for the officers influenced their decision.

The Captain called the Company on parade soon after we got there and delivered himself of a speech which for sheer offensiveness I have never heard the like. His subject was cleanliness and in emphasising the spotless condition that the previous Company had left the billets in, he went on to threaten us in a most irrational and unjustified manner with field punishment if there was anyone found leaving litter about. He even went as far as to criticise our families and our upbringing saying "because you have to live in pigsties there is no reason for your living like pigs. To judge from the way you fellows behave, at least I won't say all of you, but some at any rate, you must have been brought up in such conditions".

I question if any man has a right to speak to fellow human beings in the manner but there might have been some reason if not excuse if he had had time to judge, but we had only just arrived. He threatened us by saying that if he did catch anyone he would make him wish that he had never been born left alone conscripted. And we were compelled to listen in silence while he ranted in this fashion with endless repetitions on the same theme. Everyone's blood was boiling at having such insults

hurled at us but such is the army system we were unable to do anything about it. In conclusion I should like to say that we found the barn we were to occupy far from in the spotless condition that the Captain had painted. There was a layer of dust on the floor which gets into everything. The first two or three nights we were not allowed lights and although the place is now blacked out (with bivouacs which would be far better put to their proper use) they have to be out by nine o'clock.

The work is the same monotonous one of pot-holing the only distraction being the planes which we see almost constantly during the day

9 May 43 – Coy moves to Oued Zarga to erect Army HQ and clear an RE Dump. Pte Baird died following being wounded by an exploding mine

11 May 43 – For a couple of weeks or so now we have been taking anti-malaria tablets – they are composed of a kind of synthetic quinine. The doses have been two tablets each Monday and Thursday. Up to a few days ago they had been taken without ill effect, but since then the dose has been modified owing to the fact that a large number of the Company were taken ill with sickness and diarrhoea and the cause was traced to the tablets. I myself have not suffered in any way, but there is no doubt that a lot were pretty queer.

Owing to numerous complaints about the barn we got our own way and shifted back into bivouacs. Once more we dug ourselves in but it was a rough job this time – the novelty has somewhat worn off now. Anyway it was as well we did not make a too deliberate job of it for we were destined to remain only two or three days longer. On the evening of 5 May came the unwelcome news that we were to move at 3 a.m. Reveille was at two and after a mug of tea we boarded the lorries. The journey took rather more than three hours and took us to a rather indeterminate position some 30 kms beyond Reerja. The job we were to do was apparently an urgent one and we were on parade at eight o'clock. There was a camp for the HQ of the First Army to be built, but as usual nobody seemed to know exactly what was to be done and we frittered away the time trying to level a road. The succeeding days have been easy going ones too, and the most we have done is to erect a few tents. I have touched lucky today by being kept back to look after the Company lines.

Although the military side of the war does not enter into these notes very often I feel that without any breach of security I can record the eventual triumph of our armies in this campaign by the fall of the two last strongholds Bengasi and Tunis. We have witnessed streams of lorries packed with Jerry and Wop prisoners coming back from the front.

23 May 43 – We had only been here two or three days when the morning following the movement of half the Company we ourselves received our marching orders. But we had marched about a mile when we were told to about turn. At first I thought a mistake had been made about the direction but when we got to the camp again we were told to re-erect our bivouacs.

The move did not come until a few days later, and it was a march of about five miles to a quite pleasant spots, but rather remote from anywhere. After a few days of pottering around on roads the Res to which we were attached moved and the Company was left to its own devices.

1 Jun 43 – The past ten days or so have been very easy ones and we have had

almost more leisure than we know what to do with. After an hour and a half's drill the rest of the day has been to ourselves. Truth to tell the weather has been so hot that I have felt like a limp rag with little energy for doing more than lounging beneath the "shade" of a bivouac. I have put the word shade in inverted commas for it scarcely the right word as the interior of the bivouac becomes like an oven. Of course, by propping up the sides with stakes a little more air is obtained but then another snag is encountered – flies. There are dozens of them and seem to take a savage delight in biting chunks out of one.

We have had the opportunity of two trips to Tunis. It was quite interesting to see the place but the prices of things were exorbitant, and there is little to do but wander around the streets frequently slacking one's thirst with iced orangeade. Davy and I did try to get into a show but all the seats were booked.

2 Jun 43 – Coy moved to near Soliman – rest and training

11 Jun 43 – Coy moved to near Tunis

16 Jun 43 – On 3 Jun we moved a matter of 70 kms to within a few miles of a place called Soliman. For the first time since leaving Aochfield we were with Group HQ and the other Companies in the Group were close at hand. Neither the officers nor the men liked the idea very much, and it was soon apparent that there was nearly as much spit and polish as when we were with them before. We had to start scrubbing our equipment for the CO's inspection, but we did have a chance of getting down to the beach for a swim on several occasions. Our bivouacs were pitched under eucalyptus trees and it was certainly somewhat cooler especially as these were usually a breeze blowing off the sea. But it could be very unpleasant when it became strong enough to blow the sand which lay about there into our bivouacs and in our food.

On the 11 Apr we moved back to within three or so miles of Tunis, and are now situated in an olive grove. Last Saturday Davy and I were able to get a half day pass into Tunis where we managed to get our photographs done. On Sunday we went to a POW Camp just outside Tunis. In the In the wire compound there were thousands of Jerries and it was our job to guard them while they did various jobs in the camp.

There was quite a lot of barter and exchange going on for they would give away a lot of their personal possessions in return for cigarettes. On Monday I was feeling rather queer with diarrhoea and sickness and managed to get a billet orderly job. Yesterday we went down to the POW camp again but were transferred to the dock putting barbed wire round bombed buildings to prevent pillage.

Today Davy and I managed to get into Tunis again this time for the whole day and we went to the pictures in the afternoon and saw "Desert Victory" and "He stayed to Breakfast".

29 Jun 43 – Our work for the four following days was in the grounds of a convent where we were constructing a camp preparatory to the arrival of a unit of 800 men. The surroundings were pleasant here and we used to see the French children who went to the school there. On the fourth day we were told that the whole thing was cancelled and the Nissen hut that had been erected was left with the floor unfinished.

From there we went on to a stone quarry

for a couple of days loading lorries. The last few days we have been down at La Goidette working on the docks.

On Saturday I went to Tunis and saw the ENSA show in the afternoon but did not enjoy it a great deal owing to the fact that we were right up in the gods and on hard wooden seats.

7 Jul 43 – Once again the scene has changed for we are not situated at La Goidette a town some 15 kms from Tunis with important docks. This place was not new to us as we had been working for some days there laying down stones and gravel on the quays in order to make them suitable for loading and unloading the boats of their heavy freights of tanks, armoured cars etc. During our work there we have had a good opportunity of seeing the various craft that are no doubt to be put into action in the very near future. With a tonnage of 3,000, these boats are designed to draw only 4 or 5 feet of water and are actually cable of coming onto the beach itself. An anchor and winch will draw it into the water again when the time comes for departure. Two huge steel doors on the front open to disclose the interior of the ship and as if in a nightmare one is reminded of some fantastic Noah's Ark as the tanks like monster animals come thundering down the ramp.

Last Sunday week reveille was at the unearthly hour of half three and we were on the job at five finishing at two. This was in order that the Res could have a half day in Tunis. There does not seem to be any immediate prospect of getting into Tunis ourselves as a rest camp has been started for the Company. A section at a time are to have a week's leave, but since the scheme has been put into operation the Company has been split up into detachments. I doubt if it will come off for us. As it is since we arrived here on Monday evening we have done no work and yesterday which was quite the hottest I have experienced we spent in the sea and generally lazing about. In the afternoon Di and I had a mooch round the town. We spent a considerable amount staking our thirst and also took the opportunity of having a haircut. This included a process which is called friction. A highly scented oil is rubbed vigorously on the face and makes it sting like fury but is refreshing afterwards. The price of 30 Francs however seems a bit out of

preparation whereas the haircut itself at 7 Francs is reasonable enough.

I omitted to mention that last Tuesday week an ENSA concert party visited our camp and put on a show which was a real musical treat. All the artists were foreign and mostly French but it was sheer joy to listen to the songs charmingly put over by these girls, whilst a lady violinist a guitarist and a man calling himself the human Ostrich who ate sawdust, glass, cigarettes etc with relish constituted the best of the programme.

10 Jul 43 – Since my last entry we have done very little in the way of work and for the most part have spent our time bathing and lying around writing letters or reading. When out for a walk one evening with Di we got chatting to a Frenchman who had much to say about the conditions here during the German occupation.

Last Wednesday week there was a return visit of the ENSA concert party and we went by lorry to HQs order to see it. The show was as good if not better than before.

The day before yesterday I was lucky enough to get a pass for Tunis and by

coincidence met Davy queuing up for the EFI canteen. We went to the pictures in the afternoon and saw "Orchestra Wives" and in the evening to the ENSA concert at the Municipal Theatre. It was a shock after driving back to base at about a quarter past ten to be told that we were to turn out at one in the morning. We were supposed to see that the ramps for the invasion ships were properly supported by sand bags but there was absolutely nothing to do and we were very thankful when seven o'clock came and returned to breakfast and a much needed kip. This morning we were called out for about an hour but sent back when it was found there was nothing for us to do.

31 Jul 43 – Since my last entry we have, much to my regret moved back to the olive grove which we left about a fortnight. Of course, it was to be expected that we would be left to our own resources indefinitely, and we can, I suppose, consider ourselves fortunate that it lasted as long as it did. Several days before we left I had the good luck to be introduced to a French family by one of the fellows in our section who had got to know them. The father is an electrical engineer, having qualified in the US, and works in Tunis. The mother spent a year in England as a girl and speaks very good English, whilst of the children the two eldest girls and the boy all speak English.

I went to Tunis on two occasions since returning to HQ, Davey and I were able to get off together and we went to see Deanna Durbin in "First Love" which despite the fact that we had both seen it before proved quite enjoyable again. We are now working seasonal hours which means getting up at four, we leave off at two. If we wish we can put in a pass for Tunis and Stan Young and I did this last Tuesday visiting the cinema again to see George Raft in "Broadway".

On Wednesday we had an inoculation which left us confined to camp for 24 hours, and Friday was my day off. After visiting the EFI I booked a seat for a French version of the film "The Great Waltz". I was not able to understand much of the dialogue but the music was very enjoyable and I found the plot easy to follow. Afterwards I took a train to La Goulette and visited the French family I have got to know.

2 Aug 43 – Yesterday morning we had the privilege of a lie-in until seven o'clock and the day was a free one. Not feeling inclined to spend the day resting in camp I put in another pass for Tunis. I took the opportunity of writing a couple of letters in the writing room of the YMCA. The electricity being off the only entertainment was the Garrison Theatre and we decided to go to the cabaret that was being advertised. We got a bit of a shock when the first turn was Antonio, one of the artists of the ENSA concert party that we have already seen several times at our camp. And the whole show was practically a selection of what we had seen the previous week.

When we got back we were told the cheerful news that we were going on detachment in orders, to dig up the dead at Langstop Hill and rebury them. At about 9.30 this morning we moved off and reached our detachment about an hour later. It is about 15 kms out of Tunis on the Medjez road, and for a change we are in billets – some sort of concert hall with stone floors, whitewashed walls and a rough wooden slat at one end. I have been detailed for a job as guard over some Italian prisoners which seems preferable to handling dead bodies.

3 Aug 43 – 15 men injured in a road

'Reveille was at the unearthly hour of half three'

accident. Pte E Tait subsequently died
13 Aug 43 – Looking back on the past ten days or so I can definitely say they have been good ones. The hours have been easy, reveille at 5.30 and back in billets by two at the latest. The food was good and conditions generally pretty comfortable. There was a double bulk issue of cigarettes and we could purchase a bottle of beer a day, whilst across the road was a café selling very good drinks. As to the work itself it was naturally rather gruesome for the fellows handling the bodies at first but they soon became accustomed to it. My job merely involved collecting some Italian prisoners from the POW and taking them to the cemetery where I kept an eye on them while they dug the graves. I went to Tunis last Friday week for an hour principally in order to post a letter to the family at Khereddine arranging an outing to Carthage the following Monday. Accordingly on that day which was free I went to Tunis and after a cup of tea in the EFI made my way to Khereddine by train. Roland had received my letter OK and after having had lunch we took a train to Carthage. I saw the ruined Odeon Theatre and the remains of some houses the parquet floors of which were quite well preserved in parts. Afterwards we went to the rather fine Roman Catholic Cathedral called the Basitilique built by Cardinal Lavigerie. The priests here have white vestments and are called the White Fathers.

And now we are back once more with HQ. With its ugly olive trees and lonely situation it seems very depressing after the other place. Reveille is at 4.30 and we do not get back from work until about three. Strangely enough we were working at Carthage this morning where a hospital is being constructed.

30 Aug 43 – Since my last notes we have had our week's leave, and I will give a brief account of how I spent the time.

It was late afternoon a week ago last Friday before the lorry to take us down to the rest camp arrived. It is situated some 4 or 5 miles from our HQ just outside a village called Maecula_Rades. We have in fact passed it quite often on our way down of an evening for a swim in the sea; and the fact that it is near the sea is about its only advantage. The camp is entirely pitched on sand and this as can be imagined gets into everything. There was little to do that evening but to generally get things shipshape and afterwards go for a short stroll along the seashore.

The following morning there was a roll call parade followed by a short lecture by the Camp Commandant on what we were allowed to do to what we must not. After this we were free to collect our passes and make our way to Tunis. It is about twenty minutes walk to the station and the train leaves at 10.10. By 10.40 one is in Tunis. I had arranged to meet Davy outside the EFI and I found him here when I arrived. He was hoping to meet his cousin here but he did not turn up. After tea and cakes in the canteen we whiled away the time until 12.30 when the film we had booked to see was due to commence. The balcony seats that we had were not ideal and we sweated profusely. After steaming there for a half hour or so we were told that the electricity had failed temporarily but would be on again by 2.30. So we came out for a breath of fresh air and a very welcome pint of beer. We returned to the cinema and saw the programme, the main film being Claudette Colbert and Ray Milland in "Arise My Love". A visit afterwards to the Welcome Canteen and my first day was practically at an end. I caught the 8.15

train back from Tunis. There seems to be no restriction as to the number of people allowed and it is no uncommon sight to see them crowding the steps of the carriages and even on the roofs themselves.

Sunday I spent quite quietly and in the afternoon I walked into Rades to find a barber's which to have my hair cut. I was rather amused by the tariff which had among other things "massage ordinary – 10 fr, massage extraordinary – 20 fr".

For several days now I had been suffering from earache, and as it did not seem to be getting better I decided to go sick with it, which it must be admitted rather went against the grain while on holiday. The MO's was at the Garrison a little further along the coast, and together with another chap who was suffering from eye strain was taken by the lorry. Whilst waiting for treatment I got chatting to a Motor Mech in the RAC of the 8th Army, and found his experience most interesting. I had my ears syringed which removed some wax but did not seem to make it much easier. We returned by train arriving back at camp just before lunch. I had put in a pass for Tunis and collected same after lunch. It was about a quarter to three when I got there, and shortly after I met Sydney Shanks, There was not very much to do so we went to the Welcome Canteen, and before returning managed to get a passable (just) meal of fried eggs and potatoes in a restaurant near the station.

