

# THE PIONEER



“Exposed to the full intensity of rifle, machine-gun and tank fire and to the ceaseless artillery bombardment from the mountains which rose sharply from the narrow coastal strip they off-loaded landing craft as they reached the shore, laid beach tracks, portered supplies of ammunition, food and water to the infantry grimly fighting their way inland, acted as stretcher-bearers, and took over part of the line in an infantry role when pressure became severe, toiling through the heat of the Italian summer day and long into the night.”

**Major E H Rhodes-Wood**



## IN COLOUR FOR THE FIRST TIME

TWO UNIQUE **PIONEER** PHOTOGRAPHS IN COLOUR FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME, FEATURING THE BEACH LANDINGS IN ITALY AND THE ANNIVERSARY LIBERATION PARADE IN BELGIUM.



# It was decided that 187 (Tancred) Squadron could not disband without a final tribute to the soldier the Squadron was named after – Johnny Tancred

It was decided by Capt JD Smale (2IC 187 (Tancred) Squadron) and WO2 R Aspinall (SSM) that on the anniversary of his courageous act of bravery members of the 187 Squadron would carry out a re-enactment of his epic journey.

After a Pasta Party and final kit check at the Officers' Mess, St David's Barracks, they set off for a 16 hour march carrying a weighted dummy (as Pte Tancred had done). They left the camp at 1800 hrs heading for Islip village, approximately 10 miles away. From Islip they marched to Menmarch which was a further 10 miles. From here they marched to Long Crendon

the third 10 miles (30 miles now completed).

After a very brief stop they then marched to Ashendon, only five miles on this leg. This was followed by a further 5 miles to Brill where refreshments in the form of a hot breakfast were waiting for them, 45 miles had now been completed in less than 12 hours – still carrying the dummy and of course their back packs.

The final part was, of course, back to camp. Most of those who have served at Bicester will remember that journey either as a march or a run! They marched to Ambrosden – a further 5 miles being added to their journey. From here they

marched to Graven Hill to finish their journey at 1000 hrs replicating Johnny Tancred's 16 hours march. Here they were met by Dusty Bryant and Bob Hyslop (part of the RPC Corps of Drums) and were drummed into camp.

At 1100 hrs the unit Padre, Padre Mentzel, led a short service at the Corps War Memorial to hold a short service which was also the Disbandment Parade of a famous Squadron. WE WILL REMEMBER THEM!

The following is a report attached to the War Diary of 187 Coy PC signed by the Officer Commanding Maj GR Vivian – dated 31 Dec 43

Pictures: Paul Brown

“It is hoped, however, that to this man so representative in his middle-age and steadfastness of the British element of the Corps will come the greater remembrance of Pioneers everywhere and for all time.”

**Major General Hawkesworth  
Divisional Commander**

My Coy was ordered in to act as stretcher bearers by 56 Division and were attached to 140 MDS. The Coy went forward with 5 Light Field Ambulance, and 167 and 214 ADSs, being split into 3 parties with 3 sections to each RAMC unit.

During the arduous and very exhausting work I lost a good number of men through exhaustion and one man actually died from physical exhaustion; he was No 13011512 Pte TANCRED J, was 42 years of age, and was carrying a wounded officer down Monastery Hill. This took him 16 hours and when he had completed the job he collapsed and died from exhaustion. I sincerely hope he will be remembered for his gallant act.

When the Battle of Monte Camino was over my men were brought down and put on portering for forward troops and are still doing so. They are getting weary and tired although of good heart. The Coy are nearly all

category men.

The following is an extract from the book "A War Diary of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1946" by Maj HR Rhodes-Wood – this book is available from the Association on CD at a cost of £10 plus £1 pp.

Pioneers took over from the muleteers when the mules could go no further. They were unarmed so that their hands were free for climbing, a load of 50 or 60 lbs. weight on their backs, inching forward in the darkness, pausing breathlessly lest they make their presence known to an enemy patrol each time a loose rock was dislodged and fell noisily to the valley below, freezing in their tracks when friend or enemy fired an inquisitive flare into the sky that hung momentarily aloft brilliantly illuminating the mountain side.

This is part of the picture of portering, but another side has yet to be shown, that of the descent with

Pioneers acting as stretcher-bearers, bringing down from high mountain ledges the men too grievously wounded to make their own way on foot; four men manhandling a stretcher where the track was wide enough; two men slipping and stumbling over the rocks to the accompaniment of groans and curses from the wounded man when the way was too narrow for a full team to work; one man in the rain and the wind and the darkness with a burden of pain across his shoulders when the going was too rough for a stretcher to be used.

From Salerno to the Naples Plain and from Capua to Roccamonfino men of the Pioneer Corps had done this work and in December 1943 at Monte Camino they were still doing it; lithe and agile Mauritians of 1508 Company; small and amazingly gentle Indians of 1212 and 1214 Companies, massive and powerful Basutos of >



1941 Company, and stolid Britons of Major GR Vivian's 187 Company, and if special emphasis is laid on the record of this latter unit it is not to lessen that of other Pioneer companies engaged on similar work but rather that the story of one man may be told who typified in the highest degree the conduct and standards of the Corps in which he served.

Of 187 Company as a whole Captain H Tristram, Observer Officer of 46 Division has recorded, "They provided bearers for positions well forward of Monastery Hill. During the battle they worked for seventy-two hours without sleep or rest until towards the end they worked like robots, their limbs moving only from an unbreakable sense of duty. They were all on the wrong side of thirty."

One of these men was 13011512 Private J. Tancred. At some period during the night of 4th December he set off on the downward journey carrying a wounded officer. It was bitterly cold and the going treacherous following a day of continuous rain.

The details of that night and the following day will never be known but sixteen hours later Private Tancred stumbled into an Advanced Dressing Station, handed over the officer to men of the RAMC, collapsed and died. He was 42 years of age."

I sincerely hope he will be remembered for this gallant act," his Commanding Officer added at the end of his report.

It is no reflection on anyone that Private Tancred was not awarded any specific honour, for courage was the common currency on Monastery Hill and he would have been the last man to wish for any preferential treatment over the infantrymen who endured so much more in greater danger. He was not killed in action nor did he die of wounds. The nature of his death was inescapable, "Natural causes-exhaustion."

It is hoped, however, that to this man so representative in his middle-age and steadfastness of the British element of the Corps will come the greater remembrance of Pioneers everywhere and for all time.

At the end of December the Divisional Commander wrote to Major Vivian, "I take this opportunity of thanking the officers, NCOs and men of your Company for the splendid work by them during the Battle of Monte Camino.

Your company carried our wounded over the steep hillsides under shell and mortar fire for several days without resting. Their bravery and bearing under fire brought relief and succour to many of our wounded. Please convey to all ranks the thanks and good wishes of 56 (London) Division."

### Short History of 187 Company/Squadron

The Company was formed at Clacton on 26 Aug 40 and moved to Plymouth on 3 Sep 40 where it was employed on miscellaneous duties in scattered detachments.

Whilst at Plymouth on 20 Mar 41, 7 soldiers were killed, another soldier later died of wounds and 7 others were injured in an air attack which destroyed the Ballard Institute where the men were billeted, the Officers' Mess was also destroyed.

The Company moved to Bere Alston the following day and in Nov 41 the Coy moved to Chellaton in Devon before moving to Callington in Cornwall the following month.

In Jun 42 the Company returned to Devon and moved to Westward Ho! Before moving back to Callington in Cornwall in Aug 42.

The same month they moved to Newbury until moving back to Cornwall (Launceston in Nov 42).

A move to Scotland was made in Jan 43 (Troon) and in Mar 43 they moved to Fairfield Camp, Monkton.

They left UK in Apr 43 and landed in Algiers before moving to Bougie, they then moved to Sousse in Jul 43 and the following month moved to Tripoli.

They embarked in Sep 43 and landed at Salerno, Italy where 14 soldiers were wounded on landing, one of which later died of wounds.

The Coy comprised part of a Beach Group which fought through the North African campaign and then played an active part in the historic landing at Salerno, where they fought side by side with 201 Guards Brigade. Fighting, unloading supplies, carrying wounded back to First Aid Posts, the Coy well merited the praise bestowed on it by the Commanders of 46 and 56 (London) Divisions.

The following is a report by Maj Vivian describing the landing and part taken by the Coy operating with 21 Beach Group – this landing was known as Operation Avalance. >



THE PIONEER

“ I sincerely hope he will be remembered for this gallant act ”

**Major B L Sutcliffe**  
Commanding Officer

# EX FINAL TANCRED

**4th December 2014**



## D DAY

We left Tripoli at 0430 hrs, on 5 Sep 43 on LST 365. No incident occurred during the 6th, 7th & 8th except on the evening of the 8th when a slight air raid was made at about 1900 hrs.

On the morning of the 9th, D Day; H hour being 0400 hrs, the first party of my Company landed on Green Beach at H Plus 30 mins, under the command of Lt AP Grundy. They were opposed by the enemy on landing and a pillbox was captured to the right of Green Beach. No further incident occurred until daylight.

The second party of my Company landed on Amber Beach at H plus 30 mins under the command of Lt RR Selwyn. The beach was being heavily shelled by 88 mm and mortar guns.

The third party of my Company landed with HQ. By this time the enemy had found a perfect range and was shelling us with both 88mm and trench mortars. The whole of the Company immediately got down to their work of unloading and laying tracks, and this was carried on although we were being very heavily

shelled from time to time. The work on Green and Amber beaches was carried out by the men of my Company, and the discharging of the LSTs was done as though we were on an ordinary exercise. There was no panic, no one realised the danger during this heavy work.

After all LSTs of the Beach Group had been discharged I directed my position from the key plan which had been given to me several days prior to the operation.

Having located my position I found the enemy in occupation, so with difficulty I retired to a more suitable and defensible situation. There we settled and dug in for the night, only to be sniped from all directions by the enemy who was constantly harassing and doing his utmost to make us panicky and cause confusion. But all personnel were cool and very collected. I must add that the day was a very hard one for my Company, having stood the strain of hard and heavy work, harassed by shellfire and air raids.

I had reason to be very proud of the men of my Company. The Officers and NCOs played their part in as much as they

gave every confidence to the men. Little did they or I realise that the landing could be carried out in so orderly and successful a manner. Success was due to everyone playing the part of real Pioneers, and I say quite definitely that without our orderly and well disciplined men the landing would not have been so successful. During the course of this very arduous day we lost 3 killed and 11 injured.

## D PLUS ONE

A heavy day offloading from LSTs on Green and Amber Beaches. The men unloaded no less than 2,000 tons during the 24 hours, and this meant working at full pressure every minute of the 24 hours. The men were worthy of distinction, and all through that day there was no time even to eat or think of rest. This is where from my point of view labour is so vital. Three sections on a beach is not nearly sufficient to meet with the amount of work involved, I had to reinforce them by sending all my reserve section to Amber Beach and all my HQ Section to Green Beach which gave a >



little more manpower.

This brings out one point very clearly, that it is essential that a Company on operations of this description engaged on working the beaches must have a full company working on the one job, otherwise it will mean disaster. I will strongly emphasise this for future operations, planning should be altered.

#### **D PLUS TWO**

Another very heavy day. Not so much tonnage moved as the craft were not there, but a gallant effort of 1,200 tons were discharged from LCTs. The men, although very tired would not give in, and the motto of the Coy as inscribed on, the Pioneer Badge, 'Labour Conquers All.

#### **D PLUS THREE**

Work still going on discharging from LCTs, the men getting leg weary, and it was only on this day that we got Italian retainees to relieve my men for a break of several hours. After 72 hours of solid hard work the men were walking about like mechanical toys, LCTs coming and going,

air raids throughout the day, much damage being done during one of the raids to a petrol dump close to my HQ.

23 pioneers of another Company were killed and wounded. Still, this did not disturb the working of the men, who were cheerful and had only one aim, to get the stores and ammunition to the men in the front.

#### **D PLUS FOUR**

The same routine of work still going on. The strain was beginning to tell on the men, and it was only with an extreme effort that they overcame this tired and weary feeling.

It was on this day that news came through that the enemy might break through at any moment, and I then formed my company up and planned a defence so that, if the case should arise, I should defend the beaches to the last.

#### **D PLUS FIVE**

Working full out all day. LSTs were arriving between the offloading of LCTs, and the track had to be continually re-laid as the heavy transport was pulling it to

pieces. It was with difficulty that the track was kept intact. My men excelled in many ways, not only in unloading but in swinging the sledge hammers to fasten the track and also laying the track as fast as they possibly could at a running pace. And anyone who has had experience of tracklaying knows perfectly well this is not a light job. My company was being weakened by men going sick – malaria had just begun to show itself – but still we managed to carry on.

#### **D PLUS SIX**

The relief on this day was from a company of Indian Pioneers, which was appreciated and well accepted, giving our men a break which they thoroughly deserved. I would point out that these Indian, Basuto and Seychelle Companies are grand workers and did their job almost as well as my own men. They deserve every praise.

#### **D PLUS SEVEN**

Work was now such easier. The arrival of LSTs and LCTs was beginning to slacken off. Here I would like to point out that much credit must be given to the officers and NCOs of my company for the excellent organisation of the work. The way the officers managed the men was deserving of all praise, and the situation was well in hand. The behaviour of officers and NCOs was grand and in my opinion should be reported to higher authority.

#### **D PLUS EIGHT**

The beaches were now running as if they were a port craft coming and going, and LSTs discharging ammunition; stores, troops, and transport. Air raids were still being made but everything was well organised and there was no hanging about, no one allowed to loiter or sit about. Everyone was on his toes.

#### **D PLUS NINE**

LSTs discharging tanks, armoured divisions, transport and stores of every description. This day was a particularly hard one for the men, and in this 10 days of work it is well to record they unloaded 16,000 tons of stores, 172 LSTs, 11,400 vehicles and 36,000 men. This alone will prove that the men lived up to their reputation as Pioneers. Congratulations were rolling in from every quarter of the Services and other Regiments, and it was grand to hear officers of higher rank than myself say that without the Pioneers this operation could not have succeeded.

#### **D PLUS TEN TO D PLUS 28**

The work on the beaches continued, and only by sheer determination and superhuman effort did the whole of the beach organisation become successful. The intelligence of the Pioneer Commanding Officers and their own officers, with their vast experience of labour which was so essential was the main feature of this operation. They took the situation in hand very efficiently.

One point which I should like to raise is that a Pioneer Company coming on such operations should be at full strength. In my case I was somewhat depleted >





being under strength to the extent of one section (26men). I found it very difficult to obtain reinforcements although I did everything possible to obtain them from the transit camp prior to embarkation. There were none available, and then on landing, with casualties, it is very hard for the remainder of the Company.

And finally I would like to express one thing, and that is that the men under my command worked without fear and were at no time confused or panicky. I am very proud to command such a company. I trust whoever reads this memo of the operation will fully appreciate the anxiety of the Company Commander and the good hard work done by his Officers, NCOs and men.

In December they moved first to Suessa, then Roccamonfino, then Sipirceano where they were portaging for

46 Division and then Massmatucci.

In Jan 44 the Coy moved to Mignano where they were employed on stretcher bearing and portering of ammunition and petrol. In Feb 44 they moved to Capua and then Tibaldi again portering in forward areas and loading mule trains.

On 10 Mar 44 the OC, Maj Vivian wrote the following:

"During the attack north of the GARIGLIANO River my Company were continually engaged on stretcher bearing for 4 weeks. As no road was available the wounded had to be carried over the hills, a distance of approximately 6 miles, often involving a carry of 16 – 18 hours, worked on a system of reliefs. Goat tracks over the hills had to be used, and the nature of the ground and frequent enemy shell fire combined to make the task an extremely difficult one. During

this period 3 of my men were killed and a number wounded.

The Company was attached to 46 Division for duty and the Divisional Commander and ADMS spoke to the Company as a whole and congratulated them on their fine performance and bravery under such severe conditions."

On 10 Mar the OC received the following letter:

"Today 187 Pioneer Company passes from under command 46 Division. I shall be grateful if you will tell all ranks that the 46 Division have very much appreciated the fine services rendered by this Company. The Pioneers have been called upon to perform difficult and arduous tasks, very often under severe and dangerous conditions, and they have delivered the goods. Their contribution towards final victory has been a notable



one.

I realise that the burden of all this work has fallen chiefly upon the Pioneer in the ranks, and I would like you to tell them that I appreciate this on behalf of 46 Division. I thank them for their fine work and I congratulate them on it.

The best of luck to all of you"

Signed J L I Hawkesworth, Maj-Gen

Also in Mar 44 there was a change of OCs, Maj Vivian was posted to 363 Coy and was replaced by Maj WP Dickie. The Coy also moved to Capua then Casoria at the end of the month. In early Apr the Coy moved to Baiano where they were employed on the construction of a rest camp. Later in Apr they moved to Cancellor for work at 11 Engineer Stores Depot. In Jun 44 they moved first to Vairano then Acquino and then Pantano where they were employed at 45 BSD, DID and a Field Bakery.

Jul 44 saw the Coy move to Narni moving ammunition at 3 AAD, then Monte St Savino for bridging and road work. Late Jul they moved to Tavernelle where they were employed erecting Bailey bridges. In Aug they moved nearer to Florence in

preparation of the erection of a bridge over the River Arno – this was named 'Victory' Bridge.

In Sep and Oct the Coy moved to Crespino then Muraglione and San Benedetto working on roads and bridges on 'Star', 'Spade' and 'Badger' routes.

In Nov 44 the Coy moved to Morsduccio working on road maintenance and quarrying and in Dec 44 moved to Sassoleone again working on road and bridge maintenance.

In Jan 45 the Coy moved to Faenza and in Apr 45 moved to Imola and Bologna still working on bridging and roads. At the end of Apr 45 they constructed a pontoon

bridge over the River Po at Ferrara and at the end of the month moved to Venice.

In May 45 the Coy moved to Trieste where they worked in the port area on harbour construction and loading and unloading LSTs. In Jun 45 they moved to Pola where they erected a Bailey bridge and constructed a runway before they were employed on dismantling huts, repairing jetty, unloading ships and handling ammunition.

The Coy was disbanded in Jun 46.

The Coy was reformed at Bicester on 17 Jan 83 and immediately moved to Candahar Barracks, Tidworth. Maj J Robb although appointed OC was >



unfortunately in hospital and Capt MJ Hunting (Adjt 23 Group) was appointed Acting OC.

In Sep 83 Maj Robb was awarded the MBE and LCpl Stewart the BEM for work in the Falklands.

Also in Sep 83 the Coy had detachments in Cyprus (replacing 1400m of dannet wire at Pergamos Camp), BAOR (painting at RE Bridging Park, Hameln) and Kinnegar NI.

In Dec 83 SSgt Barfield was presented with the BEM.

In Aug 84 there were very few Pioneers at Tidworth, most of the Coy were on detachments in BAOR, Falklands, BAEE, Cyprus and USA.

The next few years the Coy was employed throughout the world – further details can be read in The Royal Pioneer, these can be viewed on

[www.rlcarchive.org](http://www.rlcarchive.org) on a pay per view or subscription basis.

In Dec 87 the Coy left Tidworth to move to Simpson Barracks, Northampton where they marched into the Barracks led by the pipes and drums of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

In Dec 89 the whole Coy were employed as the Prison Guard Force at the Maze Prison.

The Coy maintained a presence on Op Granby for nine of the 11 months that British Land Forces were there. At the height of Op Granby, over half of the Coy was deployed in the Gulf, with the remainder having their tasks extended so as to maintain Pioneer Support in Northern Ireland, BATUS and Belize.

In 1993 the Coy moved to Bicester following a Northampton Town Freedom Parade, and of course, became 187



(Tancred) Squadron RLC on 5 Apr 93.

One of the first tasks the Sqn was given was to assist in the move of the RPC War Memorial and D-30 and 120mm mortar from Northampton to Bicester.

The Sqn has been dispersed to the four corners of the earth since it formed, for example in 1995 it had detachments in Kenya, Botswana, Bosnia, Falklands and Ascension Islands, Northern Ireland and within the UK. The following year it was involved in Op Grapple (Bosnia) and Op Chantress (Angola).

In Mar 1997 the Sqn were the last Pioneers to work at CAD Kineton, a task that was started during World War 2.

In 1998 members of the Sqn helped to extinguish fires in Cyprus which had destroyed many houses including the house of the Commander British Forces Cyprus.

In 2002 members of the Sqn participated in and won the BBC's 'Toughest Job' which was hosted by Jeremy Spoke whilst the Sqn was serving in Oman.

The Sqn has also participated, amongst other tasks, on Op TELIC 1, 3 and 6. ■







## Cover

Pioneers from 39 Group wading ashore in Italy. In colour for the first time.

Picture: RPCA Archive.  
Colourised by Doug Banks

To appreciate this photograph it is suggested that you unfold the Newsletter to see the full effect of the wetshod landing.

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## EDITORIAL

**W**ITH ALL the hustle and bustle of last year's activities behind us (March through Bicester, Disbandment, record attendance at both Reunion Weekend and Cenotaph Parade), we are currently preparing for this year's Reunion.

A booking form was sent out with the October 2014 Newsletter and must be returned by 1 May not 1 June as previously stated. If you have mislaid the form contact us and we will send a replacement either by email or snail mail.

It looks as though the Reunion is going to be a great weekend, a draft programme is shown on page 16. As can be seen the Association AGM is to be held on the Friday evening, if you have any points to raise at this meeting please submit them to the Association by 15 June.

It will be strange holding the Reunion outside a Barracks, the Association has not done this since the 1950's when they were held at Blackpool, since then Wrexham, Northampton and, of course, Bicester have looked after us very well.

Bicester (St David's Barracks) is currently looking like a ghost town as we wait for the new Regt (1 Regt RLC) to move from Germany, the first Squadrons are due to arrive in June.

The distribution of the last Newsletter resulted in the return of 58 envelopes marked "Gone Away" or "Not known at this address". This means that we have lost 58 members from our active membership list although since then a few have contacted us stating that they have not received the Newsletter!

It would be appreciated if you could inform us of your move as soon as possible especially in March and September as we prepare the Newsletter for despatch.

We have now adopted the policy of not sending out Newsletters a second time, they can, of course, be viewed on our website [www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk)

A large number have already stated that they are willing to view the Newsletter this way – this saves a great amount on postage, if you are also willing to do this please let us know.

