

THE PIONEER



PIONEERS WIN GOLD & SILVER AT INVICTUS

WELL DONE TO PIONEERS MATTHEW ELLIOTT AND CRAIG WINSPEAR. ALSO CONGRATS TO PIONEER GEOFFREY DORRITT FOR SINGING AT THE INVICTUS OPENING CEREMONY.



I am the Winspear, I am Invictus



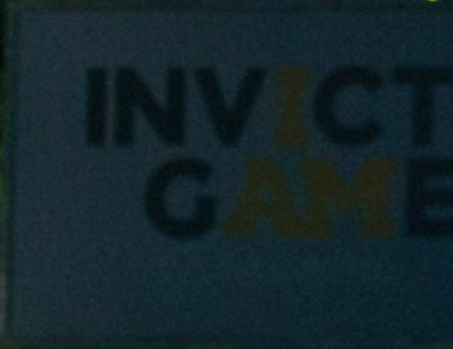
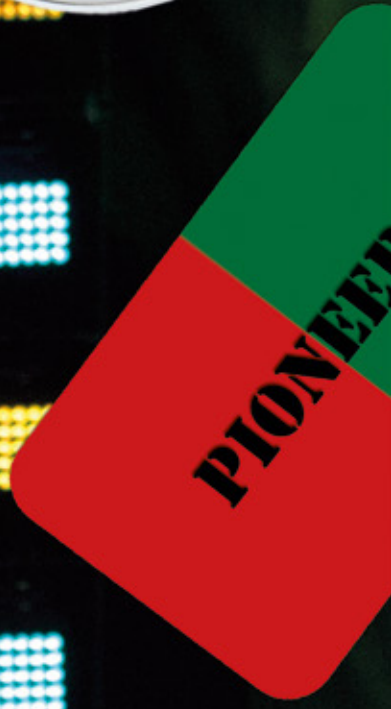
I AM



Winning Pioneers!



Thumbs up!





Pioneer Geoffrey Dorritt and Gareth !



The British Invictus Team !



Pioneer Matthew Elliot and Prince Harry !



Check out the Gold !

I AM



With one of the presenters !



The Final !



I AM!

Three Pioneers fly to the Invictus Games in Orlando - Matthew Elliott, Craig Winspear and Geoffrey Dorritt.

THE Invictus Games use the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation and generate a wider understanding and respect for wounded, injured and sick Servicemen and women.

Following the inaugural Invictus Games in 2014 which were created by Prince Harry, the Invictus Games Foundation has been set up to develop this legacy, manage the process of selecting the hosts of future games and oversee their delivery.

Following the second Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida, the Invictus story will continue and the 2017 Invictus Games will take place in Toronto, Canada from 24-30 September 2017.

The rigorous selection process for the UK team was based on the benefit the Invictus Games will give an individual as part of their recovery, combined with performance and commitment to training.

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said: "Everyone selected for the UK team can be

proud of what they have achieved as they prepare for success in Orlando.

In May 2016, Prince Harry announced that Toronto, Ontario, will step up to host the next Invictus Games.

The 2017 event will take place from September 23 to 30 and will see more than 550 ill, injured and wounded servicemen and women from 17 allied nations compete in 12 adaptive sports, including archery, athletics, indoor rowing, powerlifting, road cycling, sitting volleyball, swimming, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby and wheelchair tennis. Also, new to the sports line up will be the addition of golf.

Prince Harry said, "I always hoped the Invictus story would continue after the London Games. And having seen so many new people benefit from their journey to Orlando this year, I definitely did not want it to end here. So today, I am absolutely delighted to announce that the Invictus Games legacy will continue when Toronto hosts the third Invictus Games."

At the 2016 (8-12 May) games we had two ex-Pioneers competing and one in the choir, they were Matthew Elliott and Craig Winspear competing and Geoffrey Dorritt in the choir. Both Matthew and Craig served with 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC.

PIONEER CRAIG WINSPEAR

Brave Craig Winspear has been chosen to represent his country – less than five years after his life was hanging in the balance. The 33-year-old former High Tunstall College of Science student, in Hartlepool, is one of the 110-strong team of wounded, injured and sick military personnel and veterans selected by Prince Harry to represent the UK at the 2016 Invictus Games.

Craig's partner Hayley Wilson, 35, admitted: "I am so proud of what he has achieved." A bomb blast in December 2011 left his life hanging by a thread. The 23 Pioneer Regiment soldier lost both his legs when he slipped on wet ground in

Afghanistan and landed on a live bomb. His family were told to prepare for the worst, but Craig fought back to health despite five months in hospital.