On Tuesday I visited my French friend at La Goulette, and had quite a pleasant time there.

On Wednesday Sidney Shanks and I after a brief time in Tunis took a train to Carthage which he had not seen. The cathedral was unfortunately closed until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, so after some time spent amongst the ruins, and in appreciation of the perfectly marvellous view across the bay, we took a leisurely walk to Sidi Bore Said a very trim and clean looking Arab village. Spying some peaches in a fruiter's I went in to buy some. In the shop also was a Frenchman, and some conversation with him relative to the possibility of finding a restaurant in the district led to a pressing invitation to accompany him. This we accordingly did down a steep path which brought us to the beach and to a chalet where he was passing the summer. After an introduction to his wife and sister-in-law he suggested a bathe and as we had our towels and costumes with us this was easily arranged. He joined us in the water with the delight and enthusiasm of a schoolboy. Afterwards over a meal of fish and tomatoes we learned that he kept a shop in Tunis, and in common with the majority during the summer put up the shutters at midday. We promised to look him up the next day in his shop. This we accordingly did, and he seemed very pleased to see us again. He asked us to Sidi Bore Said for the afternoon but we excused ourselves but promised to visit him again sometime next week. For a long time I had been meaning to see Balaedre Park and today we did get there. Whilst there are plenty of trees in full leaf, the lack of grass gives the whole place a rather desolate appearance. We also located the swimming pool but unfortunately it was closed until the afternoon. On our return to the town we came across a restaurant where we had quite a decent meal for the fairly reasonable price of 40 fr. Afterwards we

went to the 4.30 performance at the cinema where we saw Warren William and Eric Blore in "One Dangerous Night" which I found amusing entertainment.

That brings me to the end of my holiday for on the following day Friday, after lunch we returned to the olive grove.

10 Sep 43 – Coy moved to Rades

11 Sep 43 – Since our return to HQ there has been no work for us. An hour or so training is the most that has been organised for us, if I except the course on mine lifting given by an RE. This, however, did not run its allotted time of a week, owing to the instructor being recalled to his unit on the third day.

The laundry position for the past two or three months has been most unsatisfactory, ever since in fact the issue of soap ceased. This followed upon the inauguration of a so-called laundry service way back at Soliman. Our clothes (or rather I should say not out clothes, as the whole affair was a glorified bag wash and the odds were very much against getting one's own things back) were returned very little cleaner than when they were sent, so the laundry was dropped. But the soap has never been re-issued and ever since that date we had had to ike out our NAAFI ration (1 bar per fortnight) for washing ourselves and our clothes. Just before we went on our leave arrangements were made for a mobile laundry to do the job. It sounded alright for although we should not be getting our own things back we were assured that all unserviceable items would be replaced. But we returned from leave to find they had not been sent owing to the machinery having broken down. In consequence we were handed back stuff which besides not being our own was in a far worse condition than the things sent. We were given soap and told to wash them, but to crown it all the next day the laundry starts again, so in our clothes have to go once more. We did on this occasion have them returned clean but I disliked having other people's clothes. Much as I detest washing I should prefer it to this system.

Our latest move of which I am about to relate has come from our higher command than the OC and for no better reason that that he and his clique can be nearer to the women that they consort with. Our situation now is that delectable spot Rades where our leave was spent. They have only consulted their own selfish interests in this move, for as previously stated the site of the camp is on sand, which while it is no great drawback for the officers and sergeants not to mention certain others in privileged positions all of whom are able to

carpet their quarters with coconut matting, the poor privates on the other hand is lucky if he is able to scrounge a bit of matting. The human animal is by nature a selfish animal and I suppose the majority are out for all they can get. I do not make out that I am so much different from the rest, but I do say that when

things come to such a pass as this it is about time the company got cracking on something that is going to help to make this war end a bit sooner. I feel almost as cynical sometimes as our old friend Wovitt, and wonder if their strings are being pulled in certain quarters by people who are having such a goof time in the army that they do not want this war to end. Thank God than present events do much to dispel such feelings and there is reasonable hope that the next few months will bring about the final and utter defeat of the perpetrators

'The laundry position is unsatisfactory since the issue of soap ceased'

of all this misery and suffering.

I have omitted to mention the job that I have been given just over a week ago. It is that of First Aid Orderly to the Company; it means that I have to dress all minor cuts, sores etc from which a large proportion of the fellows are suffering. In this climate where the flies are such a pest they readily turn septic and need daily attention. I accepted the job although I have had little experience in that direction, but a morning spent in the treatment room down at the MO's has taught me the usual procedure. Of course, if the case is a more serious one he reports sick. I felt that I was perhaps doing a more useful job than any since we arrived out here, but at the same time I shall have no scruples about turning it in if a repetition of what occurred this morning happens again. Our super-conscientious Sergeant Finmore as Orderly Sergeant had me on a job making a framework for a tent. This job that I have may not be a hard one, but I am called upon at all hours of the day including sometimes the evening and I don't feel inclined to assist in other directions. As a matter of fact when my section moved off on detachment last week I felt rather disappointed that I was not accompanying them.

19 Sep 43 – Last Wednesday week I went to Tunis on my own. After having my photo taken, and a snack in the YMCA I took a train out to Sidi Bou Said. On my previous visit there I had not really explored the village, but this time I spent about an hour there, and it is quite interesting, feature being the rather picturesque market place. I then returned to Carthage where I had a light lunch of spaghetti. The museum is open again but I am afraid I found the visit rather uninteresting. I got back to Tunis by 4.30 in time to get into the cinema where I saw Frank Morgan in "The Wild Man From Borneo".

Last Saturday I paid another visit to Tunis in the company of Davy. We went to the pictures in the afternoon and saw Loretta Young and David Niven in "Eternally Yours". Afterwards we strolled along to the drapers owned by the man whom I had got to know at Sidi Bou Said. We went out with him and had a black coffee and an ice, and he asked me to come along again next week when his wife would be at home. At the moment she is down at the chalet in the day time.

Last night accompanied by Phil Novitt, Davy and two others we gate crashed an RASC dance. It made a nice change for it is the first dance that I have been to over here, but it was a pity that it was so crowded and the fact that I had on my boots did not improve matters.

In the army one is often encountering anomalies and contradictions which make the rules, rigid as they are, rather ridiculous. As an instance there is the question of wearing of long trousers after sundown. This, of course, is one of the precautions against malaria but no thought was given to the fact that when we got up in the morning it was still dark yet we had to parade in shorts. Similarly although we are exhorted to take medicine for our own benefit the issues have been very irregular – we might go two or three weeks without having any issued. Again, we have recently had a blanket taken off us leaving us with two which seems rather inadequate with the winter coming on. Another example is regarding the sores which are so prevalent. They have come to the conclusion after all this time that they are due to lack of salt in the blood and have just started issuing us with salt tablets.

24 Sep 43 – Accompanied by Sydney

Shanks and D Davies I went to Tunis on Tuesday. I paid a call on our friend the draper in his shop and he invited the three of us back to his flat where we had a most enjoyable meal. An aperitif call Amis which was very strong was drunk before the meal. Then we had tomatoes and onions, followed by a lentil soup and best of all after that a fried egg and fried potatoes. We finished up with melon and black coffee. The table was now cleared and we played cards. During the course of the game his wife and three sisters arrived and joined the proceedings. We taught them "Old Maid" and "Donkey". We left about four o'clock and went to the cinema to see Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake in "Sullivan's Travels".

29 Sep 43 – In my job of First Aid Orderly I naturally have to see that the supplies of medical stuff are kept up. This entails an indent signed by the Major and countersigned by an MO. I took this along to a station in Rades for the counter-signature last Saturday but had to leave it and call back for it the following morning. When I went along on Sunday morning I had the intention of collecting the indent, and armed with a pass taking it to the CCS in Tunis. But I found it still unsigned, fortunately, however, they fixed me up with the necessary stuff there and then. I brought it back to camp and thought that I might still make use of my pass. I was fortunate in getting a lift in one of our trucks right into Tunis. I only stayed in town long enough to see a film called "In Which We Serve" with Noel Coward which I found very sincere and moving entertainment, and afterwards to have a cup of tea and a couple of cakes in the canteen.

It is most unpleasant here when there is a wind, for the sand is blown into the tent and covers everything and scarcely a day goes by without this wind springing up and continuing for an hour or so. Recently clouds have been gathering in the sky and at night vivid flashes of lightning are to be seen. Yesterday morning the weather broke and we had a heavy downpour of rain. Since then it has been extremely cold, and last night the one blanket was certainly not enough and I was obliged to put my overcoat on. This morning was cold but the sun still has plenty of power when unobscured by clouds, and it is fairly warm now.

1 Oct 43 – Another indent for medical supplies gave me a further opportunity for a visit to Tunis. On my arrival there I booked up for the film "Nice Girl" starring Deanna Durbin. I then set out to walk to the CCS which is a fair distance from the centre of the town. An enquiry here elicited the address of the school from which the medical requirements are actually supplied. I left the indent to be called for next Wednesday and made my way back to town. I had time for a cup of tea and a sandwich in the EFI before going into the cinema. The film was an enjoyable one although I have seen Deanna Durbin in better. Afterwards I visited the TOC H for further light refreshment. Gracie Fields was appearing at the Garrison Theatre but all seats had been booked up. I returned in time for dinner. It is rather awkward to stay out later as there are so many chaps that require dressing after they return from work.

4 Oct 43 – On Saturday morning there was a dance given by the CRE of 20 Group and Davy and I went along to it. There were so few girls there however, that the dance was a flop, the only bright spot of the evening

being the cakes of which there were an astonishing variety considering they were made by army cooks.

I was only congratulating myself recently on having escaped the general epidemic, but about a fortnight ago I took the skin off my elbow. Just as a precaution I thought I would dab some acreflamic on it, but nevertheless it turned septic and I have been treating it ever since. The Yanks are not nearly so subject to these sores and this is no doubt attributable to the better balanced diet. It seems that there must have been a sad lack on the part of the dieticians who are supposed to work all this sort of thing out for different climates.

11 Oct 43 – Last Wednesday I went in the Company's truck to Tunis in order to collect the medical supplies on order. However, owing to the fact that the CCS in question believed they were moving no indent could be executed until Monday following and all I was able to get were bandages. I say all but I actually came away with half a baleful which they seemed pleased to get off their hands.

As I had a pass I dropped off in the centre of the town to spend the afternoon there. The streets were wet from earlier rain and soon after I arrived it started again. The film I went to see was Anna Neagle in "Nurse Edith Cavell", a sincere and moving performance. I caught the 6.50 train back to Rades.

Some amenities have recently been provided for the men in the shape of a dining tent, and a marquee for recreational purposes in which has been installed a wireless. Now for the first time we are able to hear the news at first hand, instead of indirectly from someone who has been listening to another unit's set. As to the programmes themselves I seem to have no interest in them, chiefly I think because the only real enjoyment is listening to them is seated in a comfortable armchair in one's own home.

20 Oct 43 – Last Tuesday week I had the first intimation that my job would be soon coming to an end. Captain Higgs is now in command of the Company following on the departure of the Major, and apparently he did not consider the job warranted one man being wholly employed on work of this nature. However, Freddy Day who told me of this also informed me that owing to Sgt Allchurch being in dock an understudy was desirable and he had recommended me.

The next day, Wednesday was my day off and I went to Tunis and called on my friend who keeps the draper's. He asked me back to his flat and had lunch there in the company of him and his wife. The meal included a home-made sausage which in politeness I had to tackle although not fancying it a bit. It was salty and very tough, and I soon regretted eating it, for shortly afterwards I was seized with violent indigestion and hiccups. They were very concerned about me and made me lie down. I must have reacted over an hour before I got over it, but it did pass off eventually and I left them about four o'clock. I had arranged to go to the ENSA show and as the rest of the party who had my ticket had gone in I had a little difficulty in getting in. The show itself was very live and entertaining and better than the previous ones I have been to.

The following day I handed over the medical stuff to the store and after lunch reported to the Company Office.

As nothing was said relative to my vacating the tent I continued to sleep there

'We now have a wireless and can at last hear the news first hand'

until Monday when Stevie who was taking a kit inspection asked me what I was still doing in there when he came to my lay-out. As I was on pass that day I persuaded him to allow me to stay there until the next day.

After seeing "Convoy" with Clive Brooke and John Clements I took a train to Khereddine to visit the people I had got to know when I was on detachment at Goulette.

29 Oct 43 – The past few days have seemed almost unreal to me, and even now it is difficult to realise the full implications of the blow which befell me last Friday morning.

I reported to the office as usual and was astounded to be told that I was to be posted to another Pioneer Company. The position briefly was that a clerk was required in the office of that Company and by virtue of my being in the office of 6 Company temporarily was considered sufficient qualification for this transfer. I appealed to Higgs who had just been made up to Major and was also going to this Company, but it was of no avail. So feeling utterly miserable I packed up, and late in the afternoon the transport arrived to take me to 132 Company. It was pretty heartbreaking leaving all the old familiar faces behind; many of the fellows I had known practically ever since I joined up.

It was after dark when I in the company of four others who had also been posted arrived at the camp situated in a remote part beyond a place called Ariana. I kipped down in the store that night. The following morning reported to the orderly room and met Cpl Thompson and Arthur Scott my two colleagues hence forward. The day was quite a busy one checking nominal rolls etc and getting things packed up.

The next morning Tuesday we moved off. We travelled by road in troop carriers; the journey was of some hours duration and it was afternoon before we arrived at our destination (for the time being) which was actually in an assembly area just outside Bizerta.

And here we remained until yesterday morning. During that time I had the opportunity of getting to know some of the fellows in HQ with whom I was sharing an IR Tent. Besides the two already mentioned there were the cobbler, tailor, sanitary man, post Corporal and one of the drivers. I went to an open air American picture show one evening. The film was a new version of "The Constant Nymph" with Charles Boyer and Joan Fontaine. It was altogether too sloppy and sentimental for such an audience and called forth many bawdy remarks and comments.

Yesterday morning we moved off in Full Marching Order and covered a matter of three miles. Contrary to expectation we did not go straight on to the boat, but stopped in a large field. We hung about until nearly four o'clock getting a meal from a nearby cookhouse and then we were told that we to put up our bivouacs for the night.

This morning we learned that the hitch had been caused through some of the boats putting in for repair and we were not expected to move today.

This afternoon, however, we got half an hour's notice to move and I am now writing these notes in a landing craft, which, however, is not the one we are to sail in but to merely giving us shelter from the rain for the time being. For it seems that in a

very short while my feet will be off African soil and although it is not an attractive country in itself I have genuine regrets in leaving it which I suppose are bound up with the fact that I am parting with some nice people whom I was looking forward to seeing at least several times more.