We always welcome material for the Newsletter, have you a story to tell, if so please send it to us (with photographs if possible). Do not worry about spelling or grammar we will edit it for you. Talking about photographs a large number have now been put on line and can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/qybwzn7> Further photographs will be added in the near future. We now have a digital library of over

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## STOP PRESS

■ Remember Armed Forces Day is the 27th June 2015.

■ Bookings for the Pioneer Reunion Weekend are now required by 1 May 15.

## STOP PRESS

■ The Northampton Branch is to hold a BBQ on 18th July 2015.

## STOP PRESS

■ The RPC Nostalgia Group are holding a reunion weekend on 1-2 May 2015. Speak to Allan for further details at [www.facebook.com/SOOTYRPC](http://www.facebook.com/SOOTYRPC)



10,000 photographs and are adding to the collection regularly. If you have any photographs please send them to us – we will return within 10 days. We are often asked for a copy of someones Pass Out photograph, although we do hold quite a large number of these most have no date or even what Section was Passing Out.

If you have a copy of your passout photograph please send it to us (as mentioned above it will be returned within 10 days). If you could also state the date, what Section and name as many individuals as possible it would be appreciated.

As we only have two Newsletters per year it is sometimes necessary to contact members by email, this is normally to notify members of events at short notice and also the death of a member.

The Association already holds about 500 email addresses, do we have yours? If you have not received a notification from us please send your email address to: [royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)

We also like to hear from you so please send in your letters or emails, our email address is [royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)

Once again we are enclosing tickets for the

Association Derby Draw (unless you have already indicated that you do not want to receive them), it would be appreciated if you could give this draw your full support as it is one of the few ways that the Association can generate funds.

If you feel that you cannot sell the tickets please let us know and we will not send them in future.

The prints of the new Pioneer painting have now arrived and have already been signed by the last CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC, we are now waiting for the last CO of 168 Pnr Regt RLC to sign them and then they will be available for sale.

I remind members if they wish to attend the Past and Present Officers Dinner (16 Oct – Bicester), the Field of Remembrance and London Lunch (Westminster 5 Nov) or the Cenotaph March (Whitehall 8 Nov) they should inform us.

Finally, may I once again thank my son Paul for editing the Newsletter, this takes many hours to produce such a splendid magazine which is recognised as one of the best Regimental Journals. Thanks.

I hope to see a lot of you in July.

**Norman Brown**



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## Can you spot the mouse?

15 members found the Cuneo mouse in the last edition. The winner was George Pringle who finds it nearly every time!

The mouse was an easy one to find as well! It was on Page 21 just above shoe bottom 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!

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

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 30th June 2015.

Good luck.



# We had a record 86 marching in the Royal Pioneer contingent at last years Cenotaph Parade in London

In last year's April Newsletter we published that we had a record 42 attendees at the Cenotaph Parade and asked if we could beat the record in 2014 – we not only beat it we hammered it with 86 marching in the RPC contingent.

We also had Association members marching with other organisations such as Aden Veterans and Combat Stress.

The security seemed to be much tighter this year; a reflection of current events both at home and abroad. This may have affected movement timings because, unlike previous years, as the last column to move

we were still waiting on Horseguards at 1050 hrs. In the end, we got our marching orders and, with Brig CB Telfer our President once again leading us we marched to Whitehall arriving in position just before the cannon sounded for the two minutes silence. After the service and laying of wreaths we stepped off and either we had good fortune or there was an improvement in organisation we marched at a steady pace past the Cenotaph and back to Horseguards without the concertina effect we had experienced in previous years. However, just as in previous years, the support from

the British public was very impressive and humbling too. The Duke of York took the salute at Horseguards and a short time later the parade of more than 10,000 people were dismissed.

Following the Parade most members went to the Civil Service Club for a meal, a beer (or two) and a chat. Although initially crowded, the Club coped well and the service was very good. The Pioneers quickly established a corner of the garden.

Members wishing to attend and march past the Cenotaph on 8 November 2015 should inform the Association well in advance as tickets are required. ■

Pictures: Paul Brown







■ Pioneers keep in step Association President, Brig CB Telfer, leads the RPC contingent (main), Col Baker leads the Royal Hospital contingent (top left), Bob Fox Association right marker (top right)  
Picture: Paul Brown

# CENOTAPH MARCH

Whitehall, London, 9th November 2014





## Memories of Corporal Andrew Roberts, 23 Pioneer Regiment are set to live on in Middlesbrough after a road on a new estate was named in his honour.

**T**HE sign for Corporal Roberts Close was unveiled on Sunday 8 February 2015 in memory of Corporal Andrew Roberts from Hemlington, who died in Helmand Province on May 4 2012 aged 32 during his second tour of Afghanistan.

The road is situated in Hemlington between Stainton Way and Hemlington Hall Academy - Andrew's former primary school.

Andrew's family and friends, including his parents, Stephen, 59 and Pauline 63, attended the unveiling which was done by Andrew's nieces and nephews. Stephen said: "This means a lot. Not just to us but to the whole family. I am going to walk this way to the shop every day. Andrew would have been chuffed to bits. This would have been the icing on the cake for

him."

Middlesbrough Mayor, Ray Mallon attended the event. He said: "The Afghan war has been particularly brutal. As a country we have lost many servicemen, two of whom are from Middlesbrough. They lost their lives fighting for freedom and democracy. I think it is very important that we remember Corporal Andrew Roberts and Squadron Sergeant Major Charlie Wood and therefore fitting memorials should be located within the town. I can't think of a greater sacrifice than a soldier laying down their life for the country and that is exactly what Corporal Roberts and Sergeant Major Wood did. This has been a traumatic experience for Stephen and Pauline Roberts, the parents of Andrew and I know that they get great comfort from the support they have

received. Today's memorial assists with them coming to terms with their tragic loss. There will be a similar memorial for Sergeant Major Wood. I am hoping that we will have other memorials closer to the Cenotaph to remember these brave soldiers as well as other soldiers we have lost in other conflicts since World War Two."

Andrew left behind his three children Jessica, Kyle and Kayla and his girlfriend, Paula Ewers. He also left brothers Mark, Darren and Michael and sisters Tracey and Emma.

A covenant will be placed on the land once it has been adopted by Middlesbrough Council. This means that whatever happens to the road in years to come, the name 'Corporal Roberts Close' will always be attached to the land. ■






# CORPORAL ROBERTS CLOSE

TS8 9SF

## Ginger

You were our friend  
 You are our hero  
 You was always loyal  
 You was always funny and the squadrons joker  
 You kept us all going  
 Even when the shit hit the fan  
 You cared so much about each and every one of us  
 You understood the job  
 You was excellent at the job  
 You have left a big whole in our hearts  
 We will remember never meant so much  
 We remember your smile  
 Your charismatic character  
 Your friendship  
 Your song  
 But most of all we will remember  
 What you was to each of us  
 And what you will always be to each of us  
 You were everything not only a pioneer should be  
 But what every soldier should strive for  
 You will always be in our hearts and minds  
 We all miss you pal

**R.I.P GINGER**


# CORPORAL ROBERTS CLOSE

**8th February 2015**



## PAST EVENTS



■ ON 6 November 14 Association members including 4 members from 23 Pnr Regt RLC attended the Field of Remembrance.

A new stainless steel plaque was shown on the Corps Plot for the first time thanks to the endeavours of Mr Peter Thomas and was admired by all who saw it.

The Field this year was opened by His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales. SSgt Paul Monaghan fronted the Plot.

Unfortunately our In-Pensioner Micky Hull could not attend as his close friend and colleague in the Post Room at Chelsea had unfortunately passed away that morning.

Following the short service and the inspection of the Field by HRH Prince Harry most went for lunch at a nearby public house.

Later in the evening some members travelled to the Tower of London to view the Field of Poppies, this was a sight to behold and will be well remembered.

■ ON SATURDAY 15th November 2014 Brig CB Telfer and Col RF McDonald represented the RPC Association at a Service of Thanksgiving Service to mark the 825th Anniversary of Northampton's Royal Charter at All Saints Church, Northampton.

They joined representatives from community groups and organisations, civic leaders from across Northamptonshire and Councillors.

Prior to the Service they joined a Procession from the Great Hall in the Guildhall to the Church. After the Service the Procession returned to the Great Hall for a Civic Reception.

■ MR Norman Brown, Mr Ian Dewsnap and Mr Alec Cardow made the annual Christmas visit to our In Pensioner at the Royal Hospital on 8 December.

We found our In Pensioner, Micky Hull, in good health and full of festive spirit – he even bought us all a pint!

After a long chat in the Club the visitors were invited to the Royal Hospital dining hall where a superb lunch was served and enjoyed by all. For those who have not seen the dining room it is a sight to behold. The walls contain the battle honours since the Hospital was constructed. The table at the rear of the hall is the table on which the Duke of Wellington was laid on when he died.

■ ON SATURDAY 24th January 2015 the Northampton Branch of the Association attended a Burns Night in the Eastgate Public House, Northampton where 54 members attended.

This was organised by the new Branch Chairman Mr Bob Fox BEM. Bob intends to hold similar events during the year, details will be published on the Northampton Branch Facebook Page.

■ MEMBERS of the Rear Ops Group 23 Pnr Regt RLC together with Mr Norman Brown visited the National Memorial, Alrewas, on 2 March 2015 and laid a wreath in memory of their fallen comrades.

A quick tour of the Arboretum followed which included a visit to the Logistic Grove which includes the plaque to the Royal Pioneer Corps.

# The Simpson Bust

Members of the Association Council travelled to The Royal Hospital, Chelsea to present the hospital with a bust of General Simpson, a former Colonel Commandant of the Royal Pioneer Corps and also a Governor of the Hospital.



■ Brig CB Telfer presents Simpson Bust to General Sir Redmond Watt KCB KCVO CBE DL Pictures: Supplied

ON 13th November 2014 members of the Association Council travelled to The Royal Hospital, Chelsea to present the hospital with a bust of General Simpson, a former Colonel Commandant of the RPC and also a Governor of the Hospital.

This bust was commissioned by the Corps in the early 60's and was displayed outside the Regimental Headquarters of the RPC Training Centre, Northampton. (Simpson Barracks, now Simpson Grange was named

after him). When the Barracks closed the bust was moved to Bicester where it was displayed in the Regimental Headquarters.

## General Sir Frank Simpson GBE KCB DSO DL JP

Frank Simpson was born on 21 March 1899. He was educated at Bishop Cotton Boys' School, Bedford School, Trinity Hall Cambridge, and at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich.

He was commissioned into the Royal





■ Council Members, the Governor of RH Chelsea and our In-Pensioner Micky Hull

Picture: Supplied

Engineers in 1916. He served in France and Belgium during World War I and after the war went to Afghanistan and the Indian North West Frontier.

He also served in World War II initially in France and Belgium with the British Expeditionary Force and was involved in the defence of Arras and then the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940.

He became Chief of Staff to General Bernard Law Montgomery in 1940 and then Deputy Director of Military Operations at the War Office in 1942 before becoming Director of Military Operations in 1943.

After the War he became Assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff for Operations in 1945 and then Vice Chief of Imperial General Staff in 1946.

In 1948 he was appointed General Officer Commanding Western Command and in 1952 he became Commandant of the Imperial Defence College: he retired in 1954. He was Colonel Commandant Royal Pioneer Corps from 1950 – 60 and Chief Royal Engineer from 1961 – 67.

He was appointed as Governor of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in 1961 a post which he held until 1969. General Sir Frank Simpson died on 28 July 1986. His Funeral Service at St Stephens Church, Bath on 1 Aug was attended by Col TN Buck who represented the DAPL who was abroad, Maj KF Forrester (Chairman RPC Association) and Maj ER Elliott the Corps Secretary. At the Service of Thanksgiving which was held at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea on 6 Oct the Corps was represented by Brig and Mrs HJ Hickman, Brig CF Walker, Maj and Mrs FK Forrester and Maj and Mrs ER Elliott.

He was a wonderful friend to the Corps and was missed by all those who were privileged to know him.



■ General Sir Frank Simpson GBE KCB DSO DL JP inspecting the ranks

Picture: RPCA Archive

## FUTURE EVENTS

■ GUILDFORD with its strong historic and present day military links, has been chosen to host the prestigious Armed Forces Day national event on Saturday 27 June 2015.

Guildford Borough Council is planning an exciting line-up of events including a special service at Guildford Cathedral, a formal parade in Guildford High Street, and a spectacular military show at Stoke Park followed by 'picnic and proms in the park'. An impressive air display will complete a memorable day.

Keep an eye on the website for more updates [www.armedforcesday.org.uk](http://www.armedforcesday.org.uk)

The British Legion (Northampton Branch) is organising a Parade through Northampton Town centre leaving from outside the Eastgate Public House and march to the Market Square. It is hoped that Association members join this Parade. Timings are from up 1000 hrs and march off at 1030 hrs. The parade will circuit around the market square where the Lord Lieutenant will take the salute. The British Legion will also have a tombola stall and the poppy trailer has also been booked for this event.

■ THE 69th Past and Present Pioneer Officers Dinner is to be held on Friday 16 October 2015 in the Bicester Garrison Officers Mess, Ambrosden.

Officers wishing to attend should contact the RPC Association (e: [royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com) or tel: 01869 360694).

■ THE FIELD of Remembrance will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 5 November 2015.

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 immediately after the Field of Remembrance.

This year we will lunch at the Lord Moon of the Mall which is just below Trafalgar Square in Whitehall.

■ LAST YEAR as mentioned in page 10 we had a record 86 march in the RPC Contingent, can we beat this?

The Parade is to be held on Sunday 8 November 2015, tickets can be obtained from the RPC Association.

Personnel must be on Horse Guards Parade by 1010 hrs. The 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.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

■ THANKS TO all members who supported the Christmas Draw, this is one of the few areas in which we raise money to keep the Association running. The lucky winners are:

- |                  |                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1st Prize £1,000 | - J Smillie, 03780, New Milton   |
| 2nd Prize £500   | - DM Jones, 30184, Holsworth     |
| 3rd Prize £200   | - N Schofield, 05645, Dunikfield |
| 4th Prize £100   | - G Brown, 42659, Boston         |
| 5th Prize £50    | - T Rowe, 14344, Altrincham      |

# Pioneer Reunion

We have so far had a good response for this year's Reunion to be held at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry from 3rd-5th July. Booking deadline is the 1st May 2015.



■ The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry

Pictures: Royal Court Hotel

IT IS not long until this year's Reunion Weekend at Coventry. If you have not booked in yet, there is not much time left. The booking deadline is the 1st May 2015.

The itinerary for the weekend is subject to minor changes. At present it is:-

### Friday

- |                  |  |          |  |
|------------------|--|----------|--|
| 1400 hrs onwards | Members arrive and book in   | 1200 hrs |  |
| 1500 hrs         | Association shop opens. Display of Pioneer photographs and scrap books available for perusal | 1230 hrs |  |
| 1845 hrs         | AGM WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club   | 1530 hrs |  |

1900 – 1930 hrs

Association Annual General Meeting

1930 – 2100 hrs

Reception drinks and Carvery Meal

### Saturday

0700 – 0900 hrs Breakfast

0930 hrs

Coach departs for National Memorial

1200 hrs

Those not going to the Memorial free to visit Coventry City Centre

Church Service at Logistic Grove National Memorial

1230 hrs

Tour of Arboretum

1530 hrs

Coach leaves National Memorial to return to Hotel

1930 hrs

Gala Dinner

2100 hrs

Group (Dreamettes) and Disco

### Sunday

0700 – 0900 hrs

Breakfast

0900 hrs

Members free to visit Coventry City Centre

1900 – 2100 hrs

Carvery Meal

2100 hrs

Disco

### Monday

0700 – 0900 hrs

Breakfast Depart



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE CONTRACT** for the new build at Worthy Down has been signed. Work will commence after the Summer break, into September and October 2014. No move before 1 April 2016 is envisaged; with completion by 2018/19.

The detailed work on the internal layout of both RHQ and the Museum begins in September. The site combines a number of functional areas, of which the College will provide a unique entrance, with atrium, and be a focal point for the new build.

It is intended to provide small shops and restaurants with the Phase two area to allow on-site facilities 24 hours a day, not dissimilar to that found in Camp Bastion and many American bases. It will, of course, have traditional Officers' and Sergeants' Messes, although the food preparation area and stock rooms will support both.

■ **THE SOLDIERS' Charity** is totally dependent on the kind donations of its supporters and it continues to be humbled by the responses to its appeals.

In January it asked supporters to help fund its "Wounded to Work" project. This appeal focused on the work that the WISECs (Wounded, Injured, Sick Specialist Employment Consultants) have done for our soldiers. These Special Employment Consultants are funded by The Soldiers' Charity to work closely with soldiers transitioning out of the Army who find themselves wounded, injured or sick. They help identify possible careers and transferable skills before coaching them through every stage of the job-hunting process. WISECs are embedded within the Personnel Recovery Unit of a Brigade's HQ, to ensure they can assist soldiers in a familiar environment.

The appeal focused on the case of former Gunner Terry De'ath and thanks to generous donations has raised just under £180,000 to support other soldiers which is a fantastic effort. That is all down to the tremendous support and generous donations, so a sincere thanks from off at the Charity. In 2013-2014 they were able to raise just under £1,200,000 from appeals like this. Without this generosity they wouldn't be able to continue to be the backbone of support for soldiers, veterans and Army families. On behalf of all their beneficiaries, they would like to say a big thank you and hope that they continue to receive your support in 2014/2015.

■ **A SERVICE** for military veterans to have their hip or knee arthritis assessed and, if appropriate, have joint replacement surgery has been launched.

It is led by Lt Col Carl Meyer, Military Consultant Hip and Knee Arthroplasty Surgeon at Oswestry's specialist orthopaedic hospital.

The service is open to anyone who has been in regular military service, including national service. It is based at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (RIAH), Oswestry, Shropshire.

To obtain an NHS referral please ask your GP to make a named referral to Lt Col Meyer at the Veterans' Hip & Knee Surgery Service in Oswestry.  
Contact: Rebecca.ann.jones@rjah.nhs.uk  
Tel: 01691 404344

# Military Pensions

Have you served in the military since 1975? It is possible that you have earned a preserved pension payable at age 60 or 65 if you joined after April 2006.

**R**EAD THE following to see if you qualify and follow the links for the application forms if you do.  
Pensions for service leavers. There are currently 2 Armed Forces Pension Schemes (AFPS) available to service leavers:

AFPS 75 pension benefits are based on rank and length of service. All personnel serving between 6 April 1975 and 6 April 2005 will have served under the AFPS 75 scheme.

AFPS 05 pension benefits are based on length of service and final salary and personnel who joined after 6 April 2005 will be serving under the AFPS 05 scheme. However, personnel serving between July 2005 and March 2006 were given the option to move to the AFPS 05 as part of the Offer to Transfer process.

There are some fundamental differences between the schemes that cover both retired benefits and dependants benefits. To find out what benefits personnel are entitled to, read the information below and download the booklets that are applicable to the AFPS that you/your spouse are/were serving under.

## Service preserved pensions

Prior to 6 April 1975 there was no provision for a preservation of pension benefits and service personnel who left the armed forces had to have completed 16 years from age 21 (officers) or 22 years

from age 18 (other ranks). Those who left before that date without completing the above criteria, lost all pension entitlement.

The rules changed on 6 April 1975 to provide for pensions to be preserved for payment at age 60 for all those discharged over the age of 26 with a minimum of 5 years service. On 6 April 1988, the qualifying period was reduced from 5 to 2 years and the age criterion was dropped. Preserved pensions have to be claimed at age 60 or at age 65 if your service began after 5 April 2006. However, you can claim your preserved pension sooner if you become permanently incapacitated.

Service pensions are administered by Veterans UK but pension payments are made by Paymaster (1836) Ltd, the paying authority for the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS).

For help and information on your armed forces pension please ring the Veterans UK on 0800 085 3600 or write to:  
Veterans UK Pension Division  
Mail Point 480  
Kentigern House  
65 Brown Street  
Glasgow, G2 8EX

For help and information on your compensation claim please ring the Veterans UK on 0808 1914 218 or write to:  
Veterans UK  
Norcross  
Thornton Cleveleys  
Lancashire, FY5 3WP





# Artisan Skills Josh

Picture: Shand Media

Josh Campbell demonstrating his Pioneer artisan skills

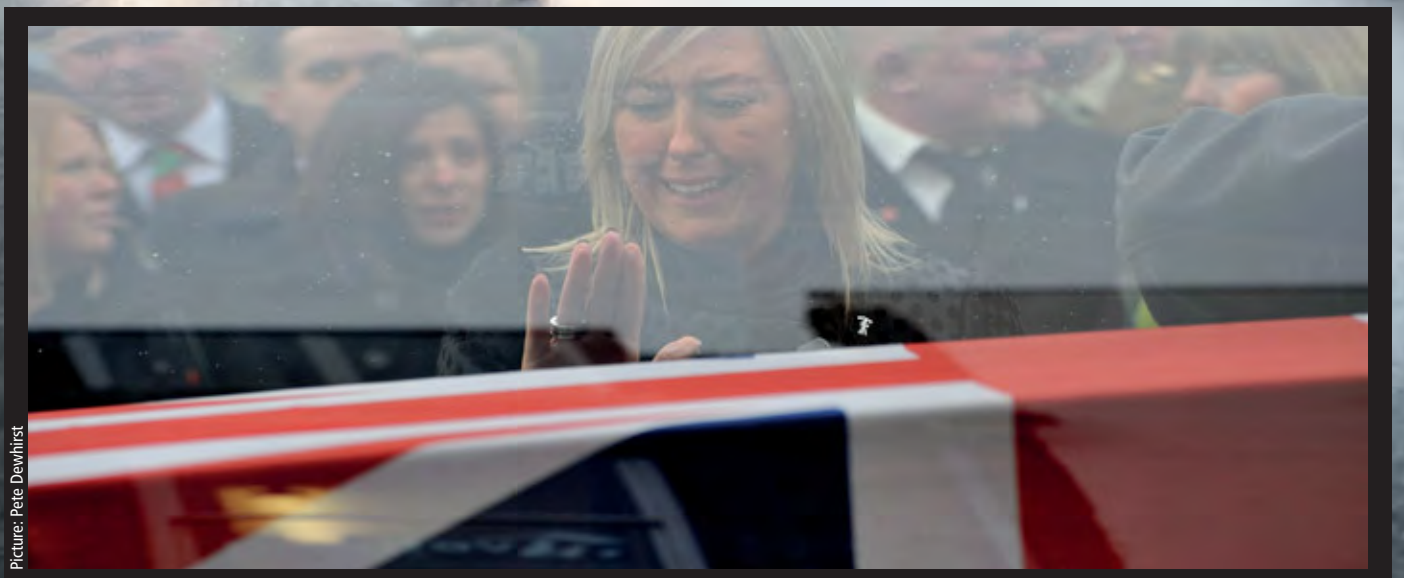
Two photographs in this issue then Josh... that must surely be two crates?