Brave Craig then learned to walk all over again on prosthetic legs. His story was so inspirational, he won a Hartlepool Mail Local Hero Award in 2013. At the time, he told of his dream to fight back and compete in the Paralympics.

Now he's all set to represent his country at the Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida, at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex from May 8 to May 12.

Five hundred competitors from 15 nations will compete in 10 sports, and Craig will compete in the wheelchair basketball team and as an individual shot-putter.

Hayley said: "He is doing really well. He is still rehabbing and he is getting medically discharged later this year, and as regards to walking on his prosthetics, he is flying along. The Invictus Games have really boosted his confidence."

The Royal British Legion will support friends and family of the UK team to recognise the vital contribution they make to the recovery of wounded, injured or sick service personnel and veterans.

It is pleasing to report that Craig was awarded a silver medal in the wheelchair basketball.

PIONEER MATTHEW ELLIOTT

Matthew, from Port Erin, was selected to take part in Invictus Games and his wife Lara and the couples sons Charlie (8) and Russell (5) also packed their bags to cheer him from the sidelines thanks to the Royal British Legion, which funded the transport and accommodation costs of all British participants and their families.

This generous gesture was very much appreciated but also richly deserved by families who, no doubt like the Elliotts, have been on a 'rough road' since being discharged from duty.

Matthew (34) runs a landscape gardening and tree surgeon business, has no missing limbs or physical injuries (except for damaged knee cartilages), but suffers from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after serving in Iraq as Lance Corporal with 23 Pioneer Regiment.

"There's still a stigma to it," he said, "I was in the army for eight and a half years (until May 2012). I had been in Iraq in South Basra and then at an air base and attached to a hospital. Nobody can prepare for what you are doing. I was driving an ambulance then carrying casualties from the back of a helicopter."

Referring to blood, he added, "It is not tomato sauce – a lot stays with you. I thought I had no problem."

The day after I got home I was on the phone to mum, my wife was in the background. I lost the plot and threw the mobile down and walked out. I have thought about suicide. I just wanted to leave my family in peace. My wife is made of stern stuff though – if not she would

have walked out a long time ago. It's not nice to have, it's not just the limbs, there are psychological wounds. Laura and my son Charlie bore the brunt of it. I had no sleep, my wife came to realise I was not the same man that she had married. I have friends who are amputees and you can see what's wrong with them. But people cannot get into your head – it's a living nightmare."

He has received specialist help at Combat Stress care home Hollybush House in Ayrshire, he also has art therapy and sees a psychologist. The therapy has helped him to understand the mechanics of PTSD.

"When you have these experiences, the brain shuts it off, it scrambles what you have seen and puts it away somewhere and it comes out later and kicks you on the backside," he said.

"I have an alter ego, a second version of me. I had a spooky experience in Iraq. During a house to house search I went into an old building by myself.

There was this black object with no limbs and a spiky head. All the anger, upset, all the problems evolved. When I am angry or upset it appears, it's a nasty one. I have to go to the bedroom and sit there and shut my eyes. I was told I am not the only one to have such experiences."

Training for Invictus delivered therapy on several levels. During rehabilitation, the suggestion was made that he take up archery – although new to the sport, he was used to handling a rifle – and try for the British team at the Invictus Games. Matthew said, "It's surprisingly calming with archery, you forget your problems and issues. You are back as a team again and give each other grief and banter and egg each other on. It's been good getting into barrack room life and humour. There are people in wheelchairs and with PTSD all taking the mickey out of each other."

Training in the 3 months prior to the games became more intensive with trips to the UK two or three times a month, and in the island with the Isle of Man Archery Club twice a week. There's also a good chance he will represent the island in the next island games.

At the Invictus games he also competed in the shot put, discus and rowing events, and is eager to thank Castle Rushen High School – where Lara teaches – for use of their equipment. Lara said, "At the time of the first Invictus Games, Matthew was still having problems with his PTSD and he didn't think he was 'injured enough' to take part, so it was really exciting that he was involved this year." Our congratulations go to Matthew on winning an archery gold medal, his team beat Canada in the final.

On 25 May 16 Parliament paid tribute to the achievements of the athletes who starred in the UK team at the Invictus Games in Florida. An all-party group of MPs, peers and senior military figures welcomed the team to salute their efforts. Team UK returned from the Games with their heads held high after taking 131 medals.

INVICTUS CHOIR

Choirmaster Gareth Malone formed a choir of wounded ex-armed services personnel to perform at the 2016 Invictus Games in Orlando in front of Prince Harry and Michelle Obama and an audience of thousands.