Extract from 132 Coy Diary:

24 Oct 43 – Moved to Bizerta and embarked

30 Oct 43 – It was nearly ten o'clock last night when we were given some tea and biscuits and cheese. After that we were told that we would be sleeping on the boat that night. There were bunks for us and I spent a reasonably comfortable night, although I did not bother to unpack my blankets. This morning we moved on to the next boat. It is absolutely jammed full of troops and to obtain a bunk was quite out of the question. Practically every inch of the floor space is taken up too, so I can look forward to a pretty uncomfortable night. In fact I shall certainly not be sorry when this trip is over for reactions to the voyage coming over from England have turned me right against sea travel.

I feel utterly fed up at the moment and to make matters worse I have not received any mail for over a fortnight. Goodness knows how much longer it will be now.

1 p.m. (approx.) – As there is absolutely nothing to do I may as well occupy myself for a little while adding to this chronicle.

I have just had lunch a sumptuous repast of biscuits, bully and cheese. Henceforth there will be no bread until we get settled down the other side and then probably not straight away for it is doubtful if the bakeries are in full operation yet.

The boat I am on is of a type with which I have become familiar at La Goulette. I did not however, think that it carried troops other than the drivers and personnel of the mechanical transport taken on board and believe actually that that is its primary purpose. I suppose, however, that the pressure on shipping is so great that the boats are loaded with as many as they will possibly carry. Having cast off from the quay we are not at anchor in the middle of the harbour, I hope that we get started soon for I shall be glad now when we get to the other end.

31 Oct 43 – Little moved in Bizerta harbour, and I believe unlikely to be sailing until tomorrow. This morning we had a practice drill for abandoning ship.

Yesterday I had a hot shower bath, a luxury I have not enjoyed for months if I except the one I had the other day while camped in the assembly area.

The meals are very frugal and I miss the mid-morning tea. Breakfast consists only of bacon and beans and the now uneatable biscuits. These should I think be porridge to make this meal more substantial. But then I imagine that if I suffer as I did on the last trip the food will be more than adequate.

3 Nov 43 – I suppose that speed as never before is the main factor in coming battles and yet it would appear otherwise where the Navy is concerned. At least that is my impression gained from the events of the past few days. Already this is the fifth day since boarding the boat and we have only got as far as Sicily.

We commenced sailing about 1 p.m. the day before yesterday. The sea although quite calm was sufficient however to set the craft which only draws about five foot of water rolling a bit which in turn began to

have the same effect on my stomach. I ate my dinner that evening but with considerably less relish than usual. A four hour guard was my lot the same evening and during that time I was sick.

Since then I have felt an utter disinclination for my meals although I have forced myself to eat them. Yesterday afternoon the fishes had another meal. During all the latter part of yesterday there was land on our port bow and there was no doubt that this was Sicily. When I came on deck this morning I found that we were at anchor in the harbour of Augusta, and are still there as I write these notes in the early afternoon.

5 Nov 43 – This voyage seems interminable, I quite thought we should reach Taranto sometime this morning but it is now past one o'clock and we are not even in sight of land.

On Thursday night after having settled down for the night I was suddenly woken and told that I should have to get up as the floor was rapidly becoming flooded due to rain and defective pipes. Accordingly I followed the cox'n to the sailors' quarters where he told me and another fellow who had also been affected we could spend the night.

Yesterday was wet and stormy booking. The sea was rather choppy and the ship rolled and pitched quite a bit today, however, the weather is fair and the sea quite smooth.

Nearly all yesterday we were sailing within sight of land, but for some reason our course seems to have changed and as previously stated there is nothing but water on every side as far as the eye can see.

6 Nov 43 – Landed at Taranto, Italy

9 Nov 43 – About seven o'clock Friday evening I heard the anchor scuttling out and knew that we had reached our destination. It was not however until the following morning that we actually docked. I was thankful to tread on terra firma once more but we were kept hanging about on the quay side and about eleven o'clock it started to rain, whereupon we took shelter in one of the landing craft. Lorries seemingly running a shuttle service gradually cleared the Company. We were taken just outside the town whilst it was still raining and to our utter disgust found that we were to bivouac in an olive grove of all places. The ground was already soggy from previous rain but worse was to come. I was fortunate in having a bivvy to myself. That night it rained intermittently but I kept dry inside. The following morning was bright but by the afternoon it was raining hard and I sat in my bivvy in growing apprehension of the rain percolating through. True enough, a pool began to collect at the entrance and quite suddenly a little while after I found that it had spread under the lower part of my groundsheet. Something had to be done and quickly too and although it was still coming down in torrents I went outside and with my bayonet feverishly started digging a channel to drain off some of the water. I now went back inside to view the extent of the damage and concluded that with luck I should be all right if I laid my bed out semi-diagonally as towards the back of the tent which was on higher ground. And although I was in some trepidation during the night when there were some more showers beyond a few heavy spots through the canvas itself I kept fairly dry and warm.

Yesterday morning dawned bright but by breakfast time it has started to rain again harder than ever. This lasted for about an hour and when I went back to my bivvy I decided that I should have to find a fresh

'I was astounded to hear that I was to be posted to another Pioneer Company'

site. Fortunately the rain seemed to have spent itself for the time being and a wind which had sprung up helped to dry my things. I erected the tent on some higher ground a few yards away.

In the afternoon I went down to the town and had a look round the shops. The place strikes one as much more English looking than Tunis and in that respect more civilised. We had a marshmallow and an ice cream in a café. Later in the afternoon after queuing for about an hour we got into the EFL. My impression so far of goods offered for sale is that they are cheap in comparison to Tunis. I myself have bought a couple of pairs of stockings at five bob a pair and these seem to be an abundant variety of fancy goods hawked by travelling vendors. Pipes sell at five bob and there are also fountain pens, razor blades besides fruits such as apples, figs and nuts. Certainly it is a treat to taste an apple again after so long.

The first morning the camp suddenly became invaded with women and girls in peasant costume consisting of blouse and full skirt and all wearing a coloured silk scarf on their heads. They were gathering olives from the ground beneath the trees and the scene had something of the picturesque, especially when one pretty girl suddenly beset forth into a lively Italian air in a strong and natural voice and with the effortless ease of the natural born singer.

The rate of exchange here is 400 lira to the pound as compared with the 200 fr in N Africa. Our BMA money with which we were issued is also supplemented by British lira notes as well, of course, as the Italian currency.

11 Nov 43 – Coy moved to Foggia for work on No 3 Airfield – still with 14 ACG

12 Nov 43 – The weather on Tuesday was a very welcome change – crisp and cold but sunny. In the afternoon I went down to the town again. I met Jack Cohen down there and we decided to go to the evening performance of a film that was being shown in the theatre there. In the meantime we had a look round the shops and I bought some Christmas cards. The NAAFI was also included as a necessary part of the programme but to our disgust after queuing up for nearly an hour they were sold out of all eatables by the time we reached the counter. Another fairly long wait in the queue for the theatre followed, but we were rewarded with an excellent seat in the circle. The film was quite good entertainment – Judy Garland in “Presenting Lily Mars”. There was an ENSA show afterwards but we did not stop for this as it was about an hour’s walk back to camp.

The following day was quite uneventful, except for the weather which was raining once more. In passing I might say something of the condition of the local people. There seems to be the most abject poverty amongst many of the people and some of the dwellings are worse in their squalor than any London slum. There was a swarm of children hanging about the cookhouse at meal times and they would avidly take from us the M & V left over that would have gone into the swill bin.

At about half past seven yesterday morning we moved off in open lorries and the ride that followed was a cold one although we were fortunate in having it fine. The journey took us until about four o’clock in the afternoon. During that time we passed through scenery that was certainly greener and pleasanter than N Africa has to offer, but in some respects was similar – olive groves and vineyards stretching interminably on either side. We

went through several large towns and the populace seemed to have turned out en masse to welcome us and the children particularly cheered vociferously and yelled “Amico and ‘allo” also giving the V sign. There was something of the pathetic about this – this war torn bewildered people taught for years to hate us now welcoming us as friends. Let us hope that a real understanding between all nations will be established after the war.

We are now billeted in what was formerly been an Italian barracks, a bare comfortless building but dry except possibly when it rains and the roof leaks in places which it looks as though it will, for there are tiles missing – more since yesterday morning when I was told some Italians at daybreak were up pinching them, no doubt for their own bombed dwellings. This building is partially inhabited by Italian families and as I write there are kids swarming into the basement rooms.

Foggia, the town of which we are just outside has suffered extensively from Allied bombs.

Bread, I am pleased to say as at Taranto is on issue here and this is definitely preferable to biscuits.

21 Nov 43 – The past week has been occupied with getting things generally straightened out in the orderly room. We were first of all in a room which was much too small and it was only by the constant agitation of Cpl Thomson that we obtained an adjoining room about twice the size. We were still lacking office furniture and had to manage for the first few days with boxes and some boards for tables and seats; refinements for the officers mess were considered much more important and the joiners were fully occupied for the first few days. Now, however, we are quite well fitted up, I have been sleeping in the orderly room for the past week, with Cpl Thompson and have been quite comfortable.

The weather has been foul and today has been the climax. The roof of this building is absolutely rotten and the heavy continuous rain has practically flooded the whole upstairs floor. This room beyond one or two minor leaks is all right, but for practically the whole of the rest of the company it is impossible to remain, and other accommodation has been found; even as I write I can hear the men moving out.

28 Nov 43 – The following day we moved to our new billet a modern block of flats the other side of the town. In spite of the fact that it is somewhat battered by raids it is for the most part quite sound and a decided improvement on the other place. It has been rather cold and draughty in the orderly room for there are no doors and windows. Today, however, we took over some other rooms in the adjoining block and our carpenters have boarded up the windows and hung doors.

Last Friday I went with Cpl Thompson to the theatre in town to see Myrna Loy and William Powell in “Love Crazy”.

The town has received a terrific hammering from the American Airforce and many buildings didn’t survive. There are very few shops open and my quest for Christmas presents has not been very successful. Handbags are about the only things obtainable.

A nice shower bath was very welcome after nearly three weeks since my last.

5 Dec 43 – Last Monday evening Cpl Thompson and I went to the Foggia Theatre

to see a film show but unfortunately the projector broke down and an American Hillbilly band was put on as a substitute.

Later in the week we tried the other theatre and this time there was no hitch. The picture was “Cairo” with Jeanette MacDonald and Robert Young, a burlesque spy drama, with some good comedy situations and attractive singing. Yet another outing was to the opera house on Thursday afternoon to see a South African concert party called “The Troopadoors”. It was really a very fine show the musicians were all top-line performers and some

attractively dressed females added to the enjoyment. Particularly clever was a male impersonation of a Russian soprano.

Although we have done quite well in the way of entertainment, others have

not been so fortunate due to the fact that just lately the Americans who have commandeered the two theatres showing pictures and are refusing admission to our fellows. This, as can be imagined, has provided a lot of bad feeling, and their resentment is fully justified. It means that all entertainment is finished as far as the evenings are concerned while the fact that they are open to British troops in the afternoons is of little benefit to the majority who cannot get there then. Such action is bound to cause much bad feelings and the British authorities are as much to blame for allowing what virtually amounts to a monopoly to be exercised by the Yanks. This unfortunately seems to be a general thing, and it is very unfair on the British serviceman to say the least. As officers as well as other ranks are affected, perhaps something will be done about it.

10 Dec 43 – Last Wednesday was my day off and I went down to the town in the morning and had a hair-cut in one of the many barber’s salons there. On my way back I thought I would try a meal in a restaurant. It was not up to much and scarcely worth the half-crown I paid for it.

After lunch I made my way to the town again in order to see the ENSA concert at the Opera House. All seats were taken but I hold of a block of stone and sat on it and had a fairly good view of the show. It was one I had seen before in Tunis called “Hello Happiness”, it contained a lot of low humour which seems to go down well with the troops but leaves me cold.

We have been having our washing done by the local women who are employed by the British authorities and it is certainly the best service we have had, the great advantage being that we do get our own things back.

We have become quite comfortable here, too comfortable in fact for we shall be moving in a day or so, and rumour has it that we shall be returning to bivouacs.

14 Dec 43 – Moved to San Guiseppe (Benevento) working on Pompeii airfield

15 Dec 43 – I am pleased to say that my fears expressed in the preceding paragraph have not been confirmed, for we are now in a building equal if not better than the one we have left.

Our move took place yesterday. Reveille was at half past four and we got away soon after seven o’clock. I travelled with Cpl Thompson and one of the batmen in a covered lorry in which we were only just able to squeeze as it was practically chock full of furniture belonging to the officers. And the OC preaches to us about there being too much attention paid to comfort in the British Army! As it was we utilised the chairs to make ourselves comfortable

‘People taught to hate us now welcomed us as friends’

for the journey and had an excellent view of the country we were passing through from out of the back of the lorry. The flat plains of Foggia soon gave place to more undulating country and then to definitely mountainous districts. Here was scenery which made one feel rather homesick resembling as it did that to be found in North Wales or parts of Scotland. Perhaps the mountain slopes were more sombre in colours, lacking the warm glow imparted by the heather and dying bracken, but the trees which sometimes clothed these slopes were rich in autumn tints. A seemingly different type of people were to be noticed in this part of the country; up to the present I had seen little to admire in the people of southern Italy - they were poor it is true, but slovenly also for which poverty is hardly an excuse. But now we were seeing women poorly but neatly dressed who carried themselves erectly and with a proud air. Well-built they were usually with sturdy limbs and rosy complexions, and almost invariably they were to be seen nonchalantly carrying large bundles on their heads, I observed that they had a small cloth pad on their head and on this perched a keg of water, a basket containing washing, sawn of tree-trunks, sacks presumably containing vegetables. No doubt the accomplishment of balancing these things on their head gave them their superb carriage and free swinging walk. One recalls the Victorian age when girls were taught deportment by balancing books on their heads and cannot help thinking that there was good sense behind it.

The vineyards of which there plenty differed from the ones we were accustomed to in Tunis, for instead of being cut back to small shrubs they are allowed to ramble freely and small trees are employed on which to support them. Thus the tree and the vine will be planted close to one another and the latter will be trained over one of the lower branches and led along to the next tree and so on, thus forming a kind of horizontal lattice work about eight or so feet high. I wondered however whether the grapes suffer in consequence of being in such close proximity to hazels or of a similar type, but apparently it is a successful method of cultivation.

We passed through a number of towns all more or less drab in appearance. The architecture with the exception of the government and public buildings is on the whole the most dreary and lifeless I have ever seen, even worst that the tenements and slum dwellings in England. Faded distemper of various colours only seems to accentuate the monotonous outlines of these buildings, while a peculiarity is in the glass panelled doors which make the houses look somewhat like shop entrances. As the majority of these tenements have not back yards or even suitable flat roofs, washing is seen to be draping the buildings from the top right down to the street level. Many of the buildings have patriotic phrases painted in black lettering on them and there were easily translated into "Long live the King" ditto the House of Savoy or the Prince of Piedmont. But Mussolini's name was conspicuously absent from these signs although sometimes one could see it beneath the paint that was used to block it out.

We stopped in a town for "lunch" - half a cheese sandwich and a mug of tea and then continued on our way. A thrilling moment came to us later in the afternoon when we caught our first glimpse of Vesuvius. Smoke could be seen belching

from the crater and stretching motionless across the sky. We arrived at our destination, a place called San Guiseppe about 15 miles from Naples and with a good view of the volcano. We were agreeably surprised with our billets. "Edificio Scolastico" is its somewhat grandiose title, but it is certainly a clean and modern building with light painted walls. The orderly room has a small annex in which we sleep. The caretaker, his wife and daughter are still living here and when we attempted a bit of Italian on them were vociferous in their denouncement of the Germans as "no buone".

As dusk fell we could all see flames shooting out of the crater and it was fascinating and somewhat aux-inspiring to watch. I should certainly like to climb to the top and hope I get the opportunity to do so. Before I felt 6 Company there were rumours flying about to the effect that they would shortly be going home but I did not take much notice of them at the time. Nevertheless for once it has come true, and they are now back in England. My feelings can be imagined rather than described for to be with the Company over three years and then to be transferred just prior to such a momentous event seems to have been the worst bad luck. I can only hope that the gossip that is going the rounds of the company now to the effect that we are going back at the beginning of January also comes true.

21 Dec 43 - We have had an opportunity during the past few days of seeing something of the village we are in. Son Gennasello is its name although it immediately adjoins a larger place called San Guiseppe. On Sunday morning I went out for a short while. All the shops were open and at the farther end a market was in full swing. The stalls had a display of trinkets and haberdashery but little of real worth. I bought a passable umbrella in one of the shops. A barrel organ was playing in the market place, strange to hear after all this time, and just another of those things one associates with the Italian although there was no monkey!

We had electric light installed the second day we were here and now have a stove too, so there is little to complain about in regard to personal comfort.

But the mail situation is far less satisfactory for we have had none since we arrived which is over a week now. I am afraid I must more or less abandon hope of ever seeing some letters and parcels that were addressed to 6 Company, BNAF, for there is little doubt that after coming all the way out here they will be sent back to England before being correctly re-addressed and even if they do come out again it will be some time before I get them, and of course, there is always the chance of a break in such a tenuous chain.

The weather up to yesterday has been warm and sunny, although cold in the morning and at night. Yesterday however the sky was laden with low clouds and it began to pour with rain in the evening. Previous to this, however, Cpl Thompson and I had decided on a stroll. We called in a shop to enquire about a primus stove we had ordered but it was not yet in. We had a conversation with the owner of the shop and presumably his father and by virtue of a little English spoken by the latter and a few interjections in Italian by ourselves we managed to understand one another passably well. The old man told us that he

‘My previous Company is now back in UK, my feelings cannot be described’

was in the US four years ago working on the railways. The refusal by a soldier who came in while we were there to pay two shillings for a mirror brought up the cost of living, and we learned that bread costs 5 shillings for a loaf weighing a kilo and margarine is also the same price while for olive oil they have to pay nine shillings for a bottle holding just a pint and a half.

These prices seem outrageously high and it is no wonder that the people are barely on subsistence level. Three nuns were in yesterday begging for food for the children which is an indication of the really desperate state to which the people of Italy have been brought. Incidentally they were refused which seemed rather harsh, but after all the army rations are not over abundant, in fact we usually feel they are not enough.

26 Dec 43 - Yesterday I had the day off and decided to pay a visit to Naples. The journey was by train and a very uncomfortable one for there were so many people travelling and the crush reminded me somewhat of the tube in the rush hours before the war. But the excitable Italian temperament was a contrast from the phlegm of the British under the same conditions; at the least provocation a squabble would ensue which came near to developing into a fight. On the way to the station I asked a man to make sure of the directions. I gathered that he was going to Naples and I kept in his company all the way. We had to break our journey at a point where a bridge had been blown up by Jerry. This meant a wait of about an hour for the connecting train to arrive. It was about nine o'clock when the train drew into Naples station. Another passenger director me towards the centre of the town. The main streets are rather fine, straight and wide with imposing buildings. The NAAFI has a corner building in the Conso Umberto and I had some tea and cakes. I spent an hour or so strolling through the streets. The shops had some good displays of fancy goods, but it is difficult to make the right choice in the way of presents. I found a cinema showing "Remember the Day" with Claudette Colbert and John Payne which I enjoyed quite well. When I came out I saw The British Welfare Club which I had read about in the "Union Jack". It is a most palatial building with a fine lounge and writing room and is certainly the best place I have yet seen for British troops. I caught the train about half past three in the afternoon. The journey was just as uncomfortable as coming and took about two hours.

Christmas day has been a lot better than the one we spent last year. The dinner was excellent. We had turkey and pork and Christmas pudding. The tea too was a good spread. In the morning Cpl Thompson and I went for a walk and found some quite pleasant paths through the vineyards in the district. On our way back we looked in the church San Guiseppe but found the service very dreary and lifeless.

27 Dec 43 - Commenced work at Vesuvius airfield

30 Dec 43 - The washing of clothes is not nearly so big a problem as in North Africa, for here there are always women ready to do them for us. Last week we had them washed by the people who are caretakers of the school. We were not entirely satisfied with the results however especially as we did not get all our own things back. So this week we decided to try the convent

in the village where we had been told the nuns did washing. We went along yesterday to this place. But for the figure of the Madonna in a niche in the wall one would scarcely suspect that the building was a convent judging from the outside. Two large wooden doors gave entrance to a courtyard from where we were conducted by a nun to a small waiting room plainly but comfortably furnished and spotlessly clean. The head sister shortly afterwards came in accompanied by two others and followed by an elderly man shabbily dressed and a cripple. It was soon apparent that he was the interpreter. He spoke with a pronounced American accent and we soon learned that he had spent some time in the States. Meanwhile the three nuns had drawn their chairs up in a straight line and the head sister put some questions to us through their interpreter. Some excellent vermouth was brought in during the conversation and some macaroons. Altogether it was most a hospitable reception and they even offered to show us over the convent. These women are certainly to be admired for the social work that they do. They have a home for old men here and I fancy that the interpreter was one of them although on a somewhat different footing by virtue of the fact the he spoke English. We declined this offer on this occasion but have promised to go on Saturday when we collect our washing.

4 Jan 44 – We collected our washing as arranged last Saturday and again sampled the excellent vermouth and the macaroons. The head sister did not appear this time however and there seemed no particular inclination on the part of the old chap to show us over the convent this time. He was ready enough however to accept the tobacco and cigarettes we had brought him and the fact that he did not want the nuns to see us pass them over to him, together with his direct enquiries about bring more along the next time we came confirmed our first impression that he was cashing in on this privilege and was allowed by virtue of his knowledge of English. We should have preferred that the cigarettes were divided amongst some of the other old men. Our clothes were splendidly washed and ironed.

On Sunday I had the day off and took the opportunity of going to Pompeii. Through the fact that the most direct line there has several blown bridges and is out of action, the journey was a rather roundabout one. In effect it meant going round about two thirds of the base of Vesuvius. The line is the one I travelled on when I visited Naples, however, at a place called Bassra to change onto the other line. While waiting for the train I got into conversation with an Italian who had lived 24 years in New York and who spoke good English or rather American.

I travelled with him as far as a place called Puglione where he lived. On parting he invited me to visit him if I was that way again. The train passed through some very fine scenery. On the right was the sea and rising sheer out of a huge rock which I judged to be the Isle of Capri. On the left were vineyards and in the background Vesuvius looking very picturesque in a new garb of snow. I alighted at a station short of Pompeii itself. At the entrance were numerous sellers of postcards, guidebooks and souvenirs. There was a party of Yanks going in so I tacked on to them for company. The tour of this ancient city was most interesting but I missed a good deal thought not having an official guide. On coming out I walked to the new Pompeii and had lunch in one of the numerous

restaurants there. Afterwards I went into the cathedral. This is really an architectural masterpiece with beautiful frescoes and ceiling paintings. In one of chapels was a most wonderful model of the Nativity.

Knowing the uncertainty of the trains I allowed myself plenty of time to get back. But a shock was in store for me. The electricity had failed. I waited nearly three hours in the train and then came to the conclusion that I should have to walk it. This I did, very much of the way, without getting a single lift. It was a good twelve miles and I was very footsore and weary when I eventually arrived back at camp about eight o'clock.

6 Jan 44 – Coy moved to Lago

10 Jan 44 – Since Thursday I have been helping to look after the billets while the company is away on what is believed to be a six day job near the Voltuno River. There are twelve men beside myself who are doing guards, while I am left in charge of the office and the store and also "batting" to the officers. This latter is a job for which I have no liking but I could not very well refuse. However, he gets but the minimum of attention.

The weather is crisp and cold but sunny during the day. This last two or three mornings there have been sharp frosts.

11 Jan 44 – Runway complete

14 Jan 44 – Airfield operational

19 Jan 44 – The first two or three days were "cushy" enough. I had little to do but to wait on Yorke (Ed note: a Lieutenant in the Coy) at meal times and collect the mail. I need to lend a hand sawing up the wood which it was intended should be completed by the time the company came back. Then assisted nineteen reinforcements, some of whom had been trying to catch up with our unit for three months. This resulted in more clerical work which I rather welcomed as a matter of fact.

The time passed quickly enough now. One of the Company's bikes had been repaired which made me more mobile for my daily trips to 197 Company for mail etc. There was plenty of food, far more than one gets when the company is together, although I don't know why that should be. Breakfast I enjoyed most, for I was able to enjoy it really fried, a pleasant change from the raw sausage, and greasy bacon. For the last, however, the cook harassed by Yorke's suggestions and the additional men found it a hard job to cope with the work, but we did not do so bad.

On Friday I was vaccinated.

Saturday saw the return of the company or rather half of it (the rest being left to complete the job) from airfield constructed near the Voltuno River.

I have omitted to mention that on Friday evening to

went to the local cinema to see a film called "Lucky Jordan" featuring Allan Ladd. On Monday evening I went again this time with Cpl Thompson to see Charles Laughton in "The Turtles of Tahiti".

20 Jan 44 – A very memorable day, one which has given me the opportunity of climbing Vesuvius. A party was organised from the Company, about ninety all told going and transport was provided to take us to Vesuvius and about half way up the mountain itself. The road did in fact extend a good deal higher, but a lava flow a couple of years ago blocked it to a depth of 35 metres in parts.

The base of the mountain is course with lumps of ash which have a peculiar greyish crystal-like exudation which I at first mistook for frost as the morning was a

frosty one. Higher there was a belt of rather fine pine trees. As we left the lorries and started climbing the trees soon thinned out and disappeared altogether and now there was nothing but the solidified lava around us. It was easy to imagine it in its moulting state moving sluggishly down the mountain side for in its petrified state there were whirls and waves which time had not as yet weathered. It was pretty hard going especially as I had not had any real exercise for a long time. The guide, however, saw that we had intervals of rest and I felt better after a while when I got my second wind. He told us that the lava always came out of the side of the mountain whilst only cinders and ash were shot out from the crater itself. He showed us the old cone which destroyed Pompeii. Before that great eruption which occurred I believe in 76 A.D. the mountain was 6,000 feet high whereas now it is a mere 3,700 feet. The original cone called Monta Somma is 9 kilometres in circumference. The present one became active in 1906 when there was a great rain of ashes. San Guiseppe itself suffered from this eruption.

As we got higher the lava had a fresher appearance as though but recently formed and soon quite a perceptible warmth began to emanate from under our feet. We were nearing the summit now and could hear the periodical "woof" of the gases in the crater exploding followed by cinders shop up many feet into the air.

Quite suddenly we were enveloped in a choking gas reminding me very much of that used for tests of in the gas chambers. The rock past here was a bright yellowish green and was no doubt sulphur. The guide now took us up six at a time to the edge of the crater during the lulls, and we were able to peer down into the mysterious depths. It was, however, rather disappointing as very little could be seen through the smoke and steam. We now made our way around the side of the mountain. Before we were able to get out of range Vesuvius emitted another burst which sent large lumps of glowing red chunks raining down around us; it was a rather unnerving experience to be bombarded in this fashion, and we were glad we were able to get out of the danger zone before the next explosion. We were now walking on lava which rang hollow to the tread of boots and presently came to a spot which was an even more impressive

sight that the volcano itself.

The lava here was actually red hot and molten and oozing sluggishly out of the earth itself rather like thick raspberry jam. The heat was terrific almost unbearable in fact: there were several men here nicking souvenirs from the lave. The way this was

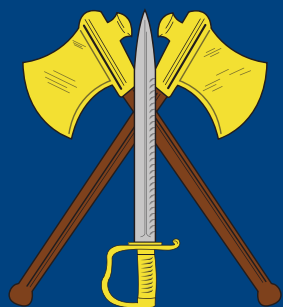
done was for one man to plunge an iron rod into the stuff, bring out a piece all flaming on the end of it whilst another moulded it into roughly circular shape by means of two small rods and pressed the cone into it.

This really concluded all that was of interest to see and the descent made considerably faster than the ascent has little worthy of recording.

It was through brown slag like stuff and the effect was rather like ploughing through snow with a momentum which needed all strength to avoid losing control and tumbling headlong. We got back to the road about half past one and after some lunch drove back to the camp.

To be continued in the next newsletter...

Blast from the Past



For this edition we have decided to publish a selection of photographs from our archives showing some of the many **Reunion Weekends**.

If anyone has any photos of past reunion weekends than please send them in.



■ 1970

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1986

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1988, featuring Dewsnap with one of his many wives

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1992, Jimmy Atkins leads the Parade

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1993

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1997, a slimmer Norman and Taff Thomas day dreaming

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1998

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 1999

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 2001

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 2003

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Unknown, do you know which year it was?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Unknown, do you know which year it was?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Unknown, do you know which year it was?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Unknown, do you know which year it was?

Picture: RPCA Archive

Press Cuttings 1941

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1941. It is the intention in future Newsletters to print details from other years.

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

THE following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1941.

The Times 2 Jan 41
DYNAMITING CITY BUILDINGS
FIREMEN STILL AT WORK
REMOVING THE WRECKAGE

The City was still a place of smouldering fires yesterday, East of Temple Bar, along Fleet Street, smoke could be smelt in the air, and towards Ludgate Hill flecks of ash floated down into the street. Firemen were still at work all through the day, playing their hoses on flames that grew into new life among the smouldering embers of ruined buildings, and vigilance was maintained by the police in keeping back people from streets made unsafe by charred and battered walls.

Royal Engineers and men of the Pioneer Corps were drafted into the City during the day to help in the vast task of clearing up the streets and removing the great masses of wreckage. They have been instructed to use dynamite wherever necessary. Many buildings, it is stated, are in such a dangerous condition that they will have to be dynamited to make access to their neighbourhood safe.

The Times 14 Jan 41
RAIDS ON THAMES
ESTUARY
ALL FIRES QUICKLY DEALT WITH
CASUALTIES IN LONDON

The following communiqué was issued yesterday morning by the Air Ministry and Ministry of Home Security:-

In an attack which began soon after dark on Sunday night and lasted for about three and a half hours, bombs were dropped in London and at several places near the Thames Estuary. Many incendiary bombs were dropped and some damage was done by fire, but the fire brigades and other Civil Defence services very quickly had the situation in hand. Some people were killed and others injured. But reports so far received indicate that the casualties were not heavy. A few bombs were also dropped at isolated points in some other areas, but little damage and few casualties have been reported, though the casualties include a small number of persons killed at a place in south west England.....

DEATHS IN A HOSTEL

In London considerable damage was done to house property in one district, and there were several casualties, including four killed. Two men were killed and a number injured in a hostel for working men.

Among the injured were members of the Pioneer Corps who were billeted in the building.

Hansard 21 Jan 41
DAMAGE REPAIRS

Mr. Salt asked the Home Secretary whether he is aware of the considerable delay which occurs in repairing the damage

done to public services and highways following an extensive air-raid, especially in our larger provincial cities, and that this delay much impedes the flow of traffic and hinders the industrial output; and will he seek to obtain a greater number of men from the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps to deal more rapidly with this situation?

Mr. Mabane The position is improving. All practicable steps are being taken to strengthen the civil organisations engaged in this work. The Army have rendered invaluable assistance to the civil authorities in the clearance of debris and repair of air-raid damage; but there are limits to the assistance they can give having regard to their other duties.

Hansard 22 Jan 41
AUXILIARY PIONEER CORPS

Mr. White asked the Secretary of State for War whether the sickness and disability allowances for the men of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps is the same as for other units of the Army?

Mr. Law Yes, Sir

The Times 4 Feb 41
CITY'S BIGGEST CRATER BRIDGED
OPENING BY LORD MAYOR

Sir George Wilkinson, the Lord Mayor, yesterday opened a bridge over the City's largest bomb crater by riding across it in his car. During a night raid a heavy bomb fell directly on a subway, and to cross the crater a girder bridge was erected by Royal Engineers in two spans, supported by steel piers. It carries a wooden roadway 10 ft 6 ins wide, and two footways.

The Lord Mayor shook hands with many of the soldiers, and in thanking them said that he had been impressed by the way they had worked both the Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Corps. They had shown a magnificent spirit – the spirit that is going to win the war.

After three cheers had been given for the Lord Mayor the Royal Engineers sang the Sappers' Song, and then in crowded lorries drove across the bridge in procession behind the Lord Mayor's car.

Hansard 18 Feb 41
SENTENCE ON SOLDIER

Mr. Silverman asked the Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that 13076368, 905th Company, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, Private Joseph Hopkinson, registered for military service with the 28 age group in August last; that he informed the military authorities of his change of address; that he received a new registration card showing his new address; that on 9th December last he was arrested, charged as an absentee, placed in police cells, and then discharged by a magistrate before whom it was proved that his calling-up papers had been sent to the wrong address; that, nevertheless, he was sentenced by his commanding officer to 14 days' confinement to barracks, and loss of pay and allowances; and what compensation he is to receive for this miscarriage of justice?

The Secretary of State for War (Captain Margesson) I am not yet in possession of all

the facts in this case, but I have ascertained that, when Private Hopkinson was given 7 days (not 14 days) confinement to barracks, his commanding officer was not aware of all the circumstances regarding the change of address.

The period for which the soldier did not receive pay was the 12 days between the date on which he was due to join and the date on which he actually joined, not the period during which he was confined to barracks. I will inform my hon. Friend when my inquiries have been completed.

Mr. Silverman If the commanding officer when he imposed that sentence was not aware that the man was innocent, is it not clear that there was a serious miscarriage of justice, and ought not some compensation to be awarded?

Captain Margesson It is just those facts to which I am giving my personal attention, but my inquiries are not yet complete.

Hansard 4 Mar 41
PIONEER CORPS (TRANSFERS)

Dr. A. V. Hill asked the Secretary of State for War whether applications can be considered for transfer to other arms, from men in the Pioneer Corps who have special scientific, technical, educational or other qualifications; and, if so, whether he will let the possibility be generally known, and how such applications should be made?

Captain Margesson Men of the Pioneer Corps are eligible for transfer in the normal way, except aliens and men with dual nationality. Applications from aliens and men with dual nationality are, however, considered, and instructions explaining the procedure to be adopted will shortly be issued. Subject to the fulfilment of security requirements, a number of such transfers are already in course of being effected.

Hansard 11 Mar 41
PIONEER CORPS

Mr. Thurtle asked the Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that the orderly room clerks of the Pioneer Corps are not paid tradesmen's rates of pay, while this rate is paid to orderly room clerks of all other corps; and whether he will inquire into this matter with a view to seeing that the Pioneer Corps orderly room staffs are put upon the same basis as similar staffs of other corps?

Captain Margesson This matter has been under consideration, and it has been decided to allow an orderly room clerk, paid as a tradesman, at group headquarters of the Pioneer Corps in addition to the orderly room sergeant tradesman already allowed. This will put the Pioneer Corps headquarters on the same footing as that, for example, of an infantry battalion.

Hansard 18 Mar 41
PIONEER CORPS (AUSTRIANS)

Mr. Parker asked the Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that there is much disquiet among Austrians in the Pioneer Corps at the attempts being made to separate them out into special units; that it is felt that this change will introduce politics into the Pioneer Corps and that the majority of Austrians would rather serve as part of the

British Army; and whether he will reconsider this policy?

The Financial Secretary to the War Office (Mr. Richard Law) It was understood that the formation of Pioneer companies consisting solely of Austrians was in accordance with the wishes of the Austrians themselves. I am aware, however, that certain difficulties have arisen over the formation of these companies, and the matter is now under review.

**The Times 25 Mar 41
PIONEER CORPS MEN ON LOOTING
CHARGE, LEAD SAID TO HAVE BEEN
STOLEN AND SOLD**

The dock of No 2 Court at the Central Criminal Court was unable to provide sufficient accommodation yesterday for 32 soldiers, members of the Pioneer Corps, who had been sent for trial from Tower Bridge Police Court, and the overflow sat in the well of the Court. All of the defendants were in uniform, and each man wore a large identification number pinned to the blouse of his battle dress.

The 32 men all pleaded "Not Guilty" to charges of looting and conspiring to loot lead.

Averill Thomas Jackson, 63, metal merchant, of Devonshire Road, Merton, pleaded "Not Guilty" to conspiring to loot lead, and to receiving a quantity of lead knowing it to have been stolen.

Mr RE Seaton prosecuting, said that members of the Pioneer Corps were set to clear away debris at certain railway premises damaged by enemy action in December. An examination disclosed that premises, which had been practically undamaged, had been stripped of lead.

The Pioneers were brought to London by lorry every day, and it was alleged that during the day lorries were loaded with lead, which was taken to Jackson's premises. The money derived from the sale of the lead was apparently pooled and divided.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.

**The Times 29 Mar 41
PIONEER CORPS MEN GUILTY OF
LOOTING, 28 SOLDIERS SENTENCED TO
IMPRISONMENT**

After a trial extending over five days 28 soldiers, members of the Pioneer Corps, were at the Central Criminal Court yesterday found Guilty of conspiring to loot lead.

The men were engaged on clearing debris at railway premises damaged by enemy action, and it was alleged that other premises which were almost undamaged were stripped of lead, which was sold, and the proceeds divided among the men.

Sergeant George Gallon, 58, who was stated to have 17 convictions and was alleged to have been the instigator of the thefts, was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. Sergeant William Collier, 29, was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, and the remainder of the convicted soldiers were each sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Four other accused soldiers, Thomas Blair, 42, Norman Parkinson, 36, Daniel Herrick, 39 and Alec Brown, 31, were all found Not Guilty, and they were discharged.

Averill Thomas Jackson, 63, metal merchant, of Devonshire Road, Merton, was found Not guilty of conspiracy, but Guilty of receiving some of the stolen lead, and he was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment.

**The Times 6 May 41
NON-COMBATANT CORPS
AN ENTIRELY SEPARATE UNIT**

The War Office issued the following statement yesterday:

Doubt appears to exist in the minds of the public as to the relative status of the Pioneer Corps and the Non-Combatant Corps (Conscientious Objectors).

The Pioneer Corps was originally formed from 15,000 reservists and old soldiers who had volunteered for further service, although they had passed the age for recall into cavalry and first-line regiments. Fine work was done in France by these men, who on many occasions found themselves back in the front line and engaged with the enemy. As demands for labour increased, the Pioneer Corps was quickly expanded and most of the less fit of the Army intake were drafted in.

On the formation of the Non-Combatant Corps – a conscientious objectors' corps – it was decided that as the only use that could be made of these men, who are unarmed, should be for labour, they would be attached to Pioneer Corps for administration purposes only, while specially selected officers and NCOs from the Pioneer Corps should be put in command of these companies.

A Pioneer Corps man has to fight and has fought in this war, whereas an NCC man, in order to become combatant and a member of the Pioneer Corps, has to make a special application to relinquish his NCC status. He may then be accepted as a soldier in the Pioneer Corps or any other unit he may apply for.

NCC personnel are thus an entirely separate unit, do not wear the Pioneer Corps badges, and, although used for many of the jobs allotted to the Pioneers, are attached to that corps only for their general organisation and training.

**The Times, 21 May 1941
ALLEGED THEFT FROM INTERNED
ALIENS**

INCIDENTS ON VOYAGE TO AUSTRALIA

Allegations that suitcases belonging to interned German and Italians showed signs of having been broken open while their owners were being taken to Australia in the transport Dunera were made at a field general Court-martial at the Duke of York's headquarters yesterday, when Acting Regimental Sergeant-major Charles Albert Bowles, MM, of the Pioneer Corps pleaded "Not Guilty" to 21 charges relating to the property of enemy aliens whom he assisted in escorting to Australia.

Nine of the charges alleged that Bowles committed larceny on the high seas by stealing property belonging to persons unknown, and nine others were alternative charges of receiving the property knowing it to have been stolen. He was also accused of conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline at a prisoners of war camp in Britain by being improperly in possession of articles he knew to belong to the interned aliens.

He was further charged with having, while in possession of money belonging to interned persons, given 10s of it to each of a number of sergeants, and with offering 10s to another sergeant.

Major N Parkes, prosecuting, said that the interned aliens embarked on July 10, 1940, and reached Australia on September 6. No escort appeared to have been provided to look after their property, and the number of broken cases and the personal belongings lying about the deck appeared to increase as the days went by.

When, on February 16 of this year part of the escort, including Bowles, returned to the prisoners of war camp, their kits were searched and Bowles was alleged to have said: "I have some internees' property in my kit." Bowles later made a statement in which

he said that an officer, ordered that the articles lying loose on the deck were to be dumped overboard. He took some of them, as it would have been impossible to have returned them to their owners.

Referring to the charge of giving money to sergeants, Major Parkes said that it appeared that the soldiers on board confiscated articles of value and money belonging to the interned aliens during the embarkation, and afterwards some of it was handed, apparently honestly, to Bowles. Bowles did not hand it to his superior officer, but divided it among the sergeants of the escort.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.

**The Times 22 May 41
ALIENS' LOSSES IN A TRANSPORT
NCO ACQUITTED ON SOME CHARGES**

When the defence was opened at the field general Court-martial at the Duke of York's headquarters yesterday of Acting Regimental Sergeant-Major Charles Albert Bowles, MM, of the Pioneer Corps, the accused altered a plea of "Not Guilty" to "Guilty" on two of the 21 charges brought against him, arising out of the voyages of the transport Dunera with interned aliens to Australia.

The two charges related to distribution of money to soldiers and attempting to induce a sergeant to accept money.

Lieutenant L G Pocock, defending, said that Bowles had pleaded "Not Guilty" to those two charges on his advice, but Bowles had always been prepared to plead "Guilty" to them and desired to change his plea.

Major GHB Streatfield, the Deputy Judge Advocate, stated that the Court would find Bowles Guilty on those two charges and would continue to try him on the other charges, which allege larceny and receiving.

Evidence for the prosecution was given by Lieutenant J O'Neill, VC, Pioneer Corps, who was an officer on the Dunera. He declared that he at no time gave Bowles a toilet set or an electric razor.

Regimental Sergeant-major Bowles, in evidence, agreed that Lieutenant O'Neill had never given him any articles. On board the Dunera he heard of a system of barter and selling, so that the interned aliens could get tobacco, cigarettes and chocolate. He saw a good deal of clothing and a large dump of stuff on the deck.

After the aliens had left the ship, all kinds of articles remained. Mr Gale, the troops officer, said that it was a great pity it should go overboard, and he (Bowles) picked up some of the things in his presence. He acquired other articles from young soldiers who were not particularly well off.

Explaining how he came to share out the money, Bowles said that there had been a search, and the money was brought to him by the sergeants, who said there was no chance of identifying the owners. Someone suggested it should be shared among the members of the sergeants' mess. He shared out the money, but did not have a penny himself. Bowles said he had had 26 years' Army service.

The Court found Bowles Not Guilty of four charges of stealing and five of receiving. They formally found him Guilty of the last two charges to which he had pleaded "Guilty". Their decision on the remaining 10 charges will be announced in due course..

**Hansard 10 Jun 41
ALIENS (RECRUITMENT)**

Sir T. Moore asked the Secretary of State for War whether he will now consider the formation of a foreign legion, to embrace soldiers of those nations which are not organising their own armies to help the Allied Forces, but whose individual subjects wish to help?

Captain Margesson Nationals of neutral States are already eligible for enlistment into any corps of the British Army, subject to their suitability. Germans, Austrians and Italians who are considered suitable may be accepted for enlistment into the Pioneer Corps. In these circumstances, I do not think it necessary to form any separate foreign legion as part of the British Army.

Miss Eleanor Rathbone Is the light hon. and gallant Gentleman aware that many enemy aliens have the fighting spirit and recognise this war as their war just as much as ours, and is it not a waste of these men to put them into the Pioneer Corps?

Captain Margesson They do very good work there.

The Times 25 Jun 41 ALIENS' LOSSES IN A TRANSPORT COURT-MARTIAL DECISIONS

Two decisions of the Court-martial which was recently held at the Duke of York's Headquarters concerning the journey of the transport Dunera which was carrying interned aliens to Australia were announced yesterday as follows:

Acting Regimental Sergeant-major Charles Albert Bowles, Pioneer Corps, reduced to the ranks, to be imprisoned without hard labour for 12 months, to be dismissed the service.

Sergeant Arthur Helliwell, Pioneer Corps, to be severely reprimanded.

Bowles had pleaded "Guilty" to giving 10s each to a number of sergeants and attempting to induce another sergeant to accept 10s. He was found Not Guilty of four charges of stealing and five of receiving. Ten charges remained for decision. They included charges of stealing and receiving, and conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline at a prisoner of war camp in Britain by being in possession of articles he knew to belong to interned aliens.

Helliwell was found Not Guilty of assaulting two aliens, one of whom attempted to escape. The charge left for decision was that he disobeyed a command by a superior officer in that he did not provide an alien with blankets and water when ordered to do so.

No decision has yet been announced in the case of Major William Patrick Scott, Pioneer Corps, who commanded the escort troops in the Dunera. He was found Not Guilty by another Court-martial of improperly addressing the troops in the ship by saying: "I close an eye to any little petty offence of purloining articles". The findings on a second charge that, having reasonable grounds to suppose that an interned prisoner had been treated with violence or neglect, he failed to ensure that a proper inquiry was made, have still to be promulgated.

The Times 30 Jun 41 COURT-MARTIAL OF PIONEER MAJOR GUILTY OF FAILURE TO HOLD INQUIRY

Major William Patrick Scott, of the Pioneer Corps, who commanded the escort troops in the transport Dunera when she took interned aliens to Australia, has been found Guilty by a Court-martial of a charge of failing to ensure that a proper inquiry was made, and has been severely reprimanded.

The charge, which was one of two heard by the Court-martial last month, was that between September 4 and October 7, being the officer commanding troops on board the Dunera and having reasonable grounds to suppose that an interned alien had, on September 3, while in the custody of military personnel been treated with violence or neglect, failed to ensure that any proper inquiry was made. Major Scott pleaded "Not Guilty" to two charges under

section 40 of the Army Act, one being that on which he was found Guilty. The charge on which he was found Not Guilty was that he improperly addressed troops on parade on board the Dunera.

Hansard 22 Jul 41 CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

LORD DAVIES My Lords, I beg to ask the second question standing in my name.

[The question was as follows: To ask His Majesty's Government if there is any foundation for the allegation that it is the policy of the War Office to draft British conscientious objector; who have been ordered by the Tribunals to undertake service with the Pioneer Corps into those units of the Corps which consist mainly of aliens; and whether they are aware that resentment is being caused among the alien volunteers as a result of this practice.]

LORD CROFT My Lords, there is no foundation for the allegation that as a matter of policy British conscientious objectors ordered for attachment to the Pioneer Corps will be drafted to Pioneer companies consisting of aliens. British conscientious objectors are sent to a training centre for equipping, documentation and formation into companies for the field, and at this centre they are placed into an entirely separate company.

For reasons of efficiency and economy aliens and British combatant personnel are also at this establishment, but they are in quite separate companies. In view of what I have said the noble Lord may rest assured that there can be no resentment or cause for resentment on this subject among the alien volunteers.

The Times 11 Oct 41 CAPTAIN SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

Captain EA Alterskye, of the Pioneer Corps, who appeared before a Liverpool court-martial in August on charges accusing him of words and conduct towards members of the ATS and girl clerks prejudicial to Army discipline, has been sentenced to be severely reprimanded.

He was found Not Guilty of four offences and Guilty of nine offences.

Hansard 23 Oct 41 PIONEER CORPS

Sir R. Young asked the Secretary of State for War for what reasons, physical or other, men of Grade A are placed in the Pioneer Corps; whether he is aware that some men who have brothers or other relatives in other corps resent having been placed in a corps where there is no chance of advancement beyond the rank of corporal; and will he make arrangements for such men, desiring to be soldiers where ability is recognised, to be transferred on making application to their commanding officer?

Mr. Sandys The strenuous nature of the tasks which fall to the Pioneer Corps, and the localities in which they may have to be performed, make it necessary to include in the corps a proportion of men of the highest medical category. I cannot accept my hon. Friend's suggestion that ability goes unrecognised.

I am informed that a soldier's prospects of promotion are at least as good in the Pioneer Corps as they are in other corps, nor is such promotion restricted to the rank of corporal.

Sir A. Southby asked the Secretary of State for War whether enemy aliens who have been permitted to join the Pioneer Corps are required to wear uniform at all times?

Mr. Sandys In regard to the wearing of uniform, enemy aliens in the Pioneer Corps are subject to precisely the same rules as other soldiers.

The Times 27 Oct 41 THE ARMY'S FOREIGN LEGION SKILL OF REFUGEES IN PIONEER CORPS FROM OUT SPECIAL CORPONENT WITH THE ARMY

Thousands of refugees from German oppression are working and finding a new life as members of the Pioneer Corps. They might almost be called the Foreign Legion of the British Army, since, unlike other foreign contingents, they are commanded by British officers; and units of the corps showed in France what they could do when it came to fighting. Some of their companies, like the company I have visited in Wiltshire, are composed almost entirely of Germans and Austrians, who had found refuge in this country and volunteered for military service on the outbreak of war. In every way they are looked upon as British soldiers.

This company is now constructing camps for armoured units – quarrying its own stone, clearing sites in the woods and turning them into tank harbours, building the living quarters down to the last electric point.

It had earned a special "Order of the Day" for its service in London during the heavy air raids. Every one spoke of the skill and tirelessness with which these men work.

Within the company are engineers and architects, doctors and chemists, musicians and writers – and whether or not their talents might be better employed is beside the point here.

Many of them fought in the Imperial armies of Germany and Austria in the First War; one corporal showed me the Iron Cross he won at Arras. Yet two-thirds of the company had passed through the horrors of Nazi concentration camps, and it is all to the good that a German doctor of high reputation now serving as a corporal has already delivered more than 80 lectures to troops in the Southern Command on his experiences in the notorious Buchenwald camp.

From what he told us, it seemed incredible that human beings in a civilised age could devise such tortures. The doctor spent 18 months in Buchenwald before being released. In the depth of winter 11,600 prisoners were herded into five barracks, and at the end of a few weeks more than 3,000 had been murdered. He spoke of a tunnel on the way to the camp in which 500 men were beaten to death with rifle butts; of the first few days when they were forced to stand to attention in snow and ice from dawn to dusk.

Their first meal after four days was part of a salted herring, with nothing to drink, and it was not long before a wave of suicide spread over the camp, or men became insane and rushed from their barracks into hails of machine-gun bullets.

HIDEOUS TORTURE

As boots began to wear out, he and another doctor occupied themselves secretly with amputating frost-bitten toes and fingers with razor blades in order to give the men a chance, and if they bled to death there was no one to help them.

Going about this British camp, all the more serene for its hidden contrasts, hearing a service conducted in a synagogue fashioned in an out-house, it was small wonder that one saw so many old young faces.

By now everyone in the company speaks English well. Two Austrians who served in the same regiment against the Italians had not met for 20 years until they came to England. Another Austrian had escaped into Switzerland with a party of his friends who passed themselves off as a football team. ■

Grenade in his hand

THANK YOU very much for the attachments, It was brilliant reading them.

They brought back memories of my dad's tales, some funny some sad.

The paragraph on the Glaswegian's was as what my dad hinted at though he did not go into as much detail. (Tough men can crumble under strafing).

All the places he mentioned too. I also remember him mentioning Major Verity and Captain Ballentyne on many occasion. Thank you for the details of the withdrawal from Boulogne.

I did not know the details of the final days.

My dad did tell me he walked to the harbour with a grenade in his hand minus the pin holding the clip in position; to save time he said, then threw it into the harbour where it exploded under the water.

A cheque for the CD Rom will arrive in a few day's time.

Again thank you, Regards
Joe Grieves

25 inch legs

I WAS called up on 15 Mar 59 and reported to Topsham Barracks to the Devon & Dorsets, I was downgraded at the medical and told as I was only 5 feet tall and had 25 inch legs you are to be transferred to the RPC.

I went to Hermitage Camp, Wrexham for basic training (5905 Platoon), From there I was posted to Hutswell Camp, Corsham where I worked in the Sergeant's Mess Kitchen.

After Christmas we were moved to Basil Hill Barracks where I became the camp messenger – they even managed to find a bicycle small enough for me to ride – happy memories.

Yours sincerely
P Northover (23612461)

I could not believe it

THE FOLLOWING is one of the many letters we receive when we supply service details to relatives of ex Pioneers:

Hi Norman, I could not believe it when I received a reply this morning from you regarding the information on my brother, thank you so much.

It took me five years to get his service records and his war medals, they said they had no record of him but I didn't let up and in the end got them.

Not only are you quicker than the RAF, you are quicker than the MOD, it took 50 years to get my GSM with the Canal Zone Bar.

Yes I will send a donation and order the CD rom.

Many thanks again
Peter (ex RAF)

Gift from God

WHO AM I, I am Derrick Shaw, a man, a person of few needs, a father (a good one I don't know, that is for my peers to preserve over me), a husband (a good one I think, I've had plenty of practice over the years).

Most of all I am a soldier at heart, now a veteran but still that soldier, a hard man (maybe), a caring man, this is a big YES, because I do care and this is how this story and tribute to the HODGSONS family started.

I was asked by fellow members of the Royal Pioneer Association and The Nostalgia Group if I would like to donate a few pounds for the Group's charitable event. The Ruby Hodgson Appeal. So like many of the veterans and soldiers we dug deep and we all gave generously.

A few days later I was telling my family about this appeal and about this wonderful family and the most courageous little girl Ruby, we brought up the Ruby story on my facebook account and could not believe what we were reading, I sat there with tears in my eyes and a very sad heart, how can a little young girl just starting on her path of life be dealt such a dirty hand.

I sat and looked at my 5 young children around me and thought how lucky my wife Debra and I are in not having to face what the Hodgson family have to go through and will be for many years, the pain, the ups the downs, the hassles the torment and many more things that will test this amazing family to the limit.

They have humbled me to my knees, I think and know a lot of families that could learn a few harsh lessons from them, I have that's for sure.

I set a task for myself in asking a few of my friends and clients to donate a few pounds into this appeal.

For me to ask for this was easy, but with Ruby living so far away, I honestly thought people were going to say no as they would never meet her or get updates on her progress, but to my total surprise the people from Cardiff stood up and were very generous with their money. One of my daughters even collected a

1 pence appeal in her school and raised over £50, the guys from my local gym raised a staggering £500 (thanks guys and ladies), we raised almost £1,700 to help Ruby and her family to go on a holiday of a life time. For me this was not about money it was trying to show

awareness of the problems our children face, they are our future, I know we cannot wave a magic wand and cure all of them as much as

I wish we could, it's not possible, but it is worth its weight in gold to me to be able to shine a little sunshine into a beautiful stars life and this was all for RUBY.

This little girl has now been part of our lives for almost a year, and I stay in touch with my fellow friends and members of the Association and Nostalgia Groups to keep up dates on Ruby's progress, so I can pass it on to my friends here.

Things were looking good, everything was in-recession and Ruby was coming off chemo and coming home, happy days, but still a long way to go, but home with her loving family where she belonged, even knowing there were more tests to come, I was very upbeat about this.

So you can imagine the shock I felt when I heard that Ruby's troubles were back and it now means that Ruby and her family have to make a huge decision to take her to America to undergo specialist surgery.

We are devastated for her and her family. My family and I in Wales are with you in every step of the way and I'm sure my extended family of ROYAL PIONEERS will come to the front line and fight this fight with you.

I could write much more about this wonderful little girl, but it's now about all of us, as parents, veterans, soldiers, and most of all Red Over Green, being what we are, the BEST when things get tough and go wrong, WE COME TOGETHER AS A MASSIVE FAMILY AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER WHEN IN NEED.

I need and ask you to be all of the above and once again, help and embrace this family into our family fold.

I ask that if we as a whole donated a few pounds each to this appeal, this would be a massive amount towards the costs of little Ruby's medical costs in America.

Hodgsons, please be strong, positive, as I'm sure there could be a lot of support coming your way.

To all my friends ...RED OVER GREEN

To Ruby all our love, hugs and kisses from the Shaw gang.

"RUBY, YOU ARE A GIFT FROM GOD"

Derrick Shaw
A Royal Pioneer

Red Ensign Drape

MAJOR BILL Elliott as Corps Secretary donated to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Northampton a Red Ensign drape during the repatriations from the Falkland's campaign.

The Regimental Chapel at the church has recently undergone massive conservation.

The church is keen to fold and encase the ensign for display in the chapel, however it is preferable to quote the

history of the item. The Church is asking if any Association member can recall the item being present at Simpson Barracks and perhaps even more important recall who it might have been associated with during the repatriations.

Maj (Retd) Mike Wilson and ex WO2 Fred Downie, both members of the Graves Registration Team who accompanied the repatriations both state that all coffins were draped with the Union Flag.

Can you help? If so let me know.

Wonderful Man

I NEED to inform you, and the Pioneer Assoc, of the sudden death of my dear husband at 05.15 on Wednesday 6 February 2013.

He had been suffering from cancer for an estimated 4 years but was only diagnosed in March 2012 due to the usual GP / NHS carelessness and inefficiencies!!! He'd had all the glaring clues but nothing was done until he went into A&E in March 2012 for a different reason!!!

On Tuesday 5 February 2013 he was in immense pain on his 'sitting bone' so we eventually called for an ambulance, at around 04.30, when the GP and nurses couldn't help him anymore. Horror of horrors? it seems that our local hospital (Frimley Park, Surrey) is now following the trend of the Liverpool Care Pathway hospitals, one reads about in our papers daily, as he was virtually comatose when we were allowed to see him just 5 minutes after arrival and just 5 minutes after that we were called in to say goodbye as he was dead. IMPOSSIBLE, Norman. That wonderful man was nowhere near ready to leave this life? as voiced by every medic and nurse he'd been dealing with in the past few weeks.

Yesterday I phoned around, to cancel appointments etc., and all radiographers, chemo nurses, GPs, etc said that there was no way he should have died yesterday as his condition wasn't bad enough at this point and, in fact, his tumours had been shrinking according to his CT scans. In fact he'd only just had a Radiography Planning CT scan last week, and this coming Monday (11th) he was due to have a course of radiotherapy. Followed by his 3rd bout of chemo. Everyone's reeling and horrified.

We (myself, and Paddy's daughter, and her husband) intend investigating this BUT definitely without the poor man having to suffer a post-mortem. Hopefully we can get hold of administered drugs sheets, and treatment given in that brief 10 minutes. We're going to give it a damned good try to investigate this thoroughly as they all but murdered him and took him away from us well before he was due

I dearly loved this wonderful man and he was well loved and admired by just about everyone he'd had the privilege to meet during his lifetime. He was a very rare person and I feel lost without him.
Jenny Tubridy

Old Photos

THANKYOU for another excellent Newsletter. Great to read all the stories and see all the old photographs. It was a surprise to see some of the old photographs of presentations of Long Service and Good Conduct Medals, including my own.

This was taken in 450 MCLG in Scotton Barracks, Dusseldorf in August 1978 by CO 45 Group RPC.

The photograph on the bottom right of Page 53, showing WO2 Fielding, Cpl Carr & LCpl Sellstorm had just been presented with their British Empire Medals (BEM's).

Once again great Newsletter. Kind Regards,

Pat Fleming

Little Britain

ON BEHALF of Liz and myself I would like to send our thanks to you for the splendid day we both had in London last Thursday for the Field of Remembrance.

I thank you on behalf of all current association members for the effort you put in trying to organise these events, trying to generate interest cannot be easy but taken into account the recent losses to the Regiment I would expect to see more at the Field of Remembrance at Westminster. It was good to see Roy Sellstrom and Dave Edwards again all be it for a passing moment, the pair of them looked like something out of little Britain - it did make me laugh.

Maybe next year I will be able to join you on the march past.

Gaz Beckett

Deserve Better

I AM writing to say that I was shocked to hear that 23 Pioneer Regt is to be disbanded.

I cannot imagine how they must be feeling, also knowing that they have not long returned from Afghanistan where they did a good job - they deserve better. I wish them all the very best of luck.

Referring to Pte Wilson (page 8 last issue), I believe he was stationed at Kineton at the same time as me although he was 251 Coy. One of the men was Pte Ron Twiner (or Twiler) who went to Korea. I did not see him again until I went to get my ticket to go to Wales for my 15 days Reserve Training and Ron told me that two men died and two men were wounded, they went over a cliff in a lorry.

Yours sincerely,
Reg Stone

Proud day for all

I NOTED in the April 2011 Association Newsletter the article on Donald Dean a former Lt Col in our Corps and a VC holder.

His grandfather owned and ran a firm GH Dean & Co and married into the Doubleday family here in Sittingbourne. Garth Doubleday married Donald's sister and died at the age of 99 some months ago.

I knew Donald Dean personally as the Company is still going at Hampstead Farm, Bapchild - a stone's throw from me, and all my family worked for the Doubleday's. Donald was about quite often seeing how the fruit was progressing as they made a lot of jam in the 60/70's as well as brick making.

Smeed/Dean brickworks have now been taken over by a larger firm. Before his

death Donald was President of both the local RBL Branch and the Royal West Kent's (The Buff's) Association.

I marched with Donald in the 70's, he was very erect and smart in his suit, bowler hat and medals - a very quiet spoken man who was respected by his former soldiers.

There is a memorial garden next to Sittingbourne War Memorial dedicated to Donald Dean and another Victoria Cross holder.

I did not ask him at the time what his connection was with our Corps but he insisted I was welcome to march with him and as he put it 'His lads' as my uncle was a Buff.

The march and service in Canterbury Cathedral was a very proud day for all.

Kind regards,
Tom Stanton

Sword Beach Sand

FIRST, I would like to say, it will be a sad day when the word, PIONEER, will cease to exist in our modern Army.

On a lighter note, I was surprised to see my little D-Day tribute to the Pioneers, in the October 2012 issue of THE PIONEER, don't tell anyone, I pinched a handful of sand from Sword Beach.

Well our annual Royal British Legion, Festival of Remembrance Concert Sunday 4th of November 2012, held at the Rhondda Sports Centre was another great success. Featuring: the Band of the Royal Welsh, with the Cambrian Male Voice Choir and Cor Meibion Morlais Choir,

Artiste: Sophie Gregory.

My first job of the day was to pick up two Chelsea Pensioners from Cardiff, then man the RBL awareness in the community stand in the foyer of the Sports Centre in the afternoon.

I'm ready now for our Remembrance Parade next Sunday, where we march from the Cenotaph in Blaenrhondda to the one in Treherbert.

Keep up the good work; it's the likes of you, that have made me feel a Proud Member of our Association.

Kind regards,
Gerwyn Bendon

See you at the reunion Derek



■ Derek Luker standing proud with The Royal Pioneer Corps Standard

Picture: RPCA Archive

I WOULD like to congratulate and thank you for the issue of the Newsletter they get better with every issue and the stories are so interesting, they keep me in touch with the old Corps and Association.

It was a great shock to me when I read about the disbandment of 23 Pnr Regt.

I'm sorry I wasn't able to attend the 2012 Reunion Weekend, I think it must be four or five years since I last attended

and it seems to have got much larger in that time. I miss meeting my many old mates, although looking at the Photos you published in the last few Newsletters there are not many faces I recognise.

I'm going to try my best to attend the 2013 Reunion and especially as it's probably the last one at St David's Barracks. Once again many thanks.
Taffy Luker (Head of the Welsh Mafia).

Those that mattered did not acknowledge the value of the Pioneer

THE BLACK, sombre cover of the last issue of The Pioneer sums up exactly my thoughts about the decision made to disband the Regiment and the Pioneer trade.

Talk about an unwelcome development and sinister visitor to the last reunion – it still rancours now with me that the professionalism, bravery and spirit of the Pioneer soldiers, families and friends should be discarded so.

I don't mean to be disloyal to the wider RLC but I feel sure that man for man, and team for team, "they" are losing the best but keeping some mediocrity – that just doesn't make sense at all.

And as for the "explanation" penned under Mark Poffley's name, well, talk about babble and bullshit. Grrr.

For my part, I can only feel grateful for having served with the finest, albeit for only a short two and a half years.

The risk of disbandment was ever-present in my mind and it drove me throughout my tour.

As such I feel so deflated to see that despite all the tangible successes of the Regiment where and when it mattered, (operations, sports fields, premier Corps/Regimental events, RMAS and recruiting/training to name but a few) those that mattered did not acknowledge the value of the Pioneer but instead decided to throw away one of their best assets.

Many, many will be directly and personally affected by the decision I know, and you, Norman will of course feel the pain more than many.

Thank goodness though for the enduring strength of the Pioneer Corps Association and its champions whose leadership will be so critical in the circumstances.

Best wishes to you all,
Nigel Smillie

the Pioneer

■ NORMAN, just had look at the latest copy of the Pioneer Newsletter online. Yet again you and your son have produced a fantastic magazine. Thanks again for your hard work and dedication. Hope to see you next year.
John Frame

■ I have just received my copy of the Pioneer "DISBANDED" and on flicking through saw page 53. The second picture down in the left column, I believe the Cpl to be Keith "Geordie" McHugh who I served with at 9 Signal Regt (BHG) in Cyprus around 1975 - 1976. I have been known to be wrong though, just ask the wife!!!
Ron Whiteley

Ed Note: flicking through? I expect it read from cover to cover!

■ I MUST say how well I enjoyed the Pioneer Reunion Weekend at Bicester. It was well organised as usual and it was great to meet Dennis McKeown and Dave Graves after 34 years. Pity about the weather, well you cannot organise everything! See you this year.
Frank Lyle

■ VIEWING the Service at the Cenotaph and the March Past I was pleased - and proud - to see you and some familiar faces striding confidently down Whitehall. Congratulations - and my sincere thanks to you and those who supported you for your dedication in continuing to attend. The BBC for once got its Pioneer script into decent shape. No doubt you had something to do with that too! Please pass on my thanks and best wishes to those concerned,
John Hickman

■ MANY thanks for yet another, but this time sadly poignant, RPCA magazine. Kindest regards,
Paddy Tubridy

Ed Note: unfortunately Paddy sadly passed away on 6 Feb 13.

■ THANK you for the Newsletter which I have thoroughly enjoyed reading and which also brought back some very fond memories. You should be congratulated on the calibre and professionalism of the content and production, it was an impressive read! Best wishes
Steve Bradley



come on, write in or email us...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

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

or email us at:

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If you have a
business or a recommendation
then send it in !

Car Stickers

We have just produced some great looking Pioneer Car Window
Vinyls. Currently we have done 5 different designs which are
around 75mm square in size.

1 vinyl is £1 | 2 vinyls £1.75 | 3 vinyls £2.50 | 4 vinyls £3.00 | all 5 are £3.50

Add 50p for postage per order. All profits go to the Association.



Sticker 1



Sticker 2



Sticker 3



Sticker 4



Sticker 5



Bugged the Nazis Secret Army

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

WHEN GERMAN generals captured during World War II were given free rein to roam the leafy rounds of Trent Park, they found themselves laughing at the British, who were apparently allowing them to sit out the conflict in the cushiest of circumstances.

Little did they know, however, that the stately home, which was owned by the Sassoon family, was playing a major role in the British war effort. And the generals were at the heart of an intelligence operation aimed at finding out some of the Nazis' darkest secrets. During World War II, Trent Park, in the north west of Enfield, had been requisitioned by the British intelligence services for use as a prisoner-of-war camp and was home to Nazi generals.

The officers, captured in North Africa, France or shot down in bombing raids over Britain, were invited to amuse themselves by playing billiards in the grand rooms of the

house, treated to full meals and taken on day trips into central London and even to country retreats. Unknown to the Germans, however, was the fact that the luxurious lifestyle they were being invited to enjoy was part of a plan designed to make them let their guard down.

And furthermore, a secret army of listeners was hidden in the bowels of Trent Park.

The team of native German-speaking Austrian and German Jewish refugees, who had fled from the Nazis before the war, were asked to record and translate every incriminating word that the generals uttered in the hope that crucial state secrets would casually be discussed.

The extent to which these recordings helped the Allies to victory has been investigated by historian and author Helen Fry, who spent three years researching the subject for her new book *The M Room: Secret Listeners Who Bugged the Nazis*. Trawling through box upon box of transcripts, she discovered how the secret listeners in Trent Park and two

other bugged POW camps in Buckinghamshire were as valuable to British intelligence during the war as Bletchley Park and the Enigma code breakers. The historian, from Golders Green, revealed: "In one of the bugged operations they heard the Germans talking about where U-boats were being kept – U-boat pens.

"These were places the Germans had built underground and the listening operation revealed that these pens existed and they also revealed where they were."

But, along with detailed accounts of armaments and equipment, Mrs Fry's research revealed the listeners learned shocking details about Nazi atrocities against Jews, gypsies and other victims.

Mrs Fry launched the M Room at the London Jewish Cultural Centre, in North End Road, Golders Green, on Tuesday January 29. Lt Col John Starling and Mr Norman Brown attended.

THE M ROOM: SECRET LISTENERS WHO BUGGED THE NAZIS
By Helen Fry
ISBN 9781-481-020-084

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THE SPECIAL Operations Executive was one of the most secretive organisations of the Second World War, its activities cloaked in mystery and intrigue.

The fate, therefore, of many of its agents was not revealed to the general public other than the bare details carved with pride upon the headstones and memorials of those courageous individuals.

Then in 2003, the first batch of SOE personal files was released by the National Archives.

Over the course of the following years more and more files were made available. Now, at last, it is possible to tell the stories of all those agents that died in action.

These are stories of bravery and betrayal, incompetence and misfortune, of brutal torture and ultimately death.

Some died when their parachutes failed to open; others swallowed their cyanide capsules rather than fall into the hands of the Gestapo.

Some died in combat with the enemy. Most though were executed by hanging, by shooting and even by lethal injection.

The bodies of many of the lost agents were never found, destroyed in the crematoria of such places as Buckenwald, Mauthausen and Natzweiler; others were buried where they fell.

All of them should be remembered as having undertaken missions behind enemy lines in the knowledge that they might not survive.

This is the story of those that did not return.

UNEARTHING CHURCHILL'S SECRET ARMY
(The Official List of Special Operations Executive Casualties and their Stories)
By John Graham & Martin Mace
ISBN 1848-847-941

POW's in Britain

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

DURING WW2 over 400,000 Germans and Italians were held in prison camps in Britain. These men played a vital part in the life of war-torn Britain, from working in the fields to repairing bomb-damaged homes.

The story of prisoners of war held by the British has been almost ignored in the annals of WW2 history, yet it is a key part of the war and affected many lives. While the situation caused problems, both logistical and emotional, and although there were skirmishes, arguments and minor conflicts, compared to the treatment of POWs in other countries the British showed a great deal of

tolerance for their unusual neighbours.

The social aspect of housing enemy soldiers on British soil was a constant difficulty. Differences of opinion as well as jealousy and even anger could cause fights. But in general the British chose to voice their outrages in the press rather than resort to direct violence. There were also those areas where the POWs were treated as long-lost friends and encouraged to socialise with the locals. While POWs experienced a mixed bag of reactions from the communities they were housed in, for many the fears of reprisals and hatred they had assumed would greet them were unfounded. The friendships formed during their long stay in Britain encouraged

many to remain there long after the war ended.

This presents a very different aspect of the war to what is usually recorded in the history books, but it is one that sums up the wartime spirit of the British, who could look beyond the conflict to the men behind the uniform and were often prepared to call them friends.

(Ed note: surprisingly this book does not mention the Pioneers who supplied a large number of personnel to act as guards and often ran POW camps, although the Pioneer Cap badge can be seen in a number of photographs).

CHURCHILL'S UNEXPECTED GUESTS
By Sophie Jackson
ISBN 978-0-7524-5565-5

Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

ANDERTON JOHN GREGORY (24094685)
15 Jun 12, Northampton
 Ex WO2, Served 1964 - 1986



■ Col PE Marot MBE congratulating LCpl Anderton of 521 Coy RPC. He refereed eight of the 14 teams which played in the 6 a side Corps Birthday Football Competition

PIGG BRIAN (24031412)
23 Oct 12, Droitwich
 Ex Sgt, Aged 62, Served 1969 - 1990

CULLEN RJ (23927889)
24 May 12, Birmingham
 Aged 71, Ex Pte, Served Jan 63 - Jan 66

SKINNER DAVID ALAN (429984)
31 Aug 12, Newport, Isle of Wight
 Aged 77, Ex Lt, Served 1953-1958

VAUGHAN CHRISTOPHER GEORGE (13045937)
Nov 12, Swansea
 Ex WO2 21, Aged 94. Served 11 Jul 40 - 6 Dec 45 in 231 Coy PC.

CHANCELLOR RAYMOND (22639574)
3 Feb 13, Bristol
 Ex Pte, Aged 79. Served 21 Feb 52 - 18 Feb 54.

GREAVES EARNEST (ERNIE) (23900118)
2 Dec 12, Northampton
 Ex WO2 (ORQMS). Aged 69, served 1960 - 1984 was ORQMS 23 Gp RPC. The following is an extract from a 1964 Corps Magazine whilst he was serving with 518 Coy in Aden: "A very unexpected, but nevertheless welcome visitor, was Col K M Wills, late RPC, en route UK — Australia aboard the SS Canberra — very gallantly he found his way across the desert to call on us and, having stayed for an hour or so, took Cpl Jimmy Edwards and Pte Ernie Greaves back to the ship for a slap up lunch and conducted tour." Ed Note: Trust Ernie to get among the food!

The following is an extract from the Dec 83 Corps Magazine:
 WO2 Greaves leaves the Service in January 1984 after serving for 22 years. He has always been employed as a Clerk and has served in Aden, BAOR, Bahrain and the UK. His experience and knowledge will be greatly missed. A man noted for his sense of humour, duty and loyalty, in fact the only disloyal act he has ever made is refusing to accept that his home town of Hull is in Humberside and not Yorkshire when the Government created new counties.

He is affectionately known throughout the Sgts Mess as "Yenny" for his consistent lack of cigarettes.

He has assisted many RSM's with his common sense advice and down to earth approach to the running and improving of

the Sgts Mess.

He is now settled in Northampton with his charming wife Shirley, and we all wish them both a long and happy retirement and hope to see them both at future Corps functions



■ WO2 E Greaves, SSgt J Fielder, SSgt J Dunbar and Cpl P Prince receive their LS&GC Medals from HRH The Duke of Gloucester at Bielefeld on 22 June 1978.

SMITH MICHAEL HENRY (TAFF) BEM (23971052)
6 Dec 12 Fenny Compton, Nr Leamington Spa

Ex SSgt, Aged 67) (Served Oct 63 to Oct 89 - mainly in Dog Section CAD Kineton) As a Corporal he served as a Specialist Dog Handler at CROSSMAGLEN, Co Armagh on active operations from November 1972 to January 1974. This was during the period when units only undertook a 4 month tour, so he stayed continually whilst a total of 4 units passed through. During this time he and his dog SHANE never missed a patrol. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon of 27th October 1973 a bomb exploded near the Royal Ulster Constabulary station at Crossmaglen. At that moment Pte Ian Jackson 1 Bn LI who was standing close to the explosion, received multiple injuries, the most serious of which was to his neck. Immediately after the explosion he was unable to speak or breathe. Sgt Watt RAMC and Cpl Smith rushed out into the street Cpl Smith assisted Sgt Watt in performing a life-saving emergency tracheostomy, using a disposable scalpel. A tracheostomy tube was fashioned out of a syringe casing. Both men were awarded the BEM for this action. (Source A Military Surgical Team in Belfast - Lt Col N A Boyd RAMC Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons Vol 56, 1975)

WILLIAMS ANDREW GEORGE (24294877)
18 Dec 12, Bristol
 Ex Pte, Aged 57). Served 3 Jul 72 - 28 Jun 85).

LAWSON BENJAMIN WEBSTER PATTERSON (BEN) (393194)
18 Dec 12, Brockweir, Chepstow
 Maj (Retd), Aged 84. Ben died peacefully aged 84, after a long illness. Educated at Pate's Grammar School and Dean Close School, Cheltenham, Ben joined the Indian Army Cadet Scheme shortly before Independence.

He graduated from Intake 1 at RMA Sandhurst in 1949 and commissioned into the RASC. After a short civilian sabbatical working in an outer-London garage, Ben rejoined the Regular Army as a Pioneer in 1955, retiring as a Major in 1975. During



■ 206 Coy Summer Camp 1978 - SSgt Patrick Tubridy and Maj Baird discussing community projects in Dorchester.



■ Sgt Patrick Tubridy been presented with the Commonwealth Plaque by Capt R Watson OC Sig Sqn also present RSM J Rooney Aust.

his career he saw operational service in the Berlin Air Lift; Suez Operation, Malayan Emergency and Borneo Confrontation and commanded PCLUs in Johor Bahru, Malacca, Paderborn and 522 Company in Kineton. He served twice in the P&L directorate in HQ BAOR and in his last appointments served successively as Chief Instructor and then as the Directorate Research & Development Officer. Following his retirement, Ben joined the NHS in Northamptonshire before moving to Avon County Council where he became Deputy Director of Personnel. In retirement in Gloucestershire, he took an active interest in village life in Brockweir, as a parish councillor, as an active member of the Indoor Bowls Club and enjoying his and Ann's garden.



■ Major Lawson

TUBRIDY PATRICK JOSEPH (PADDY)
(23497429)

6 Feb 13 Aldershot

Aged 74. Ex SSgt. Served in RPC from 1964 to 1986. Pat was an amazing person and was loved by all. A perfect gentleman who touched everyone he met with his Irish charm, his warmth, and his generosity.



■ Patrick Tubridy

LICKFOLD HENRY DON (13072418)
17 Mar 13, Swindon

Ex Pte, Aged 93, Served 24 Oct 1940 - 26 Nov 1946 with 236 Coy PC. Mr James Oliver, Chairman of the Burbage and Easton RBL wrote:

Don Lickfold, a distinguished and long-standing resident of Burbage, died on 17th March, aged 93.

Born in 1920. He worked in a walking-stick factory and met his future wife, who was also working locally. He was called up and joined the Royal Pioneer Corps at the outbreak of the Second World War. His unit landed at Arramanches on D Day and he subsequently fought through Europe, ending the war in Hamburg as a Corporal. He was demobbed in 1946 and came to live in Burbage, having married Margaret, daughter of Percy Chandler of Church Farm, Eastcourt.

Don joined the Royal British Legion in 1946 and was a founder member of the Burbage and Easton Royal Branch.

In 1949, Don's father-in-law, Percy, gave the Branch the plot of land on which the Club is built. Don was a very active member of the Branch committee and helped to raise the funds and to build both the Legion and the Village Halls and the Steward's House on the site. He served on the Branch committee from 1949 until 1980, when he was appointed Branch President, an office he held with distinction until 1989. Don became the first Branch Standard Bearer in 1950 and paraded the Standard at Royal Reviews for King George VI in 1950 and to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. He bore the Standard on many Branch, County and National occasions, including a Royal Albert Hall Remembrance ceremony. He became Chairman of the Branch in 1970. Don organised the local Poppy Appeal collection for many years and was awarded a National Certificate of Appreciation for that service in 1998.

He was always concerned for the well-being of his fellow ex-servicemen and their families and served on the Branch's service committee throughout his time on the Committee. If anyone could epitomise all that is best about the British Legion, Don Lickfold was that person and, in recognition of his service to this Village, he was awarded the Branch Certificate of Appreciation in 2008.

Don's family was very important to him

and he and Margaret were never happier than when the family were visiting them. He was immensely proud of his children, Rosemary, Graham and Carolyn, his 7 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren and 5 great-great grandchildren. He and Margaret enjoyed many years holidaying and visiting family until her death in 2007. Latterly, Kath Miller's friendship and companionship was a great comfort to him and they enjoyed many happy times together.

He remained very independent, living in Lavington Close until ill-health forced him to move to the Ridgeway residential home in Royal Wootton Bassett where he was very well cared for and made good friends.

He died peacefully in the Great Western Hospital, surrounded by his family.

PORTER John Fleetwood Tribe (488290)
Nov 12, Germany

Aged 69). Commissioned into RPC on 16 May 65 and retired on 5 Dec 81. Lt Col R Other writes:

I heard the sad news of John's death from his daughter, Tuesday, on my arrival back from China in November last year. It came as a shock to me, as, although, I knew John had been ill and, I had spoken with him only a month earlier, he had been very positive about his treatment and recovery. That was typical of him in that he didn't wish to cause worry amongst others, concerning himself.

I first met John at the DAPL's Conference in 1973. He and I were newly joined officers into the Corps, John having transferred into the Royal Pioneers from the Intelligence Corps. We were part of a large influx of officers into the Corps from a variety of Corps and Regiments at that time, each bringing with us different ideas and skills. John was to be a leading proponent of new ideas in the coming years.

He was a highly intelligent man, despite coming from the Intelligence Corps! He, always, thought carefully before giving his opinion but when he did, it was carefully constructed and usually added value to the matter under discussion. He could be very forthright in supporting his opinions and was never afraid to speak his mind, especially when it concerned the welfare of his soldiers. He had a dry sense of humour but once you knew him, he was very amusing, very good company and a true and reliable friend, if he liked you. He did not, however, suffer fools gladly and did not tolerate any mistreatment of the soldiers under his command by anyone within or without the Corps.

John was a fluent German linguist and I met him again in Berlin, when I took over from him as second in command at 14 Indep. PCLU. John was noted for the thoroughness of his handovers and that included the social aspects as well as the professional ones. I enjoyed that handover immensely! He was taking over from me as second in command at 206 Company RPC at Long Marston, so I am afraid he didn't receive the same from me as I was in situ in Berlin.

It was at Bicester, however, that we became close friends, when he commanded 521 Coy and I commanded 518 Coy. It was a time of financial hardship for many of the soldiers in the Army and the top Generals were not being particularly forthright in representing to Government the problems that this was causing. John, along with his sidekick (2 i/c) Ray Bennett, spent a great deal of their time assisting their soldiers to resolve their difficulties and even obtaining part time work locally for them or their wives. We spent many happy and constructive hours in my flat in the Mess or in his quarter, ably assisted with a bottle of Remy Martin, in coming up with ways to resolve some of the issues of the day which affected us all. John, always, took an active part in Corps affairs. He was an excellent shot and represented the Corps. He encouraged his soldiers to take part in many activities that helped relieve some of the boredom of many of the Ordnance Depot tasks and his unit was always the one to beat in sporting activities.

John resigned on a point of principle and to my mind was a great loss to the Corps as he had a very incisive mind and more importantly cared greatly for his Pioneer soldiers. He also cared greatly for his children and worried about them, often without their knowledge. We kept in touch over the ensuing years and visited his well run hostelry in Nippes, near Cologne on many occasions whilst on various exercises. He even came to a Past and Present Officers Dinner complete with ponytail! John, also, stayed at my home where we reminisced on our service together. After I moved to live in Sweden, we resorted to computer and telephone calls and had long conversations at Christmas. He was a larger than life officer, a man who cared for his soldiers and family greatly and I shall personally miss him as both a friend and colleague.

My sincere condolences go to his family. God rest you John, you will be remembered.



■ 1979. Back Row LtoR: Maj GR Cooper, Maj JS Read, Maj FM Bishop, Capt RJ Kedda
Middle Row Lto R: Maj R Withers, Maj C Telfer, Maj JFT Porter, Maj JB Rayner, Maj R Othen, Maj JRM Rayner, Maj DWDG Tilleke
Front Row LtoR: Maj MJ Grinnell-Moore, Lt Col JAO Napier, Lt Col JDS Taylor, Col NT Ridings, Brig AF Mutch, Col WM Thomas., Lt Col PJ O'Connell, Maj DR Higginbotham, Maj RF McDonald



And finally...

The Senior Exam, a dumb civilian and Clarky skiing...

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Norman Brown

THERE IS a new Senior's Exam. It consists of 10 questions and you need to get 4 out of 10 right to pass.

How well can you do? Answers are upside down at the bottom of the page, so no peaking!

1. How long did the Hundred Years' War last?
2. Which country makes Panama hats?
3. From which animal do we get cat gut?
4. In which month do Russians celebrate the October Revolution?
5. What is a camel's hair brush made of?
6. The Canary Islands in the Pacific are named after what animal?
7. What was King George VI's first name?
8. What colour is a purple finch?
9. Where are Chinese gooseberries from?
10. What is the colour of the black box in a commercial airplane?

DUMB CIVILIAN, I said to myself, but openly I said, "The system is really quite simple." You see, all people in the Army are soldiers, all privates are soldiers, but not all soldiers are privates. Some are officers who are commissioned, but some are officers who are not commissioned.

Obviously if every private was called private it would be confusing, so some privates are called things like trooper, driver, gunner, craftsmen, sapper or signaller.

Not all of the drivers actually drive because some of them cook, but we don't call them cooks, for that matter, not all drivers are called drivers – some of them are privates or gunners.

Gunners as I'm sure you know are the guys that fire guns, unless of course they are drivers or signallers in which case we call them gunners rather than drivers or signallers just to make it clearer.

All gunners belong to the artillery, except that in the infantry we have gunners who are called privates because they fire a different sort of gun, for the same reason we call our drivers and signallers private as well.

A Lance Corporal is called Corporal, unless he is a Lance Bombardier then we call him Bombardier to distinguish him from a full Bombardier, who is just like a Corporal.

All other ranks are called by their rank for the sake of simplicity except that Staff Sergeants are called Staff, but they are not on the staff, some Warrant Officers, who are not officers, are called Sergeant Major although they are not Sergeants or Majors.

Some Warrant Officers are called Mister which is the same thing that we call some officers but they are not Warrant Officers.

A Lieutenant is also called Mister because they are subalterns, but we always write their rank as Lieutenant or Second Lieutenant, and second comes before first.

When we talk about groups of soldiers there obviously has to be clear distinction. We call them Officers and Soldiers although we know that officers are soldiers too, sometimes we talk about officers and other ranks which is the same as calling them soldiers.

I guess it is easiest when we talk about rank and file which is all the troops on parade except the officers and some of the NCOs – and a few of the privates – and the term is used whether everyone is on parade or not.

A large unit is called a battalion, unless it is a regiment but sometimes a regiment is much bigger than a battalion and then it has nothing to do with the other sort of regiment.

Sub units are called companies unless they are squadrons or troops or batteries for that matter. That is not radio batteries and don't confuse this type of troop with the type who are soldiers but not officers.

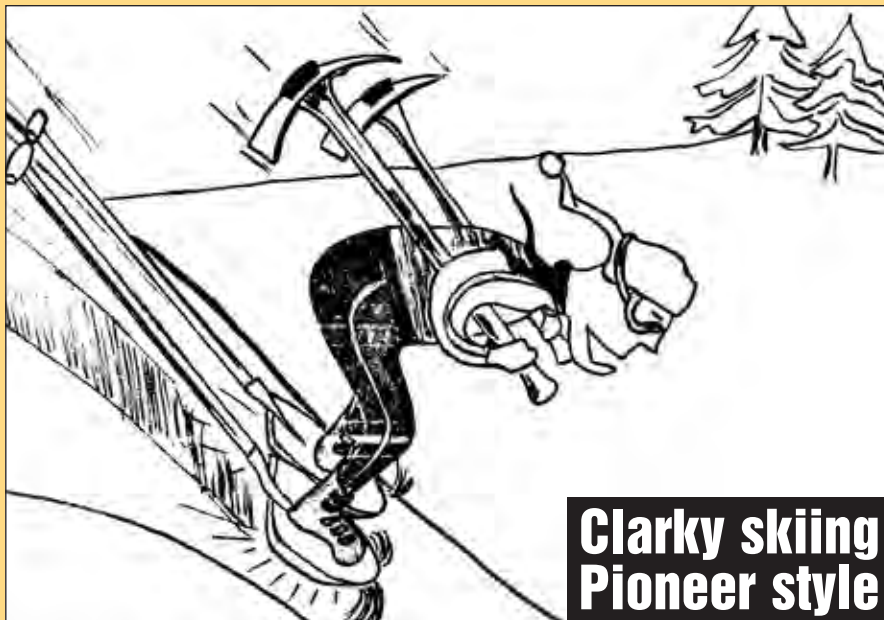
Mostly the Army is divided into Corps as well as units, not the sort of Corps which is a couple of divisions but the sort which tells you straight away what trade each man performs, whether he is a tradesmen or not.

The Infantry Corps has all the infantrymen for example and the Artillery Corps has all the gunners. Both these Corps also have signallers and drivers except those who are in the Signals or Logistic Corps.

Both these Corps provide a special service and that's why the Logistic Corps provides cooks.

In fact the Signals Corps is not a service at all because it is an Arm. Arms do all the fighting, although Signals don't have to fight too much, rather like the Engineers who are also an Arm but they don't fight too much either.

So you see, it's really quite simple. ■



Clarky skiing Pioneer style

- Answers**
1. 116 years
 2. Ecuador
 3. Sheep & Horses
 4. November
 5. Squirrel Fur
 6. Dogs
 7. Albert
 8. Crimson
 9. New Zealand
 10. Orange

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Your Letters
- Photo Gallery
- News
- The Pioneer Commando Comic
- Report from Reunion Weekend
- Part II of Pioneer Diaries Story
- Reviews
- And much more!



ANNO: DECIMO: EDWARDI: SEPTIMI: REGIS:
VICTORIAE: REGINAE: CIVES: GRATISSIMI: MDCCCX:

Picture: Paul Brown

Association members before forming up on Horseguards, Cenotaph Parade, London, Nov 2012



THE LABOUR CORPS