***“Drivers would get out of their vehicles and bow their heads...”***

# Honour





## A poignant story from Jarra Brown. Jarra was a Police Officer who was heavily involved in the repatriations at RAF Lyneham and the spontaneous ceremony in Wootton Bassett.

**Report: Former PC 2185 Jarra Brown**  
**Pictures: RPCA Archive (Background)**  
**Pete Dewhurst**

**D**EAR Family and Friends of Charlie Henry Wood; I am retired from the police now and relocated to Cyprus, but as exciting as that new adventure may seem I realised I carried so much sadness from those humbling years.

There is a huge difference between the sadness I saw and the grief that you sadly know. I witnessed so much honour for the fallen, that many people did not see and wanted to write my own tribute in memory to those men and women who were shown so much respect and rightly so.

I started writing and could not stop and found that I now have completed a book as my own personal tribute in memory of our great nations fallen.

It would not be possible to tell the full story; the day each of the 345 who were killed came home. My hope is that those who read the words that I have written will understand that the same respects were shown the day their loved one came home..

I would like to tell each Mother, Father, Husband, Partner, Wife, Brother and Sister, Son or Daughter some that were not even born, along with extended family and friends that your loved one came home a true British hero.

Please allow me to share what I witnessed on the 6th January 2011 the day Warrant officer 2, Sergeant Major Charlie Wood, 23 Pioneer Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps, came home.

What many people who grieved that day and witnessed in Wootton Bassett was only a fraction of what we saw unfold before our eyes; along that 46 mile route.

From leaving RAF Lyneham people would stand at the main gate raise their arms in salute and from there, we slowly escorted the fallen hero as people lined the street.

The Outriders would be in front clearing our route through, with all our blue flashing lights activated; we wanted people to know that in our cortege was an outstanding soldier who paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving the Crown.

A Hero at Christmas was a tabloid heading that I read, Warrant Officer Charlie Henry Wood; deserved to be recognised, as we made our methodical progress up the Wiltshire roads.

Cars heading in our direction would slow down, activate their hazard lights, some got out and bowed their heads and the humbling respects continued throughout the 5 mile route to Wootton Bassett.

As we entered the small market town that by now the whole country knew, we stopped the cortege outside the St Bartholomew Church, where the tenor bell tolled.

The tolling of the tenor bell happened by fate, but for many besides letting the community know the cortege had arrived; was the ambience it created of a solemn moment, enhancing the dignity honour and respect.

We the police escort with the outriders at my front made our way to the bottom end of the street, a short drive but one I felt as if we were intruding by driving on what felt like sacred ground, in particular passing the raw sadness I saw in so many eyes.

It really was challenging to distance ourselves from those emotions we saw and had seen so many times before; families clutching flowers, all looking down towards the conductor as he paged towards the war memorial.

Almost in unison the tenor bell tolled as the conductor's heels hit the floor, making his way with a swagger and panache, leading the Teesside hero with so much grace.

Everything seemed in slow motion almost as if time had stood so still; the quietness as eerie friends offer comfort to a family in preparation, for a grief many had not experienced before.

With the tipping of his hat the conductor would turn a symbolic action in saluting the fallen; the cortege would close up and then come to a halt.

There Charlie would remain at a brief resting place adjacent to the war memorial, where those grieving all stood.

Standards were lowered and the parade marshal of the Royal British Legion calls his members to the salute

The silence was broken as the raw emotions escaped; but amongst that deep sadness was so much respect.

One by one they approached their man; a heartbroken family in numbness on a planet they did not understand. A flower was laid; a private word or prayer was said where we 200m away watch helplessly in their pain.

It was a moment those present would never forget, so many people they did not know, standing alongside those grieving, to show they care.

Then with a further tipping of his hat and the bow of his head the conductor lead the cortege in our direction down the road.

Once we were again reunited the escort and cortege as one, we slowly made our way out of this deeply saddened town, numb with the scenes of grief that we had seen.

Slowly methodically again we turned our wheels as we left the high street and made progress towards the M4.

This was a precise operation as we had another police patrol car slowing traffic down already on the motorway, this created a sterile bubble with a rolling barrier, leaving easterly bound M4 completely empty as we entered on junction 16, onto lane one.

I lead the cortege onto the motorway, the outrider's moved across to lane two placing their bikes adjacent to the hearse carrying the Warrant Officer we escorted that day.

At the rear of the cortege was another police patrol car and a further two hundred meters was the rolling barrier holding the traffic back.

It was almost like a 'Guard of Honour' as we cruised along that major road at 50 miles per hour.

People stood on the over bridges and in respect bowed their heads; they could never mistake us, as every blue light flashed, when we brought your hero home.

Coming off the M4 we made our way to Gablecross where Thames Valley Police took over the escort of the cortege for the rest of the route.

Many of you will not know Gablecross it is a big Police Station and lined up outside

was those on duty that day, shoulder to Shoulder with Standards paraded by the military organisations and Royal British Legion, maybe a 100 or more with the Senior police Officer taking the salute.

Again traffic was stopped as we handed the cortege over, we slipped off the road and Thames Valley Police took command of this valued man that had proudly served our Crown.

For the next 26 miles he was in good hands as our neighbours continued along this most respectful route, their outriders leading from the front.

But the respects did not stop there; a further four vigil points were always manned with hundreds more stood so proud, those wearing berets would always salute.

Many cars would stop on the busy A420 where again drivers would get out of their vehicle and bow their heads.

Have no doubt in your mind your Husband your Son, your Brother and to many I met on the day your amazing friend was recognised, with so much respect along that whole route.

People stood out in the rain right up to the final turn that took the cortege into the John Radcliffe Hospital.

Yes that final turn was an extraordinary scene as Standards were lowered the length of the street.

This 46 mile journey often took two hours or more, where ever even one person stood, the cortege was slowed to show mutual respect, the nation mourned your tragic loss.

I witnessed so much respect during these four years I feel it is important to share with those who lost a loved one how much the country cared. Four years on we care just as much now.

I hope that from the words I have written give you some comfort knowing just how much respect was shown.

I also have the Royal Marines Association repatriation report which reiterates what I have written.

God bless you all and may Charlie Henry Wood hear my words; from what I was told you were a real top man. ■

*Many people liked this story especially Heather Wood who replied:*

*Very emotional and heart touching to read that Jarra - thank you. Can I ask, were you the policeman that came back to the pub in Wootton Bassett later that day to tell me about the journey to the JR?*

*Yes I did*

*Although I was not seeking you I was looking for the group of soldiers who came from Sandhurst who spent the morning with me*

*Gosh... Thank you, I can recall that very vividly.*

**HERO  
HUSBAND  
SON**





# Battlefield Tour of Scotland



Members of the Rear Ops Group 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC together with Mr Norman Brown attended a Battlefield Tour of Scotland, this was organised by Capt JD Smale RLC.

**Report: Norman Brown**  
**Pictures: Norman Brown**

**M**EMBERS of the Rear Ops Group 23 Pnr Regt RLC together with Mr Norman Brown attended a Battlefield Tour of Scotland, this was organised by Capt JD Smale RLC.

Those attending were particularly keen to draw comparisons between the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 and recent conflicts that they had all personally experienced, most notably in both Iraq and Afghanistan. At first glance the links may seem tedious, however upon deeper inspection the Group took away a number of significant lessons not only from history but that they can take forward in their future operational working lives.

Leaving on 3 March 2015 the Group travelled to Redford Barracks, Edinburgh and booked into the transit accommodation

of the Sergeants Mess, this was followed by a evening tour of Edinburgh. On the morning of 4 March a visit to Sterling Castle where we were met by a very informative guide, Ross. He began his presentation with an introduction to the landscape around the Castle, this was crucial so that the group could grasp the importance of the local geography in dictating the outcome of the Battle of Bannockburn. Despite the passing of 700 years there are still numerous natural landmarks that both Edward the Second and Robert the Bruce would recognise. A tour of the Castle followed and luckily "The Great Tapestry of Scotland" was present when we visited. A visit to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum which is located within the Castle was also made.

In the afternoon a visit to the Battle of Bannockburn Heritage Centre where the Group were impressed by the effects of the tremendous 3D graphics especially

watching the 3D Knights riding towards the Scottish schiltrons and the impact they had, or not. This obviously drew the comparison of modern tanks and the introduction of the Javelin anti-tank weapon.

The Group were then introduced to the Battle of Bannockburn 'Game' in which all participants took on a role in the Battle, inevitably the only Scotsman in the room was Edward the Second! With having a Scotsman as the King of England and a Canadian Scot at the controls it was inevitable that the Scots would win again!

In the evening another visit to see the sights of Edinburgh this time in the 'Old Town' listening to live bands.

On the morning of 5 March the Group visited the Abbey Church of Dunfermline which opened especially for the Group. This Church is where Robert The Bruce is buried. The final part of the tour was a visit to the Wallace Monument. The Group then made its way back to Bicester. ■





# Military to Civilian

Robert Locking served with 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps and was medically discharged following a sporting injury, which resulted in a back operation leaving him with 30% disability in his left leg. He served for 18 years in the British Army.

Report: Robert Locking  
Pictures: Robert Locking

**B**EING discharged from the Forces due to injury was not something that had crossed Rob's mind, however having come to terms with it and in true military fashion he set about facing the future as a civilian.

Rob joined the Army at the age of 22 in 1994. After completing his basic training at ATR Basingbourn and his Infantry Training at Vimy Barracks, Catterick he joined his regiment, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC based in Bicester.

During his last two years, Rob spent a considerable amount of time going through rehabilitation at Headley Court. It was during this time that he started building his network; he also gained valuable advice from the agencies that work within Headley Court and from others that were also on their own rehabilitation.

Rob's hardest decision was what suitable employment to look for due to his disabilities, but after attending several of the British Forces Resettlement Services (BFRS) Career Fairs and many hours networking with various employers who were exhibiting at these events he decided to book onto a CCTV Operators course, with a view to joining the security sector.

Rob applied for several positions and eventually gained employment from a

networking lead with one of the UK's largest security companies – VSG Security, where his CCTV qualification proved to be very valuable and he was based at the Disney European Distribution Centre at Magna Park in Leicestershire.

Not entirely happy with his position and having to work night shifts he continued to use the BFRS website and Career Fairs to hopefully open up more opportunities for employment.

His relationship with the BFRS team got stronger and stronger, and his qualities were noticed by the CEO Harry Dean who was very keen to interview Rob and talk about the possibility of having a position within BFRS. Although Rob was still working, an interview was arranged for him to meet with Harry Dean and Neil Dean (Managing Director) at the BFRS offices in Leicester. After a lengthy interview Rob was offered a position as the BFRS Military Engagement Officer. This position requires him to travel around the country promoting the VFRS Career Fairs and what BFRS has to offer the Forces Community, which he has grasped with both hands.

When asked what he thought of his position, Rob replied, "I found leaving the Army harder than joining the Army, it was a part of my life that was missing. The position I was offered by Harry and Neil was perfect, it enabled me to still have the contact with the Forces Community

meeting with many Ranks, and most of all I was able to pass on my experiences of resettlement and promote the excellent services BFRS offer."

Harry Dean CEO BFRS, said, "Rob is proof of our claim that ex military demonstrate a set of skills and qualities, which go above and beyond and are rarely found in their civilian counterparts'. Since he joined us over a year ago he has increased our Armed Forces Community reach, in particular he has managed to build relationships with resettlement professionals 'behind the wire' and helped to raise our overall image." ■



■ Rob with Chris Akabusi

Picture: Supplied







# World War 2

in Colour

Two unique WW2  
Pioneer photographs  
in colour for the very  
first time.





Picture: RPCA Archive  
■ 35 Coy, Ostend, Belgium, 9 September 1945

**Report: Paul Brown**  
**Picture: RPCA Archive and**  
**colourised by Doug Banks**

**W**HEN I first came across the Facebook groups of WW2 Colourised Photos I was blown away by how good some of the photographs had been converted from black and white images to full colour photos.

The group was started by one person - Doug Banks and is now a collection of some 20 restorers. We thought it only fitting to feature some of their work and this can be seen over the next pages.

The restorers analyse each photograph in great detail to get the correct matching colours of the subjects in question and then go about sympathetically colourising the photograph.

Seeing these hundreds of great photographs it was plain to see that there was not one that featured any Pioneers, which is a shame when you consider that the strength of the Pioneer Corps in May 1945 was probably one of the largest in the Army and included some 12,000 officers, 160,000 UK personnel and 400,000 Pioneers from other parts of the commonwealth.

We looked into which classic black and white WW2 photos of

Pioneers would convert well to the colourisation process and the result is what you see on the front and back cover of this issue and on this page. I'm sure you would agree Doug has done an incredible job of colourising them.

We then proceeded to find other photographs that would convert well to the colour process and obtained several new World War 2 photographs that we have not seen before. These will be featured in a future edition.

In the next newsletter it is hoped that we will do the same process, but to a few classic photographs from World War 1, featuring the Labour Corps. ■

## THE PIONEER





■ Two Sikh soldiers, 19th Indian Inf Bgde, 8th Indian Inf Div near Villa Grande on the 15th Jan 1944. Picture: IWM NA11188. Colourised by Paul Edwards



■ Maj John W. Forth, Chaplain Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (right) Caen, France, 15 Jul 44. Picture: Lt H G Aikman. Colourised by Benjamin Thomas



■ Crew of British Tank having a brew and cooking Christmas dinner, Libya, North Africa. 31 Dec 40. Picture: IWM E1501. Colourised by Benjamin Thomas



■ Group of 'walking wounded' British troops evacuated from Dunkirk, Dover, Kent on the 31 May 40. Picture: IWM H1672. Colourised by Doug



■ Medics, 5th/6th Special Eng Bgde help wounded soldiers on Omaha beach, June 6 1944, D-Day. Picture: Pvt. Louis Weintraub. Colourised by Paul Reynolds



■ Easy Red Sector, Omaha Beach - approx. 0700 on the 6th June 1944. Picture: Robert Capa. Colourised by Royston Leonard





■ General Montgomery stands beside an M3 Grant command tank near Tripoli, Libya. 27 Jan 1943.  
Picture: Capt Poston. Colourised by Paul Reynolds



■ British Infantrymen of 1st Ox and Bucks, 71st Inf Bde, 53rd (Welsh) Inf Div at Heike  
Picture Colourised by Johnny Sirlande



■ British commandos who took part in The Dieppe Raid 'Op Jubilee' at Newhaven, 19 Aug 42  
Picture: IWM H 22604. Colourised by Royston Leonard



■ Squadron Ldr Douglas Bader with Major Alexander 'Sasha' Hess outside the Officers Mess, Duxford, Oct 40.  
Picture: IWM CH1340. Colourised by Doug



■ British soldier by grave, inscription reads; "Here lies an unknown English Lieutenant who died in Air Battle 14.6.1941"  
Colourised by Laiz Kuczynski



■ New Zealand Army Sgt Ian Thomas smoking a pipe during the North African Campaign in Egypt 1942.  
Colourised by Doug





■ Queen Elizabeth with the 18 year old Princess Elizabeth visiting the 6th Airborne Division on Friday the 19th of May 1944. She is seen here talking to Cpl.'Jungle' Jones of the 22 Independent Parachute Company.

Picture Colourised by Paul Reynolds



■ Landing ships putting cargo ashore on Omaha Beach, at low tide during the first days of the operation, June 1944.

Picture: US Coast Guard #26-G-2517. Colourised by Royston Leonard



# THE PIONEER





# Larger than life Pioneer

The RPC Association historian, Lt Col John Starling, recently purchased the medals of Thomas George CARTWRIGHT, these medals included a Military Medal whilst serving with 187 Company in Italy (he also was awarded a Mention in Despatches two months later).

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**T**HOMAS CARTWRIGHT service history certainly makes some very interesting reading. From striking a superior officer, being absent without leave and many trips up and down the ranks.

**8 Feb 18** Enlisted in Royal Irish Rifles, Belfast No 22022

**11 Feb 18** Joined 5th Bn

**2 Dec 18** Attached Depot Devonshire Regiment for service with 621 Agricultural Coy

**22 Jan 19** Posted to

7 years colour service and 5 years reserve

**12 May 22** Arrived Constantinople

**13 Sep 23** Arrived Gibraltar

**10 Sep 24** Returned UK

**14 Mar 26** Discharged to Reserve – character FAIR 'A good hardworking man, clean and smart. I am unable to assess Guardsman Cartwright's character as higher than FAIR because of the amount of trouble he had during the earlier years of his service, latterly his conduct has been GOOD. Holds a 2nd Class Certificate of Education, was a farm labourer before enlistment.

**8 Jun 30** Absent from Army Reserve 8 Jun 30 – 1 Jan 41

**14 Mar 31** Discharged from

Cojuel, Near Arras

**2 Dec 39** Moved to Croisilles

**11 Dec 39** Moved to Roeux, commenced road making

**23 Dec 39** Promoted Acting Corporal

**1 Jan 40** Coy on road making at the railhead and petrol depot

**27 Feb 40** Moved to Cantin

**27 Feb 40** Reduced to Private for Misconduct

**1 Mar 40** Attached 1 Corps Petrol Park

**18 Mar 40** Reverts to Private

**12 Apr 40** Moved to Goeulzin

**24 Apr 40** Moved to Quiry La

Notte

**10 May 40** Moved back to Goeulzin to operate No 1 Reinforcement Camp for 48 Division and Corps Troops

**19 May 40** Masses of refugees passed down to Thumeries. Convoys of French and British

Troops passing in each direction

**20 May 40** Ordered to move to Libercourt, the roads are crowded with refugees as far as Thumeries. At 1630 hrs Coy ordered to return to Deuxvillers which it did so.

**21 May 40** Moved to Deulement via Armentieres. CO's car destroyed in bombing raid and Commandeered a French car. Much air activity

**25 May 40** Air attacks at Poperinghe, Kemmel and Armentieres

**26 May 40** Moved to Bray Dunnes

**27 May 40** About 2130 hrs marched to beach and stood by ready to embark. Waited all night

2 or 3 men may have got away in one boat but no more boats came. Ordered to destroy all documents and carry only personal equipment. Capt CJA Smith wounded in cheek by bullet

**28 May 40** Heavy rain. Still on the beach until 0700 when returned to billets and fed. Stood by again at 1600 hrs.

Depot Irish Regiment

**14 Mar 19** Discharged on re-enlistment – character GOOD

**15 Mar 19** Joined Irish Guards, Caterham – No initially 14411 later No 2714825

**9 Apr 20** Awaiting DCM – 'Striking a Superior Officer' on 1 Apr 20 Sentence – 56 days detention

**25 Jan 22** Changed enlistment to

Reserve

**Sep 35**

**27 Oct 39** Married Enlisted Norwich and joined 2 Centre Pioneer Corps – joined in his correct name and given Service No 13000458. Address on enlistment – 25 Knox St, London

**Oct 39**

**24 Nov 39** Joined 61 Coy AMPC

**25 Nov 39** Disembarked France Moved to Henin Sur



Unable to get embarkation space and found temporary billets for the night in the houses near the shore and tried to dry clothes.

**29 May 40** 0200 hrs ordered to march to Dunkirk and embark on the mole. Allotted embarkation serial number. Remained in embarkation column until evening and then dug-in into the sand dunes about half way between the beaches and Dunkirk.

About 2100 hrs ordered to march back to Dunkirk but were later turned back it being stated that the place had been evacuated of all military personnel. 6 transports were on fire along the mole

**30 May 40** 0400 hrs it was found that all troops had left the area and moved to between Bray Dunnes and Dunkirk. Went there and reported to Movement Control and then bedded down in the sand dunes.

Embarkation proceeded very slowly, the boats were grounded and there were very few of them.

Masses of other troops came through and were given priority. 1600 hrs under German artillery fire but no casualties. Later on the advice of a Brig returned to where we had been the previous day (about 2 miles away) and slept. There have been no rations for 4 days all food has been scrounged

**31 May 40** At dawn we returned to

the position near the hospital. Movement Control said our embarkation serial number was still valid but we must be patient. Got men in groups of 60 down to the water's edge.

About 0900 hrs a column of 23 Division came en route to Dunkirk. Joined the column and marched the 6 miles into Dunkirk (with full packs having had no food for 4 days. Company about 80 men strong with 20 other oddments picked up and attached. Embarked on 'Malines' at 1150 hrs. Landed Dover and entrained for Swindon

**1 Jun 40** HQ at Westcliffe with men scattered all over the place. Reforming slowly

**8 Jun 40** 61 Coy AMPC reformed at Westcliffe

**9 Jun 40** Promoted Acting Corporal

**25 Jun 40** Part of 16 Group. Half Coy at Reigate (12 MSD) the other half at Horley (2 ASD)

Ascertained that casualties at Dunkirk were 3 killed and 2 wounded

**2 Aug 40** Appointed Local Sergeant

**8 Aug 40** Absent without Leave – declared a Deserter 2 Sep 40

**24 Sep 40** Moved to Moor House, Hurst Green with a detachment at Reigate billeted at Manor House

**7 Oct 40** Reigate Detachment

moved to Chelsfield – working on ammunition. Remainder of Coy at Staffhurst Wood, Chelsfield and Sevenoaks

**24 Oct 40** 234 Coy AMPC formed at Oldham

**30 Oct 40** Enlisted Northampton and posted to 11 Centre AMPC as 13037716 Private Thomas George BAKER – address 7 St Mary's Terrace, Paddington

**2 Nov 40** Posted to 2 Coy AMPC

**21 Nov 40** Posted to 234 Coy PC as Lance Corporal

**22 Nov 40** 234 Coy moved to Eastbourne, erecting boom for Admiralty and beach defences at Pevensey Bay, Bexhill and Seaford

**24 Nov 40** Promoted Acting Sergeant

**16 Dec 40** Promoted Sergeant

**5 Jan 41** Reverts to Corporal

**17 Feb 41** Posted to 4 Centre PC

**16 Mar 41** Promoted Acting

Warrant Officer Class 2

**18 Apr 41** Posted to 5 Centre Transit Camp, Huyton and reverts to Corporal

**1 May 41** Posted to Depot Holywell

**4 May 41** Re-joined 5 Centre PC (SORS – Under Escort)

**30 Jul 41** Granted priv leave 30 Jul – 5 Aug 41

**3 Aug 41** Joined HQ 5 Centre PC



from Absence (in confinement

**10 Aug 41** Apprehended by civil police in London – under escort

**15 Aug 41** Tried by Field General Court Martial

1. Absent without leave 9 Aug 40 – 30 Oct 40

2. Loss by neglect of clothing and equipment to the value of £18 1 3 1/2 d

3. Making a wilfully false answer to a question set forth in the attestation papers which was put to him by direction of the justice before whom he appeared for the purpose of being attested

4. Absence without Leave

5. Losing by neglect clothing and equipment to the value of £2 7 4d

GUILTY: 1,2,3,4 & 5 except for the cost of two blankets £1 0 7d

SENTENCE: To be reduced in rank and to undergo detention for 28 days and be placed on stoppages of pay until he has made good the sum of £19 8 0 1/2 d

CONFIRMED: Brig TT Waddington MC

Commanding Mersey Garrison 29 Nov 41

**13 Dec 41** Posted to 201 Coy PC

8 Sections at Didcot with DCRE

3 Sections manning Bren gun posts at

Ordnance Depot

2 Sections on miscellaneous duties

**9 Jan 42** Reverts to old Army number

2714825

**11 Feb 42** AWOL (6-8 Feb 42 1

day 23 hours – forfeits 2 days pay

**1 May 42** 201 Coy: 10 Sections

on camp construction at Didcot

3 Sections manning LMG posts at Ordnance

Depot

**16 May 42** Name changed by statutory declaration to Thomas George

CARTWRIGHT

**23 Jun 42** Promoted Acting Lance

Corporal

**30 Jun 42** Attached to 244 Coy PC

for a course until 6 Jul 42

**20 Jul 42** Sustained minor injuries

at Didcot

24 Jul 42 Promoted Acting Corporal

**31 Aug 42** Reverts to Pte and forfeits 1 days pay (1. Breaking Camp 2. AWOL 6 hours)

**15 Oct 42** 201 Coy: Moved to

Letcombe Regis with detachments at

Arborfield, Pangbourne, Aldermarston,

Ashdown and Reading

**17 Nov 42** Posted to 187 Coy PC

stationed at Launceston

**1 Dec 42** Close arrest

**4 Jan 43** Tried by Field General Court Martial at Truro

1. Making away and selling clothing

2. Stealing property of a person subject to

Military Law

3. Stealing Public Property

4. Stealing Public Property

SENTENCE: 112 Days Detention

CONFIRMED: Brig A de L Cayenove DSO

MVO, Commanding 73 Indp Bde 7 Jan 43

**16 Jan 43** List – Fort Darland

Detention Barracks

**1 Mar 43** Moved to Fairfield

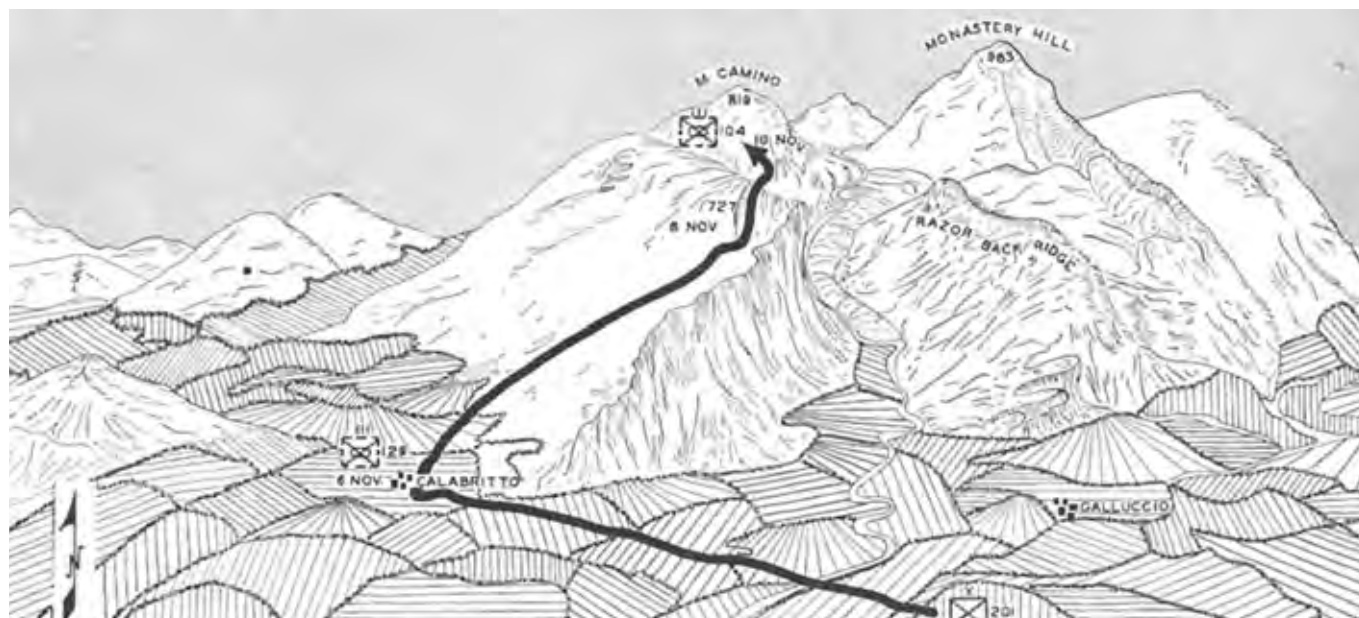
Camp, Monkton



**19 Mar 43** Posted to 187 Coy PC (37 days remission)  
**12 Apr 43** Embarked  
**23 Apr 43** Disembarked North Africa (Algiers) – moved to Bougie 28 Apr 43  
**3 May 43** Promoted Lance Corporal  
**4 May 43** Promoted Acting Corporal  
**9 Jun 43** Promoted Acting Sergeant  
**2 Sep 43** Company embarked  
**9 Sep 43** Landed in Salerno, Italy  
 14 ORs wounded - 187 Coy comprised part of a Beach Group which fought through the North Africa campaign and then played an active part in the historic landing at Salerno, where they fought side by side with 201 Guards Brigade. Fighting, unloading supplies, carrying wounded back to First Aid Posts, this Coy well merited the praise bestowed on it by the Commanders of 46 and 56(London) Divisions- Eastern Command notes (26 Group)  
**1 Dec 43** Moved to Roccamonfino. Attached to 56 Division for stretcher bearing in connection with the battle of Monte Camino  
**6 Dec 43** Promoted Acting Sergeant  
**11 Dec 43** Moved to Roccamonfino, then Spireano on 13 Dec and Massmatucci on 25 Dec 43 – portaging for 46 Division  
**31 Dec 43** There were a number of casualties during the early part of the month but no names are mentioned of reference to any incident when the the casualty occurred.  
 The following is a report attached to the Diary signed by Maj GR Vivian (OC 187 COY): My Coy was ordered in to act as stretcher bearers by 56 Division and were attached to 140 MDS.  
 The Coy went forward with 5 Light Field Ambulance, and 167 and 214 ADSs, being split into 3 parties with 3 sections to each RAMC unit.  
 During the arduous and very exhausting work I lost a good number of men through exhaustion and one man actually died from physical exhaustion; he was No 13011512  
 Pte Tancred J, was 42 years of age, and was carrying a wounded officer down Monastery Hill. This took him 16 hours and when he had completed the job he

collapsed and died from exhaustion. I sincerely hope he will be remembered for his gallant act.  
 When the Battle of Monte Camino was over my men were brought down and put on portering for forward troops and are still doing so. They are getting weary and tired although of good heart. The Coy are nearly all category men.  
 The Divisional Commander 56 Division sent the following:  
 "I take this opportunity of thanking the Officers, NCOs and men of your Company for the splendid work done by them during the second battle of Monte Camino.  
 Your Company carried our wounded over the steep hillside under shell and mortar fire for several days and nights without resting. Their bearing and bravery under fire brought relief and succour to many of our wounded. It is not the first time that your Company has been in action with this Division.  
 It was part of 21 Beach Group during the landing on the Salerno Beaches. There your Company landed on "D" Day. It handled several thousands tons of stores and assisted in the evacuation of our wounded, and when the bridgehead was threatened took its place side by side with the units of the Division.  
 Please convey to all ranks of your Company the thanks and good wishes of 56 (London) Division.  
**Feb 44** Awarded Africa Star  
**26 Feb 44** Admitted 14 Central Clearing Station  
**27 Feb 44** Admitted 2 General Hospital  
**8 Mar 44** Admitted 93 General Hospital  
**15 Mar 44** Re-joined 187 Coy PC  
**27 Mar 44** Moved to Capua and then Casoria on 28 Mar 44  
**3 Apr 44** Moved to Baiano – refining and constructing a rest camp  
**7 Apr 44** Commenced work at 11 ESD, Cancellor  
**11 Jun 44** Moved to Vairano  
**13 Jun 44** Moved to Acquino – unloading trains  
**19 Jun 44** Moved to Oabtabi – working at 45 BSD, DID and Field Bakery  
**5 Jul 44** Moved to Narni – ammunition at 3 AAD  
**22 Jul 44** Moved to Narni – ammunition at 3 AAD, then Montevarch

(24 Jul), then Radde (27 Jul) followed by Tavernelle (28 Jul) – erecting Bailey Bridges  
**5 Aug 44** Moved to Narni – ammunition at 3 AAD  
**1 Sep 44** Moved to Borgo San Lorenzo – road and bridge maintenance  
**2 Oct 44** Moved to Crespino, then Muraglione (24 Oct) followed by San Benedetto (31 Oct) followed by Marsduccio (4 Nov 44) - bridging and road maintenance  
**23 Dec 44** Moved to Sassoleone – road and bridge maintenance  
**29 Dec 44** Awarded Military Medal  
 CITATION: On the night of 19 Jan 44 Sgt Cartwright led his section carrying supplies in the COCURAEO area. The section found themselves under devastating shellfire, ten men being wounded.  
 Sgt Cartwright continued alone and delivered his load. He then returned, and used the remaining men to carry the loads forward until all the supplies were delivered.  
 He was himself later wounded.  
**18 Jan 45** Moved to Moraduccio (near Faenza) – road and bridge maintenance  
**2 Feb 45** Mentioned in Despatches – reason unknown  
**3 Apr 45** AWOL 17 hours – forfeits 1 day's pay and a severe reprimand  
**17 Apr 45** Moved to Bubano (near Imola), then San Salvatore, then Cittea De Fabria – bridging and roads  
**23 Apr 45** Medical  
**25 Apr 45** Moved to Rasa, then Padova (Venice) then Palazzolo Dello Stella (Udine) before arriving in Trieste on  
**12 May 45** Working in port area, harbour construction and loading and unloading LSTs  
**22 May 45** Moved to San Giorgio due to the delicate situation in Trieste  
**18 Jun 45** Moved to Pola – erecting a Bailey bridge and constructing a runway  
**31 Jul 45** Dismantling huts, repairing jetty, unloading ships and handling ammunition in Trieste  
**20 Sep 45** Discharge certificate – Conduct FAIR – 'A good NCO, in forward areas especially, where he deserved fully his MM  
**30 Sep 45** Returned to UK  
**2 Oct 45** Disembarked UK  
**28 Dec 45** Class A Release ■







# Association Shop



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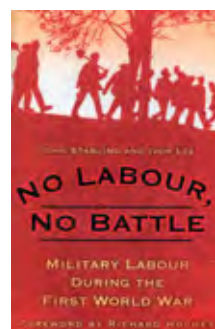


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◀ **"Royal Pioneers  
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by Major Bill Elliott

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



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Wood

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# Prisoners of Memory

An unsung story of WW2 volunteers who joined the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC) from pre-state Israel, who were captured by the Nazis during World War II and later freed by Allied forces. Starvation, humiliation, abuse and forced labour were routine.

Report: Zvi Harel/Israel Hayom/JNS.org  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**B**EN-ZION SOLOMIN, age 101, wears the cap of a British soldier and is assisted by his son and caregiver as he slowly approaches the front of the stage to light a Hanukkah candle and welcome the crowd at the

Armoured Corps Memorial at Latrun, near Jerusalem.

The ceremony was held to honour the families of the prisoners of war from the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC), who were captured by the Nazis during World War II and later freed by the Allied forces.

In a cracked voice, with his son helping

him, Solomin read his prepared remarks.

"In honour of the endurance, the survival, the Zionist flame, and the devotion to the security services," he said of the candle he would light.

The marks Solomin proudly bears on his chest tell an impressive story of combat and survival, one that has almost been erased from collective memory: the story of the 3,200 volunteers from pre-state Israel who joined the pioneer corps in mid-1940, leaving their families behind to serve in His Majesty's Armed Forces. Close to 400 of them were Arabs, and together they made up one-tenth of all the men and women from pre-state Israel who volunteered with the British army during the war.

Most AMPC members saw their first action in the western desert on the Egyptian-Libyan border.

Their objective was to fend off the Italian army. The British then redeployed them to meet the German threat, which was how some of them reached the Balkans and Greece.

The seminal event that changed the lives of many of these volunteers took place on the morning of April 29, 1941.

On the beach at Kalamata in the south of the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece, more than 1,500 AMPC members and 12,000 British soldiers were captured by the Germans.

The British gave the order to surrender only after it became clear that there would be no possibility of a rescue.

On the night before they surrendered, AMPC members engaged in battles with the German troops and suffered losses. Solomin was among the wounded.

The POWs were held in German captivity for four years.

Many were transferred to work camps, 200 were killed during the war, some suffered from various forms of torture, and those who survived were left emotionally scarred.

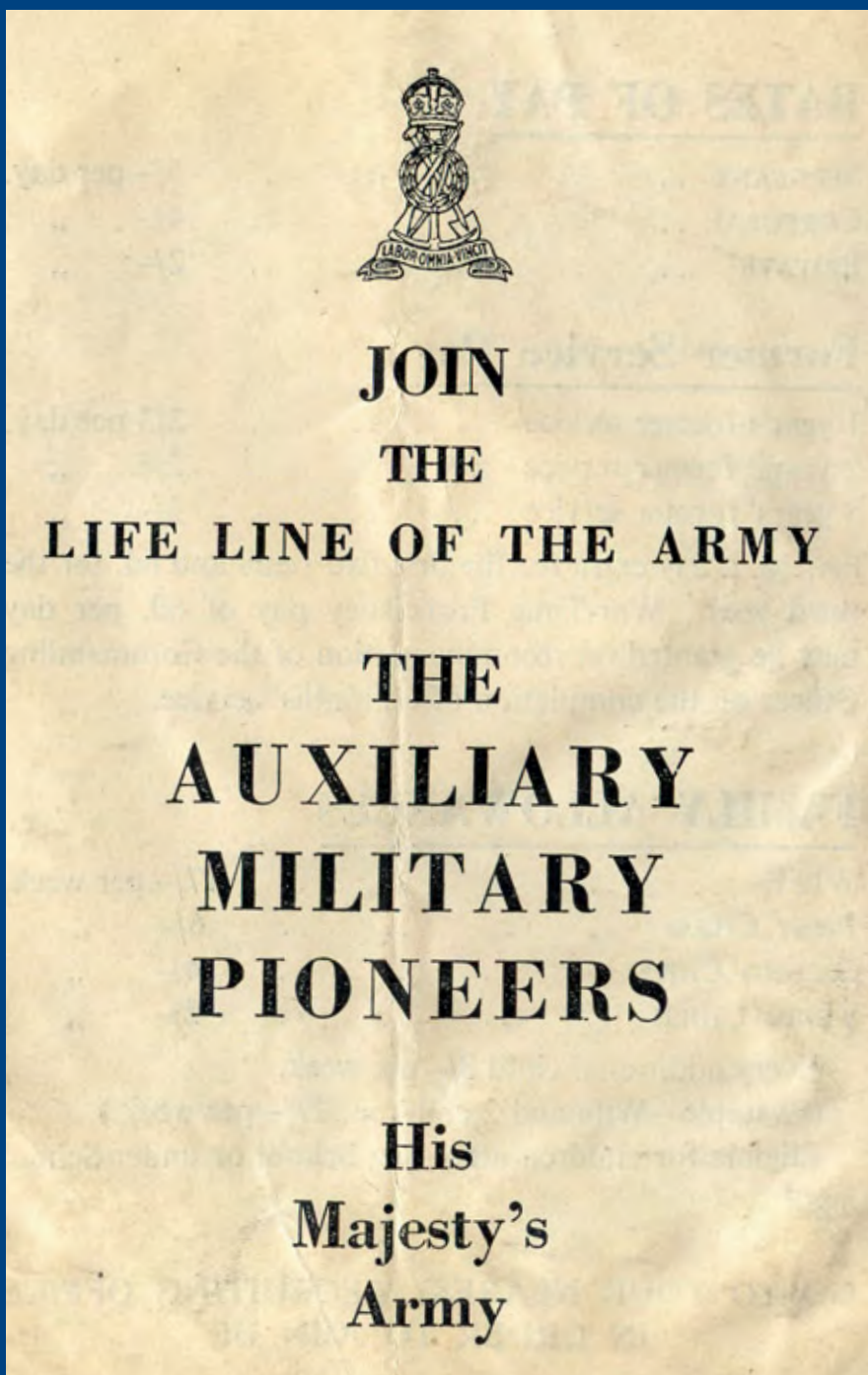
Seventy years after their release from captivity, their families set up a forum to tell the story that had been silenced for decades.

Heading the efforts is Talia Klayner-Dayagi, the granddaughter of a former AMPC soldier, who says that she has so far located 250 families with stories similar to her own.

There are currently only eight families of rescued AMPC servicemen living in Israel, she said.

The most important research on the captives' story was completed by Professor Yoav Gelber, a historian at the University of Haifa.

Gelber based his study on numerous documents collected in Israel and abroad, and on interviews with former members of the British army. In 1982, he wrote an article about the subject for the Yad





## WHO MAY JOIN

The Pioneer Corps is open to all able bodied men between the ages of 30 and 50.

Certain physical handicaps such as defective eyesight and slight disability do not prevent a man from joining up.

The work is not only interesting but also has a definite military aspect.

The Pioneer Corps has been honoured by the Lord Mayor of London by being requested to march through the City of London with fixed bayonets, a rare privilege granted to very few.

THE PIONEER CORPS IS A PROUD CORPS TO BELONG TO.

## PAY and ALLOWANCES

The rates of pay and allowances are the same as for the Infantry of the Line.

## PROMOTION

Being an ever increasing Corps the chances of promotion are extremely favourable.

## Enlistment

Men will be enlisted for General Service for the period of embodiment of the Territorial Army.

Vashem Holocaust research centre titled "Palestinian POWs in German captivity."

According to Gelber's research, at least 150 POWs are believed to have escaped from captivity. One man who evaded capture several hours before the British surrender was 90-year-old David Yechiel. Athletic and broad-shouldered, he was quick to say of himself that he had excelled from childhood in swimming and boxing, which helped him during his time as a volunteer.

Recalling the circumstances that led him to volunteer to the AMPC in 1940, he said, "I was 16 years old, and tables were set up in the streets of Tel Aviv, and they urged us to volunteer for the British army. I had to lie about my age, and so I did. I went to the British base in Sarafand (today Tzrifin) and said that I was 17 and a half.

They believed me. All my friends volunteered, and so did I. My parents supported me, but they did not know that I was going to war.

The Jewish community leaders wanted us to volunteer so that we would get a military education."

Yechiel recalled that while in the desert, AMPC members were soldiers in every sense, so they were trained as infantry troops.

"I was lucky," he said. "During the entire war, in the desert and later in Greece, I came face to face with death more than 10 times. My friend, who stuck close to me, was killed on the spot by a German aerial strike. When I got to the Kalamata port, there was concern I might be taken prisoner by the Germans.

I told myself that I would never let that happen. I figured that the Germans killed Jews, and certainly Jewish soldiers. I told myself that I had nothing to lose, either I would die trying to escape or the Germans would kill me once I was taken prisoner.

"The only option was to swim at night toward two Australian ships. I was determined. I went into the water, and I swam for about an hour and a half, carrying my weapon, until I came close to one of the ships. A small boat brought me to the ship, and so I was saved. Later on, they brought me back to Egypt and from there to the Sarafand camp, where I was

trained and transferred to the British Infantry."

Among the captives was legendary workers' leader Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, who later served as the secretary-general of the Histadrut labour federation, a member of Knesset, and Israel's transportation minister. Ben-Aharon was 35 when he was taken as a prisoner, and the trauma cut short his career as a workers' leader.

Another commander who was captured was Yosef Almogi, who later served as mayor of Haifa and held several ministerial posts.

Almogi was 31 at the time and a Sergeant in the British army. He wrote about his captivity in his book, "With Head Held High."

The former prisoners and their families spoke at length about Almogi's efforts to unite the prisoners, when he called on officers of all ranks to stay with their men and not abandon them. In his book, Almogi wrote that his request stemmed from a double fear—"that the conditions at the work camp would be worse than in a stalag [a German term for a POW camp], and that there they would try to deprive our men of their rights and even kill them."

Gelber's research found the Germans had decided they would not set up special camps for the Jewish POWs as early as 1940, when they waged war on France. They preferred that the French, like the British, separate themselves from the Jews and demand to be taken to work outside the camp.

But they were quickly proven wrong. Representatives of the British prisoners in the Lamsdorf POW camp in Silesia—where 1,160 POWs from pre-state Israel arrived about six months later, joining 19,000 British POWs—made it clear that they would not do such a thing, "and through the diplomatic pipelines it was hinted to them that the British government would also insist that the Jewish prisoners be afforded equal treatment," according to Gelber.

Gelber said that after the Germans announced that Red Cross relief packages would not be distributed to the POWs from Mandatory Palestine, the representative of the British POWs said that the British would not accept the packages either.

According to Gelber, after several months the Germans accepted the principle of equal treatment for the British POWs.

Yet "outbursts against Jews, while not uncommon in German POW camps, were usually the result of personal or camp initiative and not of orders from above," Gelber wrote in "Palestinian POWs in German captivity."

Starvation, humiliation, abuse, and forced labour at gunpoint were routine for the POWs. Several POWs were even shot to death by the Germans.

Early in their captivity, several hungry prisoners who fell upon foodstuffs were shot dead. POWs who worked in coal mines were murdered later on.

The Germans treated the POWs with cruelty even in early 1945, when Germany's surrender was only a matter of time.

"Most of them were held by the Germans until the surrender," Gelber wrote. "Some could not endure the final days of captivity and fell on the brink of liberation."

Binyamin Beit-Halachmi, who was severely traumatised by his long stint in German captivity, died aged 80. He volunteered for the AMPC at 18 and

married his wife, Rivka, in 1947.

"We didn't know what post-traumatic stress disorder was then," Rivka recalled, "but it was obvious that this was what had happened to him. I knew a pleasant, generous, and tranquil man who, after age 30, became irritable and impatient."

Brothers Shmuel and Shlomo Laufer of Tel Aviv went to war together with the AMPC and were liberated in May 1945. Shmuel's daughter Sara Kochavi, a member of Kibbutz Yagur and a journalist, recently wrote about the survival of her father and her uncle in the kibbutz's weekly journal.

"[My father and his brother] had to leave a wife and small child behind," she wrote. "My father's motive for volunteering in the British army was a double one: the closing of the port and the motivation to fight the Nazis.

What contributed particularly to the brothers' survival was that each one encouraged the other.

Even in captivity, my father never lost his sense of humour. Like many of the POWs, he learned English in captivity, and before he returned to Palestine he was sent to England to recover, as all the captives were. When they returned to Palestine, the Jewish community ignored them because in the eyes of its leaders, being a POW was no great honour."

Many of the POWs were saved in 1944 on a Nazi-planned death march from Silesia to Germany.

"There were terrible conditions of snow and freezing cold," said Yossi Solomin, POW Ben-Zion Solomin's son. "Because of the Germans' fear, they ordered the captives to march at night as well. Not everyone had food to eat—not even the German soldiers did. Everyone ate frozen beet sugar.

They marched for several months, almost to Munich, an unimaginable distance of 900 kilometres.

There was a snowstorm and they thought that they were going to die, and they shouted 'Shema Yisrael' (Hear, O Israel). And suddenly, a miracle occurred and trucks from the Swiss Red Cross saved them." ■

## RATES OF PAY

SERGEANT .. .. .	6/- per day.
CORPORAL .. .. .	4/- ..
PRIVATE .. .. .	2/- ..

## Former Service Pay

1 year's former service .. .. .	2/3 per day.
2 years' former service .. .. .	2/6 ..
3 years' former service .. .. .	3/- ..

i.e., 3d. a day extra for the first two years and 6d. for the third year. War-Time Proficiency pay of 6d. per day may be granted on recommendation of the Commanding Officer on the completion of 6 months' service.

## FAMILY ALLOWANCES

WIFE .. .. .	17/- per week.
FIRST CHILD .. .. .	6/- ..
SECOND CHILD .. .. .	4/- ..
THIRD CHILD .. .. .	2/- ..

Every additional child 3/- per week.

(Example—Wife and 2 children, 27/- per week.)

Eligible for children attending School or under School age.

GO TO YOUR NEAREST RECRUITING OFFICE  
IN ORDER TO JOIN UP





■ The new plaque at the Corps Plot Westminster Abbey

Picture: Paul Brown



■ SSgt Paul Monaghan meets HRH Prince Harry

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Mrs Heather Wood plants a cross in memory of her husband Charlie

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Mr Norman Brown speaks to HRH Prince Harry

Picture: Supplied



## FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE / LONDON LUNCH / CIVIL SERVICE CLUB



■ Members of 23 Regt with Mr Norman Brown at the Tower of London  
Picture: Supplied



■ London lunch which followed the Field of Remembrance  
Picture: Supplied



■ Association members following the Cenotaph Parade  
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members following the Cenotaph Parade  
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members following the Cenotaph Parade

Picture: Paul Brown





■ Members of 23 Pnr Regt lay a wreath at National Memorial Picture: Supplied



■ Mrs Sarah Lane tries to persuade WO2 Mike Cottrell to dance Picture: Supplied



■ Colonel David Clouston receiving the MBE. During the ceremony the Queen said "What do you do now?". I said "I command CGS's briefing team". She said "that's not why you got the award though is it? Wasn't it to do with the Pioneers". I said it was. She said that she had "always thought the Pioneers had done a great job and who was going to do it now?" I explained a little about the HT search back to engineers and mortuary affairs etc within the RLC. I also said that "it was a sad day making so many great soldiers redundant." She sympathised and I genuinely felt she was well read into the Regiment. There was certainly warmth and understanding there. It was an honour and a privilege to receive the medal on behalf of the Pioneers.

Picture: Colonel David Clouston



■ Michael Mulvey getting in shape for the BLESMA 10k run on May 25th

Picture: Michael Mulvey



■ Members of the Rear Ops Group 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC together with Mr Norman Brown attended a Battlefield Tour of Scotland

Picture: Supplied





■ Cenotaph Parade – all keeping in step

Picture: Paul Brown



■ 3 amigos after the Cenotaph Parade

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Mrs Heather Wood and Sgt S Ward posing on the dance floor

Picture: Supplied



■ Ex Sgt Frank Berry collecting for the Poppy Appeal

Picture: Supplied



■ Col Baker gives the salute to HRH Duke of York

Picture: Paul Brown



| This is a new feature to The Pioneer, where we will dig out from the many thousands of Pioneer



Report: Paul Brown  
Pictures: RPCA Archive

**T**HERE ARE literally tens of thousands of photographs in the RPCA Archive. We have started to upload them and put them online, however many of them have still not seen the light of day and overtime we will highlight some of these here.

Seeing the front cover of the Pioneers landing in Italy in WW2 converted to colour for the first time just shows how historically significant some of these photographs are.

In this issue the first set of photographs were found in the "Unknown" archives and upon seeing the photographs I remembered that someone had mentioned these standards before. A little bit more digging and I find an article by Taff Teague, buried away on Facebook...

"On 21 Aug 1948 27 Branch Standards of the RPCA were paraded through Central London with the support of the Police and all the Traffic was stopped. The parade route was Birdcage Walk, Admiralty Arch, and Trafalgar Square to St Martin-in-the Fields following the Guards Band, 150 Old Comrades and a Company of serving Pioneers from 27 Group RPC. After a service of thanksgiving the parade then reformed and marched through the Strand and then on to Whitehall to the Cenotaph, standards were lowered and wreaths were laid. A small service of remembrance was conducted with the hymn 'Abide with Me'. The parade moved off down to Parliament Square wheeling right on to

Great George Street and on to Birdcage Walk and back to Wellington Barracks. For many of the Pioneers present that day this was the first time they had seen the standards. The division is horizontal, with the upper half Wine-Red and the lower Apple Green. Such are our true colours in spite of the Scarlet Red and Brunswick Green to which Ordnance-issued flashes had accustomed us to during WW2 and to the present day. Each standard was paid for by ex serving COs and some of the existing standards still have a small silver engraved shield on the shaft indicating who it was commissioned by."

The photos on page 40 are part of a set I bought for Norman for Christmas. They feature the men of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC) fixing railway tracks and unloading supplies. The photos on page 41 feature Cap Badges being made in January 1985. ■

# Digging through the archives...



photographs, the ones that we think are of historical significance or are just very good photographs.















# 23 Sikh Pioneers Kisangule Expedition

The outstanding and excessively rare Central Africa 'Kisangule' Expedition December 1891 Indian Order of Merit group awarded to Havildar Nand Singh, 23rd Bengal Sikh Pioneers, Indian Army, who was one of the first Indian soldiers to serve in Africa, and also took part in the Sudan and Uganda operations in 1898 to 1899.

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**T**HE OUTSTANDING and excessively rare Central Africa 'Kisangule' Expedition December 1891 Indian Order of Merit group awarded to Havildar Nand Singh, 23rd Bengal Sikh Pioneers, Indian Army, who was one of the first Indian soldiers to serve in Africa, and also took part in the Sudan and Uganda operations in 1898 to 1899.

Group of 3: Indian Order of Merit, 1st type, 3rd Class, Reward of Valour, silver and enamel; Central Africa Medal 1891-1898, ring suspension, no clasp, unnamed as issued; East and Central Africa Medal 1897-1899, 2 Clasps: Lubwa's, Uganda 1897-98, correct engraved naming; (2558 HAVILDAR NAND SINGH 23RD: BL. INFY.)

Nand Singh served as a Sepoy later Havildar (No.2558) with the 23rd Bengal Infantry, otherwise titled the 23rd Bengal Pioneers, later the 23rd Sikh Pioneers, which regiment recruited exclusively from the Mazhabi Sikh community of the Punjab Province.

Despite being "pioneers" by name, the regiment functioned as a Sikh infantry regiment specially trained as assault pioneers.

With the continual slavery disturbances in Central Africa, in early 1891, Captain Cecil Montgomery Maguire of the 2nd Hyderabad Lancers, raised a force of 70 volunteers from the Indian Army, comprising soldiers from the 23rd Pioneers, 32nd Pioneers, and Hyderabad Lancers, who were to become the first Indian soldiers to fight in Africa.

Havildar Nand Singh was one of these 70 volunteers, and hence one of the first Indian soldiers to set foot in Africa.

The troops would be tested first during an expedition to Mlanje from July to August 1891, when a force was led by Captain Maguire against the Yao slaver Chimkumbu in the area of the Mlanje Mountains, located in Malawi.

This was followed by the expedition against Makanjira from October to November 1891, led by Commissioner H.H. Johnston and Captain Maguire against the Yeo slaver Makanjira on Lake Nyassa, which also included an operation against the Yao Chief Mponda.

Commissioner Johnston would later write of this: 'Encouraged by this success, we then and there resolved to undertake the chastisement of Makanjira, who had committed various outrages on British

subjects, and had recently robbed the Universities Mission of a boat and killed some of their boatmen. We hired the African Lakes Company's steamer Domira, and mounted our 7-pounder gun in the bows.

Arriving suddenly off Makanjira's in the early morning, we were saluted by volleys from his fighting men, who were drawn up on the beach, and who had evidently been expecting our arrival.

A shell landed in the middle of this yelling crowd produced an impression on them which was absolutely novel, and there was soon not one of the enemy in sight.

After setting fire to a portion of the town with other shells, I effected a landing with a small number of Sikhs, whilst Captain Maguire kept the enemy at bay by bombarding the town from the steamer. We managed to land with only one or two casualties, and the Sikhs carried off two of Makanjira's cannon and set fire to one of his dhows.

The enemy, however, came on in strength and we had to retreat to our boat, and should probably not have escaped with our lives had not Captain Maguire arrived with reinforcements. He drove the enemy back into the town, and completed the destruction of the dhow.

The next morning, Captain Maguire landed in force, and after hard fighting, in which several of our Sikhs were severely wounded, he captured all Makanjira's defences. I joined him and we drove the enemy out of the huge town, which we completely destroyed. We also destroyed two or three of their dhows.

Nand Singh was then involved in another expedition, this being against Kawinga in November 1891, the expedition being led by Captain Maguire against Chief Kawinga of the Yaos. Kawinga was a powerful Yao chief who lived on a hill which was at the north eastern extremity of the Zomba range.

As Johnston relates: 'Kawinga's fortress proved however to be a much harder nut to crack than we had expected. A gallant attempt was made by Captain Maguire and Mr. John Buchanan, C.M.G., Vice Consul, British Central Africa Protectorate, to scale the hill in face of a heavy fire.

Captain Maguire was wounded in the chest, several of our men were killed or wounded, and the force was partially repulsed, though it had captured nearly all of Kawinga's positions except the highest, and had so far scared him that he treated for peace and obtained it.

After the conclusion of peace with Kawinga, Captain Maguire considered it necessary to return to Fort Johnston, to complete the building at that place and relieve the garrison. He was to be back at Zomba for Christmas with me, but I was doomed never to see him again.

For these operations and one more against the Yao Chief Zarafi from January to February 1892, this latter being led by Commissioner H.H. Johnston, Havildar Nand Singh was awarded the rare Central Africa Medal 1891-1898 without clasp, one of only 26 awarded to men from his regiment.

It was however for an operation which did not come into the scope of the Central Africa Medal 1891-1898, that Nand Singh would be awarded the Indian Order of Merit, 3rd Class, for valour. After the Kawinga Expedition in November 1891, as mentioned by Johnston, Captain Maguire had returned to Fort Johnston to complete its building as it was intended to garrison the post permanently.

Whilst he was there information was received that two of Makanjira's slaving dhows were in a creek. Maguire embarked together with a small force of his Indian Contingent onboard the Domira, Havildar Nand Singh being present. As Johnston relates: 'He found the dhows in a little cove close to where Fort Maguire is now situated, and somewhat to the north of Makanjira's main town.

He landed with a small force of about 28 men, including Havildar Nand Singh, and was proceeding to destroy and incapacitate the dhow's, when Makanjira, and about 2000 men, attacked him.

He retreated to the beach. Unfortunately a storm had arisen which had wrenched his boat from her moorings, and had dashed her on to the rocks.

The Domira in endeavouring to approach as near as possible in order to come to his assistance, was blown onto a sandbank, and stuck fast within a short distance of the shore. When he had lost three of his men Captain Maguire told the others to enter the water and make for the Domira.

After seeing them off, and with a few faithful Sikhs repulsing with the bayonet the onslaught of the enemy, he turned to the water himself, but just as he was nearing the steamer a bullet apparently struck him in the back of the head and he sank.

Just about this time the master of the Domira, Mr. Keiller, was wounded, and shortly after Mr. Urquhart, the second



engineer, was severely wounded.

All the Indian soldiers except the three who had been killed reached the steamer safely, and preparations were at once made to defend the Domira from the attack of Makanjira's men, who were at very close range.'

So set in place an action which was to become the Rorke's Drift of Central Africa, with hand to hand fighting, Makanjira's troops would be continually fought off the sides of the Domira by the small number of Sikh soldiers and the crew of the Domira, an artists printed sketch exists of this action showing the Sikh's bayonetting the enemy from the sides of the boat. 'After two or three days' incessant fighting, Makanjira's people put up a flag of truce.

His envoys were received on board and offered in return for a certain ransom, which was paid, to cease fighting and to assist in moving the Domira off the sank bank, and to give up the bodies of Captain Maguire and the dead sepoys.

The negotiations were chiefly conducted by Dr. Boyce and Mr McEwan, in order that the two wounded Europeans might not be shown to the enemy.

After peace had, seemingly, been concluded with Makanjira's envoys, the latter said that no effect could be given to the provisions of this agreement until the white men had visited Makanjira on the shore, and as an extra inducement for them to come they promised Dr. Boyce, that he could receive for burial the body of Captain Maguire.

Owing to the two wounded officers being concealed in the cabin below, it appears that Makanjira's envoys imagined Dr. Boyce and Mr. McEwan were the only white men on the steamer. They therefore made a point of insisting they should both come to see Makanjira.

No idea of treachery seems to have entered the minds of the Europeans, who did not even think of insisting on Makanjira's leaving hostages on board, whilst they went ashore.

They therefore started for the beach with only a few unarmed attendants. One of these was Captain Maguire's orderly, an Indian Muhammadan soldier. Soon after reaching the beach an Arab led this orderly away from the rest of the party, offering to show him Captain Maguire's body.

So far as is known, after taking the orderly for a roundabout walk he urged him strongly to return to the boat, which the man did. Dr. Boyce and his party were told that Makanjira was just a short distance from the shore, in the bush, awaiting them.

They were thus led on to a distance of perhaps two miles from the lake shore, then they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a number of Makanjira's men, at the head of whom was Saidi Mwazungu, a man half Arab and half Yao. Saidi Mwazungu suddenly called out, "Makanjira has ordered the white men to be killed."

His men then turned their guns on the party. Mr. McEwan was shot repeatedly. Dr. Boyce was shot several times, but did not die. They therefore threw him down and cut his head off. The Swahili servants who had accompanied the party were not killed, but secured and subsequently sold as slaves. The Atonga steamer boys were killed, or left for dead.

One of these Atonga, however, whom the Arabs believed themselves to have killed, managed in spite of his terrible

wounds to crawl by degrees to the lake shore where he shouted for help. He was got on board the steamer, and gave an account of what had happened. Meanwhile the survivors in the steamer heard the Yao shouting on the shore that all the white men were killed, and that now was the time to attack the steamer.

The Sikh's behaved splendidly, but the hero at this crisis was Mr. Urquhart, the wounded engineer, who by dint of almost superhuman efforts, and by working at the dead of night, managed to get the steamer afloat. After a five days detention - five days without sleep, in constant and incessant danger, and almost without food - the steamer floated off the sand bank and into deep water.

The 7-pounder gun was silently got ready by the Sikhs, and before the vessel steamed away, shells were fired in rapid succession into howling crowds of Makanjira's men, who were dancing around camp fires, confident that a few more hours would see the Domira in their possession.

Maguire had been killed on the 15th December 1891. The survivors made it back to Fort Johnston, where Johnston himself arrived at the end of December - 'my arrival soon restored the morale of the Sikhs, who were literally in tears at the death of their commander, but the Muhammadan Indian soldiers had not rallied from the feeling of discouragement caused by this disaster. Soon afterwards they had, in fact, to be sent back to India, though there were men amongst them who had strikingly distinguished themselves.

It must be remembered however, that they were all cavalymen, and not used to fighting on foot, or on board a ship, and all things considered behaved as well as might be expected. The Sikh's however, throughout all this crisis, never showed their sterling worth more effectually.'

For his extreme gallantry during the action from 15th to 21st December 1891, Havildar Nand Singh was awarded the Indian Order of Merit, 3rd Class, one of four awarded for this action, the other recipients being Sowar (No.1015) Anwar Khan, 1st Lancers, Naik (No.1909) Isar Singh, also of the 23rd Pioneers, and Naik (No.1179) Jhanda Singh, of the 32nd Pioneers. Havildar Nand Singh was the most senior of the recipients.

Of the 28 Indian soldiers who partook in the operations, nine were killed, along with four Europeans, two being from the

steamer, Doctor Boyce who had accompanied the expedition, and of course Captain Maguire. In addition two Europeans were wounded, both from the steamer, and nine natives were killed, mostly the steamer's native crew.

As previously stated, the Central Africa Medal 1891-1898 was not awarded for the action when Maguire was killed, however for all the previously mentioned operations and one more against the Yao Chief Zarafi from January to February 1892, this latter being led by Commissioner H.H. Johnston, Havildar Nand Singh was awarded the rare Central Africa Medal 1891-1898 without clasp, one of only 26 awarded to men from his regiment.

Out of the original contingent of 70 Indian volunteers who went to Africa with Maguire, comprising soldiers from the 23rd Pioneers, 32nd Pioneers, and Hyderabad Lancers, only the following medals were awarded to the surviving soldiers, as mentioned 26 to men from the 23rd Pioneers, 23 to the 32nd Pioneers, and 5 to the Hyderabad Lancers, in all 54 men, which gives an indication that 16 men lost their lives not including Maguire.

Further Indian troops would have arrived since the first volunteers which explains the larger number of troops entitled to this rare medal which spans operations from July 1891 to December 1893.

Havildar Nand Singh remained in Africa, but in what role is uncertain, however he was then present together with a few other Sikhs as part of the force of 340 Swahilis, Europeans and Sikhs under the command of Major General J.R.L. MacDonald. Royal Engineers, which defeated the disaffected Sudanese troops, and managed to drive off the mutineers after a prolonged fight at Fort Lubwa's on Lake Victoria, these operations lasted from 23rd September 1897 to 24th February 1898.

He was then involved in the Uganda operations as a member of the forces under Major G.C. Martyr, and Colonel J.T. Evatt which advanced down the Nile and defeated and captured both Kabarega and Mwanga in the Uganda Protectorate, and then continued on to Nandi.

These operations lasted from 21st March to 2nd May 1899.

For his services during these operations Havildar Nand Singh was awarded the East and Central Africa Medal 1897-1899, with two clasps for Lubwa's, and Uganda 1897-98. ■





# War Pensions

War Pensions are probably the oldest type of state benefit. The aim of this article is to attempt to explain the War Pensions system.

**Report: Maj General G W FIELD CB CVO  
OBE MInstRE**

**I**N MY experience, knowledge of the arrangements for compensation for disablement caused by service is patchy, at best. As a result, there will be those who read this article (unless put off by the prosaic title!) who will not have claimed compensation to which they may be entitled. The aim of this article is to attempt to explain the system and to share my personal knowledge, having dealt with well over 1000 appeals during my time with the PAT.

## History

WAR Pensions are probably the oldest type of State Benefit and can be traced back in history to the days of Alfred the Great. The War Pensions Scheme was introduced to deal with the mass casualties of the Great War. The scheme lapsed but was re-introduced for the Second World War; in both cases it was limited to disablement from war service. However, this requirement was removed in 1949 and, since then, has applied to all disablement caused by service in the Armed Forces.

On 6 April 2005 a new arrangement came into effect, the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, and all disablement arising from that date is dealt with under the AFCS. However, the War Pensions Scheme is still very much alive for dealing with disablement before that date. This article deals only with the latter, as the terms of the AFCS are generally quite well understood by those currently serving and the chain of command.

## Administration

The two schemes are administered on behalf of the "Secretary of State" (in law, but the MOD in practice) by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, based near Blackpool. The appeal system is handled by the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber of the Tribunal Service, an organ of the Ministry of Justice and, crucially therefore, independent of the MOD.

## Entitlement

Disablement is defined as an injury, wound or disease caused or aggravated by service. In order to establish entitlement to compensation it is first necessary to make a claim (although this is not the case with a medical discharge), to demonstrate that there is disablement and to show that this is causally related to service. This can be fairly straightforward (as in Case A) or very complicated (as in Case B).

Case A. Maj Smith injured his knee parachuting in

2004. He had his cartilage removed and spent some time at Headley Court. The

injury was well documented in his Service Medical Records and at his Discharge Medical some years later. He has now developed osteoarthritis which his orthopaedic surgeon says is almost certainly the result of the parachuting injury and subsequent surgery. If he puts in a claim it will almost certainly succeed and he will receive compensation.

Case B. WO1 Jones left the Army in the 1990s and is now suffering from breathing difficulties. These were not present during service. He has been diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Mr Jones is convinced that his illness has been caused by working as a welder in the Army. He can put in a claim but it will be extremely difficult for him to prove a causal link to service, and the burden of proof is on him (as will be explained later).

## Claims

To make a claim you simply contact the SPVA. (There is a very good web site.) They will send you a claim form and explanatory leaflet. You need to give as much information as you can about your disablement, how it affects your life and, crucially, why you believe it was caused by service. The SPVA will have access to your Service Medical Records (which you can also ask to see). They will contact your GP, so it is important that he is fully aware of your condition. The SPVA will also make arrangements for you to be medically examined. When this happens it is vital that you explain clearly how your disablement affects you as this medical report will be the most important tool for the SPVA in deciding your entitlement to compensation.

The SPVA will also make an assessment of the degree of your disablement. This is done by comparing you with an average person of the same age without your disablement. They take into account your ability to perform everyday tasks such as walking, running, playing sport, gardening, shopping, DIY, etc as well factors such as the degree of pain you may be in, whether your sleep is affected and any psychological impact. For degrees of disablement below 20% compensation takes the form of a tax-free lump sum. At or above 20% you will receive an annual pension, again tax free.

## Appeals

Should the SPVA decide to reject your claim (often on the grounds that no causal link to service has been shown or that there is insufficient evidence of disablement) you have the right to appeal their decision. You can also appeal the assessed degree of disablement if you think it is too low. The appeal procedure will be explained to you. You must ensure that you make your appeal within the given time limit. In due course the SPVA will send you a

"Response". This is a file (typically 100-200 pages long) which explains why your claim has been rejected. It includes all the medical evidence on which the decision has been made, together with extracts from the relevant legal framework. A date will then be set for your appeal to be heard by the Tribunal. It is important for you to attend in person. (There are Tribunal hearings in most of the major cities.) It is highly advisable to ask that the Royal British Legion represent you. The RBL has full-time staff who attend all War Pensions and AFCS Tribunals. The panel is chaired by a Judge and has a Medical and a Service member. The latter will be an ex-Service person of wide experience. (In my time the ranks ranged from Warrant Officer to Vice Admiral!) Your RBL rep will take you through your evidence and the Tribunal members will also question you. A decision will be made on the day and you will be told the outcome. If you are successful the SPVA will implement the Tribunal decision. About one quarter of all Appeals are settled in the appellant's favour. The Tribunal has the power to reduce your award but, in practice, this happens very rarely.

As stated earlier, it is crucial to be able to show that your injury was caused or aggravated by service. Formerly, if a claim was made within seven years of the end of service, the onus lay on the MOD to prove beyond reasonable doubt that your disablement was not caused by service. However, since April 2005, with the introduction of the AFCS, the seven year rule has, by definition, lapsed. The burden of proof is now on the appellant to establish, by reliable evidence, a reasonable doubt that his disablement was caused by service. This standard of proof is still lower than the "balance of probabilities" used in civil law (and now the AFCS).

So, how do you go about raising a reasonable doubt? In Major Smith's case his orthopaedic surgeon has stated that the most likely cause of his OA is the parachuting injury and resultant surgery. So he would almost certainly have his claim upheld. In Mr Smith's case, however, he would have to show, by reliable medical evidence, that fumes from welding can cause COPD. He would still have an uphill struggle because of his heavy smoking as a younger man. The most reliable evidence would be if the SPVA Synopsis of Causation (which you can access via the SPVA website) were to list welding as a Risk Factor for COPD. (Synopses of Causation have been listed for over 100 conditions. The older Medical Appendixes can also be useful.)

The causal link may be far from obvious. Major Smith was given an award of 30% for his arthritic knee. However, years later he developed kidney cancer. Wishing to find out more about what might have



caused his illness he looked up the Synopsis of Causation. Among the Risk Factors was "Prolonged exposure to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs". Because his OA developed whilst he was still serving, his MO prescribed Voltarol which he then took for years until his cancer appeared. So he put in a Further Condition Claim for kidney cancer.

This was rejected by the SPVA who said that there was only a very slight increased risk.

But the Tribunal took the trouble to look up the original research on which the Synopsis was based and found that the risk was "statistically significant" and therefore allowed the appeal.

This real example illustrates why you may need research and expert advice in making a claim.

#### Deterioration

Once an award has been made, there is no limit to how often you can go back to the SPVA and claim that your condition has worsened. This is often the case with arthritis, for example, which is a degenerative disease. You will still need reliable medical evidence to support your new claim.

#### Hearing Loss

A FINAL word on an injury which plagues many servicemen of a certain generation: noise-induced hearing loss. The chances of a successful claim are almost zero as:

There has to be a loss of at least 50dB in each ear at 1,2 and 3 KHz.

The loss has to be measured at or near discharge and no account is taken of any subsequent age-related deterioration.

So my advice is don't bother!

#### Conclusion

If you think you have been disabled either physically or psychologically by your military service you should consider claiming the compensation to which you may be entitled.

Don't be deterred by the apparent complexity of the legislation as there are plenty of organisations which can provide advice, especially the RBL and such specialist charities as Combat Stress and BLESMA.

There is a lot at stake: up to c. £10,000 p.a. tax free for the most serious disablement, plus additional benefits and perhaps a War Pension for your widow if you die of the accepted condition.

Good luck! ■



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**Report: George Pringle**  
**Picture: George Pringle**

# The loss of 1 and 2 platoons 175 Company

Dear Norman, on page 15 of your wonderful Apr 13 Newsletter you requested us to send contributions denoting a story. I have done my best and enclose one. Bye for now. George Pringle.

**I**N DECEMBER 1941 the HQ of 175 Company Pioneer Corps were stationed in Preston and the rest of the Company comprising of 10 platoons (300 men) were dispersed on working parties or on training exercises throughout the area of Lancashire.

I was in No 3 Platoon and after 6 weeks of manoeuvres and schemes were then billeted in a desolate holiday camp at Middleton near Heysham awaiting orders to carry out beach landings in the area. However these orders were then cancelled and we were transported by the RASC to the port of Fleetwood to carry out defence work using barbed and dannet wire on the jetty and harbour.

A week later it was here that our Sergeant informed us that No 1 and 2 Platoons had been seconded to 4 Group HQ, commanded by Lt Col CR Knight, and they would be embarking at Gourock on the 6th December 1941.

They would form part of "K" Force designated to land in North Africa with a view to occupying French airfields and to construct new aerodromes for use by the RAF in support of Royal Navy operations in the Mediterranean.

As they were our advance party we were then informed to vacate Fleetwood and return to our HQ on the 11th December where arrangements would be made for us to join the rest of the Company and embark in due course to join our Platoons in Africa.

It was around this time that the Americans declared war on the Japanese as they had bombed without warning the American Naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii and our Government had immediately declared war on the Japanese.

As all ranks of our Company were now mustered at our HQ in Preston we were informed that "K" Force had received new orders which cancelled the landing in North Africa and they would be sailing to Freetown.

On arriving there they were informed to sail to Cape Town and then turn northwards through the Mozambique Channel to rendezvous with the convoy sailing to Singapore with reinforcements from the Middle East. We were then told we were going to the Far East to join our other 2 Platoons and so on the 14th December we were given 14 days embarkation leave and to report back on the 28th December by 2359 hours.

As all ranks returned on time we were all given orders to drop our kit in the billets and parade at 0800 hrs next morning. So on that day we formed up in Platoon order and then we were told we would receive inoculations and also our KDs (tropical kit) and were to remain in our barrack rooms. Our back packs, side packs and webbing together with our rifles were laid on our empty beds. We were on stand-by and passed the time playing cards, writing our letters and of course our wills. Twenty four hrs passed and we were all curious as to the delay.

However, later on the morning of the 31st December we were again ordered to parade on the square in battle dress order only. Our Officer Commanding Major Gravett gave us the order to "stand easy" and he apologised for keeping us in suspense as he had been waiting for orders from the War Office.

He then informed us that the position of our troops in Malaya was very precarious, but reinforcements were on the way to Singapore from the Middle East.

In view of that and by the time any convoy was organised and had voyaged as far as Singapore there was a distinct possibility that the situation had changed and the whole of Malaya would be in Japanese hands.

We would then be entering a no-go area and would not be in any position to help. In view of this, our embarkation was cancelled.

We were dismissed and returned to our rooms feeling a contentment of relief. Suddenly this fact was dispersed as we wondered what was happening to our advance party who had sailed from Gourock on the 6th December 1941.

During my service in the Army until 1946 the thought of what had happened to our comrades of No 1 and 2 Platoons who sailed for Singapore had always remained in my mind, so much so that in 1947 I was determined to find out what had happened to them.

With the help of the Imperial War Museum and a lucky meeting of Lance Corporal "Flash" Armstrong, I learnt a lot "Flash" was in our Company and was in No 1 Platoon. He was apparently the only survivor so with his knowledge and the IWM I am able to write this episode of an interesting but fated event.

"K" Force which I have mentioned spent the Christmas 1941 in Freetown and finally reached Cape Town in mid-January 1942 and then continued northwards via the Mozambique Channel. In approximately

100 miles east of Mombasa the convoy was divided as the bulk of the fleet of 35 ships continued northwards while the rest turned eastward.

The ships containing "K" Force sailed into Batavia on the 4th February and then disembarked at Tonjeing Driok. This force comprised 2 AA Regiments, 2 fighter squadrons of the RAF, A Signal Company, RASC and RAOC and Pioneers of 4 Group HQ (including the 2 Platoons of 175 Coy). It was now that a very odd thing took place as no-one seemed to have any information concerning these 2 Platoons or any idea how to use them.

The unthinkable proposal that they should be scattered throughout the Force on various tasks such as salvage or sanitary work but Lt Col Knight who commanded "K" Force pointed out that it would be wasteful of experienced and highly trained men.

It was finally decided to ask General Wavell at his HQ for a final decision and after prolonged talks it was decided that with the help of French, American and Dutch Staff Officers the Pioneer units were suitable to form the nucleus of a sub-Area HQ which was urgently required to be set up in Sumatra. In that island at Palembang was located a portion of the RAF Bomber Force which had been squeezed out of Malaya by the Japanese advance on Singapore together with its protective AA Artillery.

To maintain this force it became necessary to locate in the vicinity of Ousthaven an administrative HQ which was also required to arrange for the reception of a division (13,000) of the 1st Australian Corps who were on their way from the Middle East and were due at any time, so it was decided to use Lt Col Knight's HQ staff for this purpose.

There was much preparatory work to be done before leaving from Sumatra and Capt HA Wright the Group Adjutant with Cpl RA Broadbank joined the Group Commander at Bandoeng to help him and also to be initiated into the mysteries of a cypher for use when the occasion demanded. In 7 hrs time No 1 Platoon was moved from Batavia to Bandoeng to work at Command General HQ.

By the evening of the 12th February Group HQ and No 2 Platoon reach Sumatra and established themselves 6 miles in land from the small harbour of Dosthaven and with their usual will to work commenced to create the required sub-area organisation.

Difficulties abounded everywhere for communications were non-existent and



there were no rations available and means of obtaining them by local purchase had to be devised.

Labour was hard to come by and the local Dutch officials and non-officials were in the main uncooperative to such a degree as to be almost hostile. Gradually through the effort and diligence of the Pioneers order began to appear out of chaos.

Soon coordination was achieved with the Royal Navy and RAF bases and most important of all a substantial fleet of lorries and buses were collected from various sources and held under police guard awaiting the hourly arrival of the Australians for whom staging area were in the course of preparation in the jungle and plantations.

What an enormous job arranging logistics for 13,000 men from Australia who had served in the Middle East. In sweltering heat and frequent deluges of rain the work went on and regardless of rumours that invasion fleets of Japanese troops were bearing down on the North-East coast of the island. In addition any Japanese landings on the Eastern side of the island would be a greater danger, but all the ranks of 175 Coy of Pioneers cheerfully accepted responsibility far about their grade and sustained by the hope that their efforts might perhaps help to turn the tide which it seemed would ultimately overwhelm them all.

Sadly this hope was not to be realised as during the next few days that followed Lt Col Knight was likely to be faced with the responsibility of making some grave decisions he also found he was cut off from the entire world with no proper means of communication even within the island.

He was greatly relieved by the unexpected arrival on the 15th February of a Squadron of the 3rd Hussars from the Middle East.

Their armoured cars though of little use or value in the swamps and jungles lying between his HQ and the north could at least provide some small measure of local protection and above all do some much needed patrolling in the immediate vicinity. On the evening of the 16th February Brigadier Steel who was the Chief Engineer of the Australian Corps arrived with the news of heavy bombing to the North by the Japanese which resulted in the firing of the oil wells.

On the following morning Lt Col Knight was informed by the Dutch residency that a considerable enemy force was approaching. This news was confirmed at mid-day by the RAF and Signals personnel who were hurrying south to Ousthaven where in the same afternoon the first contingent of Australians arrived.

Their arrival at Singapore was too late as Singapore had fallen to the hands of the Japanese and just as the "Aussie" Division was about to depart and disembark a radio signal was received by one of the escorting destroyers ordering the return of all the troops to Java.

Plans for the withdrawal of all forces personnel were at once prepared as shipping was available for the 2,000 men of the RAF and a Signal company and any others who had reached Ousthaven.

So these units and detachments were at once transported across the Suda Straights to Java.

The ships returned empty to pick up the light and heavy Royal Artillery units, but there was considerable anxiety for these units for they were known to be struggling

southwards through the jungle ignorant of the fact that any bridges en route were too weak or narrow to allow the passage of their guns. Still intact was one main bridge twenty miles inland crossing over the River Seputi and was actually carrying the main road. However along this road were the Japanese troops who were rapidly advancing and this bridge had to be blown up by the Royal Engineers as soon as the RA units had crossed it. It was therefore a race between the Japs and the Gunners and the odds were definitely on for the Japanese troops.

Somehow, by a miracle, the Gunners were contacted and told to come south as quickly as possible and to "spike" their guns and abandon them. Two Dutch civilian lorries driven by and carrying members of 175 Coy were sent out to bring in the wounded.

The Gunners had been, because of their camaraderie, carrying their wounded comrades as best as they could even though it slowed down their retreat but they would not abandon them. As the Gunners and the Pioneers crossed the last bridge a covering force of the RAF Regiment were sent out to hold the bridge until the crossing was successfully completed.

The operation was a success so at 0200 hrs on 17th February 1942 the bridge was blown by detonating a 500 lb bomb under it. The race had been won and so Colonel Knight (who had been promoted) could now close down his HQ with a clear conscience.

During this extremely trying few weeks it was put on record the Pioneers of 4 Group Headquarters and the Pioneers of 175 Coy had excelled themselves in performing the innumerable tasks which came their way. These tasks were traffic control, anti-looting patrols, collecting the wounded, the loading of stores and routine clerical work, nothing deterred them, they were the pride of the forces.

When it was his turn to evacuate they had to receive a direct order to do so and no Pioneer quit his post not matter how weary he was feeling.

He resisted the temptation and set an example to many other who should have known better. When therefore late on the 18th February, Colonel Knight with his staff including Private TI Francis and CE Samson reached Batavia in the last ship to leave Sumatra he found his small command all present and in every respect complete.

Arriving in Botivio Colonel Knight received instructions to create another Sub-Area organisation and act as Commander of all British troops in the city. Accordingly he set up his HQ in the Bicycle Barracks in which were now gathered several thousand men from a variety of units recently engaged in operations in Malaya, Singapore and Sumatra.

There were Australians, British and Indians with a predominance of RAF ground staffs. Provisional battalions (each of 1,000 men) were formed and moved into defensive positions on the north coast of the island.

A labour force which under the command of Maj WF Carter MC, who was second in command of 4 Group, and RQMS Thatcher achieved astonishing results. It was during this time the men of 175 Coy were ordered to go to Bondoeng.

By the 25th February the Colonel had his new organisation working smoothly so the Pioneers after carrying out a good job were

no longer required. Next day, however, on the 26th orders were received that all troops had to leave Batavia as the Dutch had decided to declare it an open city.

This meant the Dutch did not want any fighting or bombing to take place and would hand over the city intact to the Japanese. At the South coast part or Chilachap, Colonel Knight was instructed to embark with his staff of 4 Group HQ. The KLM ship Zamdaam was a modern passenger and cargo vessel with accommodation for 120 people and it was hoped that due to her exceptional speed she might get through the screen of Japanese submarines swarming off the coast.

As it was, already 400 people were embarking and another 350 people were survivors of vessels that had been torpedoed during the previous 48 hours. There appeared to be not an inch of space to spare and any wounded were given cabins, but when a person found a space on the deck they occupied it for the whole of the journey. Some of the people were helping the crew to make rafts of bamboo as quickly as possible as a precautionary measure.

The gangways had been hauled up and the ship was on the point of sailing when there appeared alongside two barges holding nearly 400 Australians who had broken out of Singapore and made their way across to Sumatra. As the KLM ship Zamdaam was the only ship available and would be the last one to sail room was found for the "Aussies". So on 1st March at 0100 hrs in a setting of brilliant moonlight and burning ships and the sound of many explosions on land and sea the ship finally left the harbour carrying a mixture of 1250 people.

The next job of 4 Group HQ was to compile a nominal roll of all on board. During the morning on the first day at sea an open boat was sighted carrying 40 survivors from another ship which had been sunk less than 2 hours ago. All were taken on board and the Zamdaam continued her voyage to arrive 5 days later in the Australian port of Freemantle.

No doubt you have noticed that the Pioneers of 175 Coy (1 and 2 Platoons) had not been mentioned as going on board the Zamdaam. They were not in the South Coast part of Chilochap as they had been sent to Bendoeng.

Why they had been detached from 4 Group HQ after all the good work they had done on the island of Sumatra no-one knows. In Bandoeng they were left to their own devices to fend for themselves and they were consequently taken prisoner by the Japanese.

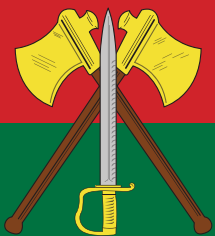
They were moved from one prison camp to another to arrive some months later in the infamous Changi prison camp in Singapore district.

Many of them had already died of wounds or dysentery en route but others died in Changi. Some were sent to Siam to work on what has been known as the railway to death.

The final information from LCpl Armstrong was there was only a couple of survivors but he had managed to survive though he had lost a lot of weight due to the meagre rations from the Japanese. LCpl Armstrong died at home in Liverpool in 1991.

I was lucky to have been in Number 3 Platoon and stayed in England during that time. ■





# Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of photographs from our archives. Do you recognise any of these Pioneers?







# Press Cuttings for 1945

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1945. It is the intention in future Newsletters to print details from other years.

Report: Norman Brown  
RPCA Archive

**T**HE following have been taken from our archives which detail Pioneer related events from various publications. These cuttings are all from the year 1945.

## **The Times 7 Mar 45 11 DEAD IN AIRCRAFT CRASH AT YORK**

Eleven persons lost their lives in the aeroplane accident at York on Monday night when a machine after exploding in the air crashed in the Nunthorpe district of the city. In addition to six members of the crew of the aircraft, the dead included two elderly women, a captain of the Pioneers Corps and Ordnance Corps private and an Italian collaborator.

More than 20 persons were treated in hospitals, but only 10 were detained. They include two children.

## **Hansard 8 Mar 45 MUSICAL INSTRUMENT (RETURN)**

Sir C. Edwards asked the Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that Private Idris Jones, Pioneer Corps, who was stationed at a camp in Perthshire, was sent by his commanding officer to his home at Argoed, Monmouthshire, to fetch his piano-accordion to help in the entertainment of the troops; that on D-Day he was sent overseas and Captain Parker, who was left behind, undertook to return the instrument to the boy's home, but so far it has not arrived; and will he make inquiries and see that it is returned.

Mr. A. Henderson Inquiries are being made into these allegations. When they are completed I will write to my right hon. Friend.

## **Hansard 20 Mar 45 GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR**

Mr. Bartlett asked the Secretary of State for War (1) what is the present quota of interpreters in German prisoners of-war camps; (2) whether, in view of the difficulties experienced in separating Nazi from other German prisoners of war, he will employ more interpreters, many of whom could be found in the Pioneer Corps.

Sir J. Grigg Camps with less than 500 prisoners have one interpreter. Camps with 500 to 1,500 have two and camps with over 1,500 have three. The numbers who are suitable are limited. Moreover, interpreters are also needed for Missions, work with Control Commissions and other such employments. It is not, therefore, possible to allot more interpreters to these camps except at the expense of other demands which must be met.

Mr. Bartlett asked the Secretary of State for War whether the German prisoner who died recently from injuries received in a clash between Nazi and other German prisoners at a certain camp received his injuries during the Canning Town

disturbances.  
Sir J. Grigg No, Sir.

## **Hansard 27 Mar 45 SOLDIER (ARREST)**

Colonel Burton asked the Secretary of State for War whether he can state the conditions appertaining to the arrest of Private F. Dewis, 106000491, of the Pioneer Corps; what was the state of his health; and whether he has been charged and with what result.

Sir J. Grigg Private Dewis was due to report back to his unit in the B.L.A. from privilege leave on 24th February, 1945. He failed to report and was notified by his unit in the normal way as an absentee. The Corps of Military Police from Southend called at his home at 18.45 hours on 8th March and this soldier was found to be up and dressed. He agreed that his leave had expired on 24th February, but said that he had been ill and had seen a civilian doctor. He had forwarded a medical certificate to the Officer in charge of Records. The Corps of Military Police asked him for the name of the doctor in order to be able to corroborate his story, but he could not—or would not—give them the name. He was, therefore, placed under arrest and taken to Shoeburyness Garrison. On arrival there, in view of his statement about his illness, he was asked if he wished to report sick immediately on a special sick report. He said he did not want to do so. He was handed over to an escort on 10th March, who conducted him back to the B.L.A. On arrival it was confirmed that he was fit to travel, but the medical officer found him to be suffering from slight bronchial catarrh. The charge of absence without leave was dismissed on 19th March as the result of a report from the military medical authorities.

## **Daily Mail 4 Apr 45 CAEN CHURCH THAT WILL BE A SHRINE Daily Mail Special Correspondent**

### **Caen Wednesday**

Plans were being completed today for the consecration and permanent establishment of St Nicholas Church in Caen as a memorial to all Allied soldiers and French civilians killed during the war. But primarily the church will be remembered by those whose husbands and sons wrote a glorious page in British military history. The Church, one of the most beautiful I have seen, had been closed as a place of worship since the French Revolution until the liberation of Caen. Now services are being held in it.

During the last war German prisoners were housed in the church. In 1938 the edifice was restored by the French as an ancient monument.

### **Plywood pulpit**

Yet the Germans, while occupying Normandy, used the place as a storehouse for petrol supplies, and when Caen was liberated the church almost became a

NAAFI warehouse and a concert hall for ENSA.

Father Ronald Dix, Army Chaplain, claimed the church for services, installed forms, and had an altar constructed from supply crates and soap boxes. The pulpit and the clergy stall were built out of plywood.

In November the energetic and earnest Rev H John, whose home is in the Rhondda Valley, took charge and continued the good work.

Under his direction and with the permission of the local authorities, the organ of St John's Church was salvaged, rebuilt and installed.

The wood cross made from the beds of two Italian soldiers and carried by him in North Africa, was placed above the altar on which the crucifix and candlesticks salvaged from the ruins of St Mary's were placed.

### **Lighting by Res**

Five stained-glass windows have come from St Mary's, so has the large crucifix on which is the figure of the Redeemer. Royal Engineers installed the electric lighting.

St Nicolas Church is regarded as the finest example in Normandy of neo-Latin architecture. It is in the same style as Winchester, Canterbury and Durham Cathedrals and is built of the same stone as Norwich Cathedral.

The organist is Pte Stanley Mills Pioneer Corps, one-time organist at Morecambe Parish Church.

Pte Clifford Butler (a Sergeant with 215 Coy Pioneer Corps) wrote on 8 Dec 98:

1. Most timber used in renovation was salvaged from the beaches.

2. The organ was built by a German POW who was an organ builder.

3. A number of Pioneers were involved and the organist was a Pioneer who had been a choir master from Grimsby. A number of us sent home for church music and when we moved on further into France I understand the ATS took over.

## **The Times 26 May 45**

### **PLUTO**

### **TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES**

Sir, - In his very interesting article on the oil pipeline across the Channel published in your issue of to-day your Special Correspondent refers to the units of the Royal Engineers and RASC which were engaged upon the task but omits all mention of the specially trained Pioneer Corps companies working in conjunction with them. These companies not only carried out a considerable portion of the construction work involved in this country but also laid mile after mile of pipe-line inland from the French coast at very high pressure and in extremely trying conditions of heat, dust, mud, and rain.

I am sure that those Royal Engineer and RASC units with which they were associated would be the first to acknowledge the very great value of their



contribution towards this remarkable achievement. The essential part played by the Pioneer Corps in operations of this kind is too often overlooked by the Press and consequently unknown to the public.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

READING, Brigadier (formerly Director of Labour HQ 21st Army Group)

3 Belgrave Place, SW1 May 24

#### **Hansard 6 Jun 45 PIONEER CORPS (TITLE)**

Colonel Carver asked the Secretary of State for War if he will recommend that the Pioneer Corps may be granted the prefix Royal, in view of the long and gallant service it has rendered in all theatres of war.

Sir J. Grigg The claims of the Pioneer Corps cannot be considered apart from similar claims for other corps. They will all be carefully examined but I hope my hon. and gallant Friend will agree with me that there are more urgent tasks on hand for the time being.

#### **The Times 9 Jun 45 TWO MILITARY PORTS BUILT DURING THE WAR**

Another closely kept war secret which can now be disclosed is the building of two military ports on the west coast of Scotland for military export traffic. After the fall of France and the Low Countries in June 1940, and the consequent virtual closing of the east and south coast ports to large ocean going ships, it became essential for additional deep water berths to be built for military traffic.

Two sites were selected, one the Gareloch, off the Clyde, and the other in Cairnryan, Loch Ryan, Wigtownshire. Deep water berths, six of 500 ft length at No 1 Military Port in the Gareloch, and five of 500 ft at No 2 Military Port, Cairnryan, provide berths with 33 ft depth of water at low water. The berths are rail served and full equipped with cranes, 20 of which, now at No 1 Military Port, were transferred from the quays at Southampton.

The work was done by about 5,000 men of the Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Corps. Fifty miles of railway track were laid. Each port covers more than 1 and a half miles of waterfront.

#### **The Times 19 Jun 45 HUMAN ELEMENT IN ARMY SCHEME ALMOST A GARDEN PARTY ATMOSPHERE FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUILDFORD, JUNE 18**

The carefully arranged scheme of Army release, like that of the organisation for the reception of liberated prisoners of war, is characterised by the attention given to the human aspect of a somewhat complicated procedure. The men and women due for

demobilisation are made to feel that they have done a good job and their last day in the services will be a pleasant memory.

At Guildford in a great camp, one the scene of intensive training, there was a pleasant quietness to-day when the work of dispersal began. Here the collecting unit and the dispersal unit for the south-east counties are almost side by side. The organisation provides for the release of 1,400 men and women in 24 hours. About a quarter of that number passed through the centre to-day. But the scheme has started well and the authorities believe that the machinery will work with the smoothness which the admirable organisation deserves.

The atmosphere was almost that of a garden party. A band of the Royal Artillery played on the stage, films were shown in the camp theatre, and among the guests who were present were high-ranking officers and women visitors.

General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, Adjutant-General to the Forces, explained the method of release and how it was infused with the human element.

The first officer to be released was Major ER Rhodes-Wood, Pioneer Corps, and the first soldier to receive his civilian clothing was Corporal LB Kirby, Royal Army Pay Corps, from Cairo. Junior Commander DM Trench, ATS, from Egypt was the first woman officer to secure release and the first member of the ATS ranks to be demobilised was Sergeant-Major Nellie Giles, who came from a mixed heavy AA battery.

There was no suggestion of haste, and one was surprised to be told that men were passed into the documentation section at the rate of one a minute. In the departure section the men and women had the privilege of buying cigarettes, tobacco, and chocolate and sweets at Army rates for the last time.

The ration, however, is a satisfactory one, each being allowed to have an eight weeks' supply of cigarettes or tobacco and two weeks' supply of sweets.

Those who are unable to reach their homes the same night are provided with accommodation and there are comfortably furnished lounges, in which newspapers and magazines are provided, and there is also the cinema

#### **The Times 10 Oct 45 DETENTION CAMP INQUEST**

The inquest was opened yesterday on the body of Private Michael Thomas Hanlon, aged 32, of the Pioneer Corps, who was found hanged in his cell at Stakehill detention camp, near Castleton, Lancashire, on Saturday.

Mrs Hanlon, the widow, said that a letter which she received from her husband on

the day of his death contained no complaints. In previous letters her husband had never complained about anything. He enlisted in the Pioneer Corps, in May 1940, at Belfast. In August 1942, he went to Ireland on leave, overstayed his leave, and on May 28, 1943, re-enlisted in the Pioneer Corps as though he had never been in the Army before. She did not see him again.

The inquest was adjourned until October 18.

#### **The Times 11 Oct 45 THE RENNES AIR CRASH NAMES OF VICTIMS**

The Press Association states that it is now known that the following persons were killed when a Stirling transport aircraft crashed near Rennes on October 7 on its way from Cairo to England:

Passengers: Lieutenant Colonel AJS Mackenzie, Royal Corps of Signals, and Chief Officer Dorothy Mary Mackenzie, WRNS, (his wife); Lieutenant Colonel GH Jones RE; Major SHA Williams, RA; Lieutenant JAL Carus, RN; Captain CT Keats, Lieutenant FE Withers and Lieutenant JE Lloyd, Pioneer Corps, Cpl EV Maltby, Sgt HB Timms, F/Sgt JE Timme, LAC SG Wardsworth, ACI J McWilliams, LAC JE Simcock and ACI HQ Golding RAF; and LAC WA Maltby WAAF.

Crew: F/O CT Dillon, WO A Griffiths, F/Lt DW Lee, WO EA Pether, F/Sgt D Wareham, and WO VG Last.

#### **Hansard 1 Nov 45 ENLISTED ALIENS**

Mr. Callaghan asked the Secretary of State for War whether it is proposed to return to French North Africa for demobilisation sixty Austrians of 362 Company Pioneer Corps, now in camp near Carlisle.

Mr. Lawson This question has not yet been decided. The release of aliens enlisted overseas but now in this country involves a number of difficult questions which are now under discussion with other Departments concerned.

#### **Hansard 6 Nov 45 PIONEER CORPS (DOCK WORK, ALTERNATIVE)**

Squadron-Leader Donner asked the Secretary of State for War on what duties the men of the Pioneer Corps would have been engaged if they had not been working in the docks.

Mr. Lawson About 40 per cent. of the men would have been engaged on rehabilitation of property, clearance of beaches and minefields, or assistance to agriculture; about 20 per cent on camp construction and maintenance; and about 40 per cent. on various military duties at home or abroad. ■

# Long Lost Trails...

The following are trying to re-establish contact...  
can you help? If so please get in touch.

#### **BICHARD Willie Dennis (13067991)**

Mr John Bichard is trying to contact anyone who knew his late father who served in 235. 135 and 97 Companies during WW2. Contact via RPC Association.


#### **DAVID ELSON SERVED IN 521 COY**

1971 to 1975 before being posted to Aldershot trying to contact anyone from that time. Tel 07768 911255 or email davidelson60@gmail.com

**DAVE CHAMBERS** – his daughter Sam Franklin is trying to contact Dave. samanthafranklin1986@gmail.com



# Les and Dave



**A**LTHOUGH we have not as yet, met face-to-face, I most certainly am a great admirer of the work carried out by yourself, and indeed your son, in the production of the Association Newsletter, The Pioneer. May your sterling work continue for many years to come. Very well done Norman.

Now Norman there are a couple of points that I am hoping you may be able to help me with. In the last copy of the magazine, Last Post, a Private Dave Suckling from Coventry was listed having passed away RIP. His service was listed as 1955-57, at this period I also served, I enclose a photograph of myself as a young Sergeant together with one of my Corporals, a Cpl Dave (Piggy) Suckling, he was also from Coventry. This photo was taken at Horsley Hall, Gresford, Nr Wrexham. So my question is could this be the same person? Horsley Hall was the Training Centre before moving on to Hermitage Camp in Wrexham.

My service was 1955 to 1977, the same Suckling was not as they say, a common name, coupled with the fact that they both seem to be from Coventry. Could it be the same person, or is there any means available perhaps you could check this out for me please. As I have said Dave Suckling was one of my Corporals and indeed a very good one at that.

Over the years I seem to read about the passing-on of so many Pioneers that I had the pleasure of

serving with, very sad, but that Norman, is life.

For my second point, it is nice to see that the MOD are at last going to issue a Medal with Clasp, for those who served in the Cyprus crisis 1963-1964. Only 50 years ago, none the less very welcome news. I say that as one of those involved in that particular Company. Can you tell me if there is a certain form that has to be filled in and sent forward, or do we have to apply in a personal letter, if so, do you have any details of where this application is to be submitted to.

Any information that you can give me would be very much appreciated Norman.

Before closing, it was very sad to read about 23 Pioneer Regiment no longer exists. I had a lot of service with 23 Group RPC both at Chester and later at Graven Hill. Many, many fond memories still linger, of the wonderful people that I had the pleasure of serving with, long may those special memories stay with me.

I will thank you again Norman, for all the fantastic work that you manage to do with the help of your son. Thank you both. Respectfully yours,

**Les Banks**

*Ed note: I am about 99% certain that the David Suckling who I published the death of in the last issue is the same one with whom you served. This is the only David Suckling we have had in the Corps since World War 2*



# On the left leg



■ Bill and George at Reunion Weekend 2013

Pictures: Paul Brown

**C**ONGRATULATIONS ON the latest copy of the Pioneer, how you and Paul find the time to produce such a wonderful magazine you both must be dedicated and determined in your efforts

As you may know Bill Sears and I are now 97 years of age and I have been in hospital 3 times so I'm not too able to move around.

We will make the effort to attend the next Reunion in July 2015.

The Cuneo mouse I think is on the ankle of the left leg of Private Emily Wren on page 21.

Bye for now,  
**George Pringle**

*Ed Note: Firstly, Looking forward to seeing you both at the reunion George and secondly congratulations yourself on correctly identifying the mouse and being the winner drawn from the hat. Prize on the way.*

## THE PIONEER

■ CONGRATULATIONS on another superb Pioneer Magazine, definitely souvenir quality. My thanks to you and your 'team'! Very best wishes for 2015.  
**Brig JH Hickman**

■ I MUST thank you so much for my pioneer magazine, which I always look forward to and enjoy. In the 'Blast from the Past' section, I was shocked to see my photograph of myself and guard dog Smiler. This photo was taken around 1976/77 as a recruitment drive with actual cardboard cut-outs in the recruitment offices of Smiler and I. Again, a big thank you and I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and New Year. Take care. Regards,  
**Kelvin McConville**

■ THANK YOU for all your hard work. The Pioneers are in my heart and it makes me weep with another camp gone, I will never forget a great Regiment. Regards  
**Derek Nash**

■ THE LATEST edition of The Pioneer covering the farewell parade of 23 Pioneer Regiment and its disbandment was simply excellent – very well done to you, Paul and all contributors. I hear from John Starling that you have now relocated to the old HQ 23 Group building – isn't that where you started? Best wishes for 2015  
**Pam and Gary Cooper**  
*Ed note: yes back to my old office from 1968!*

■ I HAVE to inform you that I am unable to attend the next Pioneer Corps Association Reunion at Coventry in July 2015, please can you pass on my name to anyone who knows me. Could you also publish the following: If any personnel who served with me at 521 Coy Royal Pioneer Corps at Bicester from 1970-1979 please give me a ring or text on 07768 914255. Yours faithfully,  
**Pte TR Elson**  
(24211570)



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:  
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com



## La Tribuna de Albacete

I HAVE received the CD with lots of images and useful information about the Spanish Company.

I don't know how to express my gratitude for your response. This material exceeds my best expectations. I wish the military archives of my own country were as

open and attentive as you have been. As soon as I have a first draft of the article, I'll send you a copy.

Thank you very much indeed!  
Yours,  
**Emilio Fernández Castro**  
Redactor La Tribuna de Albacete



# Pioneers have been involved in every major operation

**W**E RECEIVED the following email from a former member of the RAF. Pages 16-21 of the your October 2011 magazine "Pioneer" gave a potted history of the RPC and I found the following paragraph when surfing the web:

"POST WORLD WAR 2 As mentioned earlier, Pioneers have been involved in every major operation, they also served in Australia, Sharjah, Bahrain, Cyprus, Aden, Hong Kong, Gibraltar, BAOR, Egypt and the Falklands to name a few.

Although post-war service was in the main confined to the large static stores such as Long Marston, Bramley, Bicester, Kineton, Nescliffe, Longtown, Old Dalby, Melton Mowbray and Didcot they also performed unusual and varied tasks, examples being: -

13 Coy – Sea Dumping (ammunition). Including dumping ammunition from Milford Haven which had been declared unsafe to move by rail! Also dumping thousands of tonnes for the Royal Navy."

It reminded me of the Summer of 1958, when the RAF posted me to Cairnryan, Nr Stranraer, as part of a joint RAF/Army operation to build a rocket tracking station on the remote island of St. Kilda. The handful of us airmen were based at the 13 Coy RPC Quarry Camp in Cairnryan, now a holiday mobile-caravan site. Cairnryan was No. 2 Military Port and the Pioneers' job was to load surplus/dangerous ammunition which arrived by rail in wagons labelled "Davy Jones' Locker, Cairnryan." Some also came in by Liberty/Victory Ships which they also unloaded. The ammo was then taken out to sea by the Pioneers, in landing craft, and dumped in the deep! There were times when they cast off from the lighterage wharf where I worked, when the water was quite rough in Loch Ryan itself and we wondered just how unpleasant it was in an open-topped, flat-bottomed landing craft out in the open sea and whether we'd ever see them again! We always did. For soldiers, they certainly had good sea-legs and strong stomachs!

I should add that the military port itself was built to a large extent with the muscles of the RPC during the early part of the war. Very little exists of the military presence in Cairnryan now, bar one decrepit pier and a few photos I took at the time and which might interest you.

Publish the photos and my 'blurb' if you feel it would be of any interest to your subscribers. I hope the photo are self-explanatory, but I'm willing to clarify if necessary. Kind Regards,

**Chris Hebborn**





# Large whisky and soda

PLEASE let the Council know that the Beach and Cooper portraits have been delivered and have been warmly received with thanks by both elder statesmen. General Sir George Cooper's last message gives a flavour.

"Dear Charles It was good to see you and Sheila this afternoon and thank you so much for bringing my portrait. Though we hung it up straight away, I believe it deserves a better place and we will probably move it nearer the front door, replacing the rather sombre portrait of my great-great uncle who I never even knew! It was a long way for you to drive and I do

appreciate all the trouble you have taken. The portrait is excellent and is much more up to date than I remember and it is such a wonderful reminder of happy times as your Colonel Commandant. I have a feeling that disbanding the Corps was a huge mistake and I do hope the decision will be rectified before too long. With best wishes and renewed thanks. I have a large whisky and soda beside me with which to toast what I shall still call The Royal Pioneer Corps! Yours George "

The Thomas and Lucas portraits remain in safe keeping.

**Brigadier CB Telfer**

# An emotional day

THANKS very much for the latest, and perhaps greatest in terms of poignancy, copy of The Pioneer.

It was quite clearly an emotional day for all within the "family" of Pioneers and, as we've come to expect from those who've served, it was also a highly dignified and professional way of saying farewell – but

not forgotten.

It was interesting to see how the future of the Association and its events will be managed and supported, and no doubt the Derby/Xmas Draws will continue to feature regularly – hence the returned stubbs and cheque. All the very best.

**Nigel Smillie**

# Asking for trouble

THIS mouse is asking for trouble, looking up the left leg of the female soldier on page 21!

Is he inside or outside the tights that she is wearing.

The cushion has been shown at the Royal British Legion, Hailsham & District Branch and some of the members are talking of placing orders after getting the details from the label on it.

Once again keep up the good work.

**Frank Berry**

# Beautiful embroidered cushion

WHEN the post arrived today, 10th Nov 2014, Tina and myself were very surprised at receiving a package from the Association.

On opening we found it contained the beautiful embroidered cushion, the prize for finding the Cuneo Mouse in the April 2014 issue. I must place the credit with my wife, Tina, as to finding him.

**Frank Berry**

# It was a very moving moment

MY uncles grave was well kept. I buried a poppy badge I bought from the British Legion community shop that my priest had blessed during a brief ceremony on the alter the Sunday before we went.

I also laid a poppy wreath and placed some crosses into the ground; the polish days of remembrance we were informed is on 1st and 2nd day of November so I was pleased to get there before this date and ours.

One of the gardeners at the cemetery shook hands with us after he led the way to the Commonwealth war graves tiny gates

and actually got hold of my husband and hugged him with his eyes filled with tears, it was a very moving moment.

We signed the book, which was inside something that resembled a Tabernacle to me.

We saw a Jay bird on each visit over this tiny cemetery and a red squirrel played in this section.

My husband and I felt very privileged by this trip and would recommend it.

Thank you for your support at this time I am much obliged

**Caroline Wilson**

THE PIONEER

■ IT WOULD be appreciated if you could publish the following in your next Association Newsletter: Vital services and support for blind and vision impaired ex-Service personnel

Blind Veterans UK, the national organisation for vision impaired ex-Service men and women, believes that no one who has served our country should battle blindness alone.

It doesn't matter how a veteran lost their sight - it could be due to old age, illness or an incident while in Service - or even how long ago they served, if they are now battling severe sight loss, Blind Veterans UK can help.

Blind Veterans UK helps with whatever someone needs to live independently with vision impairment. This could be anything from specialist equipment to help around the home, to training and rehabilitation at the charity's service centres in Brighton, Sheffield and Llandudno, North Wales. Many find that Blind Veterans UK is like a second family, as veterans are able to make new friends with others in a similar situation to themselves.

Blind Veterans UK is reaching out to the tens of thousands of blind and vision impaired veterans in the UK who could be eligible for the organisation's free, lifelong support, but don't currently realise it.

If you, or someone you know, served in the Armed Forces or did National Service and is now experiencing severe sight loss, call freephone 0800 389 7979 or visit [www.noonealone.org.uk](http://www.noonealone.org.uk).

**Jayne Williams**



THE PIONEER





# Such a sad event

I'VE just received my copy of latest edition of The Pioneer.

It is always a really well put together, professional looking and well written magazine, but the latest edition is quite superb.

Pity that it is dominated by the regiment's disbandment, but the coverage could not have been better of such a sad event.

Many thanks again  
**Mike Tickner**

# Birmingham city centre

HELLO my names is Charlotte, my grandad was a Royal Pioneer he went to the Remembrance Sunday in Birmingham city centre and he got upset that he didn't see anyone if you could get back to me it would be much appreciated as I think it would be good for him to see them and speak to them. Thank you

**Charlotte Kelly**

*Ed note: do any other Pioneers attend this Service at Birmingham?*

# Something to treasure

YOU and your team have excelled yourselves, on behalf of the Expendables!! you not only put on a great reunion but published a fantastic magazine!

The lads really liked it and will give us something to treasure as a memorable tour not forgetting the very much respected and very much liked leader Lt Flynn White who very sadly is no longer with us but never forgotten by all.

**Mark Ritchie**

# Officer Corps

I COULD not find you as we dispersed yesterday to say 'well done' on mustering such a large contingent at the Cenotaph. All very encouraging to see such a good turnout.

If you are in conversation with any who raise the subject, you may quote me as being a touch sad that our Officer Corps was so sparsely represented.

**Brigadier CB Telfer**

# Travelled far

THANK YOU very much for your speedy response and the information.

I had no idea that my grandad might have travelled so far whilst on service and now have a new appreciation for what the Pioneer Corps did in the war effort. It has made me want to research the subject further, so thank you for the book recommendation. Best Wishes

**Hannah Moore**

# Big turnout

IT WAS a good day yesterday at the Cenotaph and a very big turnout.

Thanks for all the hard work you do. Please could you put me down for next year's parade.

I know it's early but I don't want to miss out.

Many thanks. Regards  
**Colin Robertson**

# The elusive Bill Ritchie

JUST got to congratulate you (and 'the lad') on the best Pioneer Mag ever. Paddy had lots of the old magazines, dating back to when he served, but although interesting 'in their days' they're not a patch on the professional, informative, and chatty (all rolled up in one) magazine that you produce.

They seem to get better and better each time - and the guys in the photos are getting handsomer too!!! Thank you for allowing me to get my own copy so I can carry on supporting the Reds & Greens on behalf of Paddy, especially with this latest one even featuring a report from Cpl AJ Allen about his time in Horsley Hall. You know what Paddy was like (couldn't stop talking - like me!!) but the stories he was always telling about his time in Horsley Hall would have filled a whole magazine.

I think the best story was when he, and another Irish raw recruit, were told they'd be trained to drive a lorry, but the problem was that the Welsh recruits were always given precedence (probably because HH was on their soil) so Paddy & his mate were always made to sit in the back in the hope they'd pick up a few tricks by watching!! Test Day loomed, yet still Paddy had only driven a motor bike in Ireland and hadn't driven the lorry for more than an hour or so since he'd been in HH, but always loving a challenge he got behind the wheel with the examiner and off they went down the narrow Welsh lanes.

All was going well until the examiner told him to turn left in Wrexham.

As he turned left he remembered it was Market Day. Whoops! He lost control, hooked his N/S wing mirror under the first market stalls awning, and then carried on through the whole market dragging all the awnings off and causing total devastation.

Did he pass his test? NAH!! Dragged out of the cab in front of the Wrexham shoppers, much to his embarrassment, and never given another chance until he ended up in Aldershot!! Perhaps Cpl Allen knew him as Paddy joined up just one year later? in 1956. Happy days!!!

All the time I was honoured to be Paddy's wife I was tasked with finding where his best buddy Bill Ritchie was on my trusty computer.

I searched everywhere and, naturally, asked you, but could never find the elusive Bill. Several vets served with Bill but none had heard anything of him since leaving the Pioneers. Now, in your latest, magnificent, magazine you printed an article by Mark Ritchie and it's started me off again.

Is there any chance that this young man might be a son or nephew of Bill, or at least has he ever come across Bill? Too late, now that Paddy has left us, but I'd love to know after all my years of searching for Bill. When we came to Paddy's first Bicester Reunion ('first' because he'd always thought the Association had folded up) the first comrade he met, in the scruffs bar of course, was Micky Hull.

They reminisced, all night, about their service together, mainly about C.A.D. Kineton Dog Section.

It was funny how that evening started because the two of them were chatting away, and telling stories about their old compatriots, when Micky suddenly said "Do you know what happened to Paddy Tubridy because I've never come across him since those days?." Paddy creased up and said "you've been talking to him all evening". All Micky did was to keep shouting out "No" "No" "No"

On the subject of Micky, I know he's been a bit poorly but was shocked to see

him, in your photos, in a wheelchair. He's still got that saucy grin when young ladies are fussing around him. Let me know what's happened to him, please.

Finally, it's so sad that Paddy never stayed around long enough to read this latest magazine because he'd never have read about Horsley Hall, in previous magazines, and never seen anything about Aden either so I was very interested in your report of the Aden Emergency. Paddy was there and 'in charge of' the Al-Mansoura Prison towards the end of the Brits evacuation of Aden.

The Arab 'inmates' hated him 'cos he was a hard 'task master' and they always called out White Bastard, when Paddy was bossing them around, because being Irish with such pure white skin they thought it looked really funny to them.

He nearly didn't make it, though, because the nasty Arabs in 'the pink house' fired into the prison walls early morning and it went through the wall above Paddy's head BUT if he'd been sitting up in bed it would have got him.

His final task there was to close up the prison and to oversee our vacation out of Aden in an RAF Argosy aircraft. All his life he used to talk about how he watched the Bedouins 'galloping' on their camels through the desert below. Not bad for a wee lad from Co Clare eh!!

Thanks to the Royal Pioneers he saw the world, met and worked with some wonderful people, and was so proud of being a Royal Pioneer.

Well done Norman, a truly wonderful magazine which stirred up a lot of memories as recounted by S/Sgt Paddy Tubridy. Made me cry, you did!!

All the best,  
**Jenny Tubridy**





# Standing tall

**Report: Maj Gen Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter KCVO OBE DL**  
**Pictures: Supplied**

**F**IRST met Andy when I attend the Afghanistan Medals Parade in July 2010. As the last Colonel of the Dukes, I continue to take an interest in the 3rd Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment and I remember well the sight of this extraordinary man marching off parade having received his operational medal.

He made a great impression on me then and he still does. As Controller of the Army Benevolent Fund (now ABF The Soldiers' Charity), I felt we could somehow help Andy, and so we did, in a small way. In the process I got to know him in a manner that is not usual; he has become something of a friend. I am therefore delighted that he has put pen to paper to record his experiences in what has been a heart-rending process since that fatal day, 13 October 2009. I am also flattered to have been invited to write this foreword.

Andy's approach of telling the story

through the eyes of two characters, 'Corporal Reid@' and 'Andy', is a compelling one and the book, with its thoughtful title, once opened is hard to put down. There are not many stories told by soldiers and I suspect few in the original soldiers' vernacular but this one is both tragic and very funny at the same time. Andy, like many soldiers, has a punishing sense of humour and even at the most dreadful of times manages to see the funny side of life.

This comes out very strongly in his book. There are some surprises too including the fact that his mother is an amputee. His frustrations over the ups and downs of his treatment are sobering and are useful lessons for those of us who seek to help those who are injured. What I found so illuminating was the intensity of the operational routine in Helmand and the sheer demoralising effect of the constant and ever-present threat of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). The fact that this is expressed so graphically by one of its victims is extremely poignant.

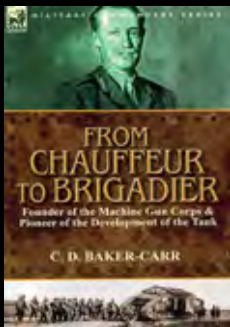
Andy's wife, Clare, is a key figure in this story and her chapter is very moving. She has been a rock, and even before reading the book I admired her for her fortitude and courage. Andy is indeed a lucky man.

Her story and that of his cousin and best mate, Karl, contrive to make this a very intimate book. It gets to the core of the issues faced by those men of the British army who have been unlucky enough to have been injured in Afghanistan. Andy tells a good tale and I have heard him speak in public on the theme that as one chapter closes another opens with new opportunities.

From what I have seen of him in these last two years has approved to me that he has grasped those new opportunities with a relish and determination that would be hard to beat.

This book is a shining example of just such an opportunity.

**STANDING TALL**  
**AUTHOR: ANDY REID**  
**ISBN: 978-1-78219-746-1**



# Chauffeur to Brigadier

**Report: Norman Brown**  
**Pictures: Supplied**

**T**HIS book was first published in 1929 and has recently been re-printed by Leonaur Print. While the story of a man who was a civilian driver in 1914, but who rose to become a Brigadier-General.

In consequence of his service during the four years duration of the First World War cannot be anything but incredible, readers will be astonished to learn that this was by no means the most remarkable aspect of Christopher Baker-Carr's military career.

Recognised as the officer in

the British Army who knew 'more about machine guns than anyone'.

Baker-Carr, often opposed, almost single-handedly, brought about the specialised training of machine gunners, the creation of the Machine Gun Training School, the increased manufacture and widespread adoption of the machine gun by the British Army and the creation of the Machine Gun Corps itself.

Recognising the potential of a new weapon to break the stalemate of trench warfare, he then became a primary influence in the development of the battle tank becoming commander of the First Tank

Brigade.

There can be few other British soldiers, who have all but faded from military history, whose role has averted imminent disaster in times of great peril and of whom it can be said that he made a contribution to victory of such importance.

Republished in this new edition in cooperation with the author's family.

From Chauffeur to Brigadier is highly recommended to all those interested in the development of modern warfare.

**FROM CHAUFFEUR TO BRIGADIER**  
**AUTHOR: CD BAKER-CARR**  
**ISBN 978-1-78282-396-4**





# Memoir of Pte George Weeks

**Report: Norman Brown  
Pictures: Supplied**

SOME days the amount of bodies to be re-buried was so numerous that hardly any constructions work was accomplished. It wasn't long before the line Regiments in the trenches discovered our Unit was an unarmed, non-combative one, and formed the impression wrongly that we were conscientious objectors. One day this led to some trouble.

British military labour during the First World War developed from an ad hoc arrangement in 1914 into a Corps some 400,000 strong, supported by as many as a million dominion and foreign workers by 1918.

Records of this contribution to victory are extremely rare. George Weeks wrote down his experience on squares of wallpaper – always a practical man. And what a record it is. The Somme, Passchendaele and the Messines Ridge all feature in George's calm description of his extraordinary experiences. He camped in 'the vast graveyard of Cambrai', he cut down an entire forest for duckboards, and he mended the aircraft of Captain Ball VC with dope and linen!

With the corps working on the front lines and often under fire, this truly was 'dangerous work'.

## **Introduction by Lt Col J Starling – the RPC Association historian**

In fifteen years of research into the role and activities of the Labour Corps (LC) this is the only soldier's diary I have ever seen. What makes it even more remarkable is the fact that for a corps that was to involve over 500,000 British officers and men there are only three known records and these were all by officers and written after the event when events could be judged in retrospect.

The diary makes interesting reading. It is the thoughts of a private soldier that have not been re-written after the war. It does not involve great military actions but day-to-day survival in terrible conditions. It is quite obvious that world or national events have little or no concern to Private Weeks and his comrades who are involved in the daily grind of maintaining roads and railways.

The LC was one of a number of units that was formed during the war and disappeared soon after the war finished. Their

activities are generally unsung and there were few formal records of their achievements; the units did not maintain war diaries. When Britain entered the European war in August 1914 all planning was based on a short war fought where local labour was easily available and tonnages of equipment were limited (siege warfare was not envisaged). France was different; most of the available manpower in France was conscripted to serve in the French Army and so the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had to maintain its own supply lines.

When the BEF deployed it was mainly an infantry-heavy force with limited artillery and was not equipped for the drawn-out siege warfare experienced from Nov 14 onwards. In 1914 the army was using about 10,000 tons of ammunition a month by June 1917 this had risen to 280,000 tons a month. Add to this food, fuel (including fodder), trench stores (sandbags, props, pickets etc), medical supplies and all the other equipment, and you can see what a massive effort was required to unload from ships in France, load trains, transfer to light railways and roads, and finally move stores to the front on mules and by men. It should be remembered these were the days before material-handling equipment and all stores were moved by hand. At the same time railways and roads were laid, upgraded and maintained by a significant uniformed workforce.

The first labour units were deployed to France in early 1915 to work in the docks and maintain the railways. As the army grew, so did the demand for labour. In 1916, with the introduction of conscription more men were being enlisted of lower medical category and over the accepted age limit of 35 for the infantry. These men, many suffering minor physical ailments like short-sightedness and from poor nutrition, were placed into infantry labour units and moved to France.

In April 1917 all the various forms of labour – infantry, Army Service Corps, Royal Engineers, POWs, etc – were placed under a single command and the LC was formed. Many units did not take to being referred to as LC and you will note that George continually refers to the Queen's Regiment because his company, 132 Company LC, was previously 24 (Infantry) Labour Company the Queen's

Regiment. Being a 'labourer' and not a 'soldier', had a certain stigma and as a result even the army ensured that medals and any graves were marked with the serviceman's original regiment (if he had one).

With the massive increase in labour units due to conscription there were still shortages. By November 1918 there were over 395,000 members of the LC. Eventually the British looked to their empire for support and Indians, Africans and West Indians came to France. By the end of the war there were 98,000 Chinese employed by the LC.

Following the war, the Corps was involved in battlefield salvage, which was to recover valuable material from the battlefield. It was not the British Army's problem to return the battlefield to farmland. Whilst carrying out this work the Corps also undertook the task of concentrating the various battlefield graves into what are now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries in France. This task proved so demanding that men who had left the service were asked to re-enlist to undertake burial duties.

George was a volunteer from a reserved occupation and being medically downgraded to C2 meant he did not have to join. His experiences reflect those of the many thousands of men who were in the LC; he has little knowledge of events outside his own section of twenty-eight men, and interestingly, even though he knows he joined 24 (Labour) Company, Queen's Regiment, when that forms into the LC he seems unsure of the company number. He reflects the attitude of many of the men transferred to the LC in that he continually refers to his 'old' regiment and cap-badge rather than the new organisation.

Throughout his service he visits all the main combat areas, starting with clearing up the old Somme battlefield, moving to Ypres to maintain roads during the battle of Passchendaele and, although not in the line during the March offensives, being actively employed in producing the GHQ Reserve Line. After the allied advance in Aug 18 he followed the advancing army into German-occupied Belgium and finally into the occupied zone of Cologne.

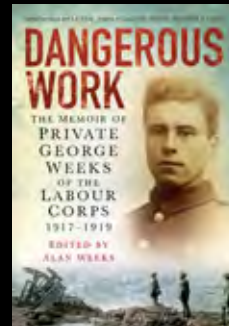
His experience shows that although the Corps was not in

the front line its members spent many long periods within the range of enemy artillery without relief. The front-line infantry tended to rotate between front line support and reserve and training (outside of enemy artillery range). George himself spends a long period at Kitchener Wood, Ypres, building an artillery-locating facility which is abandoned. Other records I have seen show men maintaining light railways, within the range of enemy guns for up to six months without a break. It must be remembered that all these men were of low medical category. Although initially unarmed, the LC was not non-combatant. The non-combatant corps consisted of conscientious objectors, whereas the LC tended to be personnel who had been medically downgraded due to wounds of age. Had the original companies been armed, a lot of work would have been lost as the men undertook weapons training etc. Following the Mar 18 offensive, a decision was made to arm the whole LC, to enable its men to defend themselves and certain areas of the line, but this took time.

George's unit, 132 Company, although a labour company of five officers and 425 men, does not fully reflect all 300 British labour companies at the front. Since it was employed in relatively quiet zones it suffered remarkable few casualties, and there are only two recorded Meritorious Service Medals and no gallantry awards.

Some units were unlucky and ended up bearing the brunt of the German advances in 1918.

I wish that this script had been available when I was researching the work of the LC as it fully represents the role played by many thousands of men, both British and foreign (Indians, Africans, Chinese etc) within the corps in France.



**DANGEROUS WORK – THE MEMOIR OF PTE GEORGE WEEKS LABOUR CORPS  
EDITED BY: ALAN WEEKS  
ISBN: 978-0-7509-5667-3**



# The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

**REEVES DM (DENNIS) PTE 22177625**

**Cullompton, Devon 7 Nov 14**

A founder member of the 39/93 Club

**WRIGHT WILLIAM PTE 24304939**

**(Aged 59) Newark, Notts 20 May 14**

Served 24 Oct 72 – 26 Oct 78.

**LESTER (ORIGINALLY LUTSKY) NATHAN CPL**

**13029964 (Aged 99) Chiswick, London**

**15 Sep 14**

Served 13 Jun 40 until 15 Apr 46 in 251 Coy PC.

**GIBBS JOSEPH GEORGE WILLIAM MAJ 240933**

**Canterbury Kent Sep 14**

Served Jul 40 – Sep 46 in 6, 10 & 264 Coys. Saw service in N Africa and Normandy (landed D+2)

**DOUGLAS PAUL**

**(ORIGINALLY KONRAD PAUL KORN) (Aged 97)**

**Pte 10351117 and 13801395 9 Feb 14.**

Served in the Pioneer Corps (87 Alien Coy) from 15 Feb 40. Saw service in the BEF. He transferred to the Int Corps on 17 May 43. He was a Secret Listener at Latimer House where he listened to captured German Generals.

*Ed Note: Helen Fry wrote a good book about the Secret Listeners called "The M Room: Secret Listeners who Bugged the Nazis in WW2".*

**DERBY G CPL 23682356**

**LEWIS MICHAEL PTE 24031939**

**(Aged 68) Middleton, Co Cork 7 Jun 14**

Served 1962 – 1964



■ Pte White, pictured as a recruit (best recruit)  
Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Mr Dennis H Reeves at the RE/RPC memorial stone in Millsbeek

Picture: RPCA Archive

Picture: A Pioneer Soldier in Northern Ireland on duty



## And finally...

Don't you try it from the magazine "The Coddon" and some humour...

Report: Norman Brown  
Cartoon: MAC

**T**HE FOLLOWING appeared in the April 1941 edition of the magazine "The Coddon" which was published in COD Donnington where Pioneers were serving – the magazine itself was edited by a Pioneer officer).

It all began in the reign of Queen Victoria, when Maj R Crosse Grain, stationed at Boffleywallah, received a handsome legacy from his aunt.

The major, who then decided to retire from the Service, also thought he would at least earn himself some fame before he went, by wearing a false nose on the ceremonial parade to mark the Queen's Birthday.

Then came the following correspondence:

### 24th May – Confidential – Discipline 24 May 1892

From: the OC 2nd Bushwachers  
To: Assistant Adjutant General,  
Boggleywallah District

Sir, I have the honour to report for the information of the GOC that I have placed

Major Crosse Grain under arrest. I have the honour to state that Maj Crosse Grain admits that he wore a false nose on parade today.

He maintains that he had a perfect right to do so as the wearing of false noses is nowhere prohibited in Army Regulations

I am, etc, A Chump, Lt Col, Commanding  
2nd Bushwachers

### OC 2nd Bushwachers 25 May 1892

Obtain medical evidence  
B Snooks, Maj AAG Boggleywallah  
District

### AAG 26 May 1892

Sergeant-Major Jobbs has interviewed Maj Grain, and states in his opinion the prisoner is quite responsible for his actions  
A Chump, Lt Col 2nd Bushwachers

### OC 2nd Bushwachers 26 May 1892

From sympathy with the prisoner's wife, the Major General is willing, on receipt of a written apology from Maj Grain (providing he retires from the Service) to overlook the matter

B Snooks, AAG

### AAG 27 May 1892

Maj Grain firmly declines to offer any apology whatever.

Sympathy with Mrs Grain is entirely thrown away, as that lady herself has been hysterical ever since the march past and cannot be induced to discuss the matter seriously.

A Chump Lt Col

### Judge Advocate 27 May 1892

The GOC requests that you be good enough to frame a charge based on the facts contained in the attached correspondence.

Early compliance, please.  
B Snooks AAG

### AAG 4 Jun 1892

I consider that a charge under Section 142 of the Army Act, viz, "False Personation," would be most suitable to the case. Charge sheet in duplicate herewith.

C Gobble, Col Offic JAG

### JAG 4 Jun 1892

The GOC cannot imagine why you wish to charge Maj Grain under this section. Why not section 16, viz, "Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman"?  
B Snooks AAG

### AAG 10 Jun 1892

Charge in accordance with section 16 in duplicate herewith  
C Gobble Col JAG

### AAG 11 Jun 1892

I have read the charge to the prisoner, who informs me that he will object inasmuch as he alleges the false nose was not "unbecoming to him as an officer, etc" He says the false nose becomes him better than his own.

A defence on these lines would be ludicrous. I would respectfully suggest trial under section 40 – "Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline."

A Crump, Lt Col, 2nd Bushwachers

### JAG 18 Jun 1892

Please frame a charge against Maj Grain under section 40 AA  
B Snooks AAG



'Quickly! I'm Territorial Army - can I buy another bullet?'

## Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News    ■ Forthcoming events    ■ Your stories    ■ Your Letters    ■ WW1 in colour
- Report on Reunion Weekend 2015    ■ Blast from the Past    ■ Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery    ■ Book Reviews    ■ Press Cuttings    ■ And much more!



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# Last but not least...



## AAG 7 Jul 1892

I have read the charge to Maj Grain. He states that he is prepared to meet it. He desires me to inform you that he will call the GOC as a witness for the defence.

He intends to prove that the GOC was wearing a set of false teeth on the parade of 24th May, and that the GOC constantly wears false teeth on, and off, duty. He also intends to call evidence to show that a Staff Officer in Badbonuggah is allowed to wear a false eye without question. I presume the prisoner is within his rights.

A Crump Lt Col

## OC 2nd Bushwachers 8 Jul 1892

If Maj Grain will send in his papers, the GOC will overlook the conduct of that officer, and will dispense with further action. Leave of absence will be granted pending his retirement.

B Snooks AAG

**A**TRIO of old Pioneers were bragging at the Pioneer Reunion and jokes about the heroic exploits of their ancestors. "My grandfather at the age of 15", one declared proudly, "was a drummer on D-Day"

"Mine," boasts another, "saved Montgomery during the crossing of the Rhine in 1944"

"I'm the only soldier in my family," confessed vet number three, "but if my great grandfather was living today he'd be the most famous man in the world." "Really? What'd he do?" his friends wanted to know. "Nothing much, but he would be 165 years old."

**T**WO more vets, again at the Pioneer Reunion, were boasting to each other about their days in the Pioneers. The first, from 522 Company, said the unit was so well

drilled that when the presented arms all you could hear was slap, slap, click.

Very good said the second but when 518 Company presented arms you'd just hear slap, slap, jingle.

What is with the jingle? Asked the first That was just our medals was the reply.

**D**URING the Iraq War, As a soldier was saying good-bye to his family, his five-year-old son, James, held his leg and started pleading not to leave.

"No, Daddy, please don't go!" he kept repeating.

They were beginning to make a scene when his wife, desperate to calm him, said, "Let Daddy go and I'll take you to get a pizza."

Immediately, James loosened his death grip, stepped back and in a calm voice said, "Bye, Daddy."

## THE PIONEER



■ The Working Pioneer Painting - signed prints available from RPCA at £20 which includes postage

Picture: Anthony Richard Grenville Cowland