They even penned a new song, *Flesh and Blood*, inspired by their harrowing experiences. Gareth said that he had sobbed like a baby after talking to some of them. They're all in the same boat, they have to redefine their lives. The choir will be a marker in their lives, by the time they're finished they'll have sung about their vulnerabilities, their weaknesses and their strengths to millions.

Gareth stated that he tried to get Prince Harry to sing with them but at the beginning he admitted to not being the greatest singer! ■





Front Cover

Gold Medal Winner - Pioneer Matthew Elliott competing at the Invictus Games

Picture: Roger Keller



Back Cover

Silver Medal Winner - Pioneer Craig Winspear with Prince Harry

Picture: Roger Wollenberg

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EDITORIAL

SINCE THE April Newsletter was distributed the number of members in the Association has dipped slightly mainly because of the number of Newsletters returned "Gone Away", although a large number have since forwarded their new address.

We have also recruited 32 new members so far this year, the latest being a 101 year old WW2 veteran who lives in Canada, unfortunately he cannot remember the unit he served with, we are hoping to obtain this information for him.

I think you will all join me in congratulating Matthew Elliott and Craig Winspear on their fantastic achievement at the Invictus Games - well worthy of a place on the front and back covers of this newsletter!

We had our 2nd Reunion from a military environment at The Royal Court Hotel in Coventry in June when 146 attended. There have also been other gatherings during the year with the 39/93 Club meeting in Bournemouth, the Nostalgia Group meeting in Bridlington, a large group of 42 members meeting in Sherringham, a get together in Blackpool in early September. There has also been a Pioneer

Fijian Reunion! The SNCOs Club organised the annual pilgrimage to the Army v Navy rugby game at Twickenham when 135 members attended, they also had a very successful dinner night at Kineton and a battlefield tour to Arnhem. The Past and Present Officers' Dinner held on 14 October 2016 had 58 attenders, this event was well organised by Major Billy Dilkes who managed to source an 18 piece band. Details of these events can be found in this edition of the Newsletter.

This year the Association has had an increased allocation of tickets for the Cenotaph Parade thanks to badgering the Royal British Legion and will have 85 members marching. We also have a waiting list for tickets. We still have some spare tickets for the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 10th November, if you wish to attend please let me know as soon as possible. We hold a London Lunch immediately after the service.

The Association moved to St George's Barracks in September, this was my fourth move. I might now get a job with Pickfords!

A few may have noticed that I was not my usual cheerful self at the Reunion and appeared a little grumpy, this was because I was due

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Some interesting facts



STOP PRESS

■ Congratulations to Pioneer James Upfield for being selected to run the London Marathon (will he do it naked!)

STOP PRESS

■ Congratulations to Pioneer Geoffrey Dorritt who is singing in the Invictus Choir at Sports Personality of the Year awards.

STOP PRESS

■ The Northampton Burns Night is to be held at the Conservative Club on the 21st January 2017. Hope to see you there!

■ Booking for the OY! YO! Reunion Weekend must be in by the 1st May 2017. Book early to avoid disappointment.



major surgery for the big "C" ten days after the reunion. Everything appears to have gone well and I am now undergoing chemo, at the time of going to press I have had 5 sessions out of 12 with luckily no side-effects – the few beers immediately after chemo probably helps. I would like to thank all who sent get well and good will messages they were very much appreciated.

As you will notice a booking form for next year's reunion is attached, let us make this one even bigger – you will notice that I have already arranged the price for beers and wines, I think you will agree that these prices are fantastic for a hotel. Full details of the programme for the weekend will appear in the April 2017 issue of the Newsletter. You are reminded, however, that we must have your booking by 1 May 2017 for you to receive the subsidised rate.

Once again we have endeavoured to make this issue as interesting as possible. We recently found in our archives a large number of photograph negatives, we hope in the future to scan these in and make them available for all to see. An example of these can be found on pages 50 to 53. These show members of the Corps (believed to be 522 Company - it would

be appreciated if someone could confirm this) tidying up the Falklands after the conflict in 1982. The article on page 22 by Paul Parlbay is also very interesting - although Op Banner covered a large period of time little has been written about the Pioneers on this Operation. Can you submit an article about your time serving in Northern Ireland? We know that over 3,000 Pioneers served in the Provence.

Also attached are the Christmas Draw tickets (unless you have already indicated that you are unable to sell them), please give this draw your support, it is one way of keeping our finances ticking over. Instead of writing your full name and address on the counterfoils you may write the number above your name on the envelope the newsletter arrived in, i.e. B176.

I hope that you, once again, find the articles in the Newsletter interesting, have you a story to tell? If so please send it in (with photographs if possible), do not worry about grammar etc, we will edit it for you.

On behalf of the Chairman and Council of the Association may we wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Norman Brown



Can you spot the mouse?

The winner of "Find the Cuneo Mouse" was Mr Peter Matthews.

"Hi Norman another great mag keep it up the mouse on page 13".

A prize will be on its way to him. It can easily be seen between the legs of the gentleman on the extreme right. As it was so easy last time with so many people sending in the correct answer, we have decided to make it a little harder.

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.

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!

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 December 2016.

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

Good luck.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS DRAW
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter



PAST EVENTS



■ 23 YEARS ago ex WO1 Norris Taylor (pictured below on the left) donated a plaque for display at what was the entrance to Simpson Barracks, Northampton. On 15 June 2016 he visited Simpson Grange to inspect his craftsmanship for the first time with Tom Appleyard (pictured below on the right) who had arranged for the brick-work to be built to incorporate Norris's historical plaque.

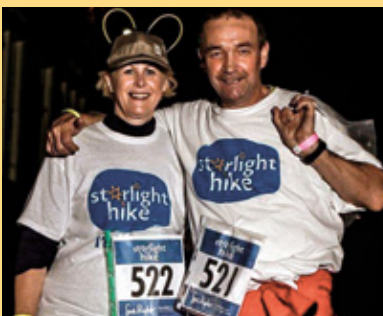
This monument ensures that the Corps will always be remembered in Northampton, it must be the nicest entrance to any housing estate in Northampton.



■ MARK HENRY and his wife started their 10k walk in aid of Sue Ryder Manorlands Hospice. In his own words...

Starting in Oxenhope we set off in two groups on the Keighley and Worth Valley railway down to Oakworth station as seen in the railway children. There we disembark to start the walk. Making our way around Oakworth we were greeted by people along the way all giving generously, from there we made our way to Haworth to the home of the Bronte Sisters and then back to Oxenhope Manorlands where we entered the grounds in silence for a moment of reflection, and then onto the finish, where we gladly ate a bacon butty and a steaming hot pot of tea. And then home for a well-earned sleep.

We were given the numbers 521 and 522 – these were the two Companies I served in – what a co-incidence!



■ THE Seventieth Past and Present Pioneer Officers' Dinner was held in the Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess, Ambrosden on Friday 14 October 2016. The Association President, Brig CB Telfer, presided over the function and the Association Chairman, Col A Barnes, gave an update on the Association. In addition Col D Clouston, the last CO of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, gave an update on the 81 Pioneer soldiers still serving in the RLC. A breakdown of the ranks is: WO1 - 11 (all RSMs!), WO2 - 11 (7 are SSMs, and 4 in training and recruiting) SSgt - 16 (7 as SQMs, 8 in training and 1 in welfare), Sgts - 18, Cpls - 25.

RPC Nostalgia Group Anniversary

The 10th anniversary of the RPC Nostalgia Group raised an amazing £1,350 for Unique Understanding Chromosome Disorders in children.



■ Piper playing at the Nostalgia Group reunion

Picture: RPC Nostalgia Group

THE 10th anniversary of the RPC Nostalgia Group raised £1,350 for Unique, Understanding Chromosome Disorders in children.

The group stayed in 4 hotels in Bridlington over the weekend 29 Apr to 1 May 2016. Unfortunately one of them had changed hands in the last 9 months when it was checked out by a member of the group who took photos to prove it was ok. This turned out to be the worst hotel of the weekend, however, with the usual Pioneer spirit the lad's and lasses soldiered on to raise money for their charity and apart from this a fantastic weekend was had by all.

Allan Sutcliffe was presented by the group with a clock while Liz, his wife, was presented with a picture of a Tiger, her favourite subject, along with some flowers. The Mayor of Bridlington John Copey and Deputy Mayor (now Mayor) and a fellow Pioneer, Liam Dealtry were in attendance to talk to the group and have photo's taken. Liam and his wife Michelle arranged all the entertainment for the night for which we thank them.

The Mayor also presented the group with a plaque from him and Bridlington. Liam Dealtry had a surprise for Kevin Digger Young with a Piper who played a few tunes

with Digger singing along. We had 84 members attend this year and it was brilliant to see a lot of new faces.

The group would like to thank the following; David Fender and Joyce for the hip flask they made and donated, Digger's wife Anne-Marie bought it for him for a 3 figure sum.

Thanks also to David and Pauline Parris for doing the collection and going out to get Allan and Liz presents. Acknowledgement must also go to Chris and Elaine Oram and Elaine's Mum for all the donations, but most of all thanks to all the other members who donated gifts and parrots (you know who you are) for the charity.

We pick a different charity every year to present the monies raised from the auction and the tombola, where Michael and Julie Radbourne did a splendid job. John Hatfield did a fantastic in taking the pictures all night.

The hotel has been told to remove its three-star sign after photos emerged showing dirty bedrooms and broken furniture. The Automobile Association said it will write to the owners of Yorkies Guest House on Pembroke Terrace requesting that they take down the sign.





REUNION WEEKEND

17th - 19th June 2016



The Pioneer Reunion Weekend was held at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry on 17/19 June 2016.

Pictures: Paul Brown, Norman Brown

THE Pioneer Reunion Weekend was held at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry on 17/19 June 2016. Members started to arrive on the Friday afternoon and were met with a Pioneer flag flying above the hotel and Pioneer signs at the entrance. The Pioneer shop was open and did a roaring

trade in the afternoon. Friday evening got under way with a carvery meal and live entertainment together with a raffle, most of the prizes very kindly donated by members. Thanks must go to Mrs Chris Thomas in selling the tickets and her husband Pete Thomas running the raffle.

On Saturday morning the first coach departed to Wellesbourne market – this was, of course, mainly for the ladies. The Annual General Meeting followed, during which a presentation was made to Mr Paul Brown, the son of Mr Norman Brown the Controller of the RPC Association. The Association Chairman said the following:



"Since 2003, Norman's son Paul Brown has been inextricably linked to the continued very successful development of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association through his support to his father, Norman, the Association Secretary/Controller.

Although Paul has never had a substantive role within the Association, he has helped maintain the Association website and all the other Association's social media tools, including the Pioneer Magazine. The magazine is a key communications portal for the Association and is always a highly professional publication, with a number of quality issues each year.

The magazine provides a substantial historical and current record of Pioneer activity. I know that Paul commits a great deal of his time for no reward to preparing for and putting together each issue of the magazine and he puts in well over a week of pretty much solid work to each edition in the run up to its submission to the printer.

But aside from this, fairly intense pre-publication period, I know that Paul

attends a vast range of Pioneer activities throughout the year to gather material and record items for forthcoming editions, liaising with contributors, taking photo's and generating copy. Overall, Paul contributes enormously to the Association each year.

Paul is not paid for any of this work. He commits his time willingly and without any expectation of recompense or even thanks. If there is an RPCA event, I now 'expect' to see Paul there with his camera, recording the event for posterity.

Paul is an unsung hero. And he is absolutely worthy of recognition. I am personally honoured therefore to be able to present Paul with a new (copy No 1) Master General of Logistic Certificate of Thanks for all that he has done for the Royal Pioneer Corps.

Paul, thank you."

In the afternoon the second coach departed to the National Arboretum, we had already been informed that the Logistic Grove was flooded and that our planned church service there was now to be held in the Chapel. However, the coach

trip turned out to be the magical mystery tour. The driver got lost and ended up going through narrow country lanes, he even managed to go over two bridges with a weight limit of 7.5 tons (his coach weighted 9.5 tons!). The coach came to a bridge with a height limit of 13'9" the coach itself was 13'8", all the top deck ducked as the coach went through! The church service was conducted by Maj Geoffrey Crook as the Padre from the Arboretum failed to attend.

Saturday night again included live entertainment, carvery meal with wine and an auction when the last of the Association property was auctioned. Once again Pete Thomas did a marvellous job and nearly £1,100 was raised.

Those who stayed for the Sunday enjoyed a quiet day with a further carvery meal and disco for entertainment in the evening.

All in all a very successful weekend, the dates for next year's reunion are 30 June to 2 July we hope to see a record number attend. A booking form is enclosed with this Newsletter. ■



SHERINGHAM BASH

1st - 2nd July 2016





Peter Wegg and his family organised a terrific weekend for Pioneers at Sheringham and raised £244 !

PETER WEGG and his family organised a terrific weekend for Pioneers in July at Breck Farm Camp site, situated just outside of Sheringham.

On arrival at the campsite we soon saw the Pioneer colours of red and green flying on the flagpost and the festivities were well underway, with Mick Micklethwaite leading the way by falling over and fracturing his wrist!

This however did not stop the hardy Pioneer from staying and enjoying the

whole weekend.

I must pay tribute to Peter Wegg - he helps a lot of people and does a lot of fund raising. He put on a free BBQ and a fire pit on the Friday evening, for which the speciality sausages and burgers were out of this world.

On the Saturday morning we all had a short service at the war memorial in Sheringham with the British Legion, which incorporated the blowing of a WW1 whistle.

On the Saturday evening Peter also

organised a fabulous free hot and cold buffet for everyone, with a gorgeous Pioneer cake for afters. The group and disco played long into the evening.

A well deserved presentation was made to Peter on the Saturday evening.

Not only did Peter put on the above bash but he also raised £244 for the Association!

Peter is also looking at repeating the event in 2 years time.

Thank you Peter and much respect!
Hope to see you at the next reunion. ■

BATTLEFIELD TOUR

15th - 19th September 2016



ABRIDGE TOO FAR





Six Pioneers go on a battlefield tour of the famous area of Arnhem and find a bridge to far

[Full story >](#)



Report: Norrie Taylor
Pictures: Norman Brown, Bob Fox

MOST CURRENT and former service personnel will have heard of Operation Market Garden, a plan to force a crossing over the bridges of Belgium and the Netherlands and thus open up the heart of Germany – an operation to bring about an early end to the war. Operation Garden was the ground element lead by XXX Corps and Market the Airborne element. The prize bridge was to be at Arnhem – “A Bridge Too Far” which would prove to be a fulfilled prophecy.

Six former members of the Corps departed from bus stops in East Anglia and Northamptonshire for the tour. The RV for us all and the tour company bus was subject to a slight (200 metre) misunderstanding by the organizer, (who will remain nameless)! The co-pilot of the bus was not too keen on flexibility, but soon joined in with the spirit of things and off we went.

Despite the problems associated with travel by road (or any other method in this country) we still managed to make the ferry port of Dover in time to miss the sailing and thus hang around for a couple of hours for the next one. A time of catch up and laughter.

During our enforced wait we discovered that Chris Bunn was on a health food kick – carrot sticks and dips, various bits and pieces such as strips of melon – he wasn’t to drink beer! His capitulation took less than five minutes.

Thanks to Taff Thomas and Bob Fox for the effort of dragging beer aboard the ferry – it kept us sustained until Calais and our first overnight stop in Brussels. It was the appearance of a bag full of bacon butties, provided by Pete, that was also the final nail in health food regime Chris was attempting – the rest of us, of course, just dug in.

Day 2 started with a visit to Joe’s Bridge (Bridge No9 on the Bochoold – Herentals Canal) – this bridge was the springboard for the XXX Corps Operation; the assault was to be led by the Irish Guards Battle Group whose CO the bridge is allegedly named after. The memorial stone to the Irish Guards used to have a badge set into it, but after many badges had been removed, it has been decided not to replace them!!

It is worth mentioning at this point that the road XXX Corps was moving along was a narrow, single lane highway with deep ditches at either side and, as an added bonus, at places thickly wooded to both sides. Additionally, because of the width of the road, the corps troops and vehicles stretched back some 45 miles to the rear.

On the 10th September 1944 the assault on the bridge commenced. There was, however, a snag.

The enemy had prepared the bridge for demolition and no one knew how to make the charges safe should they get a chance and so at this point up rolled a sapper officer but with no men.

In time honoured fashion, 5 men were volunteered for the task one of which declined the invitation.

The technical training consisted of being handed a shovel and told “when this starts, we get on the bridge, climb down to the charges and start cutting through any wire you find with the shovels”. The men climbed down to the charges in a hail of fire and did the job knowing that at any time the charges could go off. The bridge was taken intact.

The officer received an MC and each of the four soldiers the MM. Obviously a lot more happened but there is loads of information available to those who want it.

With the bridge secured and repaired by sappers, XXX Corps was ready to move off on the day of the air drop, Sunday the 17th September. The plan was to be in Arnhem within 48 hours. Shortly after the lead units moved out, they were ambushed from enemy positions and in the ensuing fight the road became blocked by knocked out tanks. A cab rank of Typhoons were whistled up to attack the enemy and their location was subsequently cleared by infantry.

The move to Arnhem was continued. By this time, the enemy had started to understand what the plan was (there is some thought that they already knew as a double agent may well have tipped them off), particularly when the US 82nd and 101st Airborne started to land along the route.

The tour then took us to Grave and Nijmegen where we discovered that an error in planning caused a delay in the taking of the bridge at Nijmegen, many casualties and to this day arguments between allies on

whose fault it was. We also visited a massive cemetery to German troops. The cemetery contains all their dead from both the Ardennes operations (The Battle of the Bulge) and Belgium/Holland it is truly massive and, sadly, is not supported as our CWWG support our cemeteries around the world. The other noticeable thing, is the cemetery does not appear to receive the visits our cemeteries do.

At the bridge at Grave, we discovered two groups of reinactors (one dressed as US Airborne and one much smaller group in the field grey of the Wehrmacht) It should be worth mentioning here that memories for some of the Dutch people in Eastern Netherlands are long and bitter and when, at a local council meeting, the prospect of reinactors being allowed to come dressed as Wehrmach, the meeting ended in fisticuffs. Mind you, the attention to detail was fascinating – we discovered how the German steel helmets varied as the war progressed and the cost of some of the kit was eye watering. Tom also visited the US cook tent and sampled the all in stew (wonderful aroma) and had his picture taken – much to my amusement he burnt his lips wolfing his taster down. All the reinactors we spoke to were Dutch!

A visit to the museum at Overloon was included in the tour; it is well worth a visit. The museum is located in an area where the largest tank battle in Holland took place and when I last visited, over 30 years ago now, many of the exhibits were out in the open – basically in situ.

Now, however, all is under cover and almost all of the kit is in working order and the locations contains probably the largest collection anywhere. The visit included a period of reflection at the CWWG Cemetery where we paused for a moment at the grave of a Pioneer - 13015608 Pte John ROWNTREE from Bradford, Yorks.

Arriving at our hotel at the end of the day we discover most flag poles in peoples’ gardens are flying a flag bearing the symbol of the Parachute Regiment. We also find we are staying at a place that was once the HQ of the local SS Training Regiment and as we discovered, in an area involved in fierce fighting between enemy and British airborne forces.

Time for a quick wash and brush up and then off to Arnhem for some welcome sustenance. The sustenance was provided

in a Turkish eatery – very good – and on the banks of the lower Rhine with the Arnhem bridge as a backdrop. We finished the meal with Raki to toast Pioneers everywhere.

Returning to the hotel for a night cap(s) we concluded a long and informative day and headed to bed. Unfortunately age may have not necessarily aged them too much, but had expanded a few waist lines to the extent that Chris and Bob had to exit the lift (licenced for 12) before the thing would move – just saying.

Day 3 was to be the most poignant. We started by visiting the 3 Landing Zones – large open areas of heath and, as it turned out to the surprise of glider pilots, fields of spuds; these areas would have been covered with airborne troops, gliders and discarded equipment containers. The Airborne Monument at Heelsum which is made from material recovered from the battle proved very interesting as did one of only two Air Mobile 6 pounder Anti-Tank guns used in the battle. Many of the troops landing, even on the first lift, found themselves almost immediately in contact with the enemy who by this time were rapidly organizing. It should be noted that the LZs were 6 miles from the bridge in the first lift and some 8 miles from the bridge on the second lift – the third lift for the Polish Airborne troops had almost been overrun by the enemy by the time the Poles arrived.

Moving to the CWWG Cemetery at Osterbeek for the memorial service we were met with massive crowds.

Not only ex service personnel, family and next of kin of those who fell and, more importantly, 25 men who actually landed and fought at Arnhem but thousands of local people came.

The service followed the normal procedure until after the wreath laying when children, who had appeared amongst the graves earlier, lifted the flowers they had all brought and waved them.

Then, after an explanation of why they were there, each child turned and placed a flower on the grave of a fallen soldier and spoke out loud his name, or that he was known unto God. At the end, the air vibrated by a very low pass by a Lancaster, followed by a B25 Mitchell and Spitfire.

Tom had brought a Pioneer wreath for us to lay and the plan was to do this later in the day – we would wear a Corps shirt and

our beret. However, Bob had forgot to pack his beret and together with time constraints we decided to lay the wreath at the end of the service and as the crowds thinned out – this we did. The rest of the day was spent listening to Chris bemoaning the fact that Bob had cocked up! We had to tell him to button it in the end. Chris also, on the day, had a habit of disappearing – so much so that future trips will require us to fit him with either a GPS tracking device, a long line or a helium balloon and length of ribbon.

One other aspect of the wreath saga that was quite moving involved a widowed lady who was travelling on our coach with her family. Her husband had dropped at Arnhem and when she saw our wreath and read the inscription she cried.

It should be worth mentioning that Dutch people, when they heard Lancaster's passing overhead of an evening, were not worried as they knew these aircraft were helping to bring the war to an end which would return them their country.

Additionally, towards the end of the war, these same aircraft brought much needed food and medical supplies for what was then a starving population. After the end of the war, men who had fought at Arnhem and who returned from 1946 when the remembrance festival was started, were accommodated with families in the same houses they had fought from; such was the sense of togetherness between local inhabitants and the troops.

The penultimate part of our tour took us to some of the actual defensive positions taken around Osterbeek.

Our group had with us three sons whose father had taken part and whose photograph was taken of him and his comrades during the battle - the gates by which they were dug in are still in front of the house and, in memory of those lost, still left as they were at the time, open.

One other event took place which, although not related to the tour, is worth mentioning. Chris was taking some photographs outside of the Hartenstein Museum and noticed a Para Brigadier in full service dress looking at the building. Chris asked him if he was in quiet contemplation and a conversation then took place. When the officer saw that Chris was in the RPC Association he said something along the lines of "we really miss the Pioneers, we

have no troops now able to carry out the full range of tasks you men did from Infantry to construction and support tasks – basically everything. It was a mistake when you were disbanded".

We ended at John Frost Bridge, named after Lt Col John Frost the CO of 2 Para who held the bridge until all ammo was spent and hardly any of his men and members of other units who managed to join him had either been killed or wounded. Photographs taken at the time show total devastation not a building surviving.

The enemy troops were from the SS, veterans of the Eastern Front and in particular the battle of Stalingrad, said they had never faced a more determined foe and had to endure a harder fight.

While we take time to remember the actions at Arnhem 72 years ago, we must never forget the impact this battle had on what, at the time, was a quiet and relatively untouched backwater of the European War. When the troops finally withdrew, the Dutch had lost many innocent lives, had their communities shattered, yet still had the courage to help, hide and eventually aid the escape of wounded British and Polish soldiers. Superficially, the towns and villages today show little obvious sign of the battle save monuments.

One last evening together before a very early departure the next day. Good company, good fun, previous secrets owned up to all washed down with a beer the price of which made us wilt (bill E108). The only problem was a delay caused by someone (not one of us or an ex squaddie) unable to get out of bed. This time though, we made the Ferry.

We should mention the tour operator – Leger Travel – no complaints (except Mr Negative at our collection point), but hats off to John our tour guide – very knowledgeable, very well researched and without him the tour would not have been so informative, or interesting.

The two drivers on our coach were top class, some of the locations we visited required them to be on their toes as access and egress were challenging – they managed fantastically – just one small coming together with a tree to liven things up.

Thanks to Tom Appleyard, Norman Brown, Pete Thomas, Bob Fox and Chris Bunn for a great few days – we shall do it again! ■

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE MOST** prestigious event of its kind in Wales, this year's Festival of Remembrance will be taking place at St David's Hall, Cardiff on Saturday 5 November starting at 7pm.

Remembrance for Wales will feature the Regimental Band of the Royal Welsh and massed choirs from across the country, with the First Minister and National Chairman of the Royal British Legion in attendance. Tickets are available now and range from £10 to £20 per person. To purchase yours, visit www.stdavishallcardiff.co.uk or call the venue's box office on 02920 878444.

■ **ONCE AGAIN** the WOs & SNCOs Pioneer Reunion Club will be organising a trip to the Army vs Navy game at Twickenham with a coach departing from St George's Barracks, Bicester.

As in the past few years the club have allowed all Association members to attend on a fill-up basis. A club Newsletter will be sent to Club members in October with a booking form, if an Association member would like a copy of this booking form either send an email to royalpioneer corps@gmail.com or write to the Association.

■ **FOLLOWING THIS** year's successful dinner held at Kineton it is hoped to repeat the venue in March 2017

Details will appear in the Club Newsletter which will be distributed in October 2016.

■ A **BOOKING** form for the Reunion Weekend is enclosed with this Newsletter.

If you wish to attend please return by 1 May 2017. It is appreciated, for some, finding the money in one lump sum may be difficult, payment by instalments is acceptable as long as all payments are received by 1 May 2017.

■ **REMEMBER** you can also see our list of events and activities on the Association Facebook Group and Page.

NEWS



■ **THANKS TO** all members who supported the Derby 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 P Wigg Fleet
2nd Prize £500	- Margaret Honey Hounslow
3rd Prize £200	- Joseph Harding Huddersfield
4th Prize £100	- J McGrath Bradford
5th Prize £50	- Preston Schofield Dukinfield

■ **THE LEGAL** Advice Centre is dedicated to offering both a welcoming and confidential environment when seeking free legal advice.

If a client has a legal issue which we cannot advise on, we can signpost the client to an organisation that will be able to assist them.

To make an enquiry contