

# THE PIONEER



## WARTIME PIONEERS IN COLOUR

THE **SECOND** PART OF OUR SERIES  
OF COLOURISED WARTIME PHOTOS  
FEATURING SOME STUNNING IMAGES  
OF **PIONEERS**







## Front Cover

Pioneers clearing up during the Blitz. London, Tower Hill.

Picture: RPCA Archive /  
Colourised by Royston Leonard



## Back Cover

Royal Pioneer Corps Wreath  
laid at Roade Memorial

Picture: Paul Brown

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## The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

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## EDITORIAL

**W**E RECENTLY came across a couple of very iconic photographs featuring Pioneers that we had not seen before. Both were in black and white these we have had colourised. One features Pioneers clearing up after bomb damage with the Tower of London in the background. The other is a Pioneer getting a hair cut amongst some bombed out buildings. I hope you like them as much as we do.

We have also featured some colourised photographs from World War 1, for which one features members of the Labour Corps.

Last year's Pioneer Reunion at the Royal Court Hotel proved to be a great success and we are hoping that this year's will be even greater. A booking form was sent out with the October 2015 Newsletter, if you have lost this please either send us an email or contact us and we will send out another.

The number of functions throughout the year is increasing, the Past and Present Officers' Dinner in October was a great success, the WOs & SNCOs Reunion Club held a Ladies Dinner Night at Kinton in March and this year had to order 135 tickets for the

Army v Navy Rugby at Twickenham and are also organising a Battlefield Tour in September. The Northampton Branch held a Burns Night in January and have plans for a trip on the Grand Union Canal in July. Mr Peter Wegg is organising a Pioneer Weekend at Sherringham, also in July. A new Branch has opened in Barnsley and we hope to have more details of their functions in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Seventy six marched in the RPC Contingent at the Cenotaph in November, the Field of Remembrance was well attended and most attended the London Lunch which followed. Members are reminded that tickets are required for both the Cenotaph Parade and the Field of Remembrance, these can be obtained from RPC Association.

The Nostalgia Group and the 39/93 Club are still both growing strong and hold events throughout the year.

Once again tickets for the Derby Draw are included with this Newsletter (unless you have already indicated that you do not wish to receive them), it would be appreciated if you could purchase as many tickets as possible - all profits go to ensure that the

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## STOP PRESS

■ Dates for your diary, the Pioneer Reunion Weekend 2017 is 15/17 Jun 2017

## STOP PRESS

■ A few copies of Pioneer Painting still available - £20 this includes postage

## STOP PRESS

■ A few places on Battlefield Tour in September are still available.

■ The Association historian, Lt Col John Starling, is to marry in August



Association stays strong.

Once again we have included a variety of topics and stories and we hope you enjoy reading this edition. As can be seen the main story this edition is the history of 518 (Coy and Sqn). The main part of this was written by Kev Shields when he was the Company Sergeant Major, thanks Kev!

We, however, are always after further stories - have you one you could tell? If so, please send it to us, don't worry about grammar etc, we will edit it for you.

Our digital photograph library continues to expand, have you any photographs which you could loan to us to include in our archives. If so please send them in, we will return them within 7 days. If possible it would be appreciated if you could put details on the reverse (names, place and date).

During the Reunion Weekend it is intended to hold a raffle on the Friday evening and an auction on the Saturday evening. It would be appreciated if you have anything suitable for either night you could bring it with you. Also please bring plenty of money for raffle tickets and the auction!

The Annual General Meeting of the

Association will be held at 0900 hrs on the Saturday morning - if any member has a point for the agenda it would be appreciated if they would submit it to the RPC Association by 1 June 2016.

A full programme of events is being organised with live groups on the Friday and Saturday nights and a disco on the Sunday evening.

It is also intended on the Sunday afternoon to have a quiz (so bring your thinking caps) and also bingo.

May I remind you, once again, to inform us of a change of address. We had fifty-five copies of the October Newsletter returned to us "Gone Away".

Most have since supplied their new address however we have stopped sending "second copies" of the Newsletter to members unless they pay the postage.

I look forward to seeing as many members as possible in the coming year.

Finally we always publish the latest news onto our facebook group and facebook page. The links are shown bottom left.

Norman Brown



## Can you spot the mouse?

We had a lot of correct entries in the last newsletter and the first name drawn out of the hat was Terry Burden. Well done Terry! A prize will be on its way.

It was on page 55. It is in the windscreen of the jeep.

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.

Sword Beach was the codename of one of the five main landing beaches in Operation Neptune, the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944.

Pioneers played an essential role on D-Day and suffered many casualties.

26 Pioneer Companies went ashore on 6th June 1944.

By 1st August 1944 there were over 35,500 pioneers in Normandy. D-Day + 79 there were 231 Coys and over 68,000 men.

**PLEASE SUPPORT THE DERBY DRAW**  
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse (sometimes lifelike, sometimes cartoon-like) which was his trademark and somewhere in this newsletter we have hid a Cuneo mouse 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.

They can be difficult to detect, and many people enjoy scouring his paintings to find one.

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 15th September 2016.

Correct entries will go into a hat and the first one pulled out will win a prize!

Good luck.





## PAST EVENTS



■ **ONCE AGAIN** members of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association gathered at the Corps Plot at Westminster Abbey for the Field of Remembrance.

This year Major Nathan Smith fronted the plot and spoke to HRH Prince Phillip. Once again it was pleasing to see two of JP Scully GC daughters attend and lay a cross on behalf of their father.

Unfortunately the numbers attending this event are getting smaller each year; if you can attend this year please do so, tickets can be obtained from RPC Association.

■ **FOLLOWING THE** Field of Remembrance 13 members attended the London Lunch.

This was held at the Lord Moon on the Mall, Whitehall and they enjoyed a curry and had a catch up.

■ **THIS YEAR** 136 members attended the Army v Navy game at Twickenham on Saturday 30 April 2016.

Once again Twickenham was a sell-out with all 82,000 tickets being sold by the end of January. We have been advised that for next year's match we should apply for tickets by early December 2016 to avoid disappointment.

■ **THE WOS & SNCOS** Pioneer Reunion Club held a dinner in the WOs and Sgts Mess Kineton on 5 March 2016 when 62 members sat down to a fantastic meal, the event was organised by the Station RSM, WO1 Spencer Belcher-Marks.

It seemed to be quite apt to hold the dinner at Kineton as the Royal Pioneer Corps had served there for over 50 years. The following is a brief history of that Association:

Pioneers first served at Kineton in March 1942 and were involved in numerous tasks such as railway construction, ammo shed construction, camp construction and ammunition.

A great number of you will remember when 522 Coy RPC served here, this Company moved from Donnington to Kineton in December 1962 and stayed until 1994 (becoming 522 Squadron in April 1993), when it moved to Bicester. Although the Company was mainly employed within the CAD it did have detachments at Donnington, Chilwell, Thatcham, Bramley and Hereford. It also ran the Dog Section at Kineton.

The following is an extract from the diary of 522 Coy: "In 1971 the CAD was being palletised – one section (26 men) palletised 400 pallets in a week!"

The predecessor Company at Kineton was 251 Coy which arrived in 1945 and served there until disbanded on 31 Mar 62. In December 1958 5 members of this Company were killed in a rail accident within the CAD.

WO1 Belcher-Marks gave a breakdown of the remaining Pioneers still in the RLC (73 – nine of which are current RSMs with two more recently selected). The Chairman of the Club, Mr Peter Thomas, thanked the RSM and his mess members for allowing the club to use their pleasant facilities and for a wonderful meal.

It was nice to see our In Pensioner Micky Hull attend the dinner - he never changes and looks as young as ever!

The Club is also organising a battlefield tour (thanks to Mr Tom Appleyard) to Arnhem in September, if you would like to attend please inform RPC Association as soon as possible.

# Unveiling of Gulf War Memorial

A memorial remembering the British military personnel who died in the first Gulf War has been unveiled 25 years after the conflict ended.



■ Gulf War Memorial at The National Arboretum

Pictures: Royal British Legion

**A**BOUT 1,000 people were at the memorial as a list of the dead was read out. The conflict began in 1990 and ended when Iraqi forces were driven from Kuwait in February 1991.

A US-led coalition fought the Iraqi army during the war after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was declared illegal by the UN.

The new memorial, at the arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire, has three pillars to represent each of Britain's armed forces.

Its centre stone carries the image of the

reverse of the Gulf Medal engraved in black granite.

The £70,000 memorial was commissioned, designed and built by The Gulf War Memorial Trust Appeal (GWMTA), a small committee comprising Gulf War Veterans and three family members of the 47 fallen.

The money was raised through charity events and sponsorship, with £35,000 coming from the Kuwaiti government.

More photos can be seen at this web address:  
<http://tinyurl.com/hb66s9w>



# Pioneers awarded the highest decoration

Congratulations to Pioneers  
Phil Govett and Jack Walker.

Picture: Plymouth Herald  
Philip Govett

WW2 PIONEER Philip Govett and Pioneer Jack Walker have been awarded the highest decoration in France.

Philip served from 1939-1945, mostly in 117 Company. He received the Légion d'Honneur during a ceremony held at Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth. The honour is in recognition of his role in France and Europe's liberation from the Nazis. He was presented with his medal by the French consul.

Jack Walker served from Feb 43 to Mar 46 in 298, 77 and 282 Companies, the latter landing in Normandy on 19 Jun 44.

Congratulations Jack.

THE PIONEER



## FUTURE EVENTS



■ THE Pioneer Reunion is to be held at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry - 17/19th June 2016.

A booking form for the reunion was sent out with the October 2015 Association Newsletter. If you have lost or misplaced this please either contact RPC Association or send email to: [royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)

The programme for the reunion is still to be finalised but will probably be as follows:

Friday – afternoon book in, Association Shop will be open.

1930 hrs carvery dinner – raffle – live group (Dreamettes) and disco

Saturday – 0900 hrs – Annual General Meeting (any points for Agenda should be sent to RPC Association by 1 Jun)

0930 hrs - coach departs for Wellesbourne Market at 0930 hrs (return pick-up 1545 hrs)

1030 hrs – Annual General Meeting WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club (members only)

1245 hrs – coach departs for National Memorial Arboretum (return pick-up 1815 hrs)

2000 hrs – Dinner – live Group (Black Country Boys) – auction

Sunday morning – opportunity to visit Coventry

1400 hrs – quiz, competitions and bingo

1930 hrs – carvery dinner and disco

■ PETER WEGGS is organising a Pioneer Jolly at Sherringham from 1 to 3 July and has arranged subsidised camping fees at Breck Farm campsite. It is believed at time of going to press over 25 members have indicated their attendance.

Over the weekend he is organising both a BBQ and a buffet. For more details message Peter at:

<https://www.facebook.com/peter.wegg>

■ THERE IS TO BE a 15th Anniversary 8 Regiment reunion dinner on 22nd October 2016 at The Village on the Green Club, Aspull, Wigan.

These Annual Re-Unions are open to any Ex Member of 8 Regiment, with their Partner or Guests any Cap Badges who served in the Regiment between:- October 1964 - July 2012. For further information contact:- Jimmy Aspinall, by Email: [jimmyasp@hotmail.com](mailto:jimmyasp@hotmail.com) or David Southall by Email: [Dcsouthall@aol.com](mailto:Dcsouthall@aol.com)

■ THE 70TH Past and Present Pioneer Officer's Dinner is to be held on Friday 14 October 2016 at the Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess, Ambrosden, Bicester.

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

■ THE FIELD of Remembrance will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 10 November 2016. If anyone would like a cross or a wreath planted on the RPC plot on their behalf they should contact the RPC Association by 1 Aug 16.

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

As has become practise we will hold a London Lunch immediately after the Field of Remembrance, this year it will be held at the Lord Moon of the Mall which is just below Trafalgar Square in Whitehall.

# Bicester Reunion

Pioneers attended from all over the country, ranging from Aberdeen, Belfast and the South West.



■ Red and Green Wedding Bentley

Picture: Paul Brown

IT WAS thought that the last Pioneer Reunion to be held at Bicester was on 27 Sep 2014, that was until the 12th March 2016 when what appeared to be another Pioneer Reunion was held in the Garrison Officers' Mess.

Pioneers attended from all over the country (ranging from Aberdeen, Belfast and the South West) to attend the wedding of Major Billy Dilkes. Billy was married at Bicester Registry Office in Garth Park, Bicester and the reception was held in the Garrison Officers' Mess.

The chauffeur for the day was Mr Norman Brown driving a vintage Bentley

(with a 6.7 litre engine!) courtesy of Brig CB Telfer. The ribbons and bows on the car were appropriately red and green. The photographer on the day was Norman's son Paul.

The two best men were, of course, ex Pioneers Dave Smith and Ricky McCracken who both gave exceptional speeches (both had been watered down slightly!).

Billy even gave both an emotional and humorous speech – it must be reported that the hard man of Bicester had a tear in his eye a few times during the day!

We wish Billy and his new wife Jill a very happy time together.



# Following in father's footsteps

Congratulations to Norman and Mrs Shirley Napier

Norman was presented with the British Empire Medal on Tuesday 1 December 2015 by the Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire, Mr David Laing.

He was awarded the medal in HM The Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to 23 Pioneer Regiment Royal Logistic Corps. It was announced in the latest Defence Review that the Regiment was to be disbanded and the trade of 'Pioneer' would cease, the Regiment finally disbanded on 26 September 2014.

His father, Lawrence, was awarded the BEM for bravery in Italy during World War 2 and his late brother, Kenneth, was awarded the MBE for arranging reciprocal health arrangements for new countries joining the EEC.



Pictures: Paul Brown

Receiving their awards from the Lord Lieutenant



# For the first time we capture a local Remembrance Parade in the Northamptonshire village of Roade

**T**HE Roade war memorial stands on the village war memorial green. The memorial takes the form of a stone cross on an octagonal column standing on a plinth with a two-stepped base. There are 8 names for World War 1 and 8 names for World War 2.

A small matching stone memorial was unveiled on 9th November 2014 to commemorate 6 Royal Canadian Air Force personnel who lost their lives when their

Wellington was struck by lightning, and exploded over the village in 1944.

At 1.35 pm on the 29th June 1944, a Blackpool-built Vickers Wellington B.III bomber, serial number HF641, of 22 Operational Training Unit took off from RAF Wellesbourne, Mountford, Warwickshire on a navigation exercise.

On board were its crew of six men from the Royal Canadian Air Force: F/O R J Andrews, Sgt W H Clark, Sgt A H MacKimmie, Sgt J B Sollie, P/O C E Stephen

and F/O P W Tokar.

During the flight the aircraft encountered turbulence and eventually entered a thunderstorm. At 5.20 pm the aircraft was struck by lightning and disintegrated over Roade.

Very few villagers remember this tragic event 70 years ago but these young men (one just 18 years old) gave their lives for the same cause as their own Roade boys and the memorial will ensure that their ultimate sacrifice will not be forgotten. ■

Pictures: Paul Brown







# PIONEERS AT ROADE

8th November 2015



## 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 | - Mr J St Hill      |
|                  | Port Talbot         |
| 2nd Prize £500   | - Mr J Schofield    |
|                  | Dukenfield          |
| 3rd Prize £200   | - Mr R Stone        |
|                  | Romford             |
| 4th Prize £100   | - Mr P Fleming      |
|                  | Hanslope            |
| 5th Prize £50    | - Mr D Higginbotham |
|                  | Peebles             |

■ **HIDDEN WOUNDS** is a free and confidential support service which has been set up by Help for Heroes.

It is available for veterans, the families of veterans and the families of currently serving personnel. It provides assessment and treatment for individuals from these groups experiencing difficulties with depression, anxiety, worry, anger and problem drinking. It can be hard to talk about having feelings like these, but avoiding it can often cause individuals to withdraw from those people who are close to them, which can make the problem worse, as individuals may feel lonely and like there is no one to help and support them.

At Hidden Wounds we are able to offer individuals an initial assessment with one of our Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners (PWP), all of whom have a thorough understanding of the Armed Forces community. The assessment lasts around 45 minutes and involves answering a series of questionnaires with the PWP and discussing any current difficulties the individual may be experiencing, before deciding together upon an appropriate plan for support. This, and treatment, can be done over the phone, through Skype or face-to-face at our recovery centres in Tidworth, Wiltshire or Catterick, North Yorkshire. Our PWPs are really knowledgeable about what's available across the country and will be able to help you figure out how to get the right support.

As we are a self-referral service, we encourage anyone wishing to access support to please contact the Hidden Wounds team on 0808 2020 144 (free from UK landlines and mobiles) or email us on [hidden.wounds@helpforheroes.org.uk](mailto:hidden.wounds@helpforheroes.org.uk) for an informal chat.

■ **OVER THE** past few issues of the Newsletter we have mentioned that HQ The RLC and the RLC Museum were to move to Worthy Down.

The following article appeared in the press on 23rd Dec 15:

**Roman skeletons found at barracks**  
Workers preparing the ground for a new Army barracks have discovered at least 11 Roman skeletons. Artefacts found with the bones included a rare coin of the emperor Valens, who reigned between 364 and 378 AD. Archaeologists were excited by the find at Worthy Down, near Winchester, Hampshire, as it revealed a range of brutal practices.

One of the bodies had been decapitated with the head placed between the legs.

Tracey Matthews, Winchester council's archaeology officer, said it was the first find of extensive Roman remains in the area and provides a 'fascinating insight'.

# Raising attention

Pioneer Dennis Grimes helps to raise money for homeless veterans with a quilt signed by various famous individuals.



■ Dennis Grimes, pictured with the quilt

Picture: Dennis Grimes

**A**FTER THE success of the Bomber Command Memorial in 2012, and working with Robin Gibb (BeeGee's) under his belt, Dennis Grimes became a trustee of "Soldiering On", a military charity helping our service men and women who had been injured.

He was feeling at a loss at what to do next, he had immersed all his time with Bomber Command. So just like the idea that had come to him on the underground train, to start the campaign with Bomber Command he had another idea. Thinking of homeless veterans, and how he might do something to raise money, and awareness to their plight. Having made many celebrity friends with Bomber Command, he thought of a quilt made of signatures of famous people.

He just knew he could get prominent figures from a range of sectors, from Prime Ministers, Olympic medallists, FTSE 100 CEOs and award-winning actors, to commit to include their signatures within a quilt to raise attention to the plight of veterans being helped by Veterans Aid, a charity giving a leg up when needed to Veterans, who have experienced problems after leaving the forces.

The quilt, that includes over 50 famous

signatures, will be displayed across various UK venues and will then be sold at auction on 30th June 2016 to raise money for the Soldiering On Through Life Trust, and Veterans Aid.

Dennis said: "The plight of homeless veterans is something that needs to be constantly brought to our attention. This is a situation that sees men and women fighting for our country, only to become homeless upon their return. This is a devastating situation in which to find themselves." But thanks to the Veterans Aid charity, and their hostel in East London. We do not see many homeless veterans, now living on the streets.

But there is still the need of, awareness and money. Discussing the ambition of the quilt, António Horta Osório said: "I am deeply honoured to have been able to sign Dennis' quilt on behalf of Lloyds Banking Group to show our ready support for those men and women of the armed forces who have risked their lives to serve us all."

Dennis served in the Royal Pioneers, in the 1960's. After all these years, I've decided to go back into uniform. I have now become a Trooper, with The Light Cavalry, Honourable Artillery Company, City of London. So this will keep me busy till I can think of another campaign.





# Skydiving Beaky!

Congratulations to Beaky for completing his naked skydive

When I first heard that Beaky was planning to do a naked skydive in Las Vegas I didn't actually think that he would go through with it. He proved me wrong. The chap above bares a resemblance to Kelvin. Well done Beaky!

Picture: Beaky





## Last year we had 76 Pioneers march in the Royal Pioneer Corps contingent at the Cenotaph

Pictures: Scrouse Bradley

**W**E had a good turnout for last years march at the Cenotaph, which was ably led by the Association President, Brigadier CB Telfer. Tickets are required for personnel

wishing to march, these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association. Following the march most personnel retire to the Civil Service Club, Old Scotland Yard (about 200 yards from Whitehall) for a meal and a chat. Once again the

Northampton Branch will be hiring a mini-bus from Northampton Town Centre, if you wish to travel on this please contact Secretary RPC Association.

I look forward to seeing more of you this year! ■







# CENOTAPH PARADE

8th November 2015



# WW2 veteran Thomas Cox died aged 90. He had no family or friends. Hundreds turned up to his funeral.

**M**Y son posted an appeal on facebook asking if anyone was available to attend the funeral of Pioneer WW2 veteran Thomas Cox.

It was shared to veteran groups, army related groups and other local groups in the North East. In 12 hours it was seen by over 100,000 people.

After 24 hours, the local press were on the phone, followed by the national press - The Sun, The Mirror, The Telegraph and then ITV News.

Between 250-300 turned up to his

funeral on a cold December day.

Not one of those 250 or so mourners knew the old soldier inside that coffin, a man who as little more than a boy had fought the Nazis in the Second World War. They didn't know him but had come to Middlesbrough to pay their respects anyway. The chapel was full and they had to broadcast the service to side rooms.

There were bikers, standard bearers, a piper, buglers, school kids, veterans, cadets, police, members of the public, serving military personnel from all branches of the armed forces and of course Pioneers

in attendance.

Thomas Cox had died aged 90 in hospital in Stockton a few weeks ago. Great efforts were made to find family and friends but none could be found.

Near the chapel door was a bunch of white flowers. "I am ex-forces myself," read the message from a Sheffield man, "and as such you are one of my brothers."

The piper played Amazing Grace beside the coffin at St Bede's Chapel, Middlesbrough's Crematorium and hush fell. Robert Cooper, chaplain at the University Hospital of North Tees in

Pictures: Ian Forsyth





Stockton, addressed the packed congregation, raising his voice so the many left outside might have a chance of hearing.

He quoted John Donne, "ask not for whom the bells, for it tolls for thee," explaining that each death diminished all of us.

"Thomas Cox may be a stranger to us," he said, "but in being here today we've recognised our bond of shared humanity. "It is good, very good, that we are here to mark Thomas's death, but how much better if we would have been able to come close to him during his life?

"Thomas Cox went to war to resist an evil that put a higher value on some humans than others. "As the famous quote says, 'for evil to triumph, good men must do nothing.' Well, Thomas Cox did

not do nothing. Today we say a respectful farewell to a man who, to use an old phrase, did his bit in the Second World War."

The 15 standards, borne by members of the Royal British Legion, were raised in front of his union jack covered coffin and then lowered as the Last Post was played. The last goodbyes made, the crammed congregation filed out quietly.

Still, the details are scant. No photograph of the old soldier could be found.

He joined the Army in January 1944 and served until August 1945.

Where he fought is not recorded but the Royal Pioneers' pivotal role in liberating France is well known.

His wreath from The Pioneers said "Rest in Peace Brother, Red & Green". ■



“It truly was amazing how many people turned up to pay respect and gave Thomas Cox a wonderful send off. Thank You all so much. The standard bearers, well done and the last post, I don't think I have ever heard it played so well, the bikers, and the Piper. Huge thank you to you all. I think we are all members of the largest family in the world, the armed forces family. Proud of you all.”

**Lin Simpson**

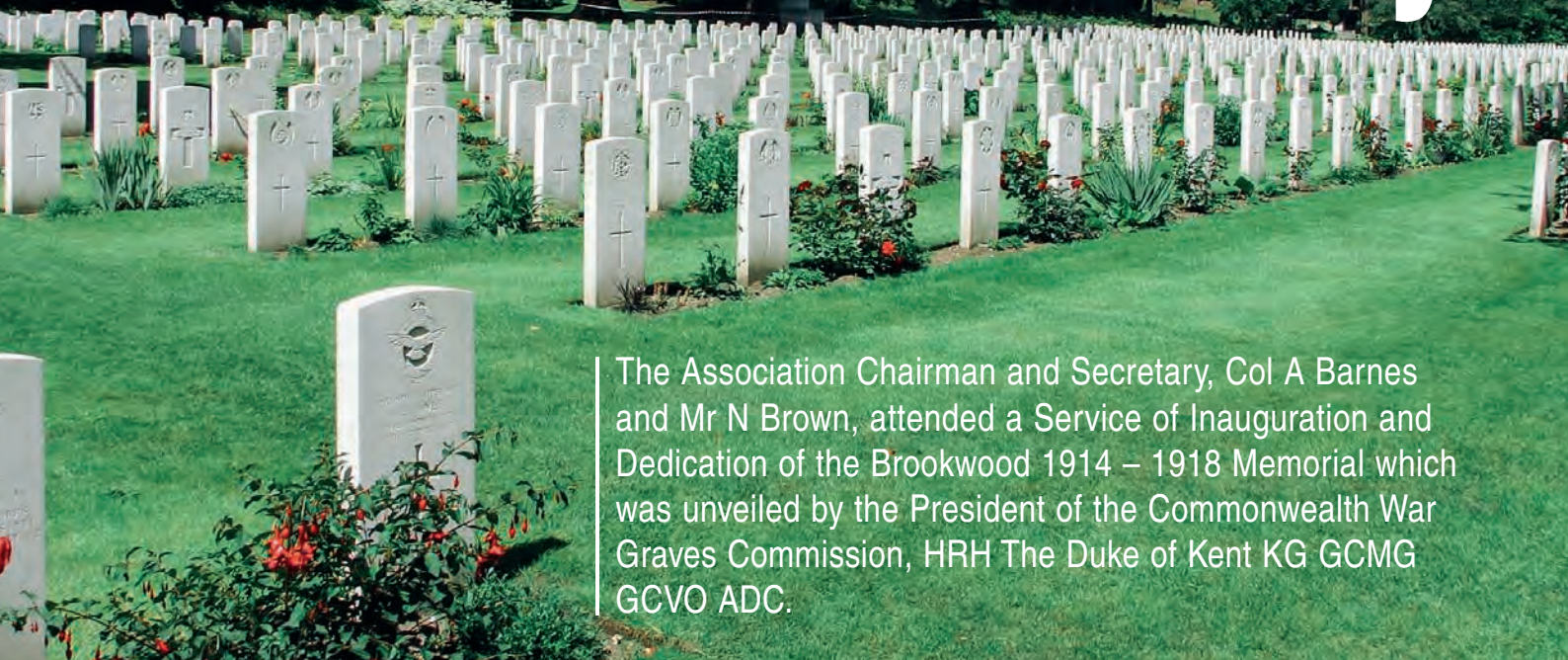
THE PIONEER

# PIONEER THOMAS COX

**11th December 2015**



# Brookwood Cemetery



The Association Chairman and Secretary, Col A Barnes and Mr N Brown, attended a Service of Inauguration and Dedication of the Brookwood 1914 – 1918 Memorial which was unveiled by the President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, HRH The Duke of Kent KG GCMG GCVO ADC.

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

**I**N MAY 1920 a debate took place in the House of Commons on the early work of the Imperial War Graves Commission. The principle of non-repatriation of the dead had been established by the military authorities early in the Great War, and was strengthened by a feeling that those who had served and died together should be laid to rest together.

Yet not all were buried in some corner of a foreign field. Aside from the many service personnel whose roles and duties were performed around the British Isles, hundreds of others returned over the course of the conflict because they had been wounded, injured, or fallen ill with sickness or disease, including many thousands of victims of the devastating influenza pandemic which began in 1918. They were treated in hospitals and convalescent homes across the country.

Those who did not recover were buried close to home. Graves and memorials from both world wars can now found in nearly 13,000 locations throughout the United Kingdom. This reflects the geographical spread of medical facilities and training camps, but also the fact that the principles established for war graves overseas were relaxed when it came to those who died on their way home, or while on home soil. In these cases, parents could bury their children in the local churchyard, and see the grave every Sunday.

Over the years, it became clear that they were serving personnel who had died in the United Kingdom and Ireland but whose final resting place was not known by the authorities. Some had been omitted from official records produced at the time. Others had been lost or buried at sea. They were all, in one way or another, 'missing'.

From the outset, commemoration of the

'missing' was fundamental to the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Of the 'million dead' of the British Empire, only half had recorded burial places at the end of the Great War. Many tens of thousands had never been recovered or identified. Some lay beneath headstones bearing Kipling's haunting inscription 'Known Unto God'. Others had been buried by their comrades in the midst of the fighting, but their graves had been destroyed or lost in the turmoil.

Some structures were erected in the United Kingdom. The sailors of the Royal Navy who had been lost with their ships, or committed to the deep in the traditional naval manner, were commemorated by name at three memorials at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham. At Tower Hill, at the heart of maritime London, a memorial was constructed for merchant mariners. Within the municipal cemetery at Hollybrook, Southampton, stands a memorial honouring members of land and air forces who were lost or buried at sea. Among them are the names of some 600 members of the South African Native Labour Corps, as well as that of Lord Kitchener, lost of Orkney in June 1916. Names now fill all the available space, so some now commemorated here at Brookwood would otherwise have been inscribed at Southampton.

The youngest were eighteen when they died, the oldest in their sixties. John Nixon Brown died only a day after Britain declared war on Germany in 1914. Clarence Edgar Morgan died on the day the Armistice was signed. More than 120 died after the end of hostilities on the Western Front. Some were victims of illness or accident, others lost their lives in Ireland. They remind us that 11 November 1918 did not signal the end of loss or conflict.

Many served in formations too often forgotten such as the Royal Garrison

Artillery, the Army Service Corps and our predecessor Corps 'The Labour Corps'.

## History of Brookwood Cemetery

With over 5,000 Commonwealth and almost 800 war graves of other nationalities, Brookwood Military Cemetery is the largest CWGC cemetery in the United Kingdom. It was established as the First World War drew to a close, and then extended for the burial of the Second World War service personnel.

Those buried here represent all branches of service, and all six of the CWGC's member governments; Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

The cemetery shares many of its architectural and horticultural features with CWGC sites elsewhere, particularly those in France and Belgium. They include the Cross of Sacrifice, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, and the Stone of Remembrance, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

## The Canadian Section and Records Building

This building stands at the entrance to the cemetery. Designed by Sir Edward Maufe, the building was a gift to the Commission from the Canadian government and was erected by the Royal Canadian Engineers. Over the entrance is the figure of a Canadian beaver sculpted by one of the engineers. The building houses the cemetery registers, officers and a reception area for visitors.

Members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were based in the UK during both world wars. Over 2,730 servicemen and women of Canadian units are buried in Brookwood Military Cemetery. Most of these burials are in the Canadian section.

## The Brookwood Memorials

Two memorials within the cemetery



commemorate Commonwealth service personnel who died during the two world wars and have no known grave.

The Brookwood 1914-1918 Memorial records the names of over 26 - who died in the UK during the First World War but whose graves could not be found - including two members of the Labour Corps.

The Brookwood 1939-1945 Memorial commemorates more than 3,400 men and women of Commonwealth land forces who died at sea, in raids on occupied Europe, or while on service outside the main theatres of war. Among those honoured on this memorial are special gents who lost their lives while operating in enemy territory.

#### Brookwood American Cemetery

Brookwood American Cemetery and Memorial are owned and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission. The graves are arranged in four groups around a flagpole.

The plot contains a chapel and a reception building. The walls within the chapel are inscribed with the names of American service personnel who died at sea

and have no known grave.

#### The Special Operations Executive (SOE)

During the Second World War the SOE sent hundreds of agents into occupied Europe to work with the resistance movements. Many agents were captured, interrogated and executed.

The majority of SOE dead have no known graves and the Brookwood 1939-1945 Memorial bears the names of over 100 of them. Among them are seven women, including one of only four women to receive a George Cross, Violette Szabo.

#### Main Commonwealth Section

Close to 3,200 servicemen and women of both world wars are buried in this section. It also contains a small group of Second World War German graves. In the centre of the plot is a Stone of Remembrance. A Cross of Sacrifice stands to the north-west. A plot of post-Second World War British service burials lies just off this section.

#### Air Force Section and RAF Shelter Building

The Air Force section contains graves of members of the air services who died

during the Second World War, including Americans who served with Eagle Squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and airmen of the Royal Netherlands Navy Air Service. Eleven members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force are buried here.

The RAF Shelter Building was designed by Sir Edward Maufe, the Commission's principal architect for the United Kingdom after the Second World War.

#### Non-Commonwealth Graves

With the exception of the American Cemetery, all graves in Brookwood Military Cemetery are maintained by the CWGC. As well as those of the CWGC's member governments, there are plots of French, Polish, Belgian, Czechoslovakian, Italian and German war graves.

#### The Chelsea Pensioners Section

The section contains the graves of over a thousand Chelsea Pensioners who died while in residence at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The graves are maintained by the CWGC on behalf of the Royal Hospital, which was founded by Charles II in 1682 as a home for army veterans. ■

# Last award for 23 Pioneer

| The final certificate of Meritorious Service was awarded to SSgt (now WO2) Paul Casey

Report: Norman Brown  
Pictures: Supplied

**T**HE FINAL certificate of Meritorious Service for 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, was awarded to SSgt (now WO2) Paul Casey, the Certificate reads.

"SSgt Casey joined the Army as a Pioneer in The Royal Logistic Corps in March 1996. He has given loyal and dedicated service for over 18 years.

SSgt Casey has been nothing less than the consummate professional in all that he has undertaken - either in barracks, in the field or on operations.

With the Regiment being removed from the Army Orbat and being affected more than any other unit by the redundancy programme, the welfare of the soldiers was paramount.

SSgt Casey has been employed as the Outreach SNCO and is responsible for ensuring all redundees are afforded the most effective and seamless transition possible into a life outside of the Army. Previously this post was occupied by a LE Captain but, with his departure, SSgt Casey has stepped up to the mark and made the post his own.

He has managed the outflow of 187 soldiers on both Tranche 3 and 4 of the redundancy programme.

With little direction he has been proactive and worked tirelessly to provide a first-class service for the soldiers.

He planned and delivered three very informative and successful job fairs where he liaised with and brought 10 major national employers - including Tesco, British

Gas, Network Rail and TNT - to the events. He has worked in unison with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to provide 15 Career Transition workshops in barracks.



With his drive and determination he also orchestrated 11 career development weeks which benefited 150 soldiers.

The development weeks were in addition to the CTP workshops and they encompassed speakers from industry giving invaluable advice to individuals for their transition into civilian employment.

Speakers included Human Resource specialists from Harrods, Bright Lights and

Tubeline; additionally there were domestic speakers from Cherwell District Council, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre and various financial advisors.

SSgt Casey has always gone that extra mile to offer individuals the opportunities to enhance their CV and to provide an insight into working life outside of the military.

He has placed 80 soldiers in work placements through Skills for Logistics or Tubeline.

SSgt Casey's dedication and desire to create opportunities to make life that much easier for every soldier making the transition out of the Army has been the epitome of selfless commitment.

Without doubt he has been a force multiplier and his contribution has been outstanding; he is, therefore, wholly deserving of formal recognition."

We congratulate WO2 Casey on his achievement and his recent promotion to Warrant Officer Class 2. ■







in Colour part 2

# World War





■ Using a bombed building in London as a temporary barber's shop, a member of the Pioneer Corps gets a short back and sides from a mate, January 05, 1941.  
Picture: RPCA Archive / Colourised by Royston Leonard





■ Men of a Pioneer Battalion, having a meal in a shell hole on the roadside near Ypres. 23rd December 1917.

Picture: IWM. Colourised by Royston Leonard



■ Members of the New Zealand (Maori) Pioneer Btn take a break from trench improvement work, nr Gommecourt, France, 25 July 1918.

Colourised by Doug



■ A French boy introduces himself to Indian soldiers who had just arrived in France to fight alongside French and British forces. Marseilles, 30th September 1914.

Colourised by Marina Amaral from Brazil





■ Indian infantry wearing gas masks in a trench, 1915, prepared for a gas attack.  
Picture: British Library



■ A mobile pigeon loft, enabling messages to be sent from the Front Line back to headquarters.  
Picture: London Transport Museum



■ Soldiers at Chateau Wood, walking over duckboards in the waterlogged fields to Flanders, Belgium.  
Colourised by Benjamin Thomas



■ The British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F) on arrival in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais area of France in August 1914.  
Colourised by Royston Leonard



■ Two soldiers finishing the dregs from a jug of rum. Chalk Pit, Poziers. December 1916  
Picture: IWM. Colourised by Gabriel Birsanu from Romania



■ A British soldier washing in a shell crater.  
Picture: British Library. Colourised by Royston Leonard



# 406 Alien Company

We recently received a great letter from an ex Pioneer who served in this Company. He served as 13302504 Pte Manuel Gavila and now lives in Anglet, France.

**Report: Manuel Gavila  
Norman Brown**

**D**EAR Sir, First of all I was to apologize for the delay in answering, I also want to thank you dearly for the beret and cap badge that I will now be able to wear once again, proudly, in front of the other veterans. We are only 3 or 4 survivors of the 39/45 war, but we are always happy to meet up.

I'm going to try to be concise. You have asked me for details concerning the 406 Coy. On a military plan, I'm sure you have more information than I do. But your readers probably want something more, so I will give you a few interesting personal little details.

I was in Casablanca (Morocco) waiting to board in the merchant navy, when I got word of the constitution of a British unit in Casablanca. So I went to the Consulate, they sent me to the recruiting office. None of the people waiting were Brits. There were Spanish Republicans having fled Spain, French people, and a third of non-French citizen Jewish from Casablanca.

So I'm queuing behind my comrades and when it comes to my turn:

'Name, sir' – CESARD Lucien  
'Nationality' – French

The officer smiles, 'That's not possible, sir. French... we're in French territory! It's better if you change name and nationality' – OK GAVILA Manuel, Spanish  
'Good'

And that was how I was enrolled. We were dressed with summer clothing, with the beret and cap badge. A resume of my service 19 Sep 44 to 23 Feb 46:

The next day we had a very moving moment – in front of the Captain we swore allegiance to King George VI and to the British Colours on the bible. This really shook me as I had never sworn anything to anyone in the French Army.

Another surprise, the breakfast – no wine, but tea... bacon, eggs and porridge with marmalade. We got used to it, and I have got to say to this day I still have my 5 o'clock tea, even when I'm writing, like today. My tea is sitting right next to me, and its 0530 hrs.

The military training – I'll just go over it quickly. The French and Spanish march in step, you can tell they've been in the Army before. The Jews can't do it, they have never really been part of any military service, being non-citizens.

After the training, off we went, by truck, towards Algiers. We had money, we paraded and showed off through the town, with our elegant uniforms. There I'm surprised by the number of organisations

such as the Red Cross, that take on soldiers. Still no alcohol there, forever tea (or coffee, cakes and milk!)

Some of the bars have big signs across their window "USA only, British only". It's strictly forbidden to enter the Kasbah

One day, out of the blue, we were told to embark in Algiers for Naples. We were actually escorted by British destroyers. There we were brought to the "Transit Camp", an enormous military camp with millions of soldiers. Everyone around was just chilling out, making the most of their time in Italy.

And again we were told to climb in the trucks and were sent North. We then went right down to the South of the Italian boot, in Calabre. It's a beautiful region. We were based in a castle, or massive mansion so to speak, with ground covered in olive trees. We picked olives that we stashed in pots of jam with salt and water, we waited 10 days, and then ate them. We also went to the restaurant quite often to eat traditional Italian pasta. Anyhow, we had really strict orders from the officers, 'hands off the girls!' The mafia was everywhere.

One night, we were invited to a nearby town, Reggio de Calabre I think, in the stadium were lots of soldiers (Allies, British, American) who were listening to an opera singer. It was an old stadium and the atmosphere was really special. She sang funny songs, opera, etc – suddenly the whole stadium went quiet, as she started singing a French song by Rina Ketty "J'attendrai le jour et la nuit, j'attendrai toujours ton retour", in English of course ('I'll wait for you'). And there, all these soldiers started crying. I also found out later that it was also the German submariners lucky song.

Our Company was divided into two, and sent to the mountains in a village called "Serra San Bruno". As we arrived, the church closed its doors, and the shutters all around us. There too they thought that we were there to harm them. Two days later, the church opened again, and we started fraternising with the locals who were literally starving. To be in their good books, whenever they asked us about religion, we had to say the whole lot: Roman Catholic.

Our work in the mountains was really difficult; military engineering. At 5, as always, we waited impatiently for the truck bringing us tea. But we were always very careful, as there were plenty of armed people around (mafia, fascists). We were, however, well housed, in a school, where our flag was always hauled up and down every day. Another great point for the British was that every fortnight we would get on the side of our bed a NAAFI; a round cigarette box with 50 Navy Cuts, a pack of razor blades, etc.

1945 had just started. We were ordered to go to a clearing in the forest, by truck. Now this is a description of the type of mission that the 406 Coy had. We were given shovels, spades and pickaxes. There were also bulldozers, tractors etc, we were to build a road across the hills. Again, at 8, 12, 2, 4 and 6 TEA, and right on time! We then had to level the grounded stones with a heavy roller. The road was about 10 metres wide, and we worked on it for just over a year.

We never finished it, but we think it was going to be used as an access for the population's cars to another main road. That is all I can officially divulge about our missions, apart from the fact that it was a huge job, but that the local populations seemed happy about it. Some came everyday to follow the works, and some would even clap and encourage us when we had to blow up some massive rock standing in our way. My Company was mainly constituted of people having already served in the army, and we were used to carrying out orders. And I have got to say that in the time that I served not one of us was ever punished.

In this part of Italy, something extraordinary happened to me. I still do not to this day realise who lucky I was. One kilometre away from the village was a tavern with the most delicious pasta (a tad expensive, but we could afford it). So we went one winter evening, cutting through the snow, we ate so much, and drank, probably more than we should have, and felt pretty ill. Unable to find the bathroom, we went outside, to relieve our overflowing stomachs. We found a half hidden spot, behind some trees, ran to it, fell to our knees and started throwing up. Famished dogs heard us, came closer and started eating what was on the floor in front of us, and even licking it off our faces. By then, with the cold, we regained a little consciousness and went back inside. That's when I saw the owner of the place, I started having a go at him, I love animals you see, telling him that he should feed his dogs better than that. What he actually answered flabbergasted me – they weren't dogs, he said, they were WOLVES!!! I still can't believe it, a wolf licking my nose! That night we found out that there were wolves everywhere in the mountains, but that they did not usually harm humans.

Later, we got orders to return to Naples, without the dear friends we had made during our stay in the mountains. From there we were sent back to Algiers, by boat, demobilisation. The Company dissolved, and everyone was given back their civil liberty.

This leads me to yet another point of



having served in the British Army. When we gave back our uniforms, we were dressed from cap to toe in the very best suits made at the time.

I also want to add that during my years of service I understood and spoke English perfectly, even after demobilisation. However, after 70 years without any practice, I can only recall a few marking (and shortened) words:

"Morning" for good morning

"Night" for good night

"Morrow" for tomorrow

"Thanks" for thank you

"Wakey wakey" for our wake up call

I must say that it was a privilege for me to serve under the British colours, and I will forever be proud and faithful to your/our flag.

Yours sincerely, Luncen Cesard.

The following is an extract from the war diary of the above Company.

12 Aug 44 Formed at RABAT, Morocco  
16 Aug 44 HQ established at CAMP DUSHANE, CASABLANCA  
30 Sep 44 Men arriving daily for medical examination and attestation – training  
1 Nov 44 First working party to CAD  
7 Nov 44 Moved to BONE  
8 Nov 44 Moved to DUZERVILLE – guard duties  
12 Dec 44 Moved to HUSSEIN DAY, ALGIERS – camp construction and petrol  
26 Dec 44 Moved to ROUIBA – working at Base Salvage Depot

31 Dec 44 Establishment increase from 10 to 15 sections  
22 Jan 45 Landed in NAPLES, Italy – miscellaneous work  
14 Feb 45 HQ moved to CROTONE  
23 Feb 45 Concentrated at CROTONE – road work  
8 Mar 45 3 sections at NAPLES – roads  
3 sections at SERRA ST BRUNO – roads  
2 sections at CROTONE – roads  
2 sections at ROTTE DONATA – roads  
3 sections at GIOVANNIO – roads  
30 Apr 45 Composition of coy never clearly stated but references made to 'Spanish element' of it  
31 Jul 45 All Officers SOS to 39 Group, Spanish personnel SOS and Coy disbanded. ■

# 88 Alien Company

The son of Peter Wolfes, also called Peter, has kindly translated part of his father's diary describing his service in 88 (Alien) Company Pioneer Corps whilst serving in the BEF.

**Report: Peter Wolfes  
Norman Brown**

**T**HE son of Peter Wolfes, also called Peter, has kindly translated part of his father's diary describing his service in 88 (Alien) Company Pioneer Corps whilst serving in the BEF. His father was 13801400 (Later 13053333) who enlisted on 15 Feb 1940 at Richborough into 3 Centre Pioneer Corps probably from the refugee camp which was also based there in early 1940. On completion of training he was posted to 88 Coy.

## 19th May 1940

Night bombardment in Le Havre. The planes are flying low over our camp. You can hear the bombs explode.

## 20th / 21st May

Woken at 1am in the morning. On the move. The Germans are advancing. Dress in fatigues. Marching 15 minutes later without kitbags. Dead leg can only make it to the beach. Stopped a car and some RAOC officers take us mistakenly to the docks.

They are also in retreat and have left everything behind. Guard asks for my identity book which I have left in my battle dress in the kit bag. Taken by the 87 Group into the evacuated docks.

This is where the incendiary bombs were dropped. Spent the rest of the night and following day there.

The 87 Group are on the move but apparently HQ said by telephone I could not travel with them.

I have to stay with four men from the 63 Group. Air raid alarm.

No English soldiers left in Le Havre. 10 pm taken by armoured car through the

empty city.

Stopped in a village. Met up with a Major who interrogated me and then joined others to sleep under a tree.

## 22nd May

Woken at 4am. Barricades erected. Soldiers with weapons ready to ambush. An order at 6 am for a lorry to take me to my company. I can't go. Stayed with 9 section on a hay strewn floor. Went to the hairdresser and heard on French radio the French are fleeing in cars to the west. 80 rifles given out. (my father spoke fluent French).

## 23rd May

Midday and we are off. 7 kms from Le Havre to a camp. All our kitbags are stolen. (said earlier he left his behind?) Search through a deserted tented camp for anything of use to take with us. Only a 6d towel, no battle dress, all personal items lost.

## 24th May (my father's birthday!)

Off duty. Went to a kind doctor. Our Pioneer Coy are supposed to hear a warning via English radio. New kit organised by RE. New bomber jacket. Birthday present. 1 piece of chocolate. 1 cigarette. A plate. 1 battle jacket.

## 25th May

Sick parade. From 12th – 17th May bacterial infection of the nose. 17th May began the weakness in my leg. Particularly bad on 20th and 21st May.

Today light duties. Barricades erected in Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park, Marble Arch according to two of our officers. 90 men with weapons ordered to move but by midday everything changed.

Taken by lorry to the docks and billeted in a room in the Gare Maritime.

## 26th May

Working clearing up in the stores. No real urgency.

Unfortunately it is at this point that he stops writing his diary, from the war diary of 88 Coy the following can be added:

## 1 Jun 40

Stationed at Bretton (France) under command of 6 Group, employed on loading and unloading RE Stores.

## 15 Jun 40

All kit and stores were lost when evacuating Le Havre on 20 May 40, all papers and stores which could not be carried were abandoned or destroyed.

## 16 Jun 40

Entrained (69 and 93 Coys already on train). Arrived St Malo and all remaining kit apart from 1 haversack per man is abandoned.

## 17 Jun 40

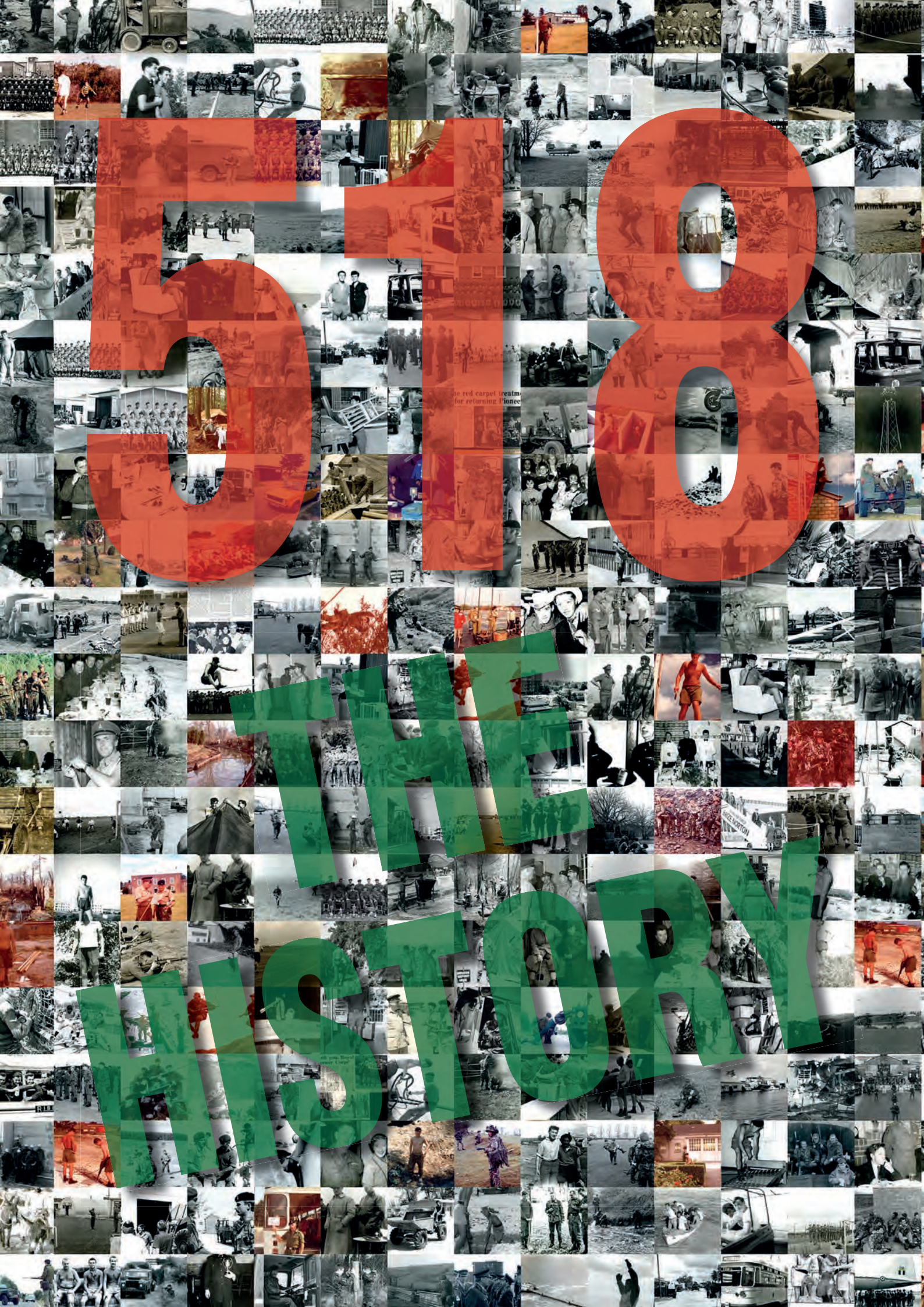
Arrived Southampton at 0730 hrs and proceeded to Alexander Palace

## 20 Jun 40

Moved to Westward Ho! They remained at this location until July 1940 when they moved to Berrington and were employed on defence works in the Wye Valley. The Company moved to London in October 1940 to assist in the blitz.

Peter Wolfe served until 6 September 1945, during the latter part of his service he was employed as an interpreter in a German Prisoner Of War Company. ■







# The following is a history of 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps from its formation in October 1948 through to August 1992. However the history does not end there...

**Report: Norman Brown**  
**Pictures: RPCA Archive**

**T**HE FOLLOWING is a history of 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps from its formation in October 1948 through to August 1992. The history does not end there as, at this point in time, apart from the usual wide range of ongoing tasks the Company are warned for a detachment to deploy with the United Nations forces to the former Yugoslavia.

With the exception of the chapter on the Gulf War, which was written by Major CR Cole the history was written by Warrant Officer 2 K Shield, the current Company Sergeant Major. The source for all this information was mainly "The Royal Pioneer", the Corps magazine. Some information was gained by writing to all the surviving Company Commanders and, for the more recent tasks, from personal experience. The chapter on Longtown proved the most difficult as, apart from lengthy accounts of football matches and other social events, there was very little information on their employment at that time.

In the main a conscious effort was made to avoid using names and personalities as this was intended as a factual account of the Company's role rather than a series of anecdotes. Where these have served to highlight the Company's "Modus Operandi", morale or standing among other units they have been included.

On a personal note, this is the first time I have attempted such a project and I ask the readers indulgence for any mistakes which may appear or for any facts which are in error. Research time, unfortunately, was at a premium.

As has been said, the Company does not end here. As part of the Army's "options for change" in April 1993 the Royal Pioneer Corps will amalgamate with the Royal Corps of Transport, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Army Catering Corps and the Postal Courier element of the Royal Engineers to form the Royal Logistic Corps. 518 Company will become 518 Squadron, 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps and will continue to carry out much the same job as part of the Pioneer Services within that Corps.

It is hoped that the high standards set by this unit will continue and that the name of 518, whether it be Company or Squadron, will live long in conjunction with the term "Pioneer".

## **K SHIELD**

### **Warrant Officer Class 2**

## **LONGTOWN**

As part of 10 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps, 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps was formed in October 1948 and took up residence at CAD Longtown near Carlisle. The next 7 years were spent in Cheviot Camp with the main topic being the bad Cumbrian weather. Sport seems to have been a most popular pastime, with the Company participating successfully in

Football, Boxing and Cricket.

The standard of the camp was of great pride to the members of the Company. Gardening competitions were held annually which gained greater importance after their move to number 2 camp in 1952, which they had to refurbish largely on a self help basis. After 27 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps moved into the camp in 1954 this even became an inter-company event of great importance.

Activities during the time at Longtown tended to polarise around social events, occasions of note include:

a. Late 1951 – Radio diffusion installed in all huts!

b. Early 1953 – A 'Television Projection Set' was installed to entertain the soldiers through the long evenings.

c. A annual all ranks trip to Blackpool to see the lights.

d. August 1955 – The showing of the colour film '518 at work and play', a film showing incidents in the everyday life of a Royal Pioneer Corps unit.

Life was not all play though. The Company supplied a contingent for street lining duties at the Coronation of Her Majesty The Queen on 2 June 1953. The remainder of the Company held their own parade in Cheviot Camp and watched the Coronation Parade on their 'television projection set'.

Although their duties at CAD Longtown are sketchy we do know that they were used as the labour force in the DB (Explosives) Area and at Easttriggs Sub Depot, there were also detachments to other areas. Kirliebridge is mentioned a few times between 1951 and 1955 and a notable detachment was carried out at Yeaton where several weeks were spent preparing the way for the SSAFA Air Display which was held on Whit Monday of 1955.

518 Company's time at Longtown came to an end when, in October 1956, they were given the order to move and within 36 hours they were on their way to take part in the Suez Operation. The Company moved out of Cheviot Camp on the night of 1 November 1956, travelled overnight to Southampton and embarked on the HMT Dilwara.

## **CYPRUS**

After a voyage of 11 days 518 Company disembarked at Limassol. Although crowded, personnel had managed to play some deck sports and even conduct some training during the journey, the Pioneers beating all comers in the balloon shooting competition. It had been assumed that the Company was on its way to Suez but Major C Wise DADPL, who met them on the quay at Limassol, told them that they were to remain on the island to "winterise" various camps.

The Company's first task was to build its own camp. This was to be a tented camp which was built on a rocky outcrop near Nicosia and became known as Eylenja Camp. The task was complicated by having to drill every hole with a compressor before any tents could be erected but at least they had civilian contractors to put up the more

permanent structures such as cookhouses, ablutions, etc.

As soon as the other units realised there were Pioneers on the island bids began to come in from all Services. Detachments were sent out to all areas of the island to assist mainly in construction work. Some of the jobs carried out were:

a. Assisting 33 Field Squadron Royal Engineers with the construction of a tunnel through the cliffs at Episkopi so as to give easy access to the beach.

b. Construction of a new camp, concrete roads and hard standings at Dhekelia.

c. Laying water mains.

d. Stevedoring at Famugasta Docks.

Despite the pressure of commitments which involved working from dawn until dusk, seven days a week, for much of the time the Company still found time to carry out continuous improvements to their own camp and even built a new wing onto the Kyrenia home for sick children, a project which earned much praise.

In April 1957 the first of the families began to arrive and social activities started with bus excursions to Kyrenia beaches. Great efforts were made to improve the barrack amenities by building their own cinema to seat 200 men, extending and improving the various Messes and holding plenty of parties to make best use of the facilities. Sporting events were keenly followed with the Company Football Team competing in the Nicosia Minor Units League.

No mention is made at this time of the Married Quarter situation, however, the single soldiers were not totally ignored. In 1958, after two years in tented accommodation they exchanged these for the 'New Korean Tent'. These, it is reported, were a great improvement on the previous tents but it was not until February 1961 that the Company managed to get into more windproof accommodation.

Not all was sweetness and light however, as, due to a traffic accident, a Private Chatterley lost his right arm and Private Kelly sustained serious multiple fractures to his arm. It goes some way to explaining the 'squaddie' sense of humour when they were repatriated with a presentation bought from a collection by their mates – a wrist watch each!

As well as construction tasks the Company was also involved in its share of internal security duties and special guards in the Nicosia area. These duties were carried out at night after working hard all day. Amongst the notable tasks was guarding Nicosia Central Prison which housed 700 EOKA men (the local terrorists) at the time. Excitement was provided by such incidents as the time a bomb was thrown at the mail truck, fortunately it rolled off the canopy and failed to explode.

The increase in terrorist activities had its detrimental effect on the social activities with families largely confined to quarters (and even prevented from joining their husbands in Cyprus for some time), functions and trips curtailed and sporting events cut back. The Company Cricket Team were highly miffed when in September



1958, 524 Company Royal Pioneer Corps arrived in Cyprus and set up their tents on the cricket pitch. In early 1959 however, terrorist activity ceased and normal Pioneering could resume. All members of the Company felt that they had earned their medal and Major Barber was awarded a Mention in Despatches for “distinguished and gallant services in Cyprus”.

The name “Chunkies” has always followed the Pioneer Corps but a certain Mr Willis Toogood, an announcer for the Forces Broadcasting Services in Cyprus, made a habit of using this term. During his “Wireless for the Blind” programme of Christmas 1958 records were played almost non-stop for the Company all with barbed titles aimed at this particular gentleman. During the evening persons unknown from 518 Company invaded the studio while he was on the air and removed his treads. These were subsequently flown from the Company flagstaff over the Christmas period. To add insult to injury, a year later the treads were resold to their owner for a five pounds donation to charity.

During the second half of 1959 the Company gradually reduced in strength as personnel were posted out and not replaced. This was in preparation for the amalgamation of 518 and 524 Companies. In a complex manoeuvre, 518 Company was disbanded and all surplus men were transferred to 524 Company, the name of the new company then reverted to 518 Company.

The new 518 Company being formed on 15 January 1960 with a Headquarters and 13 Sections. This involved a move of all single personnel to Waterloo Camp at Episkopi and all married personnel to the local quarter area. At one time, shortly after amalgamation, the Company was some 600 strong with detachments in all parts of the Island but by this time the work load had eased and normal hours were worked.

1960 saw the redeployment of troops on the island by withdrawing into the Sovereign Base areas, the Company was heavily involved in assisting with this. 1960 also saw a team of 12 Pioneers involved in the trial of the Twynham Hut. This was designed to replace the Nissan hut being composed of sections of aluminium and galvanized steel man portable and able to be erected by 10 men to any requirements of size, shape or ground.

There was some doubt as to whether the Pioneers could handle this task but after the erection of some 300 huts in various parts of the island, thus ensuring that tented camps were a thing of the past for the permanent units of Cyprus, the ‘doubting Thomas’s’ were made to eat their words.

On 27 February 1961, after more than four years in Cyprus and having built umpteen camps for other units, the Company moved into new quarters. Harding Barracks, Dhekelia was described as ‘modern barrack blocks’ and the Company soon adjusted to the luxury of life in barracks after roughing it in tents. Not all personnel were happy with the move however, as, during their stay at Episkopi, the morale of the Company had been maintained at a high level by close liaison with their neighbours – 27 Independent Company Women’s Royal Army Corps whose assistance with events such as dances, beach parties and barbecues had

been much appreciated.

Since the reformation in 1960 the Company had gradually been reducing in strength towards a planned establishment of a Headquarters and five Sections although, as usual, the goal posts moved yet again and the establishment was changed to a Headquarters and four sections.

The reader might be forgiven for assuming that the Company had worked exclusively in Cyprus during this time. In fact detachments had deployed to such far flung places as Benghazi in Libya and Kuwait. The Kuwait task was for a Sergeant and his section during the rise in tension between Kuwait and Iraq. They were employed with ‘Q’ Movements and Port Section Royal Engineers in the unloading of stores at the Airport, working initially 24 hours on 24 hours off until heat and humidity forced this to be cut to 12 on 12 off.

Adventurous training expeditions were also carried out by the Company to places such as Turkey and North Africa. One of note was led by Lieutenant Myers who, in August 1960, obtained permission for a unit party to make a short range desert expedition in Cyrenaica, North Africa (now part of Libya).

The aim of the expedition was to report on the ‘going’, water sources and habitation along the proposed route as well as to practice operating with land-rovers under desert conditions. Much time was spent before leaving Cyprus in getting fit, gathering together stores and equipment and arranging for vehicles and stores to be ready in Benghazi. They also read books on the desert, reports of previous expeditions and spoke to people who had served in the Libyan desert.

There were 33 volunteers for the expedition and, after the hard living conditions were explained to everyone three marches were made to select the keenest and fittest. The marches consisted of:

- a. A six mile march as a group.
- b. A twelve mile march as a group.
- c. A final march from Episkopi on the coast to Mount Olympus in the Troodos range, over 6,000 feet high. This was 17 miles as the crow flies but averaged 27 miles by foot across country. This was done in syndicates and eight men were chosen from the thirteen competing. The best time was 14 hours achieved by Lance Corporals Otley and Drinkwater and Private Mitchell.

Having selected the party the next three weeks were spent undergoing individual training in specific skills. Lieutenant Myers, Corporal Horton and Corporal Hornby were trained in the use of the Sun Compass and navigation by the 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, Corporal Voce, Private Mitchell and Private Stanley were taught vehicle maintenance and repairs by the area workshops at Episkopi and Lance Corporal Otley and Lance Corporal Drinkwater learned wireless operating by the local signals squadron. As there was insufficient time to learn morse 245 Squadron Royal Signals at Cyrenaica provided an operator.

The party arrived at Benghazi on 29 September 1960, stores and equipment were drawn and they set off on 1 October 1960. Disaster struck early on when, on 2 October about eighty miles south of Benghazi, the leading land rover drove off the Via Balbia and crashed. The driver had a

broken arm and the wireless operator a broken rib. After a visit to Agedabia hospital they returned to Benghazi to reorganise and restart the expedition as quickly as possible.

On 6 October the second start was made and the party proceeded without incident to Ain Metagh which they reached two days later. On the 8th they arrived at Bir Quwetin where a French geologists party had a base camp.

The replacement wireless operator had shown signs of heat exhaustion while at Ain Metagh and he had to be nursed back to health which meant an enforced three day stay at the French base. During this time Lieutenant Myers made a trip in the company of the French to the Marada Valley and Corporal Horton made a thorough search of the area for the Bir Quwetin water source but found no trace of it.

On 11 October they set off again and made Augila by midday. By this time the wireless operator was again ill and an arrangement was made with a passing American petrol company vehicle to take him to their doctor at an oil rig south of Jalo. The doctor diagnosed a liver complaint and arrangements were made to fly him back to Benghazi.

Headquarters Cyrenaica were contacted on the Americans’ radio telephone and, due to the lack of communications, the party were ordered back to base. They left the oil rig on 13 October and made camp that night some 19 miles east of Bir Quwetin. A further two nights were spent out in the desert on the trip back including one night spent in the company of a United States Army Survey team near Soluch. They arrived back in Benghazi on 16 October 1960. All of the party had thoroughly enjoyed the expedition and were very disappointed not to have completed it.

As is normal with the British Army, when there is no one to fight they invent an enemy and deploy on exercise to maintain their skills. Cyprus was no exception to this and 518 Company took an essential part in all exercises held on, and from, the island. The Pioneers were employed in the support and supply areas, helping to maintain the flow of stores and set up and maintain Headquarters, transit camps etc.

Troops were exercised in Libya on Exercise STARLIGHT for five weeks where they prepared containers and packs of rations, Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants, water etc, to be dropped by parachute in the battle area. Two articles, published in The Royal Pioneer in December 1960, follow this chapter. One was written by Captain RJR Stokes, Royal Artillery who was a Military Observer for the exercise and the other was written by a Pioneer Officer, both articles serve to illustrate the type of work carried out by Pioneers on exercise and how they were viewed by ‘Non Pioneers’. The articles which are reproduced faithfully from the original, read as follows:

#### **THE PIONEERS BLAZE THE TRAIL IN CYPRUS**

In the incredibly short space of 3 days! – a parched and barren piece of rocky ground in the Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area in Cyprus, was transformed into a complete tented camp, geared to ‘house’ and feed an entire Battalion.

Such was the feat performed recently by



1 Officer, 4 Sergeants and 65 men of 518 Coy.

If such a bald and matter of fact statement doesn't fully convey exactly what such a task involves, a few brief facts and figures are offered in support. Apart from the usual digging of soak-away pits, latrines, etc, over 100 IPP tents and 40 marquees were erected, two complete kitchens (of the new universal type of canvas structure) with associated dining rooms were put up: an MT Park and track plan laid out and organised. Some 3,000 pickets were driven into the bone-hard ground and approximately the same number of guy ropes tightened and made secure.

This was in fact the first time 518 Company (who amalgamated with 524 Company earlier this year) had tackled a Battalion Camp project. The task was set for exercise purposes, both for themselves and 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, who were to be their 'guests' in the camp for a one night stand only prior to carrying out a drop in another part of the Island.

"All this for one day, and then we will pull it all down", Private Croisdale (who hails from Ossett in Yorkshire) commented with a wry grin. "But we've proved we could do it," he added proudly.

During the 3 day setting-up period, the Pioneers were working from crack of dawn to dusk which at this time of the year in Cyprus means from approximately 5.30 am to 7 pm (or, more officially 0530 hours to 1900 hours).

Although the Coy carried out the entire erection of the camp, it has had inter-Corps support. Army Catering Corps personnel were there in force to feed the workers and look after the Para boys on arrival. Royal Army Service Corps transport did the fetching and carrying of tentage and accommodation stores from Famagusta – 95 miles away, and last but not least the Royal Air Force, Akrotiri, made available their canteens and cinema for the odd sport of recreation, "although there hasn't been much time for that," said Corporal White.

The cookhouses worked entirely on Triplex Field Cookers, and the universal kitchens proved to be a great improvement on former types used in field conditions. Sergeant John Robinson, Army Catering Corps, who prior to joining the Army in 1947 was a ship's cook in the Merchant Navy, thought the equipment was first class.

As a reward for all their hard work, Company Commander Major HM Waterhouse took two of his lads from each section to watch the 'red berets' do their stuff – and as they were due to jump at first light, this meant nearly an all night journey for the Pioneers over the twisting roads of the Troodos mountains to get there in time. Private Devlin thought it was "a marvellous show", and well worth the trip.

The Royal Pioneer Corps may rarely get any of the glamour that comes the way of many units in other arms, but what they may lack in showmanship, they certainly make up for in sheer hard work and grit.

#### EXERCISE "BARBICAN"

At 0700 hours on Monday the 2nd of July 1962 21 men of 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps left Dhekelia to proceed on Exercise Barbican II.

Our task was to set up Operational

Headquarters for an Infantry Battalion who were to control the exercise. Very briefly, the story behind all this was that in the Cypriot state of Ktima the workers, who were employed in the Copper Mine digging for oil (?) had in fact struck WHISKEY and under the influence of this "Drink of Paradise" threatened the neighbouring state of Zyi.

Zyi, not being a very strong state, requested help from the United Kingdom and as a result a Brigade was flown out at very short notice to suppress the state of Kina and capture the Whiskey points. ("Pioneers of course would have been pleased to do this on their own").

Our section having joined the convoy from Brigade proceeded to Kellaki which is a small village 2,600 feet above the sea level and north west of Limmasol. In order to get to this village the traveller must proceed along 11 miles of dusty track which winds its way up a mountain in a series of precipitous hairpin bends.

Within 36 hours of arrival the section (with the minimum of assistance of undenominational odds and bods) had erected 9 Marquees of various sizes and 30 x 160 pound Ridge tents. Those included – Control Headquarters, Intelligence, Press Building, Officers Mess, Dining Room, Quartermaster Stores and a canteen.

During the exercise proper the section was employed manning a water point at Zyi; this was a 36 hour shift job and enabled 90% of the section to get a decent bath. Other tasks involved collecting parachutes following air supply drops and unloading stores and ammunition for Brigade at the Larnaca Salt Flats. Possibly one of the most important jobs given to us was repairing two damaged culverts in the mountain road. With the aid of 6 foot iron pickets and a lot of Pioneer ingenuity the exercise was not held up.

The natives of Kellaki proved to be very friendly and a football match was held on a Sunday afternoon – the result was none too good for us but the party held afterwards made up for everything. Private Rice played an outstanding game and was admirably backed by the rest of the team but Private Cussell thought that to play goalkeeper wearing a woollen jersey in a temperature of 90 degrees was a bit off.

Another source of immense interest was watching the air strikes launched by the Royal Air Force and the Fleet Air Arm. At times it was possible to look down on the planes as they weaved in and out of the hills and valleys attacking Ktimian positions. Even though our camp was in neutral territory we got our share of very low level attacks

Throughout, the food was of a high standard possibly due to the fact that Private Haggarty "volunteered" to help out in the capacity of regimental cook.

By the end of the second week we were all in good spirits though a little tired and rather grubby. It had been a hard but enjoyable two weeks – our major casualty being Private Mounsey who had left us to be admitted to the Royal Air Force hospital at Akrotiri.

The following is the text of a letter received from Brigadier JH Cibbon OBE the Brigade Group Commander in 1962 after Exercise BARBICAN:

"I wanted to write and tell you how well

your Pioneers worked on Exercise. The Brigade has now had Pioneers from 518 Company on every major exercise it has done in Cyprus since 1960 and I would like you to know and tell them how much we have all appreciated their work."

It was obviously decided that 518 Company had been static enough and on 13 July 1962 they moved yet again. This time it was to Slim Barracks, Dhekelia while their former home was refurbished to accommodate a company of Womens Royal Army Corps. It was to be a short stay at Slim Barracks as they were warned for a permanent move to Aden. That, however, is the subject of another chapter!

#### ADEN

Initiating the move to Aden a detachment sailed on the Nevassa from Famagusta on 15 September 1962 under Captain Burnett, landing in Aden four days later. The Headquarters and remainder left Cyprus on 27 October 1962 and after a 12 day cruise aboard LST Empire Gull, landed in Aden on 8 November.

They were met by Capt Burnett and men of the advance party who had already made a good start on their tans. Initially the Company occupied a portion of Waterloo Barracks alongside 1 Kings Own Scottish Borderers with whom the advance party had already carried out some Internal Security patrols.

Waterloo Barracks was close to the sea, it was a modern barracks of sectional buildings comprising of rooms of 4/5 persons with ceiling fans and air conditioning. There was a cinema and full size swimming pool, gymnasium, pitches for all games, tennis court and even a golf course. In addition to this they even had monthly horse and camel races just down the road.

Relations with the 'Kosbies' were excellent with members of the Company deploying with them on exercises and generally gaining a great deal from sharing a camp with them. A comment from the Officer Commanding of the time notes, 'Undoubtedly serving alongside the KOSB provided Pioneers the opportunity to acquit themselves well and an exceptionally high standard of discipline was reached and maintained'.

The main task on arrival were in support the Royal Engineers building two reinforcement camps. Both camps comprised permanent buildings and concrete tent bases. The Company provided teams who specialised in concreting, Twynham erection and lining, form laying and considerable numbers of plant operators.

Shorter tasks undertaken by the Company included assistance to the Postal and Courier service with Christmas mail, the movement of the Command Map store and practical help at local Gymkhanas and various formal parades. During the first half of 1963 the Company became involved in tasks associated with the route stations to the Gulf.

As usual, in addition to 'Pioneering' the Company also had an Internal Security role to perform. Training for this was carried out each Saturday morning which included training all those personnel posted in as they continued to receive reinforcements as well as having the 'old sweats' posted out.



Camp security was also tight and the Pioneers played their part in guarding their barracks. They proved particularly reliable at this as can be seen from the following anecdote which was published in the June 1963 issue of *The Royal Pioneer*.

Scene: One large car, with Arab driver and a European in the back:

Sentry: (518 Company) ‘Pass please’.

European: ‘I say, I’m awfully sorry I don’t seem to have it on me’.

Sentry: ‘I say, I’m awfully sorry – you can’t come in’.

European: ‘Dash it all I’m a government official’.

Sentry: ‘I don’t care if you’re the Deputy High Commissioner – no pass, no entry’.

Needless to say he was the Deputy High Commissioner – however he didn’t get in.

The Company took an even greater part in the Internal Security role when Pioneer dog handlers deployed nightly with infantry patrols. The dogs were used as an early warning device as they were trained to react quietly to anything suspicious by pulling on their lead. This would then be investigated by the patrol.

There appears to have been at least one local custom that the British Soldiers did not welcome, with commendable disregard to rank a plague of bedbugs struck. The sight of hundreds of ‘squaddies’ scratching incessantly bought a rapid response from the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Over 800 soldiers moved out into the desert for a night while their billets were painted with foul smelling potions and left to gently ‘heave’ under the Arabian full moon. The enemy was completely routed and, while they retreated to the desert, the soldiers returned to their now louse free beds.

It had been unfortunate that on leaving Cyprus the wives, once again, had had to be left behind. However by mid 1963 all families had been reunited and the Company wives club was amalgamated with the wives club of the ‘Kosbies’. They took an active part in all activities including evening barbecues, bring and buy sales and a tombola in aid of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen’s Families Association.

Despite the workload of the Company at this time there was still a great deal of interest in sporting activities. The Company fielded a first and second football team, a hockey team, a basketball team and, in season, the inevitable cricket team. Results were mixed but all activities were tackled with enthusiasm and the Pioneer teams became known as a “sporting clean team” and a side to be reckoned with.

It is unfortunate that not all was fun and games however and in March 1963, Private Alfred Storer was accidentally drowned. He was laid to rest in MAALA cemetery in Aden.

The free leave travel to UK had already been taken advantage of both in Cyprus and in Aden however a new leave scheme was introduced. Leave to East Africa was in full swing at the Holiday Leave Centre at Mombasa and also in the Kenyan Highlands. Air travel was free and this was available to families and single personnel. This was made full use of by members of the Company.

Somebody had obviously noticed that 518 Company had been static too long and in October 1963 there were off again. This time it was a move of a mere 25 miles to Mandalay Lines, Falaise Camp in Little Aden. Yet again they managed to get decent accommodation in brand new

blocks, air conditioned with six men to a room. Junior NCOs had their own rooms with fitted cupboards and there were plenty of baths and showers all laid out in local marble. So life wasn’t all bad!

Although construction work was still the staple task of the Company other tasks continued to provide variety. LST Parties were regularly sent off to the Persian Gulf usually unloading NAAFI stores at remote stations around the coast. Three privates found themselves attached to a Field Survey Unit erecting markers on the Perim Island at the southernmost tip of the Red Sea. The unusual part of this task was that they had to use Arab Dhows to reach the more inaccessible points around the island.

Tasks diversified yet again when the Radfan Operation and the Dhala road project got under way. In May 1964 a further two sections of Pioneers were attached to the Company to assist with these tasks.

During the Operation Pioneers were employed at Thumier and Khormaksar (Big Aden) handling a vast tonnage of essential supplies destined for the forward troops. Many men found themselves creeping around wadis in the middle of the night patrolling against dissidents and others frequently rode ‘shotgun’ for supply convoys to the front line. Long range sniping and road mines made this a dangerous task.

Once again 518 Company were on the move! This time the arrival of 24 Infantry Brigade Group meant their eviction from Falaise Camp and they moved back to the Khormaksar area to Normandy Lines although a detachment did remain in Falaise Camp to ‘fly the flag’. It was about this time that the attached sections managed to



■ Aden

Picture: RPCA Archive



escape back to the UK although Private Buckle did go about it in an unusual way. He was on the LSL Sir Lancelot several hundred miles away when the order to move came, A helicopter winched him from the deck and deposited him at Salalah airfield, unfortunately too late to catch the Aden Airways plane. However, the day was saved when a senior RAF officer offered Buckle a lift. The offer was accepted and he arrived well ahead of his companions as he had managed to cadge a lift in a Hunter jet. Question! Where did he put his luggage?

Pioneers were involved at all stages in the construction of the road to Dhala from Aden, including the construction and maintenance of the camps used by Personnel employed on the operation, movement of the vast amount of supplies involved, and operation of major items of Engineer plant.

It was not all toil though as the workers had to be under constant guard because of snipers and one party worked while the other stood guard. Incidents were common, one night an attack was launched on one of the road makers camps, the guard that night were from the 518 Company contingent.

The alarm was raised and fire was returned by SLR and LMG. After a two hour firefight the casualties totalled two dead and four wounded although none were from the Pioneers. In a separate incident Private Gauntlett thought he'd gone deaf when his new radio packed up while he was listening to it. It's not recorded whether he was relieved or annoyed when it was discovered that a bullet from a sniper had passed through the middle of his radio.

The section of the road towards Al Milah became known within the Company as the 'mine run'. The mines were usually laid overnight by dissidents and discovered on the early morning (0400 hours) wadi inspection. This kept the lads on their toes but, unfortunately, they were not 100% successful as the dissidents managed to blow up Private Fairclough's road roller. This had a disastrous effect on his morale as the drivers used to sleep under their charges and Private Spriggs wouldn't let Fairclough sleep under his.

A commemorative tie was designed to celebrate the completion of the road with the entitlement to wear it going to all those who were actively employed on the road, or guarding work parties. It is not known how many were sold but there were certainly a lot of Pioneers entitled to wear one.

It was not only the 'boys at the front' who had all the excitement. One Saturday evening, while getting ready to go out to the families club, Mrs Parker had a round from a rocket launcher put through her balcony. There were several people in the room at the time, including the Parker's baby, but no serious casualties were sustained. Corporal Fletcher, however, became the Company's first official casualty due to this incident.

The Q department also had their moment of glory when Staff Sergeant Simmons, while out sunbathing with his wife, leapt into the sea to save a drowning Arab boy. He hauled him 50 yards back to safety and a grateful Arab family. All this despite regulations which forbade swimming in that area because of dangerous undertow and the big breakers which crashed down onto

the beach at that time of year. This resulted in an article in the "Dhow", which was the service paper in Aden.

It must be said, however, that this wasn't the only time 518 Company made it into the local paper. In 16 December 1965 issue an anonymous article appeared purporting to be by a member of the Company, it has since been revealed that it was written, somewhat tongue in cheek, (his own words!) by the Officer Commanding of the time, Major JAO Napier. The article is faithfully reproduced after this chapter.

Although the exciting tasks managed to get the most press the normal tasks and activities carried on as normal. Throughout the time in Aden the Company was constructing Twynham huts. A farewell tattoo was held for the outgoing Commander in Chief during which each unit had to give a six minute demonstration of their everyday tasks. 518 Company chose the erection of a Twynham hut and managed to erect one 18 foot x 9 foot x 6 foot in four minutes.

This well and truly established the Company as the Twynham experts. This was just as well as they were even called on to construct a church out of them. This was Saint Christopher's Church, Radfan Camp and at morning service on Sunday 8 May 1966 a 518 Company plaque was officially presented to the church and dedicated by the Padre to all past and present members of the Company.

518 Company's involvement with prisons (on the 'right' side of the law) began in Cyprus and continued in Aden. In September 1965 a new prison was opened at Al Mansoura, a suburb of Sheikh Othman, for political detainees. The Company's task was to take over the administration of the prison and assist in the internal security of the inmates. Two sections were allotted to this task. In mid November 1965, 31 Senior Non Commissioned Officers (including some half dozen from the Military Provost Staff Corps) arrived to take over the warder duties.

This released one section of Pioneers for other tasks. Although only a half an hours drive from the Company lines, towards the end of the Aden tour it became one of the most hazardous tasks, anyone approaching or leaving the prison had to run the 'gauntlet'. The drill when leaving was to open the gate then go like mad down the road for about eight minutes until you reached the first roadblock. The Company continued to administer the prison until its closure and handover to the South Arabian army in the Autumn of 1967.

Not all the work carried out by the Company was universally popular, in mid 1966 a major task of the construction of security walls in the Crater district of Aden was received. Some 65 walls were built varying in length from 10 to 200 feet and in thickness from two to four feet, all 12 feet high. The terrorists seemed to take exception to this work, probably because it blocked their escape routes, and endeavoured to knock them down whenever possible before the cement set. The standard of the work proved too much for the dissidents and the walls stood defiant.

They were, however, ingenious in their attempts in demolition, a report from 45 Commando said that the latest implements

to be used were coat hangers. (?).

As a final comment on sport during their stay in Aden the Company still managed to compete despite their dispersed commitments. The football team managed 17 wins out of 19 games played during the pre-season fixtures. Karting was a major sport there and the Officer Commanding of the time, Major Webster, as the Chairman of the Aden Karting Association organised a quarterly championships at which the Company took two trophies.

It was in the Autumn of 1966 that the British Forces in Aden started to wind down for the withdrawal and, with what appears to be a certain amount of warped humour, the Company were tasked with the job of dismantling and packing the Twynham huts, along with other stores, for shipping to the Gulf and back to the UK. Terrorist activities did not cease however and, on 27 August 1966, Private Michael Patrick Swift was killed on duty during a dissident ambush near Al Milah. He was 20 years old and had been in Aden since February that year. He was buried with full military honours at the British Military Cemetery at Little Aden on 30 August 1966.

In early 1967 the Company took on yet more skills, this time as salvage operators when the SS Shibham was driven onto a shallow reef near the detachment at Shilalah. Volunteers were called for to try and reach the ship through extremely heavy seas. Pioneers and Royal Corps of Transport personnel formed a party which succeeded in reaching the ship and salvaging most of the valuable cargo. At about the same time a detachment carrying out a task at a check point near a particularly troublesome village called Sheikh Othman found six home made pipe mortars loaded and aimed at the check point.

1 April 1967 saw Aden awaiting the arrival of the UN Mission and the violence and strikes promised by the terrorist organisations. Heavy rains began and continued with such persistency that the streets began to flood. With three to four feet of water, abandoned vehicles everywhere and dead goats floating by, Aden soon came to a standstill. Electricity failed, sewage systems collapsed, the port emptied and the airport closed. With the local population too busy trying to save their lives and belongings any thoughts of civil disturbances were forgotten.

The military were called in to help in what had become a civil disaster. All available personnel, even the clerks, were drafted in to assist with sandbagging and debris clearance, standing up to their necks in water to clear blocked sewers and all the while having to stand guard. Soldiers returned to their billets, tired and soaking wet. To find that there was a foot of water flowing under their beds, trenches had to be dug and not a dry shirt in sight. As the waters receded it was hoped that some form of peace would follow. Unfortunately terrorism was the order of the day and, typically, British soldiers working in the back streets on tasks to aid the civil authorities were fired on by the very people they were trying to help.

In May, June and July of 1967 all families were repatriated and the 'pads' moved into the single accommodation. This, in addition to the arrival in the Company of emergency sections from the UK and Bahrain, meant



that double bunking was the order of the day despite the fact that detachments were still spread out throughout South Arabia. One of the UK sections was put to work in the local Ordnance Depot where work was well under way on preparing stores for shipment out from Aden. An immediate improvement was noted when a task which was planned to last some months using Arab labour was completed in six and a half days by the Pioneers.

From early 1967 a section had been attached for internal security and cargo search in Aden docks and in July a further section commenced duties in support of Joint Services Port Unit. These detachments worked permanently with the Royal Marines, Royal Navy and Royal Military Police.

This commitment gradually built up as the evacuation progressed until at one peak period some six sections were employed on shift work. A majority of these personnel were employed loading and unloading lighters and ships in Aden harbour. This was vital as, in addition to the incessant strikes, the Arab workers were boycotting all British and American ships. The Pioneers were therefore ensuring not only that stores left, but also that food and other vital supplies came into Aden.

At about this time the Company sustained several more casualties, this is not surprising as, during the last week in August for instance, there were 102 terrorist incidents. Private Winstanley had a very lucky escape as he was in the back of a landrover when a grenade was thrown into it. He was evacuated to England where he made a full recovery.

During a separate grenade attack seven members of a wiring party were injured as they were erecting a fence. Three of that party had to be flown back to England for further treatment. Private John H Jones was not so fortunate however, when, on 17 April 1967, while on patrol as a member of a joint Royal Marine-Royal Pioneer patrol, he died almost immediately after a fall on a rocky island in Aden harbour. His body was repatriated to England for burial.

The Seaward Search Section probably had the most exciting and interesting task in the Company at this time. They were part of a multi-service group responsible for preventing the illegal importation of arms and ammunition into Aden. They were based on HMS Sheba (a 'concrete' ship) and carried out searches of newly arrived vessels, storehouses and dock buildings. They would set up roadblocks for snap searches of Arab vehicles in the dock area and also cordon and search adjacent huts and houses.

Their duties took them out to small islands and strange ships in the harbour and around the whole tough area of Aden's dockland. Long hours of patient and methodical work paid off when, early in 1967 at Ma'alla Wharf, the section uncovered one of the biggest arms finds hidden in a number of boxes marked 'water pumps'. Over 750 German pattern bolt action rifles, complete with bayonets, and over 200 pistols were confiscated.

As the Company's time in Aden drew to a close the tasks continued to be varied. The last three months saw a section involved in full time patrols with 42 Commando Royal Marines, a section had to dismantle and

pack the AKC bowling alley and, of course, work in the docks was never dull. On two occasions the Pioneers saved the day by extinguishing fires on ships and lighters, one was a box of white phosphorous grenades which Private Jones managed to heave over the side of the Chindwara before it set alight to the rest of the ammunition.

During the restrictions, the Corps 28th birthday was celebrated in style. Most personnel managed to join in a programme of swimming, soccer, a celebration dinner and smoker. They even managed to get 99% of the Company together for a photograph. Just to top it all the Company managed to claim its first terrorist. Private Mitchell, one of the Company clerks, saw a local in the act of throwing something at a party of British troops in the Khormaksar Shopping Bays. Mitchell fired one round and winged the offender allowing him to be caught. It transpired that he was only throwing a brick, but in Aden in those days any missile was potentially a grenade!

The Company has always had its share of poets. The poem printed inside the front cover, prompted no doubt by the imminent departure from Aden, appeared in the December 1967 issue of The Royal Pioneer which was the last issue to contain anything from 518 Company in Aden. It is not known who wrote the poem as it is only signed by G L P W. To commemorate their time in Aden the Company also commissioned a piece of silver in the shape of an Arab dhow which was presented to the Corps.

During 1967 the Company strength had increased to a Headquarters and ten sections with the emergency reinforcements. Over the final evacuation period all but the Headquarters and three sections had planned for the UK direct from Aden. The final contingent embarked on the LSL Sir Geraint on 29 November 1967 and sailed from Aden on the next day, arriving in Bahrain on the 5th of December. The last of the Company arrived in the UK on 12 December 1967.

518 Company Royal Pioneer Corps was disbanded at Bicester on 15 January 1968.

#### Article from the "DHOW" 16 December 1965:

"WHAT" 'E SAYS' "IS 518?"

I was in the NAAFI queue when this geezer comes up to me and says what mob are you in then mate? I looks at him and pulls myself erect (was a little faded, you knows that queues are like) and I says to him "I belongs to 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps". "Never heard of them" he says. I then thumps him one like and puts him in a chair and tells him to pin his ears back.

"Our Company" I says, "came to Aden in 1962 and was in the same barracks as them Lowland Gentlemen called the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. We got on very well with 'em and they used to look after our clothing side. We was sorry to leave 'em when we had to move to Falaise then, made up of a couple of stone buildings and some Twynhams (The thought of those days made me a little thirsty, so I says to this bloke "stay there a minute mate, and I'll get a couple of beers"). "I was one of a party that started constructing Twynhams in Salerno and Anzio. We supported (I think

that's the military word) a mob called 38 Regiment RE (good set of blokes they were too." Anyhow it was hard work and when the wind blew you had to be careful otherwise you might get in the way of a bit of cladding (cladding, for the uninitiated, is the corrugate strips of metal which go to make up a Twynham Hut). I will never forget one dusty day the wind got hold of part of a roof and lifted it over the Jabel and Anzio and it landed in Falaise". (Hastily taking another swig of me beer at the gruesome thought) I continues (I must say that the bloke was showing interest at this time). "Not all of us was putting together these Twynhams, there was "Brummie" and "Jock" who drove them small 'Dumpers and then 'Arry' and a couple others what worked the concrete machine. Them two were cushy numbers but me conscientious like stays on the construction side".

We were all very happy when these Dissidents started fighting up country and I was one of a section that went up to Thumier (that was its name in those days, its called Hab... something now), here we unloaded stores from aircraft and lorries which had come up from Aden. We found out that another section of us were also working at Khormaksar with 'A' Air Supply Platoon. It must have been serious as we also had two emergency (I think that's what they call 'em) Sections of Pioneers join us from UK. When things quietened down like these returned to UK but they did a good job – worked hard they did".

(At this point me and this bloke decided it was time for another beer, so he goes and gets two pints). "The Company's next job", I says, "was looking after Patrol dogs in Thumier. We was lucky, there was me and another six or so blokes had been trained as Dog Handlers in the UK. We had these dogs, see, we went out with 'em in front of the Infantry Patrols at night. When the dog started pulling on his lead this meant that someone was about who shouldn't oughta. The dog showed which direction the sound came from and the Infantry 'wallahs' then investigated, very exciting it was. I must admit I was sorry when the job packed in – getting quite fond of them doggies I was.

"When I gets back to the rest of the Company I finds that the HQ and one section had moved back to Normandy Lines in Aden. This was lovely grub, bright lights an' all. About March 1965 one section joined 24 Field Sqn RE at Al Milah to assist in the road building that was going on there. I was not with a section as I was doing 14 days for a slight misdemeanour as the OC put it. Anyway, my mate Jock went up and he was telling me all about it. He was driving a steam roller, and some of the other crusher. Still others was helping to build culverts. Them blokes worked pretty hard and we've still a section there with 73 Sqn RE. I hope to go up there next week myself.

At this stage this Geezer says "Yeah, that's all very well, but what are you like at sport?" (I could see he must be a bit of a footballer because of his bandy legs). "Sport", says I, "Listen mate we got a jolly good boxing team. Last year in the championships they didn't half thump people around and 'Taffy' and 'Brummie' got a cup for doing it. We plays football and cricket and though our teams are not Manchester United standard they can hold



their own against some of them bigger units. In fact, the other day some referee says how good sportsmen we all was".

"We also got our own Community Centre which some blokes in the Company put up mostly in their own time. You must come and see it, we've even got the 'tele' – just like 'ome it is. The missus of our married blokes meet there once a month, they call it a posh word 'Wives Club' (I mean how lah de dah can yer get)".

"Anyway mate I've got to go now as I've got to tend our Company's gardens, the flowers and grass is growing a treat they are. Cheerio for now".

## BICESTER

Having been disbanded (for the second time) a mere two years, on 8th of May 1970 the Ministry of Defence signed the authority for the reformation of 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps as part of 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps. The effective date for this was April Fool's Day 1970! There was no formation parade or formal ceremony and the Company started off fairly low key, just an Officer Commanding, a Second in Command and a Company Sergeant Major. Key appointments were soon filled as personnel were received from other units within 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps under whose command they were and the unit took on the look of a working company.

The Company was initially to have had three sections and to increase to a strength of six sections by June 1971 although at the end of June 1970 it still consisted of a Headquarters and little else. It should be noted at this time that a section consisted of a Sergeant and 21 men.

The fact that the Company still had only two sections by the end of 1970 did not prevent them carrying out their first tasks. They had deployed as a Company onto Salisbury Plain for two weeks to take part in Exercise 'Crystal Palace', following that a section had deployed to Germany for a two month detachment and the remaining section was employed at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst until 21 December. It was not until mid 1972 that the goal of a six section Company was achieved.

Exercise 'Crystal Palace' was the Company's first stab at their likely task in time of war. It was a test to see if a Logistic Support Force, which was to supply 3 Division in its United Kingdom Mobile Force role, could be formed from Territorial units and regular shadow units and, once formed, could operate a Rear Maintenance Area.

The Pioneers were used operating fork lift trucks in moving ammunition, fuels, rations and other stores working 24 hours a day on an 8 hour shift basis. They also took their place in providing men for guards and security. Many lessons were learned especially on how best to organise the sections for the work regime but, more importantly for the man on the ground, on how to feed hard working Pioneers. The standard of the food was good but, apparently, there wasn't much of it. This was resolved by a Pioneer who, when asked by a visiting Brigadier about the food said, "It's alright but I'm \*\*\*ing hungry!" Who said the direct method never works?

On the Unit Historical Reports the circumstances of original formation were

stated as:

"To provide a Royal Pioneer Corps Field Force unit of company strength (six sections) for allocation to specific tasks by the Ministry of Defence (Q Branch) through Commanding Officer 23 Group Royal Pioneer Corps and available on demand for employment in support of Army Strategic Command"

There were a total of four companies within 23 Group at this time and, while all of them provided manpower for tasks away from their home base, it was only 518 Company which was given this exclusive role.

The other three Companies all had a Base Depot task as their main role and, as 518 Company took on more and more of these 'away' tasks, the others provided manpower only on an occasional basis. Personnel were tasked in various sized groups from Company to section strength or any smaller group as the tasks demanded. The time spent on task also varied greatly from a few days to six months at a time.

It would be nearly impossible to list all the tasks which 518 Company has undertaken but by way of an insight into the huge variety of such jobs a list is given below of the type of tasks carried out. Included separately are accounts of the more notable tasks and a list of the places where detachments have served.

1. Assistance to the Royal Engineers in tarmacking road and airfield runways, explosive demolitions and construction tasks.
2. Movement of accommodation stores and office equipment.
3. Clearance of a beach which had been extensively used for practise beach landings prior to it being opened to the public.
4. Depot support to Central Ordnance Depot, Bicester, Central Ammunition Depot, Kineton, Central Engineer Park, Long Marston and Petroleum Depot, Westmoors.
5. Mechanical Handling Equipment trials in support of the Mechanical Handling Trials Unit in Bicester Garrison.
6. Field training exercises in support of the Royal Engineers, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Royal Corps of Transport, Royal Marines and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.
7. Marquee, tentage and spectator stand erection for various events, displays and parades.
8. Deep sea dumping of vehicles and munitions.
9. Security duties throughout the world especially in Northern Ireland.
10. Assistance with and administration of military sponsored events such as show-jumping events and orienteering competitions.

The places, other than within the United Kingdom, to which detachments have deployed are:

The Caribbean, Gibraltar, Bahrain, Cyprus, Germany, Canada, Hong Kong, Belize, Malta, Denmark, Sharjah, The Falklands Isles, Kenya, Saudi Arabia/Kuwait

## EXERCISE BIRO

Exercise BIRO took place in Hong Kong between 6 October and 21 December 1971 and involved 34 Field Squadron Royal Engineers supported by a section from 518 Company. The original task had been to extend the Lu Weng to Kau Tang road by

1,000 metres but this was cancelled prior to arrival and all tasks were carried out on Lantau Island.

Three projects were planned for the Island – the electrification of the villages of Pak Mong, Ngau Kwu Long, Tin Liu and Tai Ho, a 90 foot extension of the Pak Mong jetty and the construction of a playground for the local school.

The section left Brize Norton in a Britannia aircraft on the Thursday evening and were scheduled to arrive in Hong Kong on the Sunday but things did not go according to plan. In Gan (in the Maldives) a fault with the aircraft meant a lengthy delay which was made full use of by the passengers. Saturday was spent swimming, sunbathing, climbing coconut palms and sampling the duty free liquor. The fault was rectified on Saturday evening and the party arrived in Hong Kong on the Sunday night.

The section was accommodated in Fau Gardens Camp situated in the New Territories approximately 20 miles north of Kowloon and five miles from the Chinese border. As the projects were on Lantau Island this meant a 45 minute journey by road to Gordon Hard and from there a further 45 minute trip by boat to the Island.

The first three days of the exercise were spent in loading and off loading stores and the general preparation of the sites. After that the section was split into three and each allocated a different part of the task. The first part of the electrification of Pak Mong involved the digging of holes for telegraph poles, within three days 27 wheelbarrow loads of concrete had been made by hand and all eight poles erected and concreted in.

The other two sub sections constructed a 25 square yard helipad for the Royal Air Force. The digging of holes for the telegraph poles to Ngau Kwu Long did not go as well because the ground was rocky and in some places they encountered water at about two feet which meant digging and bailing out by hand.

The playground task involved building a concrete retaining wall 260 feet long by 18 inches wide around the perimeter and was tackled by two of the subsections who had to carry water, sand aggregate and concrete to the site from the beach.

Fortunately HMS Eagle put into Hong Kong for three days and agreed to allow her Sea King helicopters to fly sorties, for one morning, from the mainland across to Lantau ferrying sand and aggregate to the site. In one morning they transported two weeks supply of stores and allowed the men to get on with the task of levelling off the playground site, no mean feat in itself as this involved moving 180 dumper loads of earth just for starters.

The electrification of the other two villages followed similar lines except that all 37 poles, 30 feet long and weighing 600 pounds each, had to be manhandled into position. The generator had to be mounted on a concrete base which had to be laid in one operation. This required a feat of co-ordination and team work with two men making the dry mix on the beach, two wheeling it to the site and the last two adding water and laying it. Finally holes had to be cut into the floor of each of the 54 houses the generator was to supply to take the earth rods before cementing them in.

Bad weather dogged the work



throughout the period and storm warning were regularly issued. On Sunday 14 November the Light Floating Bridge, critical to the progress of the jetty project, was blown ashore and partially sank. It proved impossible to refloat the bridge on the Monday morning so it was decided to work all night and try to refloat it on the low tide at 0230 hours Tuesday morning.

A troop of Engineers and two sub sections of Pioneers were allocated to the job and they began by unloading by hand three quarters of a ton of stores which were on it. At low tide, when the submerged pontoons reappeared, hand pumps were used to pump it dry before the tide turned so it would refloat itself. All went well and although personnel had been working waist deep in the sea everyone remained cheerful. Once re-floated it was made secure and at 0830 hours everyone was given the rest of the day off.

The next few weeks were spent finishing off the tasks already in hand and repairing, rebuilding and painting the jetty. Those who had finished their particular tasks were employed in back loading all stores and equipment to Sham Shui Po where they were cleaned prior to their return to base stores.

All projects were completed by 7 December and the Grand Opening Ceremony was held on the 9th. At this the jetty, playground and electrification projects were officially handed over to the Hong Kong Government who in turn handed them over to the Village Representatives. Each sub-section paraded during the ceremonies on the sites where they had worked.

The return flight to the United Kingdom had been planned for 11 December but

was delayed for 10 days during which time the men were employed cleaning exercise stores. All personnel were back in England for Christmas after a useful and enjoyable detachment.

#### **MALTA – 7 JANUARY TO 22 MARCH 1972**

In the dying moments of 1971, due to the political situation in Malta, 518 Company were placed on 72 hours notice to move. This meant that those on leave had to be recalled and the Officer Commanding and Chief Clerk spent most of their Christmas break sending telegrams. On 7 January 1972 a total of three Officers, the Sergeant Major and 108 other ranks formed up to depart. The contingent included a detachment from other units within 23 Group Royal Pioneer Corps as the Company's other tasks had to be continued as usual.

On 8 January 1972 the Company alighted in Malta and, after a short bus ride, took up residence alongside 79 Battalion Royal Artillery in Saint George's Barracks. The accommodation left much to be desired, being stores sheds and Military Transport hangers but, as they were hard at work within six hours of arriving and working 15 hours a day, that seemed to matter little. Headquarters elements were soon hard at work organising offices and begging, borrowing or misappropriating stores, vehicles and equipment to run the Company.

As usual the tasks allocated to the Company, were many and varied. In addition to assisting 41 Commando Royal Marines in internal security duties, Pioneers spread out to all parts of the island to dismantle and pack an entire Garrison ready

for shipment home. This included items as varied as vehicles, furniture from married quarters, British Forces Broadcasting Service and Royal Signals transmitters and aerials and even the destruction of documents by burning.

While some of the stores were returned by air a vast majority were shipped back by sea, this meant many Pioneers were employed on the docks moving stores both by hand and fork lift trucks, loading them onto ships and lashing them down. Much media interest was in evidence and many Pioneers were photographed and filmed as they worked, especially the “pets special” party who were loading all the departing families personal effects which included many live animals.

The mixture of services on the island caused problems. One NCO was upbraided for not calling a squad to attention and saluting a high ranking Naval Officer on the docks. His excuse that he thought he was a Maltese Customs Officer did not go down well at all! To add insult to injury, after being told to “salute anything with a gold band”, one wag mounted an Ordnance issue cup with a gold lip (Officers Mess type of course!) on a post. This was subsequently saluted by every Pioneer who passed it.

The Maltese Garrison having been dismantled, destroyed, sold or shipped out and their task complete, 518 Company Royal Pioneer Corps returned to England for some well earned leave on 22 March 1972.

#### **CYPRUS EMERGENCY TOUR**

On 20 July 1974, shortly after the Cyprus emergency broke out (i.e. the invasion of the Island by Turkish forces), 22 men under Sergeant J Lund flew to Akrotiri. A further three sections were put on 72 hours



■ Op Platypus Cyprus 1974, Cpl Ainsley, Cpl Bryce, LCpl Cowley, Ptes Ash & McGuinn

Picture: RPCA Archive



standby and a final section at 24 hours notice to move. A massive recall operation was mounted over the weekend as half the men of the unit were on leave and by Sunday evening 98% of them were back in camp and tropical kit had been drawn.

The balance of the Company, less a section, flew into Akrotiri in the early hours of 26 July and were whisked straight off to Dhekelia by Hercules. The Island was in a state of chaos, the first spate of foreign refugees had just left and the civilian staff had not reported for work.

Wives and daughters of servicemen on Cyprus were staffing messes and cookhouses, rubbish lay knee deep in barracks and outside married quarters and, as the only available military accommodation was occupied by refugees, the Company's soldiers had to sleep on verandas and in stores sheds.

The first task involved unloading rations from ships and, after breaking down the pallets, either distributing them to families in the Sovereign Base Area or loading them onto the vehicle convoys which were to try and get through to Akrotiri. The soldiers took their turn at emptying bins as well, a task made easier by the grateful housewives who rewarded the men with a cool beer. This had its drawbacks though as the emptying got more erratic as the day wore on!

It was necessary to recover the stock from various NAAFI shops abandoned during the Emergency. These “snatches” became a regular feature of Company life. They were entirely responsible for a raid on a shop in Larnaca, led by the Company Second-in-Command and guarded by their own armed escort, where a considerable amount of frozen foodstuff was recovered, in addition to the contents of the Families shop. During a similar operation into Turkish held Famagusta the men returned with four truck loads of frozen beef and sixty life pigs.

The biggest job that the Company handled there was the removal of furniture from 400 quarters and hirings in Famagusta. The town had been predominantly Greek but was now in Turkish hands and had the atmosphere of a ghost town.

Hotels and houses were empty, ski boats and luxury yachts were washed up on the beaches, half empty glasses of beer stood in street-side cafes and dogs and cats ran wild in the streets searching for food. The soldiers made daily forays into the town and suburbs using walkie-talkies to keep in touch with each other and maintaining a radio link with the outside world.

The actual move of furniture (valued at just over a quarter of a million pounds) was completed in 15 days. As many of the houses had no keys a roster was organised so that everyone had a turn at the enjoyable task of ‘breaking and entering’ and not just the more onerous task of shifting and carrying. Occasionally a Turkish patrol would turn up and ask why they were breaking into houses!

With all their tasks finished the main body of the Company moved back to the United Kingdom in mid September to go straight on leave. The remainder of the Company returned by mid November.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

518 Company's first detachment to

Northern Ireland came in July 1972 when a section found themselves on their way across the Irish Sea instead of to Germany as had been planned. This was to take part in Operation MOTORMAN where they were employed on stores handling, providing vehicle escorts and building defences around permanent Army posts.

The Company had its first Northern Ireland casualty during the operation when Private Brannon was shot while working at the top of a ten foot sandbag wall. Despite his wound, and subsequent fall, after a short spell in hospital Private Brannon made a full recovery.

Following, Operation MOTORMAN detachments from 518 Company continued in the province at Central Ordnance Depot Kinnegar where they carried out security duties, which included gate guards, sangar duties, patrols and vehicle searching. A small detachment was also attached to the Defence Platoon at Headquarters Lisburn Garrison for a period where they helped man the Permanent Vehicle Checkpoint at the entrance to Thiepval Barracks.

The Company's involvement in security duties expanded when, in October 1976 a total of five Officers and 66 soldiers started training for a detachment as PGF at Her Majesty's Prison, Magilligan. The detachment itself started on 13 December 1976, taking over from 40 Commando Royal Marines, and was the first independent Royal Pioneer Corps unit to deploy to the province during the current troubles. The first tour at Magilligan came to an end on 15 April 1977 and must have been a success as another was arranged for later that year.

The second Magilligan tour took place between 15 August and 15 December 1977 but this time consisted of only two officers and 42 other ranks with two sections of Royal Engineers attached to make up the strength.

In March 1979 a major rebuild programme of security force bases began in Northern Ireland by the Royal Engineers. Because of the problems involved in employing civilian labour in certain locations it was decided that this would be an ideal task for Pioneers. A section was allocated to this task and they deployed in support of the Engineers for periods of up to four months at a time. Initially tasks included the demolition of damaged buildings, construction of new buildings, protection of helicopter landing sites, escort duties and defence of the camps.

The construction tasks were mainly in ‘Bandit country’ such as Forkhill, Crossmaglen, Newtown Hamilton and Castle Dillon and, apart from the usual difficulties, they also had to contend with mortar attacks and the threat of snipers.

It soon became obvious that the Pioneers were more than capable of accomplishing these tasks without supervision and in many cases were left to get on with it without any assistance from the Royal Engineers. In fact, some became so competent that they were used to supervise and instruct the Sappers in certain jobs. The worth of Pioneers was proved when all projects were completed either on time or early despite such problems as the foundations for the new police station at Crossmaglen having to be dug out of heavy slate and shale by hand, this due to the fact that all the Royal

Engineer pneumatic equipment had broken down.

As the terrorists ensure there is always plenty of work in the reconstruction of security installations in Northern Ireland, so the Pioneers have maintained a continuous presence there working with the Royal Engineers. The amount of Pioneers required has varied with the work but the variety of tasks has remained.

In addition to building work (or carrying out the multitude of tasks connected with the building trade) the troops have been employed on escort duties on convoys resupplying the sites around the Province. Detachments changing at four monthly intervals ensured that as many Pioneers as possible earned their medal but without spending too much time in that dangerous and demanding environment.

The danger has resulted in few casualties over the years. In addition to Private Brannon only two serious casualties have been recorded. One was Corporal Pullen who was shot in the side while working on a site in Crossmaglen, South Armagh, he made a full recovery after a stay in hospital, the other, Lance Corporal Lee, was not so fortunate when he lost his life in an accident only a few days after arriving in Castle Dillon.

In early 1988 the Company received warning of yet another role in Northern Ireland, it was back to guarding prisons. This time it was to be HMP Maze which, holding the greatest concentration of convicted terrorists in the world, was a high profile task. In addition to guarding the prison walls the task also included a responsibility for patrolling the countryside around the prison, assisting the local Ulster Defence Regiment battalion with their patrols of the Lisburn area, running the Intermediate Search Centre (where vehicles were brought by units who could not search them thoroughly enough at the roadside) and to provide riot control squads if needed in the local area.

Under the command of Major Featherstone, who had completed many Northern Ireland tours when he was with the Queens' Regiment, the Company started training for their tour. While those who were available started training in camp on their fitness and basic skills such as weapon handling many personnel were sent off on courses to learn specialist skills both for the tour and to train the Company prior to deployment.

Courses as diverse as search team training to specialist weapon instructors were attended and this was finalised when all the command element, from Lance Corporal to Major, attended the Commanders Cadre under the Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team (NITAT). At the end of this all those who were to go on the tour formed up in their platoons at Bicester ready for their collective training.

The training in Bicester was an intensive period where all skills were learned and honed to perfection. Team medics were trained to a high degree of first aid, search teams practised their skills, all learned the use of the riot gun and shield and practical experience was learned by patrolling in the sites and Married Quarters around the Garrison. Riot training was also carried out which proved to be so realistic that several people were carted off to the Medical



Centre.

The Bicester phase was finished off with a five day exercise where Graven Hill was the prison, Saint David's Barracks the camp and Ambrosden, renamed Ambrosderry, was Lisburn. The Company practised all the skills and procedures that they were to use at the Maze including snap vehicle checkpoints around the Depot much to the annoyance of the workers. There then followed a move to the training area at Lydd and Hythe for ten days of field firing and five days of exercises, once again under the watchful and expert eyes (and video camera) of NITAT.

The tour itself, a mere ten weeks, proved less demanding but more tiring than the training. Deploying on 26 July 1988 after a smooth takeover from 25 Field Squadron Royal Engineers the platoons moved into a five day changeover system on each discipline, that is five days on towers guarding the prison walls, five days on patrolling the countryside around the prison and five days patrolling the Lisburn area with the 11th Battalion of the Ulster Defence Regiment. In addition each platoon had a search team, which when on patrols around the prison area, was on standby to man the Intermediate Search Centre whenever a vehicle was brought in. This invariably took place late at night.

When not on stag everyone was on five minutes notice to move to react to a prison breakout. This involved forming up into teams and crashing out to various positions to set up roadblocks and observation posts and was initiated by a siren. Obviously this needed to be practised fairly often and was known appropriately enough, as Operation TANTRUM. The dreaded siren would be followed by a mad scramble to get dressed

and ready to move, a period of organised chaos while everyone sorted themselves out and then vehicles hurling out of the gate to their positions, all this not knowing for the first ten minutes whether this was a practice or a real breakout.

Just to add variety each platoon were also given a stint guarding HMP Belfast on the Crumlin Road. This provided a change of scenery and a change of pace as there was never a night went by without a shot being fired in that area of Belfast, often aimed at the sangars around the prison. The platoons returned to the Maze with their war stories and, believe it or not, glad to be back.

While the tour was hectic there no serious incidents. All personnel had their stories to tell and all had earned their medals. On 7 October the Company handed over to 3 Field Battery of 47 Field Regiment Royal Artillery and returned to Bicester.

It was not long after the return to Bicester that the Company were told that a second tour of the Maze was in the offing and that they were to return there within a year of the first tour. Many of the personnel who had been on the first tour had been posted shortly after their return so, in some respects it was back to square one, even those who had been on the first tour still had to carry out the full training and specialist courses.

A boost was given to the training when it was learned that the Company were to be armed with the new SA80 rifle and Light Support Weapon prior to the tour.

Due to the short time since the first tour it was decided that the training time for “PGF 2” could be cut down. Much of the basic skills were sorted out for the Group Battle Camp at Otterburn and, on return from there, the relevant personnel were

sent on their courses. When it became time to carry out the collective training in Bicester due to the security situation in the United Kingdom at the time, the Company took over operational control of the Graven Hill and Ambrosden areas. This fell in well with the training programmes and allowed the soldiers to patrol with the added stimulus of a real threat.

The training for the second tour followed the same format as for the first one, and, after the exercise, field firing and NITAT phase the Company was once again ready to deploy. This took place on 25 September 1989 and, once again the Company were responsible for the Maze and life was back to normal. Tower stags, “Tantrums”, patrols, “Tantrums”, vehicle searches, “Tantrums” and more “Tantrums”!

The work regime was just as intensive for the second tour (and included the Crumlin Road jail stint) but, as with the first tour, this helped the time pass quickly and they were soon looking forward to their handover to the next unit.

Patrol reports, usually fairly boring reading, occasionally made the eyebrows raise. Corporal “Ninja” Brown submitted one which told of his vehicle checkpoint which he set up in the area of the Maze at about two o'clock one morning. The only car which turned up happened to be driven by a very nice young lady who said she was just on her way home from seeing her boyfriend.

When asked to open the boot she became somewhat agitated and, in a whisper, asked Corporal Brown not to be surprised by what he saw in there. It was with some apprehension that he shone his torch into the boot only to see, in his own words, “The largest and blackest marital aid



■ 2 Platoon 518 Coy Northern Ireland

Picture: RPCA Archive



I have ever seen!” At this point the search ended and, according to the other members of the patrol, you could see the glow from the two faces at three hundred metres.

It wasn't just the platoons who had their tales to tell as one of the few injuries of the second tour was sustained by Staff Sergeant Brian Fielding, the Company Quartermaster Sergeant. As part of his duties he had to look after the thirty metre range and the associated clay pigeon range. One day, while inspecting the range, he noticed the trap seemed to be cocked. He leaned over to check this at which point the thing decided to go off! Corporal Anderson, who had accompanied him to the range, turned round from a job he was doing to see his boss flat on his back and unconscious.

A visit to the hospital and the dentist managed to put right most of the damage to his lower jaw leaving him with a neat little scar as a reminder. Of more lasting effect was the damage to his pride especially when he was greeted with cries of “PULL” and “DUCK” for the next six months.

On 29 November the Company once again handed The Maze over to their successors and returned to Bicester for some well earned leave.

518 Company detachments continue in Northern Ireland both in a security role and in support of the Royal Engineers. It is likely that this will continue as long as there are British troops in the Province.

## BELIZE

In August 1978 the first detachment of 2 sections deployed to the Central American country of Belize. They were immediately separated with a section some 170 miles across the jungle at Rideau and Salamanca

Camps while the other remained in Airport Camp near Belize City. As usual they were thrown in at the deep end due to an unscheduled hurricane; the clear up of the aftermath became their first task.

During 1979 the detachment was reduced to 1 section but, from the deployment in 1978 until 1986 the Company had a continuous presence there. It is true that some of the handovers were extremely brief (the outgoing section departing on the same plane as used by the incoming one) and acclimatization times varied from five days to less than 24 hours nonetheless, during those eight years, 518 Company was always represented in the country.

The Pioneers were tasked both in support of the Royal Engineers and directly on other jobs. They were mainly the building of living accommodation initially, but tasks soon diversified. During the time there they were involved in the construction of sangars, ranges, camp roads and paths, married quarters, runways, Harrier shelters and hides, rapier battery emplacements, jetties and camp fencing. These tasks were carried both in the relatively civilized surrounds of Airport Camp and throughout the jungle especially in the disputed border area with Guatemala.

It did not take long for the detachments to realise that there was more to Belize than building sites and they persuaded the local infantry unit (a Ghurkha battalion at the time) to take them out on jungle patrols. This then developed into organised jungle training courses and involvement in exercises mainly as enemy for Army and Royal Air Force units.

The jungle training was not without mishaps as, during one expedition there

was a near tragedy when an assault boat overturned whilst on the Belize river. As the river was in full flood and flowing extremely fast only six people managed to get to the river bank while four men were swept down river by the fast current. The Pioneer platoon were anxious and concerned when it was discovered that one of the platoon, Private Bullock, was one of those who were swept away.

A full rescue operation was put into action and the four men were found the next morning clinging to a tree in the river. It was discovered soon after that Private Bullock had showed extreme courage and leadership during this trauma by inflating a lifejacket for someone who was in difficulty and by keeping the four men together with physical and moral support until help came. His bravery was later rewarded with a commendation from the Commander British Forces in Belize.

Belize is in an ideal place for recreational and adventurous training. This has been made full use of by the detachments over the years. Saint George's Caye was the local adventure training centre which catered for canoers, dinghy sailors and snorkelers. Scuba diving expeditions were also mounted to the barrier reef. Each detachment got a period of leave around the middle of their tour, although there are some who fly back to the United Kingdom and others who simply soak up the sun on the Cayes, many others make full use of this opportunity to see such exotic places as Mexico City and Florida.

After 1986 the Pioneer presence in Belize did not end. The format of the detachment changed in that the Pioneer platoon form up and train in the United Kingdom with the Royal Engineer troop with whom they



■ Falklands Island Detachment, 1982

Picture: RPCA Archive



are to deploy, the detachment also rotates on a six monthly basis with 187 (Tancred) Company, Royal Pioneer Corps. The tasks and the jungle however remain the same.

### THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

The first detachment from 518 Company arrived in the Falkland Isles in August 1982 after a ten day sea voyage. One of the first tasks was the removal of rotten meat from the stables on the racecourse just outside Port Stanley. To protect against the smell and the chance of disease this task was done in complete Nuclear, Biological and Chemical suits, including respirators, and accompanied by medics spraying disinfectant.

The initial detachment consisted of two platoons but was replaced by three platoons in February 1983. The length of time spent there by each platoon depended on the tasks available but, after the initial rush of jobs things settled down to a platoon and a half sized detachment for four to six months at a time.

The work was variable in support of both the Royal Engineers and the Falklands Islands Logistics Battalion involving such things as construction of accommodation and rapier emplacements, driving, clearance of battlegrounds, sea dumping of Argentinean ammunition and sorting out the Stanley Ammunition Depot.

Tasks were carried out all over the Islands and accommodation varied considerably. Initially it was aboard the ships anchored in Stanley harbour, then soldiers were billeted in houses in Port Stanley itself. Out in “The Camp” (as anywhere outside Port Stanley is known to the locals) the men lived in Portakabins, tents being totally impractical there. As the size of the garrison increased

the problems of accommodation were solved to some extent by the arrival of the “Coastels”. These were floating hotels designed for use with oil rigs but ideal for use in the Falklands. Three of them were moored off the shore between Port Stanley and the airfield and proved most comfortable. In April 1984 the detachment was relieved by a platoon from 187 (Tancred) Company and the responsibility for this task rotated between the two companies.

In 1986 25 Engineer Regiment were tasked with Operation FLOGGER. This was, quite simply, to return as much serviceable equipment as possible to the United Kingdom and then returning the area of Port Stanley to its original grassland state. This was to involve the lifting of 80,000 armoured planks from the airfield, pulling in fifteen kilometres of barbed wire and dumping it at sea, dismantling seventeen Rubb shelters and reducing four Rapier sites – each consisting of thousands of sandbags. It was decided that a large detachment would be needed for this and that, at the same time, the opportunity would be taken to make use of the field firing and adventurous training facilities offered there. In November 1986, the Officer Commanding and 110 men deployed in stages to the Islands to start work.

During the time there everyone attended a week’s military training and a week’s adventurous training. The military training included map reading, weapon handling, section battle drills and range work during which the .50 Browning heavy machine gun and Carl Gustav anti tank weapon were fired.

This phase ended with a live firing platoon attack complete with overhead fire,

explosives and air support from Phantoms. On the adventurous training side activities included rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing and water skiing. To top it all during their off duty moments many managed to get in a “MINJO” (Men in Need Of a Jolly Outing). These consisted of trips in Hercules to drop mail at South Georgia or refuel fighter planes, helicopter rides to the outlying islands to see the wildlife and outings on 125 cc motorbikes to disturb the wildlife.

Despite all the above activities the work went so well that fifty of the detachment returned to the United Kingdom early while the rest finished the job. Due to the sterling work that had been done to return Port Stanley and the rest of the Falklands to normal, 25 Engineer Regiment were awarded the Wilkinson Sword of Peace. In recognition of the part that the Pioneers had played in this the Engineers presented 518 Company with a Wilkinson Sword Poignard which hangs in the corridor of the Company offices with the following inscription:

PRESENTED TO  
518 COMPANY ROYAL PIONEER CORPS  
BY 25 ENGINEER REGIMENT  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION  
OF  
THE WILKINSON SWORD OF PEACE  
FOR OPERATION FLOGGER  
FALKLANDS ISLANDS  
NOVEMBER 1986 TO MARCH 1987

This was the last major deployment of Pioneers to the Falkland Islands, the current detachment consists of a team of four soldiers who carry out driving tasks for the Falklands Island Logistic Battalion.

### OPERATION GRANBY



■ 4 Platoon. Operation Granby.

Picture: RPCA Archive



In August 1990 Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army successfully invaded its neighbour Kuwait. This invasion caused many nations throughout the whole world to react by providing armed forces initially to defend Saudi Arabia and ultimately liberate Kuwait. The British named the deployment of the United Kingdom armed forces Operation GRANBY.

On 24 September 1990 518 Company, after ten days of speculation, received a signal confirming its involvement in Operation GRANBY. The Company would consist of a company headquarters and six platoons. The platoons would be found from all elements of 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps.

On 25 September the Company was told that its vehicles and sea move equipment would need to be ready by 28 September, this gave three days for the “Q” Staff to obtain all equipment and pack it. Although much of the equipment had been prepared the Company was not allowed to draw it until its involvement was confirmed. The “Q” Staff worked solidly for nearly three days to ensure all was ready.

The following day (26 September) the Company was told that a platoon would be required to go on 1 October 1990 as part of the Army activation party, 1 Platoon commanded by Second Lieutenant Mike Holt was nominated. They were to support 39 Engineer Regiment in the establishment of facilities at the Force Maintenance Area (FMA) at Al Jubayl.

This involved building a 2,000 man tented camp (which later became known as Baldrick Lines) including provision of showers, central cooking facilities and power. Al Jubayl would form the base where 7 Armoured Brigade would move through and be supported from.

The pre-advance party (Major Code, Corporal Anderson, Lance Corporal Sommerville and Private Darby) arrived in Al Jubayl on 8 October 1990 and joined 1 Platoon sleeping in a large quayside warehouse. The conditions were less than ideal but 1 Platoon had already started making themselves as comfortable as possible, which included “acquiring” as much US Army equipment as possible – including the American “camp cot” which was far more comfortable than the UK version.

During the initial period Headquarters FMA issued the following priority for Pioneer tasking:

1. Labour essential for the establishment of the FMA.
2. Labour essential for the Brigade training package.
3. Labour essential for the establishment of the Brigade Maintenance Area.
4. Labour essential for daily replenishment. Defence of Headquarters, installations and logistic units.
5. Labour support essential for the running of logistic units.

The main body of the Company arrived in Al Jubayl on 16/17 October and were to acclimatise for a minimum of two days before being tasked. The whole Company was to spend the next ten days wholly supporting the FMA and were employed on a variety of tasks which included:

1. Continuing support to 38 Engineer Regiment to install showers in Baldrick Lines.

2. Providing escorts and security for incoming personnel during the move from the air head to Al Jubayl.

3. Casualty Decontamination Cell training with the Armoured Field Ambulances.

4. Offloading ships at port.

5. Manning two defensive positions on the quayside.

Individuals who arrived in theatre were moved from the airhead to the FMA by coaches which were driven by “Chogies”. On one particular trip a driver who had earlier been acting furtively decided to divert off the normal route. As the major threat at this stage of the operation was that of terrorist attack, Private Rivers decided to put the chap right, he immediately cocked his weapon, placed it on the back of the drivers head and suggested that the coach should return to the normal route. The driver was obviously impressed with this request because he immediately turned the vehicle around.

One task which is worthy of more detailed mention is that of providing defence and security to Ammunitions Supply Point 2 (commonly referred to as ASP 2). ASP 2 was being built by the US Marine Corps and was actually defended by an infantry company of 75 US Marine Corps. ASP 2 was to hold 10,000 tons of ammunition stocks and was located about fifteen miles North West of Al Jubayl in the desert. It was on an area of high ground with good fields of observation. Because of the pressure placed upon the use of Pioneer manpower it was decided that only a platoon could be used to defend the Ammunition Supply Point. This was not a particular pleasant task and it came to be known as Hellhole 2.

Not only was the Company to secure the area, it was responsible for assisting in building and developing the defences. The defences initially comprised four prepared positions covering the approaches to the ASP, they were eventually developed into four raised watch towers where a team of four Pioneers would spend one to three days at a time. Fortunately the major discomfort was the heat, but as the rainy season approached the temperatures during the night were cold enough to freeze water. During the initial phase of work there, when Pioneers were still sleeping on the ground, Private Ward woke up one night due to a sharp pain in his arm and then immediately fell back to sleep. When he woke up in the morning his arm was very swollen as a result of a snake bite. He was hospitalized for four days.

In addition to the defence of ASP 2 the Company did occasionally send Pioneers to assist with the fusing of 155 mm ammunition.

By the end of October, 7 Armoured Brigade were preparing for a period of work up training in the area of Al Fadili (35 kilometres north west of Al Jubayl). The logistic elements of the Brigade had been organised into a Brigade Maintenance Area and Brigade Administration Area. Elements of the Company were now employed within the Brigade area assisting with the construction of water points and bulk fuel installations. When construction was complete Pioneers took over the security of these locations.

As the logistic units within the FMA expanded Pioneers supported the Ration

Depot, Bulk Fuel Installation and container park, as well as continuing escorts, engineer support and Casualty Decontamination Cell training. At this stage the Brigade requested additional Pioneer support and were allocated three platoons, this left three platoons supporting the FMA. It was decided that a small company headquarters would deploy into the Brigade area to coordinate the efforts of the three platoons. The small company headquarters and three platoons would establish a base, co-located with 43 Ordnance Company, from which troops would deploy on a daily basis.

On 14 November the Brigade field training exercise began, only the Company Headquarters Forward received notification of the deployment, this involved a substantial reallocation of manpower overnight. During the Brigade field training exercise the Company (Forward) were deployed as follows:

- 1 Platoon – Dressing Station 1B (Casualty Decontamination Cell)

- 2 Platoon – 1 Section Prisoner of War Cage

- 1 Section Brigade Maintenance Area Water Point

- 1 Section Brigade Administration Area Water Point

- 3 Platoon – Dressing Station 1A

The Brigade field training exercise lasted three days and the deployment of Pioneers did not change over the period, however, immediately after the exercise 1 Platoon were deployed to provide security for the Brigade Ammunition Control Point. The conditions for this task were particularly unpleasant as the ammunition control point was located in a dirty quarry with very little natural or artificial shade. The other platoons returned to their pre-exercise deployment.

At this stage the Company also began supporting 7 Armoured Workshops; it provided Heavy Goods Vehicle drivers for the movement of engines and Main Assemblies. The platoons deployed in the FMA were also kept very busy securing ASP 2, Bulk Fuel Installations 1 and 2 and in Engineer Support (construction of perimeter fencing and artisan support). Based on the roles the Company were tasked to accomplish, successful justifications were made for an issue of additional equipment and the Company received Ptamigan secure radios, mortars and limited night viewing devices.

Unfortunately it was not at this stage successful in gaining additional vehicles. By mid-November the FMA/Brigade Group had established a Rest and Recuperation facility and therefore Pioneers were sent on day trips to local towns and to the local swimming pool.

By the end of November 1991 the Company was aware that additional troops would be deployed and that 1 (UK) Armoured Division would arrive in January. As part of this, 187 (Tancred) Company, Royal Pioneer Corps would deploy to support the FMA while 518 Company would be placed under command of 1 (UK) Armoured Division. The Company continued to carry out a myriad of tasks in support of both FMA and Brigade, but was also able to arrange a number of training packages including some range days.

On one range day whilst conducting live firing section attacks, a particular attack



was reaching its climax when a herd of camels came onto the range, unfortunately one camel took a 5.56 round. This was assumed to be an accident but there are some doubts. Lance Corporals Rodger and Turpin were despatched to put the camel out of its misery. Fairly soon the owner of the camel turned up, he could not speak a word of English and no-one could speak a word of Arabic. Major Code, using a mixture of sign language and charades convinced the owner that he would be given compensation.

The Company later heard that the owner expected the compensation the next day and when it did not appear he went back to the range and ‘captured’ a number of soldiers and would not let them go until an interpreter explained the situation to him. The owner eventually received 13,000 Riyals for what appeared to be a rather pathetic excuse for a camel but which he stated was his best racing camel!

As preparations began for the reception of additional troops, facilities at the FMA required expanding, consequently the Company became increasingly involved in the FMA at the expense of the Brigade Maintenance Area. Only two sections would remain in the Brigade Maintenance Area.

On 9 January 1991, 518 Company were placed under command of 1 (UK) Armoured Division, the Company was to be independent and tasked by the Deputy Chief of Staff of 1 (UK) Armoured Division through Division Rear. A signal from Commander FMA (Brigadier White) under whose command the Company had been since arrival in the Gulf is at Annex A. It goes some way to explaining the good name that the Pioneers had earned since their arrival.

By now the Company had received an additional platoon commanded by Captain Mark Hughes. The initial tasking of the Company within the Division was as follows:

1. Two platoons in support of 43 Ordnance Company establishing and securing of Divisional Supply Areas.
2. Four platoons in the Casualty Decontamination Cell role in support of Dressing Stations 1A, 1B, 5A and 5B.
3. One platoon on Security tasks in the Headquarters of the Divisional Administration Area.

The Division was initially located in the Al-Fadili training area North West of Al Jubayl, the Company Headquarters initially moved into a quarry which was known as the Edinburgh Fire Base. At this period the weather, which was by now quite cold, turned wet – very wet. Probably 4 Platoon commanded by Lieutenant Flynn White, with Sergeant “Gus” Paton had the worst of it – the area on which they were located held water and consequently it began to resemble the Somme more than the Saudi Arabia desert.

This wasn’t 4 Platoon’s only bad experience with tents, later on in the campaign during a particularly bad storm they woke to find their tent on the move. Despite several Pioneers hanging on for dear life the wind got the better of them and the tent was blown away. Despite the fact that they were able to get a replacement tent the original was never seen again.

The Division would move north from the

Al Fadili training area to Area Keyes, which was east of Hafir Al Batin, following this move it would move westward to Area Ray from where it would strike northwards through the breach made by the 1 (US) Infantry Division (The Big Red One).

Prior to and during these preliminary moves the Company carried out many varied tasks. It continued Casualty Decontamination Cell work in support of the Dressing stations, provided security of Division Supply Areas, “bombed up” war reserve tanks, supported 45 Field Support Squadron and provided rear area security. At one point two platoons were flown back from Area Keyes to outload essential stores from Al Jubayl. Some of the tasks carried out by the platoons meant that they had to deploy away from the Company Headquarters.

For example 1 Platoon was tasked to move forward with Dressing Station 1A to Area Keyes – seven days ahead of the Company Headquarters. This in itself did not present a problem, however should the platoon be re-tasked to another role the Company Headquarters would not be able to provide additional equipment (e.g. mortars, general purpose machine guns, night vision devices) and transport resources. Consequently the Company bid for additional transport and this was agreed by the Deputy Chief of Staff; thereafter the platoons were to receive integral transport which would allow them to move independently with the complete range of stores and equipment.

At the end of January, 43 Ordnance Company moved into Area Ray ahead of the Division to establish the Divisional Supply Area which was to be known as Log Base Echo. Both 3 and 7 Platoons, who were supporting 43 Ordnance Company also moved to provide defence. However, when the size of the task, which was to defend 26 square kilometres was realised, additional Pioneer units were requested. Consequently a small Company Headquarters and an additional platoon were despatched and tasked to ‘Defend and Secure Log Base Echo’.

As with all defence and security tasks throughout the tour the major threat was considered to be terrorism and small forces aimed at destroying logistic supplies.

During the final weeks of preparation the allied air offensive began on 17 January with air-off publicised results. The Iraqi response was to fire its Scud missiles, all elements of the Company operated within range of these attacks; the closest that Scuds came was as the Company Headquarters and three platoons were deployed on Log Base Echo when a Scud missile fell on Hafir Al Batin about fifteen kilometres away.

While the Company Headquarters and three platoons were on Log Base Echo we had a number of visitors; Lieutenant Colonel Mike Le Masurier and Captain “PAM” Brown and, on another occasion, Major Iain Milne. During Lieutenant Colonel Le Masurier’s visit he decided to visit the toilet one night, which was essentially a wooden box surrounded by a camouflage net. The Colonel was shown where it was and he happily wandered off, twenty five minutes later however he had not yet reappeared.

Fearing the worst a search party of one

was despatched but no trace could be found, until in the distance a lone figure was spotted talking to the vehicle borne Quick Reaction Force. Thankfully it was the Colonel who was trying his best to discover where Company Headquarters was without revealing to the Pioneers that a Lieutenant Colonel could get lost within 25 metres of leaving a tent. Major Cole, Capt PAM Brown and Company Sergeant Major Shield saw the funny side of this and made a number of ribald comments however PAM Brown’s initial concern for his boss was touching.

Major Milne visited from Headquarters (Middle East), during the flight down from Riyadh his webbing (and his respirator) had been lost by the Royal Air Force. As the party were driving back from the airfield to Log Base Echo it passed through Hafir Al Batin and Major Milne was alarmed to discover that a Scud had fallen fifteen minutes or so earlier. Not surprisingly a spare respirator was quickly found!

On 15 February the major elements of 1 (UK) Armoured Division moved from Area Keys to Area Ray. The Company Headquarters moved under the Command of Captain Paul Hancock, when it was established and the Division was by now surrounding Log Base Echo the small Company Headquarters on Log Base Echo re-joined the Company Headquarters main. At this stage the Royal Pioneer Corps Divisional Liaison Officer, Captain Andy Brown (the best dressed man in Saudi!), was successful in obtaining additional equipment for the Company – it now had a full quota of transport and mortars.

1 Platoon were redeployed from supporting both Dressing Station 1A and 62 Ordnance Company (which was located in Al Jubal) to provide Pioneer Support to 1 Armoured Division Transport Regiment to assist with the movement of combat supplies.

On 18 February, 2 Platoon was redeployed to support Dressing Station 1B which itself was supporting the Artillery Brigade. The platoon deployed to an area which was only twelve kilometres south of the border whilst the Artillery Brigade carried out numerous raids on Iraqi positions.

These raids involved the Artillery Brigade moving forward to a temporary fire base and carrying out a number of fire missions. The Dressing Station would also send a mobile element forward in case any casualties were incurred. Lieutenant Stephen Bery, Sergeant Hamilton and a number of other members of 2 Platoon, “The Untouchables” went on a number of these raids.

On 20 February the Company deployment was slightly revised and was to cover the initial stages of the Ground War. 7 Platoon which was with 43 Ordnance Company, was redeployed to support 4 Armoured Division Transport Regiment. Staff Sergeant Morrison’s platoon was split between 1 Armoured Division Transport Regiment and Dressing Station 5B and 1 Platoon was redeployed to Dressing Station 1A. 7 Platoon’s task was to secure ammunition points as the Artillery Brigade moved forward, this involved 7 Platoon moving fairly far forward and leapfrogging from one ammunition point to another.

In addition to fulfilling the Casualty



Decontamination Cell role most of the platoons attached to the Dressing Stations were also planning to provide clearance parties. The Division had a stated by-pass policy which could have led to logistic units moving into an area which was not totally clear of the enemy. The pioneer platoon attached to the Dressing Station would provide security on the move and clear locations prior to the Dressing Station occupying them.

Whilst the Division was sitting at Area Ray G day was nominated, final orders were issued and final preparations were made. The countdown to G day was stopped at G minus three on 20 February, which was the day the Company received a number of Battle Casualty Replacements which brought the Company strength to 210 men.

On 23 February the Company was warned that the ground offensive would start on 24 February at 0538 hours. What was expected to be a difficult offensive thankfully proved to be a rout. Within six days the Division was north of Kuwait City and a cease fire had been instigated. Individual accounts from the Platoon Commanders are given at Annex B to this chapter and it is interesting to note how varied was the employment and how close to the battle some of the platoons were. 3 Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Mark Duggan remained with 43 Ordnance Company throughout the offensive, much to their chagrin. They eventually rejoined the Company on 8 March 1991.

As ever the Pioneer work is never done and the Company continued to carry out a number of Battle Field clearance tasks. The Company still managed to play football, sunbathe and carry out some gardening (3 Platoon were extremely proud of their rockery!).

After nearly six months in the Gulf region the Company received information that it would be returning home on 21 March 1992.

**ANNEX A**  
**070700JAN 91**  
**From: HQ FMA ME**  
**TO: 518COYRPC**

FROM COMD FMA FOR OC AND ALL RANKS 518 COY RPC. AFTER SOME 3 MONTHS WORKING UNDER MY COMMAND IN THE FMA YOU ARE TO MOVE TO 1ST ARMoured DIVISION ON 9 JAN. DURING YOUR TIME WITH THE FMA I HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY YOUR HARD WORK, ADAPTABILITY AND SHEER DETERMINATION, COVERING A RANGE OF DIFFICULT, DANGEROUS AND OFTEN UNPLEASANT TASKS IN ALL CONDITIONS. WHETHER IT WAS YOUR WORK IN THE DUSTBOWL OF THE ASP, THE BFIS, CARRYING E AND MAS ABOUT, ERECTING MARQUEES FOR BLACKADDER LINES OR THE MULTITUDE OF DEFENSIVE TASKS THAT YOU HAVE CARRIED OUT, YOU HAVE BEEN EFFICIENT AND PROFESSIONAL AT ALL TIMES. YOU HAVE ALL DONE WELL, WITH 7 ARMD BDE GROUP ON OP GRANBY ONE AND I AM SURE WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO WITH 1ST ARMoured DIVISION ON GRANBY 1 POINT 5. MY THANKS AND BEST WISHES TO YOU ALL FOR A SAFE NEW YEAR.

**ANNEX B**

## **1 PLATOON TOUR OF IRAQ/KUWAIT 24-28 FEBRUARY 1991**

G Day 24 February 1991. 1600 hours leave area Ray with Dressing Station 1A.

G + 1 25 February 1991. 0100 hours arrive staging area No 2. 0800 hours depart staging area 2. 1200 hours passage through breach – stopped in breach for one hour due to mines ahead. 1630 hours arrive in area of forming up point – minefields! PT 166726, one casualty – 54 ASG played with mine in cab of ambulance. Blew up in his face – died half an hour later. Lance Corps Woods decided not to play with mines anymore. 1700 hours second casualty from unknown unit (not Dressing Station 1A) stood on mine. 1900 hours left area.

G + 2 26 February 1991. 0300 hours convoy split, our half lost(ish). Park up to wait for daylight. 0430 hours found by other members of Dressing Station 1A. Taken to Phase Line SMASH. Arrive 0730 hours PT 199699. 0900 hours half Dressing Station go forward. We receive first 15 casualties by helicopter, 2 x British soldiers – 13 x Iraqi soldiers (mainly shrapnel wounds). Lunchtime – move to catch rest of Dressing Station. Evening – move up to support 7 Armoured Brigade as they take on objective LEAD. Our location on setup 4-5 kilometres behind front line. Disturbed from sleep by friendly artillery firing from 800 metres away.

G + 3 27 February 1991. AM Dressing Station reconstitutes and moves as a whole from PT 409740. 1000 hours pass into Kuwait across Wadi Al Batin. 1200 hours convoy approached 2 Enemy Prisoners of War. Pte Richards, Edwards, Stansfield and Lynes sent forward to recover them and escort in ambulance to next location. 1700 hours Enemy Prisoners of War removed by helicopter. Dressing Station move out from QT 011741. 2330 hours lost again (Dressing Station drive 300 metres from their planned location).

G + 4 28 February 1991. 0600 hours news of ceasefire passed. 0800 hours ceasefire NBC dress state O. 0830 hours move to nearby location to reconstitute at Dressing Station QT 158677. 1400 hours move to ceasefire location QT 529749 (?), until 02 Mar, continue to receive casualties from enemy POW camps. Pte Edwards took charge of 4 x Enemy Prisoners of War, including one very seriously ill, while lost. Edwards navigated back to Dressing Station 1A revived. Then recalled to 518 Company.

## **2 PLATOON – DIARY OF EVENTS**

19 February 1991. Joined Dressing Station 1B at grid NT 755136 – (forward staging area 4).

21 February 1991. Platoon commander and section OBS medical support to artillery raid at grid NT 820150 ( 5 x Regimental raid).

22 February 1991. Platoon Sergeant and Section Commander as above.

24 February 1991. Moved into Iraq with Artillery group Administration Area at 1140 hours – Harbour at grid NT 751231 – 1 x Enemy round fire and landed 800 metres to east of location.

25 February 1991. Moved through breach to Staging Area Charlie – at 1400 hours approximately to grid NT 815463. Moved again at 2200 hours to grid NT 915557 – provided defence and security for Dressing

Station.

26 February 1991. Moved in morning to grid 618610. On arrival at location encountered 17 x Iraqi soldiers who wished to surrender – processed Prisoners of War, recovered weapons – (17 x AK47s, 3 x Dragonovs, 4 x RPG7s, ammunition and 1 x Bayonet). Provided security for Dressing Station.

Prior to move Prisoners of War were handed to 12 Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery. 1900 hours moved to grid PT 618655. Platoon commander and 1 x section provided escort/reconnaissance party. Remainder travelled with main body. Officer Commanding 7th reconnaissance party went to O Group at Artillery Headquarters while remainder headed to new location.

During move Dressing Station strayed into attack by 4 Brigade on enemy position. Should either of the combatants decided upon a flanking attack then Dressing Station convoy may well have been overrun by armour. The platoon provided all round defence for Dressing Station and hoped for the best. Saw armoured vehicle “taken out” by LAW 80 using 3 x spotting rounds and main armament.

27 February 1991. Harboured at grid PT 618655. Moved at 1000 hours to Kuwait. Moved to grid square QT 0120, on route encountered surrendering enemy battalion/DW. It was a pitiful sight, many forms of dress and enemy soldiers begging for food and water. As convoy passed weapons were left abandoned by the road. Many still with hatred in their eyes, however strangely only 2 x dead visible, possibly Republican Guard Force Officers.

Convoy also delayed by blue on blue – MBT from 14/20 Hussars destroyed 2 x Scimitar/Striker from 16/5 Lancers after being informed no enemy forces in the area.

Passed platoon of Prisoners of War formed up in 3's and being led by platoon commander – good discipline though defeated!

On arrival at new location we provided security and guarded 2 x Prisoners of War who had been treated by Dressing Station.

28 February 1991. Moved to grid 931699 for move to area of Kuwait City. Move started at 0800 hours. Stayed there till 1800 hours then moved to grid QT 495685.

01 March 1991. Established Dressing Station 0100 hours. Provided defence security and guarded Prisoners of War.

02 March 1991. 1630 hours returned to Company location.

## **4 PLATOON – WAR DIARY**

23 February 1991 G – 1. The platoon had by this time been attached to Dressing Station 5A. We were situated in area Ray, at grid NS 649683. The day was spent preparing to move to the concentration area, before moving on to a staging area at grid NT 572152, just short of the breach. The platoon was tasked to supply Casualty decontamination cell support to the dressing station, however, because of the enemy's failure to deliver chemical weapons, the platoon was tasked by the CO SAFA to provide flanking protection for the column of vehicles during moves and halts. We acquired 4 land rovers to provide a mobile rover group to enable us to react quickly to any hostile fire.



24 February 1991 G Day. Was spent packing and making final preparations for the move forward. Briefings and orders were received and given. Timings were eventually brought forward, due to the rapid advance of allied forces, and we moved directly to the staging area.

25 February 1991 G + 1. The dressing station moved slowly through the breach and into FUP White at grid NT 819503. No hostile forces had been encountered at this stage and the platoon continued to provide defence for the dressing station.

26 February 1991 G + 2. The dressing station crossed phase line “New Jersey” at grid NT 832542. We moved in tactical bounds behind Brigade main. The platoon was split into four teams, each with a section commander and 6 men. The platoon commander controlled the teams from a lead vehicle. The platoon sergeant brought up the rear of the convoy with the stores and administered the platoon from there. The dressing station received some priority casualties, one of whom died. Elements of the platoon buried the corpse.

27 February 1991 G + 3. The platoon took 12 prisoners at first light, and a further 12 at approx 1100 hours. The dressing station was static for some hours, before moving at night behind 4 Brigade Main Headquarters. The situation remained confusing, as very little information was passed down the chain of command. The prisoners were taken at grid PT 577530.

28 February 1991 G + 4. The platoon continued to provide flank security. The dressing station dealt with few casualties. Only one casualty dealt with was British. We moved close to the Iraq/Kuwait border to grid QT 805700.

01 March 1991 G + 5. News of Iraqi prisoners of war flooding in continued to reach us. The platoon witnessed thousands of them in transit. There were worries of mines being scattered on the Battle Field. The dressing station continued to receive few casualties. No chemical casualties were received at all.

02 March 1991 G + 6. The dressing station moved across the Kuwait border at grid QT 805700 and into a Brigade concentration area at grid PT 630528. News of a ceasefire was circulated prior to crossing the border. The platoon supplied defence and security for the entire duration of the hostilities. No other tasks were undertaken, with the exception of searching, handling and guarding prisoners of war which were either taken to the platoon, or left by other units, or surrendered directly to members of the dressing station.

03 March 1991 G + 7. Returned to Company headquarters at 1630 hours.

## 5 PLATOON – WAR DIARY

26 February 1991. Five platoon were involved in the ground war from day one, attached to 45 Field Support Squadron, Royal Engineers, with Staff Sergeant Reid and Corporal Wall’s section going forward with the Engineer RV, which supplies mines and explosives with Giant Vipers for the clearing of the breach and laying 800 metre minefields to the flanks for protection.

The move forward started on the 26 February 1991 with the forward RV being put on 2 hours notice to move. On the night of the 26th, morning of the 27th we

moved.

G + 1. Resulted in us trying to catch up with the forward elements of the Armour and going over the Saudi Arabian border in Iraq at 1745 hours. This continued for some 3 to 4 days almost without sleep, driving further into Iraq. Numerous incidents occurred.

Once whilst moving under the cover of darkness a land rover from the packet in front of us strayed from the road and heard three bangs, on investigation the driver found 3 Iraqis under his land rover, not too impressed. Small arms fire came down and at one time 4 British troops half a kilometre in front of us came under intense enemy fire. Needless to say we took very quick evasive action.

One of our dispatch riders was ‘unseated’ after driving over an anti-personnel mine, no back wheel left. We assisted in the holding of some 25 prisoners of war and so it goes on....

After some 3 to 4 days in Iraq we moved back down toward Kuwait crossing the Iraq/Kuwait border at approx 0135 hours on the 28th February 1991, where we stopped for a well-deserved break some 32 kilometres north of Kuwait City. We then went for a drive toward the City itself, and the scenes of death and destruction were unbelievable, with the road impossible with vehicles burned out and dead bodies lying everywhere.

Apparently when the ground forces started to move the Iraqis tried to leave Kuwait City in anything that they could drive. They were caught by our air support between a minefield and a high rise and killed almost to a man. It was a sight which brought home the true horrors of war and one which I am sure will stay in the minds of our soldiers for a long time to come.

## 6 PLATOON WAR DIARY NOTES

G Day. Found 6 platoon once again employed in two different places. This time 1 section commanded by Corporal Fraser was employed at Dressing Station 5B doing chemical casualty decontamination and the remaining two sections and the platoon commander (Staff Sergeant Morrison) was employed at the Divisional DP (Distribution Point), helping to resupply the Division with rations. This included selecting and palletising the rations, HGV driving, motor bike despatch riders, fork lift operators and security duties.

During the ground battle 1 section had the responsibility of searching and guarding 2 prisoners of war who seen walking across the desert by an observation helicopter pilot, who dutifully landed, picked up the 2 prisoners of war and handed them over to the nearest allied location which just happened to be Dressing Station 5B.

The remainder of us who were with the Divisional DP had a very uneventful war during which we provided the quick reaction force for the move forward in order to resupply the Division.

## 7 PLATOON WAR DIARY NOTES

20 February 1991. Platoon deployed providing defence support to DSA 4, guarding over 16,000 tons of artillery ammunition in a site 6km by 4 km. We received verbal orders to move north at first light to support 76 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport, 4 Armoured Division Transport

Regiment, to guard artillery XP2 (Crossover point 2).

21 February 1991. Move to 76 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport conducted in three phases:

Phase 1 – 0700 hours move of rover group (Captain Hughes, Corporals McGing, Mardell and Bagguley) by road.

Phase 2 – 1200 hours move of main body by helicopter in two lifts.

Phase 3 – 1230 hours move of platoon Staff Sergeant and rest by road.

New location at NT 7411 held ammunition, on wheels and ground dumped to support the artillery raids taking place, the breach fire plan and the initial phases of the artillery battle,.

22 February 1991. Completed defence of artillery XP 1. Defences consisted of an observation post built on top of a low hill overlooking the area. Construction of the observation post completed slowly, as the hill was composed of the only rock in the area. 2 x Section strong points had been constructed around the site.

However, since their construction, the Royal Engineers had thrown up an earth berm around the site, making the occupation of these positions untenable. Section positions re-sited in the earth berm. During the day, friendly artillery fire continued sporadically including some impressive displays of MRLS fire power. No enemy activity reported in our area, which was approximately 10 kilometres due south of the border. Now at G – 2 and counting.

23 February 1991 G – 1. Remained firm at artillery XP 1. Artillery raids continued. Received orders for move on 24 February to new location ACP 2, 3 kilometres south of breach, 13 kilometres inside Iraq.

24 February 1991 G Day. As 1 (US) Infantry Division began to make the breach, supported by whole Corps Artillery, including 1 (UK) Artillery Brigade. We prepared to move north to ACP 2 located at NT 8130. At Commanding Officers O Group we were ordered to leave 1 section behind to secure remaining stocks of ammunition. The remainder of the platoon moved with 76 Squadron main, moving via a holding area at NT 8016, approximately 3 kilometres south of the border, to ACP 2.

The platoon crossed into Iraq at 1436 hours. On arrival at ACP 2 we deployed into a configuration used on all subsequent moves; reduced to only two sections, our capacity to defend the location was limited. Consequently, the platoon deployed to cover the most exposed flank of the squadron located with General Purpose Machine Guns and mortars. During the night, the guns continued to fire on Iraqi positions in the land area, and we received orders for the move through the breach the next morning.

25 February 1991. Our orders for the move through the breach had specified:

Route Mike, speed 10 kmph, density 40 vehicles per Km, Dress state 3 ROMEO. In the event, we crossed on route Papa in a nose to tail convoy in dress state 3, at 1050 hours. Most of us were expecting a major belt of obstacles, and didn’t realise until afterwards that we had actually gone through the breach. We then halted for 5 hours on phase line Wisconsin, some kms short of the staging area Delat, our planned first halt.

The area in which we had stopped had



been Iraqi depth positions. We came across our first Iraqi soldiers (4 dead) which were soon buried. There were 2 x ZU 23/4 anti aircraft guns and what looked like a battalion command post left abandoned in the staging area by the enemy. At about 1700 hours we moved north to a new ACP location at NT 910561 arriving at 2130 hours. The long time for such a short move being caused by a diversion around a mine field and light enemy resistance in the area.

26 February 1991. A series of short notice moves as the guns pressed forward, platoon at 15 minute NTM at all times.

1st move to PT 058588 arriving at 0430 hours.

2nd move to PT 260662 arriving at 1245 hours.

3rd move at PT 3659 arriving at 1411 hours.

By this stage, the 26th Iraqi Infantry Division had been left in pieces behind us and the guns were engaging positions occupied by 25 Infantry Division. At times, the guns were engaging positions only 5 or 6 kilometres from the gun lines, and our advance at this stage was quite exposed. During daylight moves we were able to see the damage caused by our guns and aircraft as we passed through abandoned, destroyed positions. Our final move on 26th February took us to PT 664619. Arriving at 1243 hours. On arrival we could see to our front an Iraqi ammo dump exposed. It continued to burn through the night and into the next day.

27 February 1991. During the day a number of prisoners of war were captured. Some surrendered to 26 Field Squadron and were processed that day. Others walked in from the west and were taken prisoner by personnel from 76 Squadron. 4 prisoners were captured by Staff Sergeant Roberts, Lance Corporal Cater, Privates Williams and McDowell whilst on patrol east of our location. During the afternoon, we moved to the artillery group maintenance area, arriving shortly after dark.

28 February 1991. We moved to the staging area for the drive to Kuwait. All resistance had, by this stage, ceased. Our prisoners were handed into the prisoner of war cage established at the staging area. Three spare blankets were fought over by 50 prisoners of war, desperate for comfort items.

At the staging area, we were finally re-united with 1 section. 1 section had been told that they would be relieved after 24-28 hours by 3rd line troops. Once it became apparent that no troops were coming back for them, they moved forward, hitching lifts with units following the advance, before finally re-joining us.

At 1900 hours, we left the staging area and began the drive to Kuwait, crossing the border during the early evening before halting to allow the Royal Engineers to clear the route.

01 March 1991. Arrived at Division Concentration Area, north west Kuwait City, at 1330 hours.

## THE FUTURE

On 17 September 1992 the Army Establishments Committee approved the changed to the establishment of 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps. The changes, which take effect on 5 Apr 1993, create 23 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, 518

Company, Royal Pioneer Corps is to be retitled as 518 Squadron, Royal Logistic Corps, with much enhanced transport, weapons and equipment.

The "Section", which became "Platoons", now become "Troops". Whatever the titles, 518 will continue to serve worldwide from Canada, Belize, The Falklands, Northern Ireland, Germany, and, at the time of writing, Yugoslavia to its home here in Bicester. The spirit, camaraderie, humour, loyalty and professionalism that has always been endemic to 518 is still there.

Those of you reading this, who have served in 518 and fear for its future, need not worry. The soldiers of 518 care for their heritage, they march proudly on, and on and on...

## TO BE CONTINUED.....

### OFFICERS' COMMANDING

Oct 1948 - Dec 1950 - Major AJ MacDonald  
Dec 1950 - Dec 1952 - Major CS Bragg  
Dec 1952 - Dec 1954 - Major DC Coull  
Dec 1954 - June 1956 - Maj RG Whelband  
June 1956 - Jan 1960 - Major EC Barber  
Jan 1960 - July 1961 - Maj HM Waterhouse  
July 1961 - May 1962 - Major JS Logan  
May 1962 - Sept 1963 - Major JB Ryall  
Sept 1963 - Sept 1965 - Major CC Davey  
Sept 1965 - April 1966 - Major JAO Napier  
April 1966 - Jan 1968 - Maj BA Webster MBE  
June 1970 - August 1971 - Major BE Tune  
Aug 1971 - Aug 1973 - Maj MJ Grinnell-Moore  
Aug 1973 - Oct 1975 - Major C Etherington  
October 1975 - May 1977 - Major C Telfer  
May 1977 - October 1978 - Major G Hill  
Oct 1978 - Jan 1981 - Major R Othen MBA  
Jan 1981 - Sept 1984 - Major TS Powell  
Sept 1984 - Jan 1985 - Major GM Downey  
Jan 1985 - Sept 1986 - Major GF Crook  
Sept 1986 - Oct 1988 - Major MJ Featherstone  
Oct 1988 - August 1990 - Major CG Hardy  
Aug 1990 - Aug 1992 - Major CR Code  
Aug 1992 - April 1993 - Major PA Wilde

### SECONDS' IN COMMAND

1948 - 1950 - Captain J Harrison  
1951 - Captain J Tulip  
1951 - 1953 - Captain TW Monaghan  
1953 - Captain G Leeman  
1953 - 1954 - Captain P McCarter  
1954 - 1956 - Captain EC Barber  
1956 - Captain FC Howie  
1956 - Captain A Howard  
1956 - 1958 - Captain FE Howes  
1958 - 1959 - Captain JA Haynes  
1959 - Captain VHC Sheffield  
1959 - 1960 - Captain JDS Taylor  
1960 - Captain RC Balcombe  
1960 - 1962 - Captain VHC Sheffield  
1962 - 1963 - Captain DM Hainsworth DSC  
1963 - 1964 - Captain MT Burnett  
1964 - 1965 - Captain JAO Napier  
1965 - 1966 - Captain G Clark  
1966 - 1968 - Captain AJ Reynolds  
1970 - 1973 - Captain IM Homewood  
1973 - 1975 - Captain JB Sievier  
1975 - 1977 - Captain IA Milne  
1977 - 1978 - Captain RCH Pearce  
1978 - Lieutenant DE Morgan BEM  
1978 - 1979 - Captain DWDG Tilleke  
1979 - 1981 - Captain TS Powell  
1981 - 1983 - Captain CG Hardy  
1983 - 1984 - Captain A Joyce  
1984 - 1985 - Captain FG Curtis  
1985 - Captain LJ Yeo  
1985 - 1986 - Captain D Rimmer

1986 - 1987 - Captain PJD Ralph  
1987 - 1989 - Captain RD Stapley  
1989 - 1990 - Captain BT Hope  
1990 - 1991 - Captain P Hancock  
1991 - 1992 - Lieutenant PAM Brown  
1992 - 1993 - Captain SJ Berry

### COMPANY SERGEANT MAJORS'

1948 - 1951 - WO2 HJ Newman  
1951 - 1952 - WO2 FL Shields  
1952 - 1954 - WO2 JW Hird  
1954 - 1955 - WO2 CE Hawksworth  
1955 - WO2 Fowlie  
1955 - WO2 Thompson DCM  
1955 - 1959 - WO2 JM Dowsey-Magog  
1960 - 1962 - WO2 LT Smythe  
1962 - 1965 - WO2 J Merrick  
1965 - WO2 H Maye  
1965 - 1967 - WO2 AT Ramjanally  
1967 - 1968 (?) - WO2 RCH Pierce  
1970 - 1972 - WO2 DA Simons  
1972 - 1974 - WO2 AM MacDonald  
1974 - WO2 A Nimmick  
1974 - 1975 - WO2 LG Banks BEM  
1975 - 1976 - WO2 JO St Hill  
1976 - 1978 - WO2 R Turnbull  
1978 - 1979 - WO2 A Sharp  
1979 - 1983 - WO2 H Russell  
1983 - 1986 - WO2 P Collins  
1986 - 1988 - WO2 E Houston  
1988 - 1991 - WO2 RNE Kirby  
1991 - WO2 DF Long  
1991 - 1992 - WO2 K Shield

### COMPANY QUARTERMASTER SERGEANTS'

1951 - Sergeant D McCartney  
1951 - 1954 - Sergeant TA Coussens  
1954 - 1955 - Sergeant Hennessey  
1955 - Sergeant R Montgomery  
1955 - 1956 - Staff Sergeant AJ Hutchings  
1956 - Sergeant Buck  
1956 - 1960 - Staff Sergeant W Bass  
1960 - Staff Sergeant M Spencer  
1960 - 1961 - Staff Sergeant AA McGrane  
1961 - 1964 - Staff Sergeant CB Markham  
1964 - 1966 - Staff Sergeant DA Simons  
1966 - 1968 - Staff Sergeant B Price  
1970 - 1971 - Staff Sergeant IM Johns  
1971 - 1972 - Staff Sergeant S Downes  
1972 - 1974 - Staff Sergeant G Fincham  
1974 - Staff Sergeant DB Isgar  
1974 - 1976 - Staff Sergeant N Beattie  
1976 - 1977 - Staff Sergeant J Fielder  
1977 - 1978 - Staff Sergeant RW Ledgeway  
1979 - 1982 - Staff Sergeant N Beattie  
1982 - 1983 - Staff Sergeant D Stoten  
1983 - 1986 - Staff Sergeant JW Mead  
1986 - 1987 - Staff Sergeant CA Wagstaff  
1987 - 1989 - Staff Sergeant PJ Pullen  
1989 - 1992 - Staff Sergeant BJ Fielding BEM  
1992 - 1993 - Staff Sergeant K Whalley

### CHIEF CLERKS'

? - 1956 - Corporal JG Campbell  
1956 - Sergeant TK McCarthy  
1956 - 1958 - Sergeant KL White  
1958 - 1960 - Sergeant F Sinai  
1960 - 1961 - Sergeant JS Read  
1961 - 1963 - Sergeant HW Wroot  
1963 - 1965 - Sergeant M Cureton  
1965 - 1967 - Sergeant R Rodda  
1967 - 1968 - Sergeant CL Pool;  
1970 - 1972 - Sergeant GB Hill  
1972 - 1973 - Sergeant P Lamble  
1973 - Sergeant D Gascoigne  
1973 - 1975 - Sergeant K Sinclair  
1975 - 1977 - Sergeant D McKeown  
1977 - 1978 - Sergeant K Sinclair  
1978 - 1979 - Sergeant PA Watts  
1979 - 1982 - Sergeant SJ Woodward



1982 - 1984 - Sergeant (later Staff Sergeant) RD Breeze  
 1984 - 1987 - Sergeant DMJ Graves  
 1987 - 1989 - Sergeant KA Blundell  
 1989 - Staff Sergeant P O'Connor  
 1989 - 1991 - Staff Sergeant AP Way  
 1991 - 1992 - Staff Sergeant BE Hynard  
 1992 - 1993 - Sergeant SB Savage

#### THE CORPS BADGE (1939)

A rifle, a shovel and a pick “piled” on them

A laurel wreath, all ensigned with a crown.

Beneath, the motto “Labor Omnia Vincit”.

#### THE CORPS COLLECT

Almighty God, without Whom our labour is but

Lost, Grant we beseech Thee, that the Royal

Pioneer Corps may faithfully accomplish every

Task entrusted to its care, that our faith May be made perfect in work well done;

Hear Us, O Lord, as we call unto Thee from the ends of the earth,

in the Name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

AMEN

#### THE CORPS MOTTO

LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

Work conquers everything

#### THE CORPS' PATRON SAINT

Saint Joseph, our Lord's earthly Father, the husband of Mary.

#### THE CORPS BADGE (1984)

Two Pioneer axes crossed in saltire beneath

Their heads and surmounted of a Pioneer sword

And a laurel wreath below the same a scroll

Inscribed Royal Pioneers and the whole ensigned

By a Royal Crown all argent

#### 518 SQUADRON

RLC Journal Oct 93 – Caving Expedition by Pte Hayes. Our tour was almost at an end when Pte Theron and I volunteered our services to the National Geographic Society in Berlin making one of their much acclaimed documentaries, the subject being the ancient Mayan caves.

Our job was assisting the Society with the heavy and cumbersome backpacks containing cameras and lighting equipment amongst other things.

We were to rendezvous with the Society at 0600 hrs, forty miles from Airport Camp. From there we had a two hour road drive with a further hour on the jungle tracks, with the troop element of the expedition trying unsuccessfully to sleep off the effects of the previous night's fumes.

When we finally arrived at the mouth of the cave we discarded our packs and began to relax, when we realised that one of our team was missing, so off we went back into the jungle to look for him. It wasn't too long before we found him slouched against a tree looking the worse for wear.

When we finished laughing we helped him to his feet and set off to rejoin the expedition. It was then time to venture into the cave. Once the kit was in place we split

from the Geographic Society and had a look around the cave and the Mayan poetry that has been there for thousands of years.

After a good look around we went outside whilst the society got on with filming. After 999 takes it was time to pack up and head back to the base location, which was conveniently five miles from JB's Bar, and, after a few drinks and a bite to eat, it was decided to call it a day.

The next day we went even further into the jungle to check out another cave, which was much larger and home to a bat colony said to number more than a quarter of a million, all of which seemed to flap around our heads as we entered the many rooms of the cave.

All in all we had a thoroughly enjoyable couple of days with the National Geographical Society, which we will remember for a long time to come.

RLC Journal – Aug 94 – Shoburness Detachment by Cpl Moody. On 7 March I took a detachment of eight soldiers to Shoburness to lay a large concrete base pad so that an ammunition incinerator could be erected. Little did we know that we would spend our first day standing in concrete. It was a good job we were dressed like 'Compo', with our Wellington boots on, although string was banned for holding up our trousers.

There was also some steel fixing, form laying and helping to lay the drains. Ptes Bertram and King helped with destroying old ammunition, including anti-personnel mines. No – NOT the ones that got away, we have it on good authority. When the detachment came to a close, we all agreed that we had all learnt some new skills and also some of the forgotten skills we had not practised for some time.

RLC Journal Aug 95 – On 10 October 1994 1 Troop departed Bicester for a six month detachment at Kinnegar Logistic Base (KLB) in Northern Ireland. Only a few members of the troop knew what to expect in Northern Ireland as 1 Troop are quite a young troop and had not been in the Province before. As it happens we arrived there just as the cease fire was taking hold, so the tour turned out to be a quiet one.

Soon after arriving at KLB the troop departed for the Infantry NIRRT course at Ballykinler. This lasted for a week, which saw patrol tactics, IED drills, ECM equipment and various other subjects, including a lot of 'death by view-foil'. After completing the course it was back to Kinnegar and straight into the task which the lads were keen to get on with. The troop was broken down into two sections and covered the guard duties. Quick Reaction Force (QRF) duties, patrols and escort. It took no time at all for the lads to be fully conversant with the task.

We found time to play various sports for the workshop, with Sgt Hughes, Cpl Moody, Pte Murphy and Pte Harvey playing football against the Senior Ranks, winning easily. R&R was a Godsend. The nine days entitlement is well-deserved (and indeed well received). We finally completed the task on 31 March after handing over to 2 Troop 522 Squadron, wishing them well and hoping they have as successful task as we did. We were reluctant to leave.

RLC Journal Feb 96 – We have been involved in a number of tasks in this last period. These have varied between routine

tasks, such as support of BOD Bicester to high profile tasks such as supporting 48 Squadron RE in the construction of an AMS range at Catterick. The AMS allows grouping and zeroing, and elementary application of fire, to be conducted on an electronic target range, without the requirement of butt markers or screen targets. This task was initially undertaken by 10 Troop, who were then relieved in place of 8 Troop.

9 Troop have recently completed a task at Minley Manor, where they were attached to 9 (Para) Squadron RE. This task received extensive cover in Soldier, though unfortunately it did not highlight the Pioneer input which was, most of the time, employed in the more technically demanding work. The construction is aimed at providing the Engineers with a bridge that has ready-made demolition charge bore holes, combined with a construction that reflects the majority of building techniques used by the RE in bridging a span. The detachment was commanded by Cpl Chamberlain.

Finally, special congratulations to LCpl Samuel, who is the first RLC Pioneer to complete the All Arms Commando Course at Lymington. Sgt Peach hopes to be the second.

RLC Journal Apr 96 – After Exercise Log Leap we again headed for the field on Exercise Scully's Cross. Working from the Wathgill Camp troops concentrated initially on ATD training before going on to wider objectives, such as the recovery of the Squadron 21C from the Catterick Training Area. All had the opportunity to fire GPMG (light role), 51mm mortar and ODT. A lucky few also had the chance to fire 94mm HEAT, with spectacular effects. During the second phase of the exercise, the squadron redeployed to Otterburn Training Area. Here, with a view to the future, the emphasis was placed on peacekeeping operations.

Unfortunately this phase was cut short due to the requirement to despatch 7 Troop to Germany to take part in 1 GS Regiment's pre-Op Grapple training, however, this was not before we were treated to a rare pleasure of observing Sgt Peach “driving” a Bedford at night. Whilst 7 Troop were training in Germany, a composite deployment was mounted at twenty four hours notice to Ploce in Croatia. This two week priority task involved the recovery of PSP matting for a future heliport in Gornji Vakuf (GV). However, a number of other tasks were undertaken, yet again emphasising Pioneer flexibility.

7 Troop returned from Germany to be stood down from the Op Grapple tour and, to cap it all, at short notice, sixty-four of the squadron were deployed two days before Christmas as part of IFOR. Although initially there seemed little to do, tasks gradually became apparent, leading to troop size deployments, hence, since arriving in theatre we have deployed troops to Lipa, Tomislavgrad, Kupres, Sipovo and Sarajevo. 7 Troop in particular achieved good results in Kupres, creating perimeter wire defences with limited resources.

Cpl Selstrom's assault pioneer section have been extremely busy on a number of deconstruction tasks. Pte Flavin coming into his own. With the arrival of 8 Troop the Squadron 21C (who have finally deigned to



join us after their Christmas holiday), the squadron now looks forward to a variety of artisan tasks throughout the area of operations.

RLC Journal Aug 96 – New year found us at Kupres with 4 (UK) Regiment, setting up the FAA. Based on a small cluster of factories around a timber yard, the FAA had to be up and running in time for the first of the IFOR main body troops. In order to accomplish that we had to ‘rearrange’ the layout of the fence, prepare hard standing and secure the entire perimeter with razor wire and logs (to block holes in the base of the fence.). During one visit in early January the Commander Royal Engineers marvelled at the amount of work going on, he was heard to ask his plant troop commander just how many Sappers he had on the site. “Just one”, was the reply, “the rest are Pioneers”.

For six weeks while MALBat (the Malaysians) prepared to take up the reins, Capt John Isherwood ran the Ops Room based at Kupres while SSgt Lou Russell and his troop took on the rear area security of Zone 9, with a troop of Light Dragoons attached,. One of the tasks was to provide armed escorts for the American CIMIC team as they went from town to town, negotiating and liaising with local mayors and police. Much of the patrol work was based on Land Rover multiples but there were occasions when Scimitars and HMMWVs were ‘hijacked’ and we had ‘Armoured Pioneers’ on more than one occasion.

Lt Al MacIntyre and his troop went camping in Sipovo for a while, staying at the four star Timber Yard Camping Municipal. The task was to convert a dutch barn to accommodation for 21 CS Squadron. This was largely a carpentry task for the studding with a skin of ‘wriggly tin’.

9 Troop with 2Lt Rob Moss spent the early part of the year holidaying in Sarajevo. Cpl Satchell and his section worked for the ARRC at the Termes Hotel. Their main task was the defensive wiring around the hotel in the ‘cleared’ minefield. On one particular day it was declared clear by the British on advice from the French Engineers, then one of the French officers, gesticulating wildly and shouting to the section, made them have second thoughts and Cpl Satchell. Taking no chances, pulled out until someone who spoke French could confirm that it was in fact clear. That said, there were more than a few soldiers who held their breath as they drove in the pickets.

RLC Journal – Oct 96. We have continued to maintain a presence in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. 7 Troop has been kept busy with tasks in Banja Luka and Bugojino. Deployments were in support of the Royal Signals Divisional Support Squadron and 36 Engineer Regiment respectively. The Banja Luka deployment involved the construction and establishment of a 300 man Corimec camp, tent erection, laying a hard core base and AM-2 matting, as well as various labouring and artisan tasks. In contrast the Bugojina task involved the reduction and stripping out of the shoe factory camp.

Over the course of the tour 7 Troop deployed to no fewer than nine locations, including Kupres, Sipovo, Vitez, Lipa, Banja Luka, Bugojino, Tomislavgrad and DJ Barracks. Tasks varied from the construction

and pioneer skills to perimeter security of IFOR camps, as well as mobile patrols. Whilst tasked to patrol an AO in the vicinity of Kupres, an additional task was to observe the controlled demolition of a variety of ordnance carried out by the HVO, Lt McIntyre and LCpl McInnes (Assault Pioneer) oversaw the operation.

After returning from Op Resolute, the squadron’s main effort is now firmly directed toward 7 and 8 Troops deployment to Northern Ireland in October.

Finally the squadron would like to pass on its best wishes to OC Maj Chris Belgum and 2IC, Capt Andy Parry as they move on to Manchester University and 150 Transport Regiment (V) respectively.

RLC Journal Aug 97. We continue to be heavily tasked, with 7 and 9 Troops deployed to Kinnegar and Antrim respectively and a section in the Falkland Islands.

The deployment of 7 Troop two days before the Lisburn bombs acted as a timely reminder of the worrying increase in terrorist activity and was a useful focus throughout the tour of the vigilance required. Cpl McInnes, the Troop Assault Pioneer, was tasked to upgrade the camp security and erected a kilometre of triple coil concertina wire around the weaker areas within two days. The troop made a useful contribution to the unit, both at work and on the sports field, with several soldiers representing the base at football and cross-country. Well done to LCpl Lane, with a creditable seventh in the Northern Ireland cross-country championships.

A training package was introduced for the troop when off duty, using the facilities of Palace Barracks to carry out ATD training, so the pleasant experience of going into the gas chamber was unavoidable. Six soldiers were also trained to Cat C standard, thanks to the hard work of Cpl Tibbs, the troop driving instructor.

The reduced size of the squadron in Bicester meant a concentration of resources was needed to meet task requirements. With the influx of new recruits 10 Troop conducted a series of TEWTs at Yardley Chase, the aim being to bring the soldiers up to speed with their basic observation, harbour, patrolling and deliberate attack skills. Following on Sgt Teague organised a week’s adventurous rock climbing, incorporating the Welsh mountains and Swange.

Sgt Bateman (11 Troop) had his own ideas when it came to adventure training. He decided on a leadership exercise, with a little dry skiing, walking, map reading and rock climbing thrown in.

The squadron has also contributed to the regimental display, a fundamental demonstration of the combined skills a Pioneer unit is able to provide, the main emphasis being placed on artisan work. Its first recipients were the RLC Troop Commanders Course in February. The display was divided into a series of stands, of which some were the Assault Pioneer (ably organised and presented by Cpl Temple), Defence (Cpl Smithson) and artisan skills (Cpl Sherriffs and Cpl Wyeth).

The recent return of 7 and 9 Troops coincided with the move of the squadron into its training period notable for being one of the busiest; additionally the squadron is conducting preparations for the

Joint Rapid Deployment Force commitment, Op Lodestar, Batus, squadron battle camp and regimental adventure training, all combined with the customary duties, courses and joys of barrack life.

We welcome OC Maj A Mullholland since our last Journal input, Capt Simmons as Admin Officer and WO2 Toms as SSM. Farewell to (now) WO1 Shields, who moves as Regimental Sergeant Major.

RLC Journal Oct 97. FTX Exercise Welsh Warrior was preceded by a week’s training for 7 Troop in Sennybridge ‘to get them back into it’. 2LT Racey and Sgt Smith designed a training programme to prepare the troop for the following two weeks, acclimatization to even more rain. The rest deployed on 8 June, taking with them the standard weather conditions for Sennybridge, booked months in advance. The preferred choice was a farm location which, to the squaddies surprise, was quite comfortable.

The FTX involved patrolling, ambushes and deliberate attacks. We learned to live in that most testing of exercise homes, the trench, where many soldiers were able to adopt pet frogs which had managed to make the trenches their home prior to 518 arriving on the scene. ‘Meals on wheels’ were provided by SSgt (SQMS) Wrigley and a special mention must go to the soldiers’ saviour, Cpl Brocklesbury and ‘BROCKSHOP’, which deployed into the field on numerous occasions to provide the necessary moral boost. The FTX culminated with the squadron armed to the teeth, carrying out the obligatory dawn attack, a successful end to an enjoyable battle camp.

RLC Journal Feb 98. ‘The Homeless Duck’ seems quite appropriate motto for 518 Squadron, with the majority deployed on a number of tasks away from barracks. 7 Troop provided support to the regimental 3-2 upgrading course in September and welcomed Sgt Hon as their new Troop Sergeant, recently posted in from Grantham, Sgt Hon was immediately thrown in at the deep end as the regimental team captain for the Cambrian Patrol, meanwhile the majority deployed to Chicksands on JFHQ Exercise Purple Link and embarked on setting up all the tentage and other administration requirements for 900 personnel. The task was then to provide a guard force.

8 Troop have been supporting a 24 Airmobile Brigade exercise in Barry Budden and then deploying to Brecon on Exercise Far East to construct Ops for SENTA under the command of newly arrived Troop Sergeant, Sgt McCracken. Cpl Reeves commanded a detachment of eight in the harsh environment of Sardinia in support of the AMF, where his section were tasked with the real time security of CPX Exercise Dynamic Mix.

Lt Rob Moss and 9 Troop deployed to Batus in September on Exercise Medicine Man 4 with C Company 1 Worcester & Sherwood Forrester’s Regiment. Prior to their deployment 9 Troop underwent an extensive training package on Salisbury Plain with the Royal Dragoon Guards battle group, familiarising themselves with tactics and life with Warrior. Deployment to Canada saw the troop roled as a Warrior platoon in C Company. The live firing exercise began at basic level, involving section trench clearance with grenades,



tank stalks with HEAT and various battle runs. Training then progressed through platoon and company level operations to battle group level. 9 Troop's ability was commented on by a member of the safety staff when debriefing them on a platoon attack – he described it as “textbook, the best he had seen”.

10 Troop deployed to Bosnia at the beginning of October under SSgt Barrett in support of the continuing SFOR mission. The rest now prepare to join 10 Troop in Bosnia.

On a sadder note, the squadron said goodbye to Pte Matthew Walker of 8 Troop, who was fatally injured in a house fire in Bicester. He was a popular member of the squadron and an excellent soldier, who will be deeply missed.

RLC Journal Apr 98. The ‘homeless duck’ has been out and about a great deal recently and much of the last few months has inevitably been taken up with training for deployment to Banja Luka as Defence Company for the Multi-National Division (South West). We spent a wet week field firing in Sennybridge (or not in the case of 94 MM law, as we could not see the targets in the fog and rain). After much shouting, shooting and scraping of knees we finished with a fire team race over Pen-Y-Fan, which was won by a fit but breathless LCpl Perks and team.

A quick day back in Bicester and then it was off to Longmoor to begin training in earnest for the kind of tasks we expect to find in Banja Luka. Patrolling and general security duties were refreshed and sharpened, aided by an excitable and enthusiastic civilian population provided by 522 Squadron.

The Security Forces Base at Longmoor provided us with the perfect place to practise Quick Reaction Force drills and to train personnel in the art of keeping calm in the face of a provocative crowd. We then moved on to the Bosnia Collective Training to put the gloss on a by now comprehensively trained squadron.

Deployment after Christmas meant a good chance to spend time with families before departure – after a last minute fit of squeezing useful Christmas presents into bergens we deployed on 4 January.

Although it is early days we have had our fair share of excitement. Our Deployment to Banja Luka from Split could have been marred by an accident involving a local civilian, who crashed into one of our vehicles, causing it to leave the road, rolling as it went. Quick, calm action by Sgt Brocklelsby followed and the end result was no casualties. We are now settled in the Meat Factory and Division seem to have plenty in mind to keep us occupied.

RLC Journal Jun 98. The variety of tasks continues in Banja Luka and soldiers still find themselves alternating between framework patrolling, inspection of sites and weapons, and rebuilding work on local schools. We have been under the media spotlight of late, requiring much combing of hair and perfection of winning smiles. We have been the subject of a Serbian TV documentary made by Bell TV, a first for an IFOR or SFOR unit, something we take a great deal of pride in. The cameras followed us on cantonment site visits and showed the monitoring of Republic of Serbska training and exercises. We were pleased to

find that, when the locals were asked their opinions of us, they described us as being ‘very polite’. Needless to say, after such a barrage of media attention, the OC has now employed a make-up artist and the SSM has put a star on his door. Our work on the children's playground at Vrbanja continues, as does SSgt Barrett's now famous horseshoe pit stop. SSgt Barrett discovered, among other unused GS supplies sitting around in Banja Luka, a supply of horseshoes and nails and decided to drag confused Bosnians and their steeds off the roads to offer them a free change of shoes. Cpls Glade and Sheriffs have now been drafted in to deal with demand as the word spreads.

SSgt Barrett himself has now returned with his troop to UK. No stopping for them, however as, once they have had a short spell of leave, they are off to support 22 Field Hospital on Exercise Top Cat in Longmoor, where they will be trialling the erection of new tents, surgeries and support equipment.

RLC Journal Oct 98. ‘The Homeless Duck’ has now returned to its favoured stomping ground in Bicester as the squadron has completed its recent tour of Bosnia as the HQ MND(SW) Defence Company. It has been a remarkably successful and educational tour for us, taking over from 1 Squadron RAF Regiment, a much larger organisation. Our NCOs have undoubtedly benefited from the sometimes daunting task of carrying out checks and inspections on Republic of Serbska Army (VRS) cantonment sites, in fire team strength, in the face of some fairly senior, combat experienced Serbian commanders.

Our dog handlers have been involved in riots in Drvar, we have assisted in the removal of a war criminal from a VRS prison and we have even been required to give an old fashioned ‘show of strength’ when an inspection team being escorted was refused entry to a cantonment site. On top of all of this excitement we also refurbished much of the Banja Luka Metal Factory's ailing defences. In the process we seem to have been able to paint most things in classic Pioneer red and green – only the shortage of supplies in theatre has stopped us decorating the whole camp.

We have also tried to continue our various G5 projects, in particular a school ground and a local geriatric hospital. No materials were available so we have been using whatever we could find locally, re-using old bricks and wood and making swings and climbing frames from discarded vehicles and old tyres. Again the finished article received just a light touch of red and green paint – for the grand opening we were surprised to find our 100 expected guests had increased to 600 curious locals. The Chefs did their best to cope, doing a creditable recreation of Jesus' loaves and fishes miracle.

In our few moments of spare time we also managed to carry out the odd bit of field firing. We are fond of our firepower and so were pleased to be able to get a number of US Apache helicopters to come and play with us on Glamoc ranges. It is rare that you can call in fire from such awesome machines and the whole day was totally memorable. It was made all the more memorable by the invention of a new platoon battle drill by Lt Racey. Whilst

assaulting a position he devised the ‘wedge’, a tactic involving the bunching of the whole troop together, shoulder to shoulder, and then advancing pantomime horse style, towards the objective. We do not know yet whether Warminster will approve the adoption of this amazing manoeuvre.

RLC Journal Dec 98. July saw the return of the squadron from its varied and successful tour as the Divisional Defence Company in Banja Luka, a tour in which we certainly proved that there is more to being a Pioneer than ‘stagging on’ at a gate. Many of our soldiers got the chance to exercise their artisan skills (and their creative talents) on a host of G5 projects and these, coupled with regular patrols, site inspections and public order tasks, have produced a much wiser and more experienced squadron.

RLC Journal Apr 99. The squadron has now entered its training phase, a time to catch up with Army Training Directives, courses and a chance to hone Pioneer skills. The latter was quickly achieved, in part, by participation on Exercise Pioneer Chase IFTX at Longmoor Training Area. This was a shock to the system in more ways than one, with Regimental Ops booking the ideal weather, sub-zero temperatures and thick fog.

Fitness is one of the strengths of the squadron and the OCs Friday fun runs are reaping their rewards, with LCpl Perks, Ptes Durkin, James and Swift returning having passed P Company, LCpl Perks has volunteered for Pathfinder training (and this is a man who cannot find his way back from the NAAFI at night). One of the major tasks of the training squadron is to organise the Pioneer Capabilities Presentation, a chance for Pioneers to demonstrate their skills. Water purification, railhead clearance, defence and war graves stands were included. Visitors ranged from the GOC 4 Division and the Director General Logistic Support (Army) to newly enlisted recruits.

RLC Journal Jun 99. On returning from Christmas leave the squadron concentrated on in-barracks training in preparation for Exercise First Hurdle, the squadron FTX in Sennybridge. The SQMS's decision not to order arctic clothing was certainly felt in the unexpected sub-zero temperatures. This was coupled with monsoon-like downpours and many were heard to comment that it was a pity he did not forget to order the exercise weather. It was so bad it resulted in the OC, Maj Al Mullholland, catching pneumonia (obviously not one of the Arnhem breed). A fleet-of-foot SSgt Paterson almost required a winch to pull him out of a bog (muddy field, not the other kind) thanks to some unusual map reading by Cpl Bagnall.

The squadron's other major commitment was to produce the Pioneer Capability Presentation. We also put on a display for the RLC Troop Commanders Course and learnt just how little honour there is among officers when they have a bucket of cement in one hand and someone with his back turned in their sights.

On the sporting front the squadron tried to wrest the Army Minor Unit boxing cup from 69 Commando Engineers. The boxers expelled copious amount of sweat in training and the difference was quite evident in the improvement in their technical ability. Credit goes to Sgt



Sheehan, with a little help from his friend, Herol Graham. Mr Graham also kindly agreed to attend the final and present the trophies, however, sometimes skill is not enough. A gallant effort by our boxers was met by sheer aggression from the Commandos, resulting in a 5-2 defeat in what was widely agreed to be an entertaining final, even if the end result was a little disappointing.

Having completed a tour of Bosnia, several exercises and Pioneer Capability Presentations, we were looking forward to making some serious inroads into what remained of the leave year. The Balkans played their usual havoc with our plans, however, and soon the corridors were filled with the question, “What, who or where is Kosovo?” The Squadron was warned for deployment to Macedonia and so briefings, injections, documentation and a trip to the dentist were the order of the day. With another troop readying itself in support of JFHQ, who knows where we will be when we next come to write?

RLC Journal Oct 99. After much frustration and waiting for both the squadron and their families, we deployed to Macedonia, with 9 Troop forming the vanguard on 11 Jun. 9 Troop immediately found themselves at work, dismantling a vacated 1,000 man tented camp. Luckily the troop managed to find the local river, complete with death slide, which almost proved to be Pte Capper’s downfall, as he ‘did not know how’ to let go of the rope.

The rest of the squadron arrived in Macedonia on 15 June, flying into Skopje International Airport. When our transport finally arrived, we found ourselves going further south, to the Nail Factory in Titov Veles, where our Chief Clerk, Sgt Lisa Wain, the first woman to serve with the squadron, found out what it was like to live in a hangar of 100 men.

7 Troop deployed a section even further south to Prelip, palletising and rebanding ammunition, later relieved by a section from 8 Troop. Meanwhile 9 Troop found one of their sections on the Greek border, working at the convoy support centre. Whilst in Macedonia we were sent to 4 Brigade’s old location, as they had moved to Pristina, leaving quite a large trail behind them.

After only a short stay in Macedonia the squadron moved up to Pristina in two convoys, expertly led by 2Lts Cape and Brown, putting all their Leconfield training to good use. Once in Pristina we moved into a disused cotton factory (aren’t they all?) with the rest of the regiment, but this only proved a short stay before we set up a location at the railhead, co-located with a troop from 79 Railway Squadron on the outskirts of Kosovo Polje.

No sooner had we arrived than the OC, Maj Al Mullholland, was in an exploit of ‘derring do’ that will no doubt be retold many a time in the Officers Mess at Bicester. While driving into the location, his Rover was stopped by a heated local argument (the first of many we were to witness) between two locals. As things deteriorated, despite the OC’s intervention, the local UCK commander pulled out his Beretta pistol and crawled round the back of his car, to be met by the OC’s rifle and his demented screaming. Luckily the pistol was handed over without any shots being fired.

Once again, as soon as we had settled in,

the tasks began to arrive. The work at Prelip and the CSC continued as well as Cpl Fleet’s section detached to the Special Forces in Pristina.

8 Troop were also tasked with building an armoury and ammunition compound north of Pristina. What should have been a simple task was slightly hindered by the discovery of a 2,000 lb bomb in one location and a minefield in the other. Pte Zaloumis actually shovelled up the empty shell of a mine whilst clearing debris.

Train security has also been a big task for us. One journey in particular attracted high ranking attention, as our mission to ‘have a presence on the ground’ of some of the stations interfered with what one American General felt was very much ‘his turf’.

And so life goes on in sunny Kosovo with the odd thunderstorm to hinder our training sessions. Meanwhile Sgt Ricky McCracken celebrated his fortieth birthday in the Balkans in five tours, with Pte Easterbrook, one of the youngest soldiers in theatre, will have to wait until September for this 18th birthday. At the moment the squadron looks set to return to the UK sometime in September, coming back to Kosovo in March 2000 in one form or another.

RLC Journal Jun 00. 8 and 9 Troops have just completed Exercise Axemen’s Storm in Sennybridge Training Area. The ten day exercise was aimed at practising low level infantry tactics as a vehicle to develop endurance and leadership. As usual Sennybridge provided its normal service in that all the weather seasons and conditions were crammed into one day. Pte Gough was heard to say that “a happy soldier is a dry soldier” hours before following the OC and falling into a stream during a recce patrol.

A recent signal requiring the use of certain thunder flashes by 31 March provided the cue for an excellent troop deliberate attack, led by Lt Paddy Cope, which was watched by the new CO. The exercise also permitted SSgt Hon to get to know his newly formed 6 Troop, which will in due course be leaving us to form 206 Squadron. They undertook a successful skiing expedition to Andorra, by way of reward. Lt Jim Dutson, who had just successfully completed his All Arms Commando Course, led the trip, ably assisted by Sgt Langridge, his skiing instructor and Troop Sergeant. Cpls Norman and Thwaite were fortunate to join 1 Kings, who were short of the odd section, on Exercise Grand Priix in Kenya for six weeks. The exercise included field firing and adventurous training. From all the reports they had a thoroughly rewarding exercise and have been excellent ambassadors for the squadron and regiment.

A five strong team took part in a two week climbing expedition. Exercise Pioneer Sunquest, to Spain, led by SSgt Alburt in February. The first week was run as the Rock Climbing Proficiency Course, with the second giving participants a little more freedom. This led to some superb examples of how not to do it. The most notable event was a particularly difficult climb, when Cpl Ellis decided to take up bungee jumping half way up, instead of continuing the climb.

RLC Journal, Oct 00. In April the squadron took over responsibility for the Improved Tented CAMP (ITC) IN Kosovo, when Cpls

Keeton and Merritt deployed with eleven others. During the past few months work has increased significantly and the new purpose-built camps have come on line and the ITC has been withdrawn and prepared for recovery to DSCD Bicester in July and August. It had been thought the task would have finished by the end of May and so those who deployed were rotated with Cpl Thwaite taking up the reins for (what is hoped to be) the final two months.

After Easter break the squadron conducted its own adventurous training exercise in the Lake District in early May. Expertly run by the SSM, WO2 Hamilton, activities included rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing, orienteering and a one and two day treks over Hellvelyn and Scarfell Pike respectively. ‘Hill Miles’ were well and truly earned by Lt Brown, Sgt Haines and Cpl Ellis, in that they conquered both peaks four times each during the two weeks.

RLC Journal Jun 01. After a well deserved Christmas leave the lads were straight back in at the deep end, deploying on Exercise Axemen’s Endeavour in Sennybridge at the end of January. The exercise itself was a good two week package starting with a Patrolling Phase then moving onto operations in Built Up Areas (OBUA). This proved to be enormous fun and concluded with the Squadron ‘clearing’ the village of enemy with a deliberate attack. The SSM, WO2 Kilbride, had secured sufficient ammunition and pyro to ensure that the operation was well supported and SSgt Jackson got the attack off to a good start with his ‘dems’ simulating the artillery support. The exercise concluded with a week’s live firing package using all the troops weapons. It was not an easy fortnight, but the Squadron worked hard and proved that we had all the necessary skills to effectively conduct key point defence tasks.

11 Troop, supported by 12 Troop, deployed the following week on Exercise Warpaint in Canada for two months. The exercise involves the refurbishment of the BATUS ranges in conjunction with the Royal Engineers. The troop of thirty-seven is led by SSgt Jackson with Sgt Norman undertaking the Troop Sergeant responsibilities. At the start of the exercise the temperature, -10oC was the main challenge, particularly when it came to knocking in 6 ft pickets into the frozen ground; unless you were Pte Anderson. It’s not all doom and gloom though, the reward for working a six day week is a seven day long adventure training package in the Rocky Mountains undertaking the Basis Winter Skills package, which has proved a great success.

The Squadron was warned just before Christmas that it is to undertake the Roulement Transport Squadron role in Northern Ireland. This is a one off and a first for the Pioneers. It presents the problem of all the Squadron personnel having to obtain a Cat C driving licence. This will allow everyone to gain a Specialist Qualification and also undertake an operational tour, but does present us with the short term problem of driver training which is now underway in earnest. The Squadron has also finished preparing for and has just assumed the Charlie Troop role of supporting the JTFHQ.

The Squadron has again made a



significant contribution to the Regiment's boxing team, with Ptes Strigeon, Neill, Riddell and Dau all fighting in The RLC Championships. Cpl Chandler and Pte Newman have also continued to represent the Regiment's football team.

Unfortunately at the start of April we said farewell to the OC, Maj Stephen Brook, who had to leave us at short notice to move on to bigger and better things. Capt Pete Organ will take command until our new OC arrives in July. We also said farewell to the Squadron AO, Capt Christ Startbuck, on his retirement from the Army, and wish him well in his future career as a QM at an Army Cadet Unit.

The Sustainer Feb 02. 518 Squadron has been tasked with the roulement Transport Squadron role in Northern Ireland commencing Spring 2002; it is to drive the Saxons and Taverns in support of four resident battalions and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This task came as something of a surprise to the Squadron, only 20% of whom had any form of driving licence in July this year. Since then there has been some frenetic training in driving skills, HAZMAT qualifications and a plethora of MR management courses. With four months remaining before deployment, 70% of the Squadron now have C+E licences. It just goes to show: anyone can drive a truck! As we head towards the New Year we look forward to the Lydd training packages.

In between the courses, 518 Pioneer Squadron has developed a taste for freefall parachuting; one of the Joint Service Parachute Centres is only five miles from camp. Several of the Squadron have now completed the basic freefall course, with a multitude waiting for vacancies on future courses. This wish to 'throw oneself out of serviceable aircraft' is engendered by the OC, Maj Nick Foden-Ellis (formerly HQ RM) and the Admin Officer, Capt Huw Thomas (formerly 10 Para) who maintain a friendly Para v Commando rivalry.

The Sustainer Apr 02. The OC and command team completed their recce of Northern Ireland at the end of November amidst some of the busiest public order situations the security forces have had to conduct in recent years. This provided a good focus for future training and ensured that the recce was used to its full potential. In the meantime the remainder of 518 Squadron have been driving around Bicester in the newly arrived Saxon Patrol variant vehicles. The transition between Pioneer Squadron and Transport Squadron is bounding along, with soldiers qualifying daily on a new vehicle or acquiring a new category licence. The officers and seniors have been busy on various course at DST, ensuring that vehicle documentation and accountability will be as sound as the soldiers' new found skills. This new role has provided an excellent opportunity to increase the number of licence holders within the regiment. We have achieved in a matter of months what would otherwise have taken a year or two to complete.

More recently, 518 Squadron made up the majority of the Regimental boxing team at a match hosted by the Mayor of Stoke on Trent. The standard of boxing was extremely high, but unfortunately the team were outclassed despite each boxer putting up sterling efforts. However, it provided first

class training for the team to compete in the next Army Championships.

The Sustainer Oct 02. After a long hard year of training for the Squadron's Op BANNER tour, the time had finally come, and on 25 March 2002 the advance party were on their way to Northern Ireland. The remainder of the Squadron followed soon after, and it wasn't long before the Pioneers had truly established themselves within Belfast and Londonderry.

The driver role is a new one for a 'Pioneer' Squadron to fulfil, and all members of 518 Squadron were keen to show that they can drive as well as any other unit. The Commanders and Pioneers on the ground used the skills they had learnt in the build-up training and applied the '23' ethos to the job at hand. The leadership and quick thinking shown by many of our soldiers on the ground have earned countless messages and letters of praise from the infantry battalions we support. For example, Pte Martin, who when left with a team on the ground after the Multiple Commander had pursued a number of suspects on foot, re-organised the team, got them into his Tavern and them moved to provide a cut off. As a result three joyriders were stopped and arrested. Pte Crowie put himself in grave danger in order to save the life of a Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officer. Pte Crowie manoeuvred his vehicle into position to draw the crowd's full attention in order to allow the PSNI to extract to safety.

Despite being back in Bicester, it has not been easy for the Surge Troop. As well as normal regimental duties they have also been carrying out continuation training on the Saxon. In late May they were responsible for moving GWR Saxon over to Northern Ireland for the marching season. No matter what's reported on the news, the tempo of operations has increased out here and 518 Squadron are going to be even busier over the next few months.

The Sustainer Feb 03. As the Squadron entered its last month in the Province the pace of life seemed to accelerate, not only did Belfast remain the centre of excellence for public disorder, the Sqn also seemed to become a very popular place to visit. Our new CO, Lt Col PA Jones MBE (an ex-Trucky) was highly impressed by the level of expertise achieved. When given the opportunity to drive a Saxon Patrol he readily accepted, but was somewhat surprised by the Public Order scenario the instructor forgot to mention! We also received a visit from Brig Wallace, Commander of the newly formed 104 Logistic Support Brigade, which not only acted as an excellent dress rehearsal for the CO's visit, but also saw the Brigadier visit HQ Northern Ireland to promote the cause of The RLC in the RTS role. Despite being a new role for the Pioneer CEG, the RTS has been an excellent tour and offers training and development opportunities in an operational environment that are unrivalled in the rest of the Corps, particularly at JNCO level. As the tour ended, the Sqn was rewarded with many plaques and presentations, one particular gift was the Thin Red Line painting of the battle of Balaklava in 1864, a battle honour of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders when they halted a massed charge by Russian cavalry. We were particularly proud to

receive such a gift, as it has never before been awarded to an RTS.

With morale soaring, we returned to comparatively sunny Bicester at the end of September looking forward to our well-earned four weeks POTL. Some quality time was due with families and the majority of the singles headed for Playa Las Americas!

As a late arrival 2Lt Kemp-Gee qualified by hours for her first medal, but was not entitled to the full four weeks POTL, however, she did manage a week's adventure training at the Norway Ice Camp, Lillehammer. Her choice of sports were mainly Bobsleigh and the Skelton. Many may question her sanity, but she also had a go at the Luge. On the final day she turned to the Bobsleigh, with the same speed and adrenaline, but without the knocks, it was the perfect combination.

Finally we would like to say farewell and good luck to all those leaving the Squadron, be it on posting, promotion or out of the Army and, of course, to welcome all those who now have the honour of serving with the fighting 518! The future is red and green.

The Sustainer Apr 03. After an excellent series of Christmas parties on the back of OP BANNER PRI profits, the Squadron has dissolved for the time being to back fill other Squadrons for Op TELIC. The OC Maj Nick Foden-Ellis, still has a train set to play with as he takes over as Ops Officer for the deployment to Kuwait.

The Sustainer Dec 03. We have seen a number of changes over the summer. We welcome Maj Dave Allen from HQ 4 Division, who took over the reigns of 518 Squadron in September and, fresh from the challenges of both the Troop Commanders Course and PCBC, 2Lt Green who takes over 9 Troop. Cpls Stalker and Catchpole also join 518 Squadron from Germany.

Maj Foden-Ellis's time as OC 518 Squadron came to an end in August, which meant only one thing, it was time to throw a few parties! Thanks go to ABBA, Britney Spears, Westlife, Village People and especially Madonna for performing at the Squadron party. Thanks go to both Maj F-E and his wife Allie for all the support they have given to the Squadron – we wish them all the best in their new posts and also with the new challenges of parenthood.

During the summer the Squadron deployed a training team to Grantham under Capt Cooper and SSgt McInnes. Their task was to train RHQ 168 Pioneer Regiment (V) and 101 Squadron (V) prior to their deployment to Iraq. A group under SSgt Forster from the Squadron travelled to Deepcut to represent the Regiment at The RLC Open Day. The day was a great success, in particular LCpls Hart and Jones' weapons stand and Pte Riddell's bricklaying stand, both of which were extremely popular with members of the public. The Squadron also supported the RPCA Weekend at Bicester. Under the guidance of the SSM each Troop was tasked with running a stand. The darts stand made its usual appearance and 12 Troop ran the darts match challenge. Thanks also to Cpl Nicholson for running the cocktail bar, which was very much appreciated on such a hot day.

The Sustainer Feb 04. No sooner had we come back to work after summer leave, than Lt Kemp-Gee's Troop deployed on Exercise Battering Ram with JTFHQ at



Wattisham Airfield for ten days in September. Our main effort was to support 256 Signal Squadron by providing force protection to the HQ and managing the shower units. This was as part of our responsibility to provide the Support Troop to JTFHQ.

Concurrent to this, the Squadron were busy getting a Troop, under 2Lt Green and Sgt Shepherd, ready for a short-notice deployment to Iraq to enhance the defences at Shaibah Logistic Base. 2Lt Green's excitement on deploying was tempered by having to build roundabouts, patios and a swimming pool as well – not quite what Sandhurst, Deepcut and Warminster had prepared him for!

October saw Lt Kemp-Gee's Troop and SHQ deploying on Exercise Eagles Eye supporting 16 Air Assault Brigade. This involved working on Salisbury Plain clearing DZs (picking up parachutes - which had its moments – and playing CIVPOP and Host Nation Armed Forces. This allowed all ranks to get involved and to be rescued by 3 Para from 1 Para. It was hard to work out which was worse – being captured by Paras and being rescued by them! After being rescued, the Troop enjoyed rides in Chinooks and Hercules (a first for some), ending up in RAF Lyneham, leaving the OC, Maj Allen, 2IC, Capt Cooper, and the Ops SNCO, Sgt Chandler, still looking for parachutes on Imber DZ. From there, the Squadron moved to Pirbright for the next week on Exercise Axemans Welcome, the aim of which was to bring the soldiers up to date with their ITD(A)s, rangework and patrol drills. At the same time, Sgt McInnes' Troop prepared to deploy in desert combats to Germany on Exercise Forged Halberd. This was to play enemy for 102 Logistic Brigade and the Troop is still shivering in Germany now. On their return, the Squadron will be complete for the first time in three months.

The Sustainer Feb 04. After a long hard tour in Iraq, during which we completed many tasks ranging from handing out aid and patrolling Umm Qsar, to the unenviable task of Army War Graves. It was decided to take the Squadron away on adventure training to try and create a calm atmosphere where the lads could get on with the training and enjoy themselves. We eventually chose Penhale Camp near Newquay. The season was ending so it wasn't too busy, but still had a bit of life for the nightly trips into town.

Surf kayaking was run by a God-like apparition who goes by the name of SSgt Jenkins (from Wales you know boy!). His prowess on the water was not mirrored by his pupils who spend more time upside down inspecting the ocean floor than actually kayaking upright. There were also the Squadron 2IC, Capt Des Skinner (first name Darrell, but not many people know that), and SSgt Salter trying new tricks such as flipping upside down and landing on his neck in shallow water, then blabbing like a baby.

Rock climbing was run by Cpl Smith, who had great fun trying to scare the lads and succeeded with only a handful of guys doing the longest abseil. However, nothing could deter the resident rock apes namely the OC, Maj Hing and the 2IC, (Darrell), who were forever in search for another harder climb to prove who was the biggest

man (the OC won that one, unsurprisingly).

SSgt Rudge and Sgt Howe ran the orienteering, but this was considered too work orientated. So became sightseeing instead, taking in the sights of the area such as castles, shipwrecks, cider farms and of course pubs.

Sailing was controlled (in a manner of speaking) by Cpl Hudson, the RLC Boatswain. He had the enviable task of trying to teach the lads how to sail properly, ie stay in the dinghy keeping it upright and in control. Many civilian were put off by Pioneers in ill-fitting wetsuits in semi-submerged dinghies hurtling down Stithian's Reservoir shouting 'get some'. Many members of the Squadron enjoyed it so much they want to continued on further sailing courses.

We were also granted one day off to take part in an activity of our choice from deep-sea fishing and quad biking around an off-road racetrack. The fishing spawned all the normal tales of huge fish and being very seasick. The Captain did allow the guys to take a few beers with them, which leads on to a special mention of Pte Harris who has been a soldier for four years and served in the Oman and Op TELIC, but couldn't get served with four cans of Guinness in a supermarket (he did not take his ID card for fear of losing it overboard). As for the quad biking, Pte Valle managed to roll one over on top of himself – within 3 m of first leaving the pits.

All in all, it was a great two weeks and plans are about for next year's Squadron outing.

The Sustainer Apr 04. This period saw two short deployments – one operation and one exercise – taking place for soldiers in the Squadron.

Lt Green, fresh from Troop Commanders' Course and the Platoon Commanders' Division, saw 9 Troop back to Iraq to work at Shaibah Logistic Base on a short-notice deployment. After a very brief refresher period and the usual number of vaccinations, it was a flight out by C-130 and straight into work. The rebuilding of the Theatre Military Working Dogs accommodation took place and support to civilian contractors in constructing a swimming pool at the Logistic Base as well. The latter task was not on the original task list for the deployment but nobody seemed to mind too much. The fact that the pool's completion was celebrated with the obligatory barbecue didn't hurt although the rendition of the haka did surprise a few of the other guests!

Of a more serious note, the Troop also refurbished a World War One memorial to British and Empire troops some 10 kms from the Logistic Base and then provided the force protection parties for the Remembrance Sunday parade. This was felt by all concerned to be a worthwhile task and was particularly sobering as it brought home to some of the Troop the fact that British troops had fought here before.

SSgt McInnes took his troop to Germany for three-and-a-half weeks to provide the enemy for 102 Logistic Brigade units on Exercise Forged Halberd. Seeing as we had been working alongside them in Kuwait and Iraq for three months earlier in the year, there were several proposals as to dress and equipment for the enemy and methods of entry into friendly locations. A good exercise

which tested the Troop, both in their defence skills and vehicle handling, and, of course, allowed them to stock up on some essential items just before Christmas.

Unfortunately, this period also saw us saying farewell to two long-serving members of the Regiment and Squadron – SSgt Pat Patterson and Sgt Kev Haines. Both have reached a status in the Regiment that is hard to achieve and we wish them and their families the best of luck for the future.

On a happier note, at the time of writing, the wife of the OC, Maj Allen, was in labour, giving birth to their first child. Once again, we take this opportunity to say congratulations and best of luck.

The Sustainer Jun 04. We were grateful to receive all personnel safely from Op TELIC 2 under the guidance of Lt Green and Sgt Shepherd. They achieved a great deal and have left the Pioneer flash on as many construction tasks as seemed possible.

After a substantial period of leave the Squadron were rudely awoken with an intensive range package, incorporating ITDs of an evening. The FTX to follow was in Sennybrige where it had snowed heavily to celebrate our arrival. Some of the Foreign and Commonwealth soldier from warmer climes especially felt the cold, the static nature of the defensive position, compounding the temperature. Eventually we extracted and moved out to harbour locations, where we enjoyed the shelter from the wind in dense forest.

Sgt Chandler had written the exercise and had incorporated leadership at all levels. The Section Commanders patrolled their section through certain areas where they were to be faced with scenarios, such as RTAs. Then, after a good night's sleep and some decent scoff, it was time for the Squadron to conquer Pen-y-Fan. The soldiers showed fantastic determination in their approach to the route, which was physically demanding and the burden of carrying all the support weapons. The CO and the RSM came along to show their support and Commander 104 Brigade met us along the route where he took the opportunity to talk to the soldiers and assist in the carrying of the GPMGs.

There was more to come with the final phase of the exercise where the soldiers could put all their OBUA training to good effect by moving in to and securing Celieni Village. It was here that we enjoyed the Section in Defence Range and crawling through the underground system. The decision was made to contact a little early due to the weather warnings threatening us with being stranded for the weekend.

The Squadron has been busy in the meantime, fulfilling taskings on a regular basis such as providing the TSG for OPTAG training and providing the display for the RLC Troop Commanders Course. Since then the Squadron has had representatives enjoying RLC skiing and training for the Inter-Squadron Boxing Competition. Congratulations to Cpl Rees for obtaining the new qualification in NBCI on the new NBC kit – the first in the Army no less!

The Sustainer Aug 04. Troop level training in the form of ITD and basic skills upgrade, has been ongoing at a steady pace with a number of soldiers achieving their respective upgrading within their trade. The run up to the Easter weekend saw 12 Troop assisting the local community in some minor



refurbishment of the pre-school facility. Minor works combined with a fresh coat of paint received plaudits from the facility patrons and a sound job was completed.

Lt Green currently has his hands full with the coaching and management of the Nijmegen Marches Team. The training hours and hard work they have put in to date paid dividends on the pre-qualification weekend at RAF Cosford, when the Team successfully marched their way to victory in the event, some reward so far for their efforts.

Numerous Section Level attachments have been fulfilled with the soldiers giving a good account of themselves and of the Pioneer CEG in general. Sections were tasked and employed at South Cerney and Brize Norton to assist the permanent movements staff. Although not the most exciting duties, the individuals acquitted themselves with the professionalism expected. Exercise Saton Force saw a number of sections assisting 11 EOD Regiment in their course training. Manpower assisted in specialist tasks and acted as CIVPOP in order to test the Ammunition Technicians under pressure.

The Inter-Squadron Rugby for the Commanding Officer's Trophy was a resounding success for us, led admirably by the mighty Joe Kava and the slighter frame of twinkle toes Laquere. Congratulations in abundance to the whole team and especially the coach SSgt Forster who managed, against all the odds, to take the highly successful 23 Pioneer Regiment Rugby Sevens Team and somehow coax out of it victory over the other Squadrons. Incredible!

We have also had a number of personnel changes. Capt Kev Thorne (who was once a Chef apparently) assumes the role of AO, 2Lt Hundal takes up the mantle of 11 Troop Commander and WO2 (SSM) Jenkins moves to the Squadron Sergeant Major slot. The Squadron bade farewell to Capt Cooper and SSgt McInnes on posting and Sergeant Major Kilbride who leaves the Army on completion of his colour service.

The Sustainer Oct 04. We deployed on Exercise Eagles Strike for two weeks in July. 10 Troop, with augmentation from 11 Troop and 187 Squadron, finally left for Salisbury Plain to meet up with 16 Air Assault Brigade. The taskings were to act as casualty simulation and civilian population, working closely with the Coldstream Guards who were also there to test 16 Brigade. We found ourselves working slightly in the dark as there seemed to be no command and control for the civpop taskings, however, SSgt Berton persisted and finally gained direction from the Brigade G3 Cell.

We soon found the taskings coming in thick and fast, not just in the local area but ranging across the UK from Salisbury to Wyton, Catterick and Leconfield. Our two minibuses covered many miles over the two week period. One of the high points of the exercise were our civpop personnel from Fiji going on their first helicopter flights, of which there were several.

During the last week of the exercise we were tasked to move and operate within the Basingbourn Barracks area from where the BSG was operating. During this stage, Cpl Henry excelled as the chief terrorist/informer and made many faces in the BSG sour every time they saw him as his

presence normally precluded some enemy action. Cpl Henry was also tasked to liaise with and escort the Chief of the local tribes to meet with the OC BSG. This part was played by Sgt Penston and eight of the biggest Fijian bodyguards known to man. The Fijian's played the role well to such a point that the BSG gate guard nearly burst into tears when the body guards began realistically acting out their roles. All members of Composite Troop would like to thank the security personnel of the BSG to let us walk around unchallenged and allow us to photograph their CP with its maps and overlays.

The Sustainer Feb 05. The major focus over recent months has been two major Squadron exercises. The first, and main effort, was exercising troops in all aspects of field firing, up to section attack, including grenade, mortar and GPMG. The second saw the Squadron supporting 168 Pioneer Regiment (V) in their annual camp, field firing and undertaking a number of artisan tasks.

After such a hectic build up and exercises the Squadron could see the fruits of their labours and appreciated the training they had received.

Maj Dave Allen departed fro HQ 160 Brigade in Brecon with Maj Will Steel moving from Adjutant to OC for an interim period. Lt John Green moved on to ATR Basingbourn and Cpl Cheung to the Army Foundation College in Harrogate, we wish them well. Promotions go to LCpls Alcorn and Aspinall promoted to full Cpl, Ptes Baker, Levy and Webster to Lance Corporal. Congratulations to you all!

The Sustainer Jun 05. The Squadron prepared itself for 'sunnier climes' and deployed to Cyprus to support 51 Squadron, 17 Port & Maritime Regiment so they could complete Battle Procedure, a big mention is deserved for the PRT Cpls Steen, Bird and Bennett who worked relentlessly to bring every one up to the same standard of battle skills. The effort and performance of our Maritime friends should be commended and it made the instruction a pleasure for our Training Team.

Radio Sonde seemed like a flash back from the dark ages and to our surprise the issue of radiators were well received, as the first days PT in the dark and freezing cold was something those left at home would find hard to believe. The dry training allowed our Troop to gel and the newly posted soldiers soon found their feet and integrated well.

Pte Granton nearly brought a tear to his Troop Commander's eye as he received a present from the Troop and an 18th birthday cake. As a hard day's training in the FIBUA village drew to a close it was time to hit the local bar and break out the Karaoke. Cpl Harris and Pte Dixon definitely did not have the X factor but the "MC" Pte Atkinson, ran the nights entertainment thinking he was in some sort of Rave Night Club. The selection of Music proved different, especially to the Troop Commander's ear, still the Troop eased springs and the bar owner, by the time we left the island, had built his second house.

The exercise was going somewhat left of arc when the landing craft hit the beach in glorious sunshine with the orders clearing stating that Cyalumes would be marking our approach. Our first harbour area was

only 500 metres up the hill just off the side of the cliff top. There was an air of apprehension, as Lt Jarrett, nicknamed 'Handsome Rob', had to tab to the far end of the training area on day one, meaning that we were surely to follow. With the harbour party left in the dark Sgt Oliver secured the beach for the much needed re-supply of C Sups. Unfortunately they failed to materialise which proved a blow to morale. The glorious Cypriot sunshine which had been looked forward to whilst in Britain proved to be less enjoyable after the three hour move in full CEMO.

Morale was boosted with a great deal of patrol action allowing the guys to practice and hone their skills in field administration. The heat increased dramatically for the final insertion into Paramali Village where Cpl Bennett and his merry men were acting as Civ Pop. Cpl Benny Bennett slipped easily into the image of one of the locals. Finally, a mention is deserved for the Cpl Steen's 'dirty dozen', a team of Maritime Warriors who he led through arduous training and on to the final assault.

To summarise the men had benefited from a beach landing, a heli-move, endless amounts of ammunition, and compo cooked up on Uncle Tom's fire. The troop enjoyed scuba diving and rock climbing, with mountain biking and yes more karaoke. The deployment was a great success achieving the aim and objectives set out by the lead unit, 17 Port & Maritime Regiment. Valuable experience was gained, especially by those that only joined 23 Pioneer Regiment from training this year, everyone worked and played hard making the most of the opportunities available and raising the overall profile of the Pioneer trade to the full.

The Sustainer Aug 05. One third of the Squadron are deployed around the four corners of the globe. The remainder have undertaken MACC tasks at two local schools to refurbish their facilities. These tasks were assessed to be providing good training value to the soldiers in the form of concrete laying and fencing, with the added benefit of providing some excellent PR for the Regiment in the local community.

The Royal Artillery requested help on Salisbury Plain and help dig in a Rapier position. This initially seemed like a fairly menial job but on arrival, it became obvious that they were happy to employ us in the construction of defence positions. Under the watchful eye of LCpl Ring a near 'DS solution' example of a stage 3 Rapier Site was manufactured.

The Sustainer Oct 05. 'Never as Team Captain again' was my mantra as the 23 Pioneer Regiment Nijmegen Team completed the first day of the four day marches. The fun (a weekend enjoying Nijmegen town festivities and a day in Amsterdam) was definitely over and the pain was here. Most of the team ignored PTI (Cpl Bird's advice to keep active for a couple of hours and went straight to bed at 1600 hrs. The next day was emotional to say the least. We changed our team marching tactics from walking in small groups close to each other to marching in a squad. It kept group cohesion after we had lost Ptes Waganivanua and Bibb due to injuries. That evening was the most painful as we massaged feet and taped blisters. The medics from Belfast who lived next 50 us



were vital in teaching the best treatment of blisters. Thanks John and Neil. By the third day we were truly into the Nijmegen spirit singing marching songs and in step. It worked a treat and leading the team in songs likely to raise a few eyebrows. The most memorable moment was when a Swiss Army team joined us for singing “See the lady in Black!” It was definitely a song for the never-ending roads without civilians! By the end of the third day, the end was in sight and the eight that were left stuck together and completed the last day by 1230 hrs. What a great achievement!

The Sustainer Dec 05. Following summer leave, it was decided that we would go away to get the blood circulating back with a live-firing package. Two weeks in Brecon saw everyone progress through all stages from individual shooting right up to troop attacks. We had more ammunition than you could shake a very big stick at, word soon spread around the Figure 11 target community that 518 were in town and it was not safe to pop up. Live was transformed into brass, boots were drenched and skills were honed. It was even possible for 10 Troop to go on task to ‘make good’ (an understatement) a cottage used by snipers in Castlemartin.

The Sustainer Feb 06. The Squadron deployment to Sennybridge on Field Firing at Castlemartin, refurbishing an old cottage for use by courses, namely Infantry sniper and SF. The task seeing an excellent opportunity for the bricklayers and carpenters to show their skills. Eager to set too the team began stripping out floors and partially demolished ceilings ‘Grand Design eat your heart out.’

The Squadron returned and quickly deployed to Yardley Chase to fine tune skills in key point defence, vehicle anti-ambush drills, convoy drills, map reading and patrols. A Brigade assembly area was established at North Luffenham, then attached to 33 Field Hospital for three weeks, providing force protection and setting up the Force Identification and Processing Centre so that the medical staff could understand the Regiment’s War Graves role. The majority of the section constructing the POW camp or being poached to assist the infantry “what would they do without us”? We returned to dismantle the POW camp and home for tea and cakes.

The Sustainer Apr 06. Following the rigours and excitement of Exercise LOYAL LEDGER, the Squadron returned to camp full of news concerning deployment to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK in support of 39 Engineer Regiment. As time has gone on the tempo of life has increased. The remaining time in camp has passed by in a blur of pre deployment preparation and theatre specific courses.

Cpl Scott attended the Specialist Weapons Course, Sgts Oliver and Orrell along with Cpls Aspinall, Bennett and Catchpole attended a ‘Train the Trainer’ Course, allowing them to produce an extremely informative and well presented package to bring the boys up to speed for the time ahead. ASgt Hart, LCpl Ring and Ptes Herbert and Wild all won the busman’s holiday of a lifetime and sailed with MV Anvil Point to Karachi as part of the boat protection party.

The Sustainer Jun 06. The bulk of the

Squadron deployed on Op HERRICK in early February 2006 in support of 39 Engineer Regiment RE, constructing Camp BASTION in the south of the country amongst other construction tasks. Lt Ross Edward’s troop undertook large scale construction tasks, a great opportunity for the lads to get hands on practical experience and exercise their artisan skills in a challenging environment. Lt Ed Rosevink has his troop slightly further back but nevertheless keen to get involved with any tasks going and their talents are being used to the full and much appreciated by those whom they are co-located with. The 3rd troop returned from the relative security of Oman supporting 16 Air Assault Brigade in their preparation exercise, just in time for a spot of leave and the pleasures of the ECI.

The Sustainer Apr 07. The aim of Exercise Urban Duck was to conduct low level training following four months on Guard. Phase 1 involved a troop level FTX, Phase 2 was a five day artisan task and Phase 3 was a three day patrolling and force protection package when applied to the OBUA environment. Phase 1 was a great success though the shock of shaving in sub-zero temperatures on Hankley Common almost proved too much for the Troop Commanders. Manfully they battled through and the Squadron formed up en masse at Imper Court for the artisan phase where one of the tasks was to re-wire the security wire around a court and build a sand/gravel bunker.

The Sustainer Feb 08. As we enter the New Year a small element of the Squadron remains on POTL, mainly our Fijian contingent. The past year has been a challenging one for the Squadron, both in terms of commitments and maintaining some form of control over our soldiers serving simultaneously in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Falkland Islands.

The fact that we appear to be in such good shape owes much to the leadership and management from the junior commanders. The entire Squadron are looking forward to 2008 when we can hopefully catch up on courses, leave and take part in some adventurous training. The forecast of events is rapidly beginning to take shape and we will deploy to Wyke Regis in February for a week of team building exercises.

This will be followed by two weeks in Nesscliffe Training Camp in early May. This preparatory training should ensure we are ready to deploy on field firing later in the year and the various Regimental and Brigade exercises that are on the horizon.

The Sustainer Feb 09. 518 Squadron has much the same operational focus; they are to deploy on Op TELIC 14 under 12 Mechanised Brigade. They are therefore also concentrating on individual PDT with C licences and All-Arms Search Advisor Courses foremost at present.

Star of the Squadron this month was Pte Amoah, a past Commonwealth Games competitor and Olympian, who competed in the Army table tennis team winning the Sunderland Doubles tournament.

The Sustainer Oct 09. 518 Squadron deployed on Op TELIC 13 in March, soon to become Op BROCKDALE, the Pioneers were to assist with the theatre drawdown. Beginning with the collapse of the Bulk Fuel Installation and the Ammunition Storage

Point in the COB, the subsequent tasks were varied; ranging from creating a temporary wash down point, building (and then occupying) a sentry point, fabricating transit crates and stuffing and dunnaging ISOs amongst other tasks. In this time the Pioneers have worked alongside Drivers, Suppliers, Ammo Techs, Engineers, Signallers, REME and JF Log C, showcasing their versatility. The lads are now based at KSF, filling a similar role. As the closure draws ever nearer, so the workload increases. So far the soldiers of 518 Squadron have played a valuable part in the culmination of Op TELIC.

The Sustainer Apr 10. Officers and soldiers of 518 Squadron took a well deserved rest after a busy 2009. However the rest is drawn to a close and the Squadron is preparing for Op HERRICK deployments in 2010. A number of soldiers from the Squadron are due deployment on Op HERRICK 12 in March. The soldiers selected to deploy formed a composite Force Protection Troop under Lt Jodie Slater, SSgt Barthram and Sgt Taylor are the Troop SNCOs. The Force Protection deployment is to be the first in an enduring role for 23 Pioneer Regiment. The Regiment is warned off to provide one Troop per Op HERRICK deployment until further notice in order to provide force protection for the designated CLSR, initially 12 Logistic Support Regiment.

The Sustainer Jun 10. During the last month the Squadron has been frantically training for three separate tasks on Op HERRICK 13. Firstly Command Support Troop, which will be providing force protection on the 13 Air Assault Support Regiment CLPs from September. The Troop commanded by Lt Butcher has been busy on MST. Sgt Bennett has completed the Quad Ops Course and the Troop has also been incredibly busy gaining the relevant driving qualifications for this demanding forthcoming tour.

The Sustainer Winter 10. 518 Squadron have been preparing for two Troop level deployments to Op HERRICK 13. HST Troop commanded by Lt Slater has been trained in the specialist IED search role.

Their PDT culminated with a two week long CFX on Salisbury Plain with all members being successfully licensed to deploy to theatre. The second troop have deployed in the Command Support Troop role under Lt Butcher. In July the Squadron honed infantry skills conducting a river crossing of the Thames.

The Sustainer Summer 11. This spring 518 Squadron passed on the task of providing Pioneer capabilities in Afghanistan to 522 Squadron. 9 Troop have handed over responsibility for protecting Combat Logistic Patrols in Helmand to Lt Martin Murphy and his men. Op HERRICK 13 has been a big change in the concept of FP with less emphasis on providing integral protection and greater importance placed on providing a manoeuvre support group, over watch and clearing routes, whilst maintaining the guiding principle of facilitating the maintenance of momentum of the CLP.

518 Squadron’s advanced search teams also handed over to 522 Squadron’s teams shortly. The 518 search teams have operated across Helmand. Each team has operated with several different BGs and taken its turn as the High Readiness Team based at BASTION. ■



# Sikh Pioneer Association

The above Association recently contacted the RPC Association and requested permission to publish an article which appeared in our April 2015 Newsletter.

**Report: Sikh Pioneer Association  
Pictures: RPCA Archive**

**T**HE above Association recently contacted the RPC Association and requested permission to publish an article which appeared in our April 2015 Association Newsletter regarding the Kisangule Expedition in Central Africa in 1891.

Permission was, of course, granted and the following email was received from their Secretary:

"Hello Norman,

I am attaching a copy of our latest newsletter along with, below, a summary of the two Regiments.

I hope you find the newsletter interesting and look forward to catching up again soon.

The Pioneers of the old Indian Army were a vital part of all Frontier expeditions. I have been told by families of old British officers that service with the Pioneers was highly sought after by cadets at Sandhurst. As you may know only the top 20-25% of any Sandhurst class was eligible for the Indian Army. And alongside the Gurkhas and Frontier Force units, places with the Pioneers were highly prized, since no Frontier expedition could leave without a Pioneer contingent, so a posting to the Pioneers guaranteed action. The Indian Pioneers were trained infantry, but also took on the building tasks essential on the Frontier, such as road and bridge building, and construction of piquets and sangars. There were no metalled roads into the North West Frontier until the 1930s.

The first two regiments of Sikh Pioneers (which became eventually the 23rd and 32nd) were raised in 1857 during the Indian Mutiny. Initially they were referred to as Bengal Engineers and were raised from parties of Sikh labourers in Punjab building canals. Men of the 32nd Pioneers were involved in the blowing of the Kashmir Gate in Delhi on 14th September 1857. The 3rd regiment of Sikh Pioneers (the 34th) was raised in 1887.

The three regiments all recruited primarily from the Mazhabi Sikh community in the Punjab, men who trace their ancestry back

as untouchables and in Sikh villages tend to take on the roles of builders and labourers.

In the 1st World War, the 34th came to France as the divisional pioneer battalion of the 3rd Lahore Division of the Indian Corps. They were almost wiped out at Festubert on 23rd November 1914, when their positions were attacked by Germans who had sapped to within 5 yards under cover of darkness. Unable to counter German grenades, the Sikhs were bombed out of their trenches and only fierce counter-attacks regained the positions. This is where Darwan Singh Negi of the Garhwal Rifles won a VC.

After the Western Front the 34th went to Mesopotamia and then Palestine. The 23rd and 32nd, in addition to providing reinforcements for the 34th, also served in the Middle East. The 23rd had a wonderful centrepiece being a silver model of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which I have seen in the Sikh LI Officers' Mess.

In the 1922 Indian Army reorganisation, the three battalions were grouped together as the 3rd Sikh Pioneers. But with cutbacks and as more of their role was given to the Sappers, all the Indian Pioneer regiments were disbanded in 1933.

In 1941, with wartime expansion of the Indian Army, a new regiment, the Sikh Light Infantry was raised. Some of its officers and NCOs came from the old Sikh Pioneers. It recruited from the same Mazhabi Sikh community and its 1st Battalion went on to serve with distinction in Burma as part of the 17th Indian Division. The Sikh LI were granted the right to carry the Sikh Pioneer battle honours, which the Regiment prides itself on to this day. At independence in 1947 there were 3 battalions. This summer the Sikh LI is about to raise its 18th, plus two territorial battalions. Quite incredible. And it has provided two Indian Army Chiefs, General Ved Malik and General Bikram Singh.

All the best  
Iain Smith

The following is an extract from their Newsletter

"Later in this newsletter, Members will be able to read an interesting article on the Kisangule Expedition in Central Africa in

1891 in which men of the 23rd and 32nd Sikh Pioneers took part. The article is reproduced with the kind permission of Norman Brown of the Royal Pioneers Corps Association and appeared in that Association's April 2015 newsletter, "The Pioneer".

I came across the article during a routine search on the Internet. However, having made contact with Norman Brown, he very kindly mentioned that in their archives they had a collection of photographs of the IV, later 64th Madras Pioneers, some covering their role in the construction of the final section of the Nilgiri Railway from Coonoor to Ootacamund (now Udthagamandalam). It is a fascinating collection of images demonstrating the wide range of skills of an Indian Army Pioneer Regiment. The Regiment had been in garrison in Bangalore until 1904, from where it marched up to Ooty.

It remained in Ooty from January 1905 to October 1907, during which the Regiment lost 14 men to disease and accidents during construction. In all the men of the Regiment built over 3 miles of the line, the heaviest work being on an 80 feet deep cutting at Yellanhalli and the Regiment was also involved in the construction of bridges and roads.

Even when the main body of the Regiment left for Belgaum in October 1907, a detachment remained behind until April 1908 completing works on banks, cuttings and retaining walls.

The railway opened later in 1908 and some Members may even have travelled on it up to Ooty. It is indeed a marvel of engineering, climbing as it does up an altitude of over 7,000 feet. And those with a connection to the Indian Army Pioneers should be rightly proud of the achievements of the 64th.

For anyone who has not had a chance to visit Ooty, the BBC made a series a few years ago on the Indian Hill Railways, with one episode about the Nilgiri Railway. So if you would like to have an appreciation of the landscape in which the railway was constructed and how difficult the construction must have been, look out for the repeats on BBC4." ■



# The RLC Museum

If you have any objects or archive relating to your time in the RPC that you are thinking of disposing of, please do consider donating it to the Museum.

**Report: Clive Elderton**  
**Picture: Clive Elderton**

**T**HE main focus of my work has been to develop the plans for the new RLC Museum, which will be opening in the newly developed Worthy Down site near Winchester in 2019-2020.

This site will hold the new tri-Service Defence College of Logistics, Policing and Administration, the RHQ AGC and the RHQ The RLC.

The Museum will be located at the front gate to the site, and is a very exciting development.

We have confirmed the exterior and basic interior structure plans with the architects, and the museum will be over twice the size of the current RLC Museum.

It will have space for all our collections, including our excellent collection of military vehicles and coaches, plus the RCT Medal Collection, all on permanent public display for the first time.

There will also be café facilities and a conference room for lectures and presentations.

The displays themselves will be newly created and will cover the entire history of the RLC.

We will go from its most-recent campaigns and modern structure back to

our beginnings with the Royal Waggon Train. The team at the Museum, supported by our Board of Trustees, will produce plans for how these displays will look, by identifying what individual and groups of items should be included in the displays.

We have been developing the collection of objects and archival material and are always looking to develop the collections, to better tell the rich and varied history of The RLC and its Forming Corps. Recently, we have had major acquisitions relating to the Railway Sqn, plus other Forming Corps artefacts.

If you have any objects or archive relating to your time in the RPC that you are thinking of disposing of, please do consider donating it to the Museum.

We're particularly interested in building up our collection of objects and archive in the post-World War 2 period, especially the 1970s-1990s. So if you have something you would consider donating please give the museum a call on 01252 833371 and ask for the Curatorial team.

## **THE RLC MUSEUM - YOUR NEW MUSEUM NEEDS YOU!**

Readers will be aware that by the end of 2019 we will have an exciting new, purpose built Corps Museum at Worthy Down.

The Museum will be far larger than our existing Museum building and outside the

wire. Work is underway to ensure that we fully and accurately capture our Corps and Forming Corps history so that we can properly develop the new displays around the people who have served as Army logisticians over the past two centuries.

We know there are gaps in our collections, in our archives and in our understanding of the many and varied functions and exploits of the Corps - we don't know what we don't know!

Recently several former members of the Corps and Forming Corps have provided short written accounts or snapshots of their own experiences on operations, training and of Corps life in general.

These excellent narratives add considerably to the rich tapestry of our heritage and are especially helpful in covering some of the lesser known logistic functions, specialisms and activities.

If you can help with your own snapshots of our Corps based on your own experiences, anonymous if you wish, it will considerably help us to ensure that our heritage is properly preserved for future generations.

Please do make contact with our Archivist, Gareth Mears, on [archivist@rlcmuseum.com](mailto:archivist@rlcmuseum.com) or Mark Tindle the Manager on [marktindle@rlcmuseum.com](mailto:marktindle@rlcmuseum.com) or call on 01252 833371 in the first instance.

Thank you ■



# Tossing explosives around and going out with a bang

| A tragic story, involving Pioneers that were assembling the weaponry to be used on D-Day.

**Report: Northern Echo**  
**Picture: RPCA Archive**

It was four minutes to four on February 4, 1944. "I saw a flame, shaped like a big bat's wing, come from the loading area – it must have been 50 or 60 yards across," recalled the chief goods clerk Len Cockerill. "Then there was a terrific explosion, which burst my ear drum. Next thing I knew, I was sailing through the air."

John Weller, the ammunition truck driver, still sounded incredulous about what he had witnessed three weeks later. "There was a vivid red flash and a terrific bang. My lorry disappeared," he told an inquest, "and the railway truck, in which the four men were, also disappeared. "When I came round, all I could see was some pathfinder incendiaries coming down like great white lights. As clearly as anything, I remember saying to myself: 'By hell, Jerry's copped us a real packet today'."

Devastation was widespread: seven houses, a hotel, a cafe and the goods yard offices were destroyed. And the four men, all soldiers, did quite literally disappear: their bodies were never recovered.

The terrible events began at about 3.50pm when Mr Weller pulled his laden lorry into the station goods yard. It was a busy day. A passenger train had just left, and another was due any minute to collect the 25 people – largely schoolchildren making their way home or servicemen heading off on leave – on the platform. A packed double-decker bus was picking up its last passengers – Royal Air Force and Army men – from the Railway Hotel to take them on a big night out in Darlington.

And nine soldiers were loading explosives onto railway trucks. They'd been at it for days – they didn't know it then, but they were assembling the weaponry that would be used in the D Day landings in Normandy four months later. In fact, there was some concern locally about the amount of explosives that was building up in the goods yard. The night before, at the bar of the Railway Hotel, the landlady, Mabel Cockerill, had said: "I'm worried about having all this ammunition so near." Stationmaster Walter Gibson replied: "If that lot goes up, none of us will have any worries." Within 24 hours, he wouldn't, poor fellow.

Lorry driver Weller arrived at the goods

yard with ammunition from the Hornby Park dump, near Bedale. As he parked up and walked away, Mr Cockerill noticed from a window in the Railway Hotel that four soldiers began unloading it. "I remember thinking that a month ago, they were handling those things so gently, two men to a box," he told The Northern Echo in 1967. "Now they're throwing them."

Bang!

And the big bat's wing flame fanned out followed by a noise so loud it was heard ten miles away.

Six six-ton trucks of antitank grenades had exploded, followed by tons of incendiary bombs which shot off like fireworks, sparking lots of smaller, satellite fires.

Amazingly, the petroleum depot over the

knew that his wife and daughter were inside, but duty demanded his remaining by the signal levers. He got a colleague to open the gates to let through a train...and when it was clear he allowed himself to be taken to hospital."

Said the Echo: "One of the local heroes is a taxi driver who ran along the line waving a flag to stop an approaching train. The roof of his car was torn off and all the glass shattered."

But 12 people died. Six were civilians: William Tindall, 40, contractor's labourer; Lancelot Rymer, 41, motor driver; Richard Stokes, motor driver; Mrs Mary Wallace Richmond, 43, railway clerk; Miss Nancy Georgina Richardson, 19, railway clerk; Walter Gibson, 46, stationmaster.

Six were servicemen: Leading Aircraftman

Euan Jenkins, 31, of Barry, South Wales; Lieutenant Lawrence George King, 29, radio/telephone operator of St Albans; Private David Reed Hopkins, 23; Private Norman Day, 18; Private William Thomas, 18; Private George Stares, 34, of the Pioneer Corps.

The last four were those who just disappeared before Mr Weller's eyes.

"The coroner... called Police Inspector Atkinson," said the Echo, "who testified to finding a piece of spine on the grass verge opposite the Railway Hotel and to finding pieces of skin, bone and clothing

stretching for a distance of 500 yards from the scene of the explosion.

He took the remains to a County pathologist. He later submitted a piece of Army shirt, which he found on the south side of the explosion, to ultra-violet rays which revealed the name "Day" on the collar. "Dr William Goldie, county pathologist, expressed the opinion that the remains came from at least three persons. One portion of skull had black wavy hair, and the other two had brown hair."

The four soldiers are buried in a tiny grave in Hornby churchyard, about five miles away.

So what caused the explosion? An official court of inquiry was held immediately, but its classified conclusions were not released to the inquest.

The coroner was told that the inquiry was satisfied that there was no negligence and that all precautions had been taken. The jury returned verdicts of "accidental death"



road wasn't hit. Even more amazingly, the 20,000lb blockbuster bomb in the goods yard did not go bang.

Instead, the 14-ton railway truck in which it sat was blown into the air and landed – no worries – on top of stationmaster Walter Gibson. Despite an Army doctor's six hour battle, there was no saving him.

Extraordinary episodes of bravery broke out.

"Though her husband was dying and her home was wrecked, Mrs W Gibson, the stationmaster's wife, warned people in the vicinity to leave their homes," said The Northern Echo's sister paper, the Darlington and Stockton Times. "Mrs Mabel Cockerill defied her own injuries to drag an elderly guest from the ruins of her home."

"The signalman, 47-year-old Fred Robinson, was one of the heroes. Although severely injured, he stood by his post in the wrecked box by the level crossing. He saw his cottage across the road collapse and



on all 12, and the cause was officially regarded as an unsolved mystery.

Sabotage, though, was ruled out – a group of Italian prisoners of war were said to be working nearby.

Reports from the Echo in the Sixties suggest that a grenade with its detonator primed had somehow got in the load. The rough handling would have set it off. Another theory was that contractors working on Catterick airfield had a bitumen furnace near the ammunition trucks and it was regularly seen tossing red hot coals out of its chimney.

Catterick Bridge Station was one of those confusing stations that was in a settlement of another name – a bewilderment that the Richmond branch line specialised in. The branch line was nine miles and 62 chains long and opened on September 10, 1846. It ran off the East Coast Main Line about five miles south of Darlington at Dalton Junction, near the village of Dalton-on-Tees. In 1901, the junction was renamed Eryholme even though that small village is further away from it than Dalton.

Heading west, the first station was Moulton, which was close to the village of North Cowton. The second station was Scorton, which was closer to Moulton than Moulton station. And the third station was Catterick Bridge which was where the branch line crossed the Great North Road. It was originally in a settlement called

Citadilla, which is now part of Brompton-on-Swale. The end of the line was Richmond, in a splendid station, which is now a superb arts and dining centre.

There were plans to bridge the Swale at Richmond and carry the line on up the dale to Reeth, but they never came to fruition. The branch line closed to passengers on March 3, 1969.

Beside Catterick Bridge Station was the junction where the Catterick Military Railway started its journey off the Richmond branch line. As Echo Memories told recently, the military railway was so hurriedly constructed in 1915 to serve the new Army camp that it shared the bridge over the Swale with road traffic.

There were four stations on the military railway: Brompton Road, Camp Centre, California and Scotton.

In the last three years of the First World War, 750,000 troops passed through the camp, nearly all of them using the railway. In 1922, a metal bridge over the Swale was built for the military railway. It is now a brontosaurus-like skeleton on the edge of Catterick racecourse car park.

About 250 yards south of Catterick Bridge Station was the Railway Hotel (between the station and the hotel was the goods yard where the explosion happened). The hotel was on the crossroads where the B6271 Scorton to Richmond road met the Great North Road.

The explosion ruined the Railway Hotel, and that night soldiers are supposed to have salvaged what beer they could from its open cellars. The ruins were demolished a couple of years later, and its site beside the Great North Road has had light industrial uses since. Because the hotel was so badly blown to bits, no one bothered to annul its liquor licence which remained valid until February 1984.

Old hands in the district still know the hotel's crossroads as Haggie's Corner after Robert Haggie, who was landlord there from 1916 to 1932.

(Ed note: the report contains one error – only three of the soldiers were Pioneer Corps, the fourth was RAOC. They were:

11651281 Pte David Reed Hopkins (Aged 24) RAOC

14669189 Pte Norman Day (Aged 18) PC – enlisted into the General Service Corps on 4 Nov 43 (for basic training) and transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 16 Feb 43

14669506 Pte William Thomas (Aged 19) PC – enlisted into the General Service Corps on 4 Nov 43 (for basic training) and transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 16 Dec 43

1691868 Pte George Stares (Aged 43) PC – enlisted into the Royal Artillery (Search-Lights) on 14 Nov 40 and transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 10 Sep 43

Their graves are numbered 2,3,4 and 5 at Hornby (St Mary) Churchyard. ■

# Finally handing in his boots

| Lt Col Graham McLane MBE RLC is retiring after 40 years of loyal and dedicated service

Report: Mrs L McLane  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**G**RAHAM started his career in the Royal Pioneer Corps in July 1976 at the age of 21. He had had a few failed jobs behind him and he thought he would try the Army and see where it might take him.

He has never looked back! At the end of basic training he was already showing his potential, being awarded 'Best Recruit at PT'. A certificate that still hangs proudly in his toilet!

During his career as a non-commissioned officer he served in Bicester, Cyprus, CAD Kineton, Bassingbourn, Germany and RAF Scampton and in-between had six month tours in Northern Ireland, Belize and the Falkland Islands. In 1992 he reached WO1, a rank he had strived for since leaving Wootton Barracks. In 1994 he took a Late Entry Commission into the Royal Logistic Corps and his first posting was at Bicester as Admin Officer. During this time he did a 4 month tour in Bosnia. After leaving Bicester he was posted to Rheindahlen in Germany where he had a very successful (and personally very rewarding) tour as ARRC Families Officer. All his hard work was rewarded in his being awarded the MBE by Her Majesty the Queen in June 2000. He then moved on to 16 Tank

Transporter Squadron, Fallingbowl as Quartermaster. In 2002 he returned to Bicester where he took up the post of Quartermaster Technical. Following this Graham served a further tour as Quartermaster Main. During his time at Bicester he took part in 2 operational tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2007 he moved to Upavon to be the Commanding Officer where he played a major part in Project Hyperion moving people from Wilton and Upavon to Army Headquarters in Andover.

In 2009 he retired (and stayed retired for all of two weeks!) This time he is committed to being, as far as the Army is concerned, permanently retired. Almost immediately, after this 2 week retirement, Graham took up a Full Time Reserve Service contract as the Quartermaster, Army Headquarters. During the seven years at Army HQ Graham oversaw the building and commissioning of 3 new Officer Accommodation blocks, as well as a seemingly never ending process of moving Directorates between buildings and sometimes even locations. Project Hyperion planned Army HQ to accommodate a maximum of around 1750 people; on Graham's last day there will be just over 3,000 personnel (not to mention anywhere between 200 and 400 visitors daily) on site. In this post Graham has demonstrated his organising and logistic capability beyond all

doubt.

Graham will leave Army Headquarters in April and he is looking forward to a quieter life! He is planning on having more time with his wife Lianne and daughters Claire and Lucy as well as spending time in his garden. As a keen supporter of Army Rugby he will doubtlessly be hoping to add his voice to many others as he shouts the Army on to victory after victory. ■





| We dig through the archives of the many thousands of Pioneer photographs, picking out the



Report: Paul Brown  
Pictures: RPCA Archive

**F**OR THIS issue I have chosen an early photograph of The Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and the actual front page of the Daily Mirror from 26th October 1939, entitled "Men 35-50 get chance to join up" where recruiting begins for a new Corps of men - The Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps."

The Beach photograph was taken on 16th April 1940 and shows the AMPC practising their drill on a beach.

The formation of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was authorized on 17th October 1939 by Army Order 200 of 1939. An Army Council Instruction laid down that the Corps should include the following Headquarters:-

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Centre H.Q.

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Group H.Q.

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Company H.Q.

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Centre Headquarters were to be formed at certain stations. Their functions were to receive, clothe and equip recruits and personnel posted or transferred from other arms, formation and training of companies and sections and their despatch to meet

requirements, the reception of returning personnel from Units, the reception of officers gazetted to the Corps and their posting to companies etc.

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Group Headquarters were to be responsible for the administration of the companies allotted to them. At home a Group Headquarters was to be formed only when three or more companies were required to be grouped to carry out a special role.

Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Company Headquarters was designed to administer a variable number of sections which would normally not exceed 12.

The Company was to be the normal unit allotted to meet labour requirements at home and overseas. ■



# Digging through the archives...





DAILY MIRROR, Thursday, Oct. 26, 1939.

# Daily Mirror

No. 11,197 \* \* \* \* \* ONE PENNY  
Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

## 'RAIN OF BOMBS'—GOERING

AS Hitler called his generals into conference in Berlin yesterday, the newspaper of Goering, chief of the Nazi Air Office, declared that the moment had come when bombs must rain down on the British Isles.

Plans for greater air and sea action against Britain are believed to have been discussed by Hitler and his war chiefs yesterday.

The conference, which followed Von Ribbentrop's "fight to a finish" speech at Danzig, was attended by General Keitel, Chief of Staff of the Nazi High Command, and General von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

The newspaper which proclaimed Germany's next step in the war was the *Essener National Zeitung*. It declared:—

"The moment has come when the war desired by England must rain down upon the British Isles themselves."

### R.A.F. Planes Over Berlin

The R.A.F.'s answer to Nazi threats came yesterday in an Air Ministry announcement that during the previous twenty-four hours R.A.F. reconnaissance planes had flown at night over Berlin, Magdeburg and Hamburg.

And it is understood that once again every British machine returned safely.

The German High Command's communique on the Western Front yesterday claimed that the last French soldier had been driven from Reich territory.

### Bullets at Loudspeaker

The French official radio commentator told of a violent struggle on German soil south-east of the Warndt Forest. He said the enemy was repulsed.

The French war communique said: "On the whole the night has been quiet. There has been patrol and artillery activity to the west of the Saar." The announcer went on to say: "The enemy is continuing his clumsy propaganda on the front and using loud-speakers on the right bank of the Rhine."

"However, a German car upon which one of these loud-speakers was fixed was sighted by our machine-guns, who immediately opened fire on it."

"We do not know what happened, but the blare of the loud-speaker was soon cut short."

(British United Press, Associated Press.)

## NAZIS READY TO USE POISON GAS

Mr. Arthur Henderson asked the Prime Minister in the House of Commons yesterday whether in view of the repeated German allegation that gas was supplied to Poland by Britain, in breach of the Anti-Gas Geneva Convention of 1925, he would make a statement on the matter.

"The Secretary for War has already given a most explicit denial of this impudent and transparent falsehood," said Mr. Chamberlain.

"Nevertheless, I am grateful for this opportunity of making it clear once more that poison gas has never been supplied by this country to Poland in any form." (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Henderson: Is it the view of the Government that this allegation is studied propaganda undertaken to justify the use of poison gas by Germany?

Mr. Chamberlain: We have had similar instances in the past.

## MEN

This Will Be Their Badge



## MORE QUIT "MINNIE"

LORD CAMROSE announced in the House of Lords last night that there would be a reduction of more than 30 per cent. in the number of "responsible officials" at the Ministry.

"That," he said, "would mean a very large saving in money."

He himself would no longer occupy an official position as chief assistant to Lord Macmillan, Minister of Information. The machinery had been put in running order now, and he had no doubt that it would function properly.

The Earl of Midleton had called attention to the official figures of the headquarters staff of the Ministry showing that after 410 transfers to other departments a controlling staff numbering sixty-one remained.

Of these fifty-six had salaries of £800 a year and upwards, while the salaries of five remained unfixed—with 200 subordinates, apart from the clerical staff and messengers.

He moved that a drastic reduction of the staff and headquarters expenditure should be carried out.

### £1,650 for "Pensioner"

He pointed out that at the beginning of the last war there were two directors with one assistant and fifty pensioners. At the end of the war the staff had risen to 526 at a cost of £77,000 a year.

In 1918 the establishment was scattered all over Europe and a good deal of Asia. No salary exceeded £800 a year.

The present Ministry's staff included representatives of missionary societies, headmasters, the technical member of the Tea Marketing Board, artists, professors of music and a dramatic agent.

Lord Midleton asked if it was a fact that a Civil Servant who retired with a pension at sixty years of age had been recalled at a salary of £1,650 to do work which any journalist of experience would do for £500 a year.

Viscount Fitzalan, supporting the motion, said the setting up of the Ministry disclosed an amazing lack of foresight.

Lord Macmillan, replying to the debate, said that as a result of the rearrangement of the staff the Ministry had been able to dispense at headquarters with sixty-seven officials with corresponding reductions in the auxiliary staff.

## REPORT ON ROYAL OAK NEXT WEEK

"Inquiry into the cause of the loss of H.M.S. Royal Oak is now taking place as speedily as possible. I hope to be able next week to make a further statement as the result of the inquiry," Mr. Churchill told the House of Commons yesterday.

"But I shall have to be very careful," he added, "so as not to disclose information which might be of advantage to other parties."

Sir Archibald Southby: Will the First Lord bear in mind the grave apprehension which exists in the public mind regarding this disaster?

Mr. Churchill: I certainly will bear that in mind.

Questioned regarding the German U-boat commander's statement that he waited two days before going into Scapa Flow and watched other vessels going in, Mr. Churchill replied that a number of the statements made by the commander were in part repetitions of information which he (Mr. Churchill) had given to the House and in part had no relation to the facts.

# 35-50 GET CHANCE TO JOIN UP

PIONEERS are expected to cause the biggest rush to join up since the war began when recruiting begins today for a new corps of men between the ages of thirty-five and fifty for service at home and abroad.

The Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, as the new Force will be known, will give 1914-18 ex-Servicemen who have been trying to join up again the chance to do so. All men between the ages thirty-five-fifty, irrespective of whether they served in the last war or not, will be eligible.

Pioneers will do work of great importance. On their efficiency will depend the power and morale of the Allied Forces at the front.

They will have pay, dress and rank of a private in the infantry.

There will be plenty of opportunity for promotion. Ex-Servicemen will thus have a great chance to rise rapidly from the ranks.

An official at the War Office told the *Daily Mirror* last night:—

"Pioneers will be responsible for the maintenance of all kinds of supplies to our armies at home and abroad.

### Keeping Troops Supplied

"The importance of the work they will do cannot be over-emphasised."

It will be their job to handle vast amounts of stores at docks, bases and depots, and to ensure the smooth transportation of the stores to the troops.

New roads and light railways will have to be constructed, and the old lines of communication will have to be maintained.

These duties will be handled by the Military Pioneers.

"The men who join up will do so on the same basis as a private in the British infantry," the official added.

"Pay and conditions will be the same, and they will wear a similar type of uniform."

### Corps Strength a Secret

"There will be plenty of opportunity for promotion, and men with trade as well as Army experience will be invaluable to us."

The work they do will be vital, and tomorrow we expect a big rush of recruits.

"It is impossible to divulge what the strength of the corps will be, but we will do our utmost to see that no man is turned away."

"The efficiency and morale of our Armies at the front depend on the efficient working of the organisation responsible for its maintenance."

"It is to ensure that such an organisation shall exist that this new Corps is being formed."

Men in reserved occupations should not apply for enlistment in the Corps, but if they are in doubt, they should seek advice at the nearest Labour Exchange.

## TURKISH TREATY RATIFICATION SOON

The Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons yesterday that it was intended to ratify the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty as soon as possible, and to make arrangements for the instrument of ratification to reach Ankara next week.

In reply to Mr. Attlee, the Prime Minister said it was usual for treaties to be laid before the House for twenty-one days before ratification, but, he added, "in view of the exceptional circumstances of the present case, it is desired that the Anglo-Turkish Treaty should be ratified as soon as possible."

"We therefore propose to submit the treaty for his Majesty's signature at once and exchange the instruments of ratification at Ankara next week."

## 'Please Mr. Driver—!'

Lady Cushendun appealed yesterday to motorists, now that petrol is rationed, to give lifts to pedestrians.

"In the past three weeks I have signalled motorists flying past me with empty seats, but not one of them, whether driven by men or women, has ever stopped to offer the much-coveted lift," she told the *Daily Mirror*.

"We are, of course, familiar with the necessary admonition to the young not to accept or offer hospitality of this temporary nature. We are even prepared to believe that older people have to be on their guard against being rumped."

"But surely in time of stress there is something between these extremes which should allow a twentieth century Samaritan to function."

## BRITAIN DENIES SNUB TO SOVIET

Britain yesterday denied that she had rejected Russian proposals for the defence of Poland.

Her denial was given in the House of Commons yesterday by Mr. Butler, Foreign Under-Secretary.

Mr. Attlee, leader of the Socialist Opposition, and Mr. Mander (Liberal) pressed the Government to reconsider its refusal to publish the documents on the British-Soviet negotiations.

The Government, stated Mr. Butler, would not get in touch—"in view of important considerations"—with the various countries concerned to ask their permission to reveal the documents.

### "Government Never Hides"

Mr. Mander: Has the British Government any reason to hide itself? Does it object to the publication, and, if not, why not make the approach to these other States?

Mr. Butler: The British Government never hides itself.

Mr. Gallacher (Com. West Fife): Is it not true that they refused the proposals for the defence of Poland?

Mr. Butler: I cannot accept the statement.

Mr. Gallacher: It is true.

Later, Mr. Butler told Mr. Mander that the Government was examining the possibility of following up the recent exchange of Russian timber against British rubber and tin by a new arrangement suitable to war conditions.

British United Press says that forty-five Soviet economic experts, representing the oil, grain, machine and shipbuilding industries, have left Moscow for Berlin.



# VE Day 1945

Ex WO2 Peter Wayne  
(13116554) remembers VE  
Day 70 years ago (he served  
from 14 Feb 41 to 17 Oct 46)

**Report: Peter Wayne**  
**Picture: Peter Wayne**

**I**N April 1945 Brussels was a very pleasant place to be, the town had been liberated in September 1944 and what damage it had suffered was no longer visible.

Restaurants and shops were well stocked. I was now attached to the Interpreter's Pool which had necessitated me signing the Official Secrets Act and changing my Pioneer Corps Cap Badge to that of the General Service Corps.

I was promoted Sergeant and given a Norton 350cc motorbike and taken around Brussels for half an hour which deemed sufficient evidence to be issued with a Military Driving Licence. I was given a map showing me the route to Minden a small town in Westphalia about 150 miles from Brussels.

Not being convinced either of my driving nor my map-reading skills, I tested my newly acquired rank and stopped an army lorry with ten men in the back.

The Cpl Driver was going to an adjoining town and was happy to make the small detour via Minden. My motorbike was duly loaded on the lorry and I took my place next to the driver.

No 507 Military Government Detachment consisted of a CO (Colonel Usher Black Watch), a Medical Officer, a Security Officer, a Transport Officer, A Legal Officer, a Finance Officer and about 20 men with varying skills.

I was at the beck and call of any officer who required my language skills, and the administrative area under our control was the approximate size of Wales including several towns with a population of 50,000 plus.

None of the officer spoke any German and I found the constant quibbling among the officers who needed my service most unpleasant. Within a week, our CO (who despite our difference in rank became almost a friend) requisitioned 2 additional interpreters, who made my life more bearable.

I was in charge of War Crimes, which took me to several towns in our area where a legal officer (mostly a solicitor or a QC) were dispensing justice, with powers to pass the Death Sentence. It is now largely forgotten that the Nuremberg trials only dealt with a few of the big fishes, there were thousands more who were the evil executioners of their masters commands.

By now (end of April 1945) the German Army was disintegrating but there was still a state of war. After an exhausting day at court, I had a brief nap in the afternoon, when I was awakened by the noisy sound of some tracked vehicles on the cobbled street outside my quarters.

I rushed out and saw 4 Tiger tanks in pristine condition which had come to a halt outside our HQ. The Tank Commander, a 6

foot Major jumped out of the Turret and waited. There was not an officer to be found, as acting Warrant Officer P Wayne, approached this giant in his ankle length grey leather coat with some trepidation. He saluted me smartly and in very broken English said, "Deutschland kaput, war finish."

I answered in my best German which left him gob-smacked. "The war is not yet finished Germany has not yet surrendered." His reply, "But I surrender." He opened his coat and handed me his ceremonial dagger, and a Walther pistol in a beautiful leather holster. (The dagger I still have, but the pistol had be handed in on demobilisation).

I informed him that we could not possibly accommodate him, as the Officers quarters in the Hotel Kaiserhof were fully occupied and we had no facilities for taking or guarding prisoners.

As he had plenty of petrol, I suggested (rather wickedly) that he should slowly drive 20 kilometres to a place called Bad Oeynhausen (The HQ of 21st Army Group) and ask for General Montgomery who would give him the treatment his rank deserved. He had his gun barrels already covered, but I suggested that he should attach a white flag to his radio mast. He seemed to be rather a decent chap, I never found out what happened to him.

The first days of May were unforgettable. Our teleprinter was running hot with news items and there was a constant stream of prisoners passing through.

They were a strange assortment of very young German soldiers and some Groups of Mongolian soldiers in German uniform. I found out that they were unarmed volunteers doing menial tasks for the regular Wehrmacht.

It was at this point that we realised the tremendous task ahead as there was no German Administration, no Mayor no Council. Schools were closed, hospitals only partially functioning.

Most of the loyal Nazi members had fled, fearing that we would deal with them in the same way as our Russian Allies. Even some farms were abandoned with livestock unfed and cows un milked – some had died as a result.

The 8th May 1945, was a sunny warm day. The wild cherry trees lining the country roads around Minden were in full bloom. Posters, announcing the surrender of all German Forces and instructing the population to hand in all weapons in their possession and also warning that any attacks on military personnel would be punishable by death were displayed throughout the area.

I was in my jeep, with my Corporal driver, when a bullet whizzed past me, missing me by about a foot. We both jumped into a ditch next to the road and fired at the cherry tree nearest to us. After a while an army rifle with half the barrel sawn off was thrown down from the tree, followed by a

young girl with her arms raised. She admitted that her youth leader (who had fled) appointed her a werewolf and gave her the gun with instructions to shoot at any foreign soldiers in sight.

I informed her that she would be shot, but that my Colonel would have to sign the authorisation papers.

Back at HQ, Col Usher at a loss of what to do with this girl (she was 17 and had been living rough for about 2 weeks) decided that we should hand her over to the Sergeant Major who should administer some corporal punishment – 10 lashes with a twig on her bottom).

As there was no social service to pass her onto, it was really zero hour, I took her to the local church and left her with the priest.

I often wonder what might have happened on that VE Day morning 70 years ago if that bullet had not failed to hit its target! I would have missed a great party in the evening which also happened to be my 25th birthday. ■



■ Peter Wolfe in WW2 with his wife who became a Lieutenant in the ATS (first alien to that rank)



■ Sgt Peter Wolfe in Pioneer Uniform





# Association Shop



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- ▲ **Blazer  
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lovely  
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- ▲ **Tie Pin**  
lovely  
**£2.00**



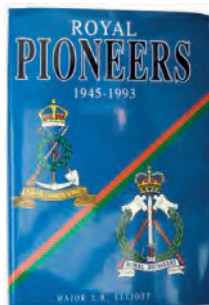
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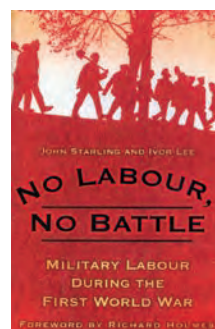
- ▲ **"Royal Pioneers  
1945-1993"**  
by Major Bill Elliott

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



- ▲ **"A War History of  
the Royal Pioneer  
Corps 1939-45"**  
by Major E H Rhodes  
Wood

This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of  
**£11**



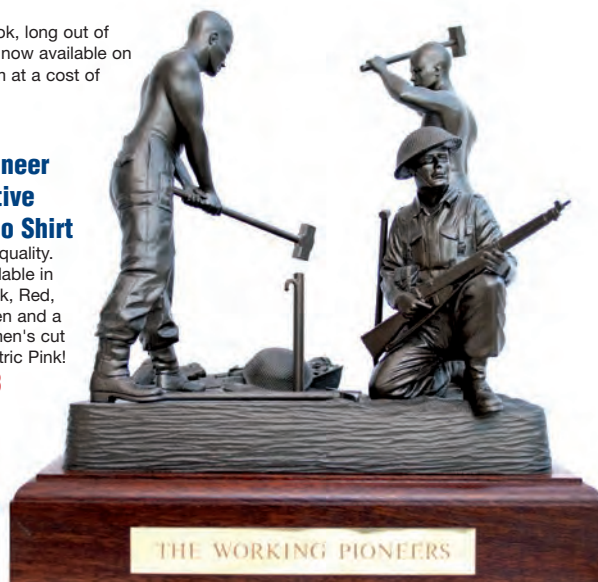
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# Press Cuttings for 1947-1950

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the years 1947-1950. 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 years 1947-1950.

## **The Times 7 Feb 47 THE CALL TO DESERTERS - SENTENCES ON FIVE MEN**

The first men alleged to have given themselves up under the Government's call to deserters appeared before a district court-martial at the Royal Pioneers depot, Burlish Camp, Stourport, Worcs, yesterday.

Five privates of the Royal Pioneer Corps appeared on charges of desertion. They were:

Private Henry John Popham Anthony, 45, of Bemerton Street, London N; Private George William Fish, 49, of Annersley Road, Highgate, London N; Private W J Oakley, 37, of Chigford, Essex; Private W Rod, 26, of Goldborne, near Wigan; and Private A Cheetham, of Netchells, Birmingham.

Before the court-martial opened 18 privates of the Royal Pioneer Corps who surrendered during the past two days under the Government's call were gathered in the court room and informed that they would be released into open arrest.

They had up to then been held in close arrest. This action, it was stated, was taken on instructions from higher authority. It means that the men will be allowed to move about without escort and will receive Army pay. They will, however, be confined to the camp.

In the case of Private Anthony, charged with desertion from March 1, 1941, to January 28, 1947, Captain FV Hamilton said: "I ask the court to treat this man as leniently as possible in order not to shatter his faith by making him feel that the Government announcement was a delusion and a snare."

Private Fish pleaded "Guilty" to deserting at Langley, Bucks, on May 4, 1941, till surrendering in London on January 30.

Captain Hamilton, pleading for Fish, said, "If leniency is not given all those men still absent will...."

The President – "I am not concerned with the men still absent, I am concerned only with the case of Private Fish. You will confine your remarks to the accused."

The sentences read to the men last evening by the prosecuting officer, Lieutenant AN Combes, were:

Private H Anthony, nine months' detention; Private GW Fish, 84 days detention; Private WJ Oakley, six months detention; Private W Roe, nine months' detention; and Private A Cheetham, six months detention.

All the sentences have been confirmed and promulgated, but in the case of Private Roe investigations are being made as to certain facts stated by him.

## **The Times 10 Nov 47 BRITISH MAJOR SENT TO PRISON FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT PARIS, NOV 9**

Major Alfred Waywell, aged 48, of the Royal Pioneer Corps, was sentenced to six months imprisonment, without hard labour, by a British court-martial in Paris yesterday. He was also ordered to be dismissed the service. He was found Guilty of stealing 400 blankets and a German car. On another charge, of stealing 240 blankets, he was found Not Guilty. He had pleaded "Not Guilty" to all three charges.

## **The Times 14 Nov 47 LAW REPORT NOV 13 HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE - KING'S BENCH DIVISION SOLDIER'S DEATH AFTER DRINKING GIN - NOT DUE TO WAR SERVICE MONAGHAN v. MINISTER OF PENSIONS**

Before Mr Justice Denning

His Lordship dismissed the appeal of Mrs Annie Josephine Monaghan, of Hardwick Place, Dublin, from a decision of a pensions appeal tribunal rejecting her claim to a pension on the ground that the death of her husband, Private James Monaghan, was not due to war service.

On November 12, 1944, the deceased man, 42 years of age, with 4 and a half years in the Pioneer Corps, died in hospital to which he had been admitted two days earlier suffering from gin poisoning.

Monaghan was in a working party in an advanced position near the River Maas, Holland, helping to unload material for the construction of a Bailey Bridge, in November 1944.

Evidence at a court of inquiry was that the gin was given to the Pioneers and to REs by some Canadians, who said that it came from an abandoned Red Cross barge. An analysis of the spirit was impossible as the cask was found to be empty.

One witness at the inquiry said that he himself was given three-quarters of a pint, which he drank. He went to bed and remembered nothing until he awoke next morning, began to dress, felt dizzy, and "passed out." Another witness said that he had a few drinks. They were fiery and burnt his throat, and shortly afterwards he "passed out."

All those who drank the gin recovered except Monaghan. Death was diagnosed as a collapse of lungs due to aspirated vomit and right-sided pneumothorax.

Mr GH Crispin appeared for the applicant; Mr HK Parker for the Minister.

Mr Crispin contended that the liquor was raw spirit and unfit to drink, but that the

deceased had no means of knowing that it was unfit to drink; and that after the first mugful he did not know what he was doing. He was entitled to assume that what he was given was fit to drink.

Mr Parker submitted that there was no evidence that the liquor was contaminated, and that all the others who drank it recovered. It was no doubt stronger and of a proof not known in this country. The deceased's death was due to action in his own personal sphere.

## **JUDGEMENT**

Mr Justice Denning, in giving judgement, said that the principles applicable to the case were set out in Minister of Pensions v. Chennell (62 The Times L.R. 753; (1947) K.B. 250). The line had to be drawn by common sense as to what was a cause and what was merely part of the surrounding circumstances.

The cause of the deceased's death was that Monaghan, with others, was drinking raw spirit, an act entirely within his personal sphere.

His war service was only part of the surrounding circumstances. The case came within Wedderspoon v. Minister of Pensions (63 The Times L.R. 202; (1947) K.B. 562). The real cause was Private Monaghan's drinking raw spirit and not his war service.

## **The Times 15 Jan 48 FUSE EXPLOSION DEATHS**

Two Pioneer Corps men were killed and 11 injured when mine fuses which were being inspected blew up at Saxelby, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, yesterday. The injured men are in Leicester Infirmary.

## **Hansard 20 Jan 48 ACCIDENT, SAXELBY**

Mr. Anthony Nutting (by Private Notice) asked the Secretary of State for War, whether his attention has been called to the recent disaster which occurred at Saxelby, Leicestershire, when an explosion of mine fuses which were being tested before removal resulted in the death of three members of the Pioneer Corps (two of whom were under 20 years of age) and the serious injury of some 20 more; whether he is satisfied that all the personnel employed on this dangerous work were adequately trained; whether he will give instructions that in future no soldier under 20 years of age shall be employed in this type of work.

Mr. Shinwell: A court of inquiry has been convened and I will write to the Hon. Member when I have received its report. I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my deep regret to the relatives of the men who lost their lives as a result of this accident.

Mr. Nutting: Is the right hon. Gentleman



aware that one of the boys killed in this disaster was a raw recruit with only seven weeks' service, and that when, at the inquest, the question was asked whether all were adequately trained for the job, the answer was given that all were warned of the danger; and is he further aware that the answer he has given is no answer whatsoever, and that if a young man of 18 is warned that a job is dangerous, it is tantamount to asking him to do it?

Mr. Shinwell: A matter of that sort would be the subject of consideration by the court of inquiry. We have considerable difficulty in these matters.

First of all, these boys are operating under skilled specialists who are trained in matters of this sort, in addition to which, as 70 to 80 per cent of the men consist of National Service intake, it is quite impossible to be stringent from the standpoint of age.

#### **Hansard 10 Feb 48 EXPLOSION, SAXELBY (INQUIRY)**

Mr. Anthony Nutting asked the Secretary of State for War whether he has yet received the report of the court of inquiry on the explosion of mine fuses at Saxelby, Leicestershire; what are the findings of the court; and whether he will give an assurance that only soldiers with considerable experience of explosives will be employed upon this highly dangerous type of work.

Mr. Shinwell: The report of the court of inquiry has been completed, but I have not yet received the views of the military authorities in the Command concerned. When I have had an opportunity to consider their comments, I will write to the Hon. Member.

As regards the last part of the Question, only personnel of considerable experience are employed in work of a technical nature in connection with the disposal of ammunition, and Royal Pioneer Corps personnel employed as labour in handling ammunition boxes do so under expert supervision.

Mr. Nutting: Will the Minister ensure that

that assurance is followed up in every case, and is he aware that, out of the three people killed in this disaster, two were recruits, one with only seven weeks' service, who could not possibly have had considerable experience of explosives?

Mr. Shinwell: I think we might defer judgment until we see the report.

#### **Hansard 24 Mar 49 DEFENCE FORCE**

Mr. Parker asked the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations when, and for what reasons, the defence force raised in Basutoland during the war was disbanded.

Mr. P. Noel-Baker: During the war, Basutoland sent contingents to the African Pioneer Corps. After the fighting ceased, it sent contingents to the High Commission Territories Corps, which was employed on guard and other duties in the Middle East. The men were enlisted for two and a half years; it was never intended that the forces to which they belonged should be permanent; and in fact they were disbanded, when they had completed the special tasks for which they were engaged. There has never been a permanent local defence force in Basutoland.

#### **WESTERN DAILY PRESS AND BRISTOL MIRROR 26 May 49 PIONEER OFFICER DENIES HITTING SOLDIERS**

"Beaten Up" Allegations

Lt Victor John Martin (36) of 59 Coy RPC, attached to the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, and whose home is at Bristol, pleaded not guilty at a court martial at York yesterday to six charges of striking private soldiers, and six charges of conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline by allowing a CSM to "beat up" soldiers in his presence. The hearing was adjourned until today.

Maj CPB Knight of the Directorate of Army Legal Services (PSCTG), said the court think possibly that the state of discipline in the Company was in a very queer state indeed.

It was stationed at Castle Howard and commanded by Major Harris, who, the court might come to the conclusion, was a person who did not like having charge of the Company, and was averse to having soldiers placed on charges.

Maj Knight said that when it was suspected that improprieties were going on among the men, a number of them were beaten up either by Lt Martin or the CSM.

#### **ORDER DENIED**

Maj DW Knight, now commanding No 12 Company RPC, but formerly commanding the 59th at Castle Howard agreed that Lt Martin told him in July 1948 that a medical examination had disclosed signs of impropriety by a certain soldier.

He (Maj Harris) gave instructions that this must cease, and had the soldier removed to another unit, but neither that soldier nor anyone else was charged.

It was quite possibly his intention that the matter should not go to court-martial, but he denied that it was his intention that the men should be beaten either by Lt Martin or the Sergeant-Major. He denied saying that he would rather the men were taken round the corner than put on a charge.

Mr T Wright, of Edinburgh, the former CSM in the Company, said he saw Lt Martin strike some of the men and struck some of them himself in the presence of Lt Martin, who did not protest.

Returning from an interview with Maj Harris, said Wright, Lt Martin told him "Maj Harris has told me that he is not going to deal with it at all. He has told me to take them round a corner and get it out of them."

Lt Martin told him that the commanding officer had thought of that course because if the facts came to light it would cause too much scandal.

Wright agreed that he had been tried and punished by reduction to the rank of Corporal for his part in the affair, and had since resigned voluntarily from the Army.

He denied that it was he and not Lt Martin who did all the striking. ■

# Long Lost Trails...

#### **ERIC BASHFORD**

Hi, I am still trying to locate Eric Bashford who was in 206 COY in the 1970s. Norman has very kindly supplied a back copy of the magazine with his pictures in it. If anybody else has any further information or pictures I would be extremely grateful. In case you are concerned why I am looking for him, I am hoping to reunite him with his sister Caroline. Thanks in advance. Allan Clarkson, c/o RPC Association

#### **ROBERT GRIFFITHS**

Tricia Griffiths is looking for

anyone who remembers her father Robert Griffiths who served in the Corps from 1961/67. Contact [triciaagriffiths@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:triciaagriffiths@hotmail.co.uk)

#### **CHRISTOPHER GOWLAND**

Did anyone know my dad Christopher Gowland. He joined the pioneers about 1973-1974 till about 1980. He served in Northern Ireland and was stationed in Germany at some point. Contact Richard Gowland [www.facebook.com/richard.gowland.73](http://www.facebook.com/richard.gowland.73)

#### **GARY HOWARTH**

Hi all I'm trying to find an old friend of mine from the corps. His name is Gary Howarth last seen whilst we both were serving in Germany at 8 Regt RCT with 70/144 Coys RPC WSG any help please ask him to contact me at [tad24405539@gmail.com](mailto:tad24405539@gmail.com)

#### **TERRY MCCLOSKEY**

A CPL clerk when I last saw him at Kineton in 1982. We went through training together in 1974 with Rhine section. Contact John Hatfield

[www.facebook.com/john.hatfield.73](http://www.facebook.com/john.hatfield.73)

#### **RICK KEARSLEY**

Hi Guys I'm looking for a man I served with on the Range detachment at Salisbury plain SPRD in 1978/9 by the name of Rick Kearsley. We got on and I'm just trying to find old mates. He was obviously a Pioneer and I was a Hunner. Thanks in advance for your help Contact Rick Kearsley [www.facebook.com/garry.murphy.3766](http://www.facebook.com/garry.murphy.3766)

The following are trying to re-establish contact... can you help?



# Treated like royalty

I RECEIVED the Magazine this morning - very many thanks and congratulations on your award. Like many families we never spoke about the past and Dad certainly never spoke about his army life unless he was talking to another ex serviceman.

The fact we know so much is because late in his life he wrote down what you published in the October issue for one of my sons who had a project at school based on the war. He had a very soft spot for Holland having been so well received there - I have photographs of a family in Nijmegen with whom I suspect he was billeted - don't think he ever kept in touch but in 1956 he decided to take me to Holland (my mother didn't enjoy travel).

After admitting to the hotel owner that this was not his first visit and on telling them he had been there during the war we were treated like royalty.

He did keep in touch with one of his platoon until his death - who became a surrogate uncle.

**David Butler**

# Alive and kicking aged 94

HELLO... some of you may remember this post from me in 2013, well I'm very please to report that we have now located Robert, he's alive & kicking aged 94.

Thank you Norman Brown for your help, the information you provided from his service number ultimately helped us to find him.

"Hello, I'm hoping you guys can help me with a query regarding my husbands grandfather. We know little about him other than his name, Robert Walsh, he was from Bolton, Lancs and according to his 1942 marriage certificate was a Private in the Pioneer Corps. His service number was 3973596. Please can someone tell me if the Pioneer Corps is the same as Royal Pioneer Corps and how I can go about finding out more about him. Thanks a lot."

**Samantha Spracklen**

# Great uncle Stanley

Ed note: the RPC Association supplies many relatives with details of service for both ex Pioneers and ex Labour Corps, the following is one of many letters of appreciation that we receive...

I must apologise for not replying sooner. Since you very kindly answered my query so very swiftly I have been very busy in our new house decorating and sorting out the

downsizing we are trying to achieve as we enter the "retirement" phase. The information you have provided will enable me to report back to the rest of my family on Great Uncle Stanley with a bit more clarity and if I'm lucky enough to get to France in November to pay my respects it will be with a bit more knowledge.

**Steve Perkins**

# Found first ever mouse!

FOR ME this edition of the Pioneer has been the most interesting ever. I have found my first ever mouse and a photograph has brought back memories of my service. The mouse is on page 55 in the top right hand picture of Bill Krepper getting de-mobbed. It is in the lower left corner of the windscreen of the jeep.

The picture I refer to is on page 62 and shows Lt. Alan Sharp at a shooting match. I served with Alan, he in the rank of Corporal and me Lance Corporal, at Northampton at both Simpson Barracks and 'The Old Barracks' in the Town whilst Simpson was being revamped. We were Recruit Instructors. We played football for the Corps Team together and also represented the Corps at the annual Army Shoot at Bisley gaining a Methuen Medal for our efforts.

I lost track of Alan when I moved on to 521 Company and then 206 at Long Marston from where I left the service after

five years and one day. I had joined up in 1961 in the Royal Engineers and passed out as a Combat Engineer. I transferred to the Military Police and after a disastrous few weeks transferred again to The Corps.

Years later, the late seventies I think, I had cause to visit Northampton in my capacity as a Detective with West Midlands Police CID. I hasten to add the enquiry had nothing to do with the Service or the Corps. Having completed our business there I decided, on a nostalgic whim, to drive up to Simpson. Approaching the gates who should be marching down the road but Alan. I stopped and greeted him to find he was now in the Rank of Captain. I went to his home and we had a spot of lunch and talked over some old times.

We parted company and have had no contact since. I left the Police in 1995 in the rank of Sergeant. Just a little story prompted by an old photograph.

**R Stevens Ex L/Cpl 23872495**

# Dressed to impress

MANY THANKS for the Regimental tie which looked very smart at my local Parade on Sunday 08/11/2015.

I felt very proud to represent the Regiment at ELM PARK RBL, Hornchurch Essex. My 14 years in 168 Pioneer Regt included tours of Bosnia with 170 Defence Troop, ARRC ( 1996), attached to Kings

Own Royal Border Regt(2000). Then Cyprus with the KORBR(2001-2002) for 18 months, includes 6 weeks on exercise in Jordan.

And finally 168 Pioneer Regt attached to 23 Pioneer Regt for OP TALENT(2003). Many Thanks again for helping me look so smart.

**Francis Dunn**

# Helped to solve the family arguments!

ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC Norman; I had no idea this information was available so my brothers will be over the moon when I show it them it tomorrow.

Dad spent most of his time in the army in the smoke unit.

He was attached to the 1st Canadian

Army in Belgium and Holland for a couple of months in 1945.

I'll put a cheque in the post tomorrow as a donation to the RPC Association.

Once again thanks you have helped to solve the family arguments!

**Harry Bannister**



# See you in June Joe



■ Joe St Hill

Picture: RPCA Archive

I AM writing to confirm that I have received your cheque for £1,000 – the prize money from the Association Christmas Draw. Thank you very much as it was a big surprise when you called with the good news.

Over the years many of our members have expressed what a great job you are doing as the Secretary/Controller of the

Association and I also wish to endorse their comments and appreciation.

I look forward to receiving my copy of the Pioneer as it keeps us up to date about our Veterans and close company mates.

Take care Norman I will see you hopefully in June at Reunion Weekend.

**Joe St Hill**

## Your memoirs...

OVER THE years we have published many stories and memoirs.

I know that there are a lot of Pioneers out there with some amazing stories. Before you pop your clogs, why not put

pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard and we will publish it for you.

Don't worry about spelling and grammar as we will correct it.

**Norman Brown**

## THE PIONEER

■ I ALWAYS enjoy the Magazine, but never more so than this October's edition. I was in hospital after a batch of operations and reading it from cover to cover, more than once, cheered me up and I am sure contributed to my recovery.

**Pat Baird**

■ THANK YOU so much for getting back to me so quickly and providing me with information from your records. I will certainly take your advice and take the next step of following up with the Army Personnel Centre.

**Janet Christie**

■ THANK YOU so much I've learned more today than ever, my mum is ecstatic once again thank you

**Michelle Blackburn-Jones**

■ JUST GOT the magazine today. Excellent as usual. The mouse, is in the jeep window. Thanks for a great magazine.

Tickets to follow.  
**Keith Moore Melbourne Australia.**

■ WHAT CAN I say about your latest masterpiece words fail me, just to say you and Paul have surpassed yourselves once again. The history keeps coming and I feel so very humble to have served in such a distinguished Corps as The Royal Pioneer Corps it's a long way from the Barbados Volunteer Regiment. Keep up the good work you too see you soon.

**Dusty Bryant**

■ NORMAN, thank you so much for such a detailed and speedy response. I will certainly be purchasing the book along with also a donation.

**Jacqui Tookey**

■ THANK YOU so much for your early reply and for the information you have given us, a wonderful start for my Dad to work from. Hope to be in touch again soon, thank you once again for your help.

**Amanda Hewitt**



Write in or email us...

## The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 1 Regiment RLC  
St David's Barracks  
Graven Hill  
Bicester OX26 6HF

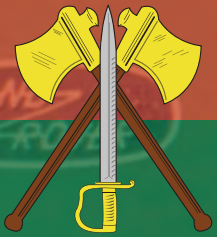
or email us at:  
[royalpioneer corps@gmail.com](mailto:royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)







Picture: RPCA Archive  
■ "Patrol the World with 518"



# Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of photographs from The Royal Pioneer Corps Association archives.



■ 518 - Belize, 1989, LCpl Teague, Pte Sutcliffe, Pte Rees, BDF, Pte Sharples, Pte Talbot. Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 518 - Summer Camp, 1983. Picture: RPCA Archive

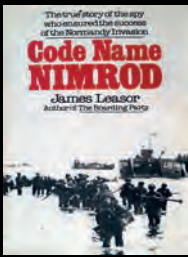


■ 518 - Belize Cpl Jordan working in the "Pit" at Roaring Creek Suspension Bridge Belize 1988. Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 518 - Canada, 1981, Ptes Dury and How. Picture: RPCA Archive





# Codenamed Nimrod

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

**B**EFORE the D-Day landings in 1944, British and American deception planners sought to convince the German High Command that the Allied invasion would be in the Pas de Calais, northeast of the Seine, and not in Normandy. The Allied deception plan was as complex as it was ingenious. Captured German agents under British control sent streams of false messages to their German masters about a totally fictitious buildup of troops along the English southeast coast, from where their obvious destination would be Calais.

But shortly before the D-Day landings some doubts still remained as to whether the German commanders generally believed that Calais was the main Allied target.

In a desperate last-minute attempt to convince Hitler, possibly against his commanders' views, a volunteer was sought to fly to France, carrying what would seem

unarguable evidence that the main landings were to take place around Calais.

This volunteer came from X-Troop (prior to this he served in the Pioneer Corps), formed by Lord Louis Mountbatten from anti-Nazi Germans, Hungarians and Austrians.

Many were Jews whose families had died in concentration camps. All had volunteered for hazardous tasks where their particular backgrounds or qualifications were of great value.

The man chosen was a young Austrian refugee whose father was Jewish and whose mother was Catholic.

After months of careful training, which included a complete identity change, he was flown into France on this crucial and impossibly dangerous mission.

He was first to pose as a radio technical expert come to work with the French Resistance and as soon as possible to make contact with the Germans as the master spy Nimrod – a figure carefully built-up by the British as a German "mole" who had lived in London for some years and was providing

key information to the secret German spy transmitters that the British had been allowing to broadcast in order to build up his personage.

The details of Nimrod's adventures in France provide the core of the book. It is a true adventure story of such secrecy that it can only now be told.

Since the initial landings had already taken place while he was still with the Germans, he not only had to convince them that Normandy was the feint but he also had to escape at the crucial moment and make his way back through the Allied lines.

Those final adventures provides a very strong climax to a continuously exciting tale, and because it is based on fact the suspense is all the more intense.

How many who served in uniform in Normandy and Europe after 6 June 1944, and survived – British, American, Canadian, German alike – owe their lives to the courage and resolution of this unknown warrior?

**AUTHOR: JAMES LEASOR**  
**ISBN: 0-395-30228-5**

# SAS Nazi Hunters

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

**I**N THE summer of 1955 sixty SAS were parachuted into the Vosges Mountains of North-eastern France – the last bulwark of the defences of Hitler's Reich. There the Führer had ordered his forces make a last-ditch stand, to prevent the Allies from marching into the Fatherland. Dropped some five hundred miles behind enemy lines, the SAS were tasked with wreaking havoc and bloody mayhem, ensuring that Hitler's do-or-die defence would fail.

From the very start these sixty men were hunted by thousands of crack German troops, as they blew up railways, ammo dumps and road convoys, and targeted high-ranking enemy officers. At mission's end thirty-one SAS were listed as "missing – fate

unknown". In truth, they faced a horrific fate at the hands of their captors.

The man who had commanded this mission refused to let their killers escape justice.

Faced with the post-war disbandment of the SAS, Colonel Brian Franks MC formed a top-secret, clandestine SAS unit. Under the auspices of Winston Churchill, this deniable "Man Hunting" force was paid and equipped from out of a black budget in a deep-cover operation lasting through 1948 and beyond. Across war-ravaged Europe they hunted down the Nazi war criminals, plus those who had run the notorious concentration camps, stumbling upon some of the darkest secrets of the new war – the Cold War.

Known as "The Secret Hunters", this force was

peopled by a cast of characters more extraordinary than any fiction.

Captain Henry Druce, who waged war from his jeep in a silk top hat and corduroys; Captain John Hislop, a champion jockey who was evicted from his former regiment for showing a 'regrettable lack of military aptitude'; and Russian Prince Yurka Galitzine, the fabulously well-connected grandmaster of black operations.

Still studied by the SAS today, The Nazi Hunters are a founding part of the Regiment's myth, constituting one of the greatest untold stories of the Second World War

**THE NAZI HUNTERS – THE ULTRA-SECRET SAS UNIT AND THE QUEST FOR HITLER'S WAR CRIMINALS**  
**AUTHOR: DAMIEN LEWIS**  
**ISBN: 978-1-78429-387-1**





# The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

**WICKEN RAYMOND E. (24295173) 5 OCT 15 (AGED 63) EX PTE. ASHFORD**  
Served 1972 – 1994.

**KENNEDY ROBERT ARTHUR (13073248) 23 SEP 15 (AGED 95) EX W02**  
Served 24 Oct 40 to 2 Sep 46. Warrington.

**MORRIS RONALD (RON) (23996963) 10 SEP 15 (AGED 68) EX W02 (CSM 521 COY RPC)**

**ROBERT RAC (ROBERT) 23030770 EX SGT (AGED 79) BASINGSTOKE**

**ANSLOW ROY 23423943 PTE (AGED 76) CWMARAN**  
Served 1957 – 1959

**ROSE WILLIAM JAMES (14208756) 31 OCT 15 (AGED 93) EX**  
Served from 26 Feb 42 to 14 Feb 46 in 190 Coy PC. Sherborne. His eldest son Brian writes:

I regret to inform you of the death of my father William Rose, Jim to everyone that knew him. He served with the Pioneer Corps between 1942 and 1946.

He always said they were the best years of his life. He landed with the Canadians on Juno Beach on 'D' day his 22nd birthday (very good of the government to arrange such a big party for him) and then went up through Belgium and Holland helping to build bridges across the rivers and dikes. He ended up working in the concentration camp at Belsen - something he would never talk about.

He was 70 years old before I could ever keep up with him on a shovel. At 87 we had him breaking concrete with a jackhammer! All he ever lived for was working.

His last three years were spent in the loveliest of care homes. At 93 he still walked unaided and drug wise was on 1 Paracetamol and 1 Aspirin a day (recreational?) Unfortunately he fell a couple of weeks ago and broke his hip.

The fixing operation was relatively minor and completely successful, the post-operative care was sadly lacking.

When the care home found out about the true situation, they pulled out all the stops and managed to 'spring' him.

He died with dignity the following day, October the 31st, surrounded by people who loved him.

"He joined the Army as a country boy from Dorset and came out a man." His own words repeated throughout our lives.

**ELPHWICK DERRICK (22442501) 15 AUG 15 (AGED 82) EX SGT. EASTBOURNE.**  
Served 1 Jan 51 – 1 Jan 53.

**WRIGHT ROY (22894444) 1 SEP 15 (AGED 79). BURTON ON TRENT EX PTE**  
Served 9 Jan 53 – 31 Jul 55.

**ANDERSON IAN (IAN) (24175601) 27 JAN 15 EX CPL. LEIGH**  
Served 9 Jan 53 – 31

**OCKENDEN BRIAN (24851354) 26 OCT 15 (AGED 44). BICESTER EX PTE**  
Served 1988 – 1992 in 522 Coy.

**BURWELL DAVID CHARLES (24274634) 8 DEC 15 (AGED 67). GLOUCESTER EX CPL**  
Served 1971-1994.

**CARTER STEPHEN JOHN (24156141) 4 JAN 16 (AGED 63)**

**MCNALLY PETER (23961702) 14 DEC 15 (AGED 69). WARSOP EX CPL**  
A keen footballer who won many trophies with 521 Coy.

**CRAMER PHILIP FRANK (13035629) SEP 15 (AGED 100). IPSWICH EX CPL**  
Served 1940 – 1946 (Worked in London during the Blitz then in the Faeroe's Islands before posting to a Smoke Company.

**MERCER FRANK (13063582) 5 JAN 16 (AGED 95) EX SGT. ST HELENS.**  
Served 1940-194 in North Africa Sicily. Italy. D.Day + In France Holland & Germany. Post war, in charge of POW Camp at Quedgley Court Gloucester.

**BURTON REX (23454606) 25 NOV 15 (AGED 74). SPALDING. EX PTE.**  
Joined Association in 1959.

**VALLIS ERIC ARTHUR (13053 AND 14126218) 5 JAN 16 (AGED 89). CANTERBURY EX LT COL. EX NORMANDY VETERAN**  
Enlisted into the ranks (not Pioneer Corps) and was commissioned into the Pioneer Corps on 15 Jul 44 and joined 35 Coy serving in Ostend. He was posted to 826 Coy on 15 Apr 45 stationed with 3 BAD at Lichtevelde before moving to Brussels.

In 1950 he joined the Reserve of Officers and then the Army Emergency Reserve. He was a regular attendee at the Annual Officers' Dinners and a member of the St Albans District Branch of the Association.

**LEGGE PWJ (PATRICK) 2383526 AND 302053) 28 DEC 15 (AGED 93). BOVEY TRACEY EX MAJ**  
Joined the Home Guard (East Yorks Regt in May 41, transferred to R Sigs in Dec 41 and commissioned in Pioneer Corps in Jun 43 and served until Apr 47.

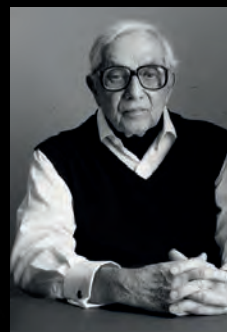
Re-enlisted into RPC in Jun 51 and served until Mar 73. Joined the Association on 1 Dec 48 – the 493rd member to join.

**COX THOMAS (14991545) 29 NOV 15 (AGED 90) EX PTE SERVED 18 JAN 44 – 14 AUG 45 STOCKTON**

A Pioneer who passed away with no family or friends. Full story on page 14/15.



■ Ian Anderson  
Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Ken Adam  
Picture: RPCA Archive



## ADAM KLAUS HUGO (13803430) (AGED 95) EX PTE.

Joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 3 Oct 40 and transferred to the RAF on 30 Jun 41.

Pioneer Sir Ken Adam, who was the only known German fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force during WW2, who went onto design James Bond sets and worked with Kubrick.

As a production designer, Sir Ken Adam consistently pushed his imagination to the limits, creating movie sets, each different, as thrilling to look at as the action unfolding up on the screen. His work on seven James Bond films -- including the first of the series, *Dr. No* -- set the tone for what became the Bond franchise. His vision behind the war room in *Dr. Strangelove*, the interior of Fort Knox in *Goldfinger*, the flying car in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and Blofeld's lair in a volcano's crater in *You Only Live Twice*, are just a few examples of the heightened sense of reality Adam so deftly created in his 50-year career, making him the film industry's first production designer to reflect the rapidly advancing electronic age of the '60s and beyond. His work earned him two Oscars and numerous BAFTA awards.

He was born Klaus Hugo Adam in Berlin, Germany in 1921 into an upper-middle-class Jewish household. Through his older brother, Adam met the son of [actor and film director] Max Reinhardt, and the Bauhaus school architects like Erich Mendelsohn, who all made an impression on him.

Adam's father, Fritz Adam, co-owned a well-known high-fashion clothing and sporting goods store, and the family lived an almost idyllic, privileged existence until Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933.

The Nazis arrested his father, but he was only kept for three days, because a former employee, who had become a senior leader in the SS got him out. That was the red flag, and after that there was no sense of staying. But his father, who was very German -- he had served as an officer in the Prussian cavalry in WWI and was the owner of a famous store -- it was difficult to accept that they had to leave. Adam's family left for England in 1934, and they eventually settled in London.

His mother was the main money-earner in England, which his father wasn't used to at all. She opened a boarding house in Hampstead and did very well, and his father went out with a little suitcase to sell gloves. It really destroyed him. It was just so unfortunate that his health didn't hold up and he died in 1936.

Adam became increasingly interested in cinema after coming into contact with a number of artists among the Jewish refugees. Around the family's enormous dining room table, he listened nightly to harrowing stories of misery and escapes from Nazi Europe and was introduced to artists like Vincent Korda, a Hungarian art director in films (brother of screenwriter and film producer Alexander Korda).

Adam was in architecture school when the war started, and was apprenticing at a firm that specialized in making bomb shelters. He soon enlisted in the Pioneer Corps and then, eight months into his stint in the Pioneer Corps, Adam applied for a transfer into the RAF and was accepted.

"Sir Ken was the only known German fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force during WWII," said Helen Fry, author of the book, *Churchill's German Army*.

He first served in the only unit of the British army open to him, but this was his war and he wanted to fight properly. He sent off application after application to the RAF, but was turned down.

Then, during training in the Pioneer Corps, he was seen courting the commanding officer's daughter on the promenade of a Victorian seaside town when he should have been doing drill practice. He was hauled before the commanding officer and asked to send off an application to the RAF again. Two weeks later, he was sent several hundred miles away to Scotland to train as a pilot.

After training on Tiger Moth ('30s-era biplanes) in Scotland, he was sent to Canada and the United States for additional special fighter pilot training before joining the 609 Squadron a year later. Adam flew a Hawker Typhoon, one of the wars fastest and most powerful fighter planes, heavily armed with air-to-ground rockets and 20 mm cannons. His Squadron worked with the advancing British forces.

After his squadron attacked the Falaise Gap in Normandy, his commanding officer said to him, "Ken, if you want to see the damage that has been done, I'll let you go on the ground in a truck." And he went. It was something he never forgot.

The smell of dead animals was terrible -- there were dead horses (he had no idea the Germans were using so many horses) and cows. As a single fighter pilot, you never really got in much contact with what was going on the ground. For the first time being on a battlefield like Falaise was a shock to the system. And to be in close touch for the first time with the bodies of dead SS soldiers, and so on was an experience he never forgot. He just couldn't get rid of the smell.

Adam demobilized from military service in 1947 and got a job, first as a draughtsman at Twickenham Film Studios. He worked in the art department on the films, *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, *The Crimson Pirate*, *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Helen of Troy*, all boat movies. So, in an effort to avoid being pigeonholed as a naval designer, Adam caught the attention of industry executives with his design work on *Ben Hur* and *Around the World in 80 Days*.

In 1962, he was hired as production designer on the first James Bond film, *Dr. No*. While on location and building the film's sets in Jamaica, Adam was allowed to return to his art department on the production at Pinewood studios in London.

But whatever challenges he experienced with producers and directors on his first films, nothing could have prepared him for the tornado that was Stanley Kubrick who hired Adam to work on comedy about nuclear war and the end of the world entitled, *Dr. Strangelove*. He had an incredible relationship, because they were both pretty young. He used to drive him to Shepperton studios in his E-Type Jaguar; and when you drive anybody every day for five or six months you get to know that person very well.

But friendship and mutual admiration aside, Kubrick's hands-on style of directing was infamous for its nerve-wracking impact

on anyone working directly under him.

"Kubrick stood behind me all the time," Adam said whilst working on the film.

He tried to get involved in every aspect of filmmaking. He had initially done a different design of the war room on two levels, and when he showed it to him during our first meeting he loved it.

Then, after two or three weeks, "Ken, I don't know what to do with all of the people on the second level. You have to re-design it." And that shook him after three weeks of already working on the design. So, he went through the gardens at Shepperton studios to calm down, took a valium and started redesigning.

Adam's ability to create sets that didn't reflect reality at all carried over into his work on the next Bond picture, *Goldfinger*, when he endeavoured to give the otherwise lacklustre interior of Fort Knox (based on designs given to him) a considerable makeover.

He had seen the exterior of Fort Knox, which was rather dull, art-deco. Because you weren't allowed near the interior, he came up with a design where I stacked gold up 40 feet high and behind a grill and all over the floor, a cathedral of gold, up to 40 feet in height.

When he showed this sketch to the producers, Cubby [Broccoli] and Harry [Saltzman], they said, "It looks like a prison." But, he insisted and said, "It's what I want." And when the film's director, Guy Hamilton, backed me up, I didn't have many other problems with them on the future Bonds.

Adam continued to put his inimitable stamp on the Bond films *Thunderball*, *You Only Live Twice*, *Diamonds Are Forever*, *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker* -- his last in the series.

"During the war, Sir Ken faced the real threat when he flew dangerous sorties over enemy territory, from which many of his fellow pilots never came back," Helen Fry said. "This was a struggle between good and evil -- fighting back against the evil regime which he as a German-Jew had had to flee. The Bond scenes, which Sir Ken designed, betray an insight into this personal struggle and capture again a world-defining struggle between good and evil, albeit in the make-believe world of James Bond."

Adam won his first Oscar in 1975 for his work on Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* and won his second Oscar for *The Madness of King George* in 1994, and maintained a busy work schedule up until 2001.

Adam also re-established a relationship with the Berlin of his birth after working on the thriller *Funeral in Berlin* in 1966. He was asked to design the city's Millennium Exhibition in 1998, and the last film he designed, *Taking Sides*, was shot in the old UFA studios just outside Berlin. For his work establishing stronger Anglo-German relations, Adam was knighted in 2003.

"It was very exciting to me, because I saw the old stages where they made movies so many years ago when I was a boy," Adam said. "Obviously, before I did films in Germany I was pretty bitter, but I came across so many nice and intelligent Germans who weren't even born in that time of Hitler." "I began to like how they treated me." ■





## And finally...

**Some little known military facts and a reminder about the Pioneer Reunion at Coventry...**

**Report: Norman Brown  
Cartoon: Peter Brookes**

**T**HE following are some little known military facts. I also have dug out some facts from World War One. Some of them certainly make interesting reading.

**1.** During World War II, many POW escapes from Nazi prison camps were the result of playing Monopoly. The Red Cross sent special Monopoly boxes marked with a red dot on the Free Parking space to let prisoners know. In the game box, the Red Cross hid German marks amongst the monopoly money, a compass in the dog counter, a metal file in the board itself, and silk maps of the prison inside hollow hotel pieces.

**2.** In 2005, the Ministry of Defence issued soldiers special antimicrobial underwear that can be worn up to three months at a time without needing a change.

**3.** Contrary to popular belief, after the formation of the standing army in 1661, the army was a volunteer force until

conscription was first introduced in 1916 during World War I. Conscription was reintroduced in 1939 for World War II. Following the second war, conscription became known as "National Service" and required all men ages 17 to 21 to serve in the military for 18 months. National Service ended in 1963 and conscription has not returned to Britain since.

**4.** During the Falklands War, the HMS Sheffield was hit by an Argentinian anti-ship missile and slowly began to sink. As the sailors awaited rescue, they began to sing "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" from Monty Python's Life of Brian. During the first Gulf War, RAF pilots would often sing it on their missions.

**5.** In 1943, the Japanese military utilised 60,000 Allied POWs and 180,000 Asian prisoners to complete the Thailand-Burma Railway. Thanks to horrible prison conditions and cruelty of guards, approximately 12,399 POWs and 90,000 Asians died during construction. Roughly 6,318 of the POWs who died were British.

**6.** In 1863, Queen Victorian commissioned the Victoria Cross during the Crimean War. It is the highest honour that

can be awarded to a member of the British Armed Forces and is actually made from scrap metal taken from a Russian cannon captured during the war. Due to its rarity, the medal is a highly sought collectors' item, and once fetched £400,000 at auction.

**7.** According to the Ministry of Defence, it costs £30,000 to train a soldier. The selection process costs £7,000, while Basic Training and the Combat Infantry Course cost £23,000.

**8.** Officially a British soldier had to be 19 years old to serve overseas but many lied about their age. About 250,000 under-age boys served. The youngest was discovered to be just 12.

**9.** Average life expectancy in the trenches was about six weeks. Junior officers and stretcher bearers were some of the people most at risk.

**10.** During four years 25 million tons of supplies were shipped to the British forces on the Western Front including three million tons of food and five million tons of oats and hay for the horses.

**11.** As the war went on the amount of food given to soldiers was reduced. A common meal in the trenches was maconochie - a stew of turnips, potatoes and carrots. Other rations included bully beef and even Marmite. There was a small rum ration but tea tasted horrible thanks to the chloride of lime used to purify the water.

**12.** The war claimed the lives of at least 6,000 men a day. More than nine million soldiers died during the fighting.

**13.** An incredible 65 million men from 30 countries fought.

**14.** Some 25,000 miles of zig-zagging trenches were dug on the Western Front alone. Many had nicknames like Bond Street or Death Valley. German lines were given names like Pilsen Trench.

**15.** A soldier spent 15 per cent of the year on the frontline, usually for no more than two weeks at a time.

**16.** At the Battle of Mons in 1914, the British infantry fired their Lee-Enfield rifles so efficiently that the Germans thought they were facing machine guns.

**17.** At Christmas 1914 an unofficial truce was observed along two-thirds of the Western Front. Near Ypres, Belgium, some



## Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News    ■ Forthcoming events    ■ Your stories    ■ Your Letters
- Bill Sears Life Story    ■ Blast from the Past    ■ Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery    ■ Book Reviews    ■ Press Cuttings    ■ And much more!



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German and British troops played a football match in No Man's Land. Germany won 3--2 (but not on penalties).

**18.** Sixty per cent of casualties on the Western Front came from shellfire. There were also 80,000 recorded cases of shell shock.

**19.** In 1917 anti-German sentiment forced George V to change the Royal Family's name from Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to Windsor. Many road names in Britain were changed too.

**20.** Famous people who served include the writers AA Milne, creator of Winnie the Pooh, Lord Of The Rings author JRR Tolkien, sculptor Henry Moore and the actor Basil Rathbone.

**21.** None of the soldiers had metal helmets in 1914. The French were the first to introduce them, in 1915. Future prime minister Winston Churchill wore a French one during his time on the front in 1916.

**22.** Air raids on Britain, carried out by Zeppelins and aircraft, along with the naval shelling of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby, killed more than 700 people.

**23.** Disease accounted for a third of deaths during the war. Duck boards eventually helped ease cases of trench foot, an infection caused by damp and cold. But with semi-sanctioned brothels being set up

behind the frontline a massive 150,000 British soldiers came down with venereal infections.

**24.** A total of 346 British soldiers were shot by their own side, mostly for desertion. Another sanction, called Field Punishment No 1, saw offenders strapped to a gun wheel or post, sometimes within range of enemy fire.

**25.** As well as taking up thousands of male jobs at home some 9,000 women served in France as part of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps working in such roles as cooks and drivers.

**26.** There were 16,000 British conscientious objectors who refused to fight. Many received white feathers as a sign of cowardice. Some were given non-combatant roles, others were imprisoned.

**27.** The prominent war recruitment poster Your Country Needs You famously featured Lord Kitchener with a pointing finger.

**28.** So-called Pals Battalions included groups that had joined up together. They included schoolboys, railway workers and two made up of professional footballers.

**29.** By the end of 1915, 2,446,719 Brits had volunteered. But conscription was still needed. It was introduced for 18-41 year olds during 1916.

**30.** The Victoria Cross was awarded 628 times. The youngest recipient was Jack Cornwell, 16, who remained at his post during the Battle of Jutland despite suffering ultimately fatal injuries.

**31.** One of the biggest blasts of the war occurred when the British detonated a million pounds of explosives under the Germans at Messines Ridge, in Belgian West Flanders. The resulting explosion could be heard 150 miles away in London.

**32.** In 1917 food shortages at home caused by the loss of British shipping to German U-boats meant the government banned the use of rice at weddings and the feeding of pigeons.

**33.** More than 100,000 homing pigeons were used. In 1918 one called Cher Ami, saved 200 US soldiers who had been cut off when it delivered a message to rescuing forces despite being injured by a bullet.

**34.** At the height of the war the British Army had 870,000 horses. Dead ones were melted down for fat which was later used for making explosives.

**35.** On the morning of the Battle Of The Somme, July 1, 1916, the British suffered 60,000 casualties - 20,000 dead.

It was the worst toll for a single day in military history. Allied forces advanced six miles. ■

## THE PIONEER



■ Royal Court Hotel, Coventry. Hope to see you there. Please book as soon as possible.

Picture: Scouse Bradley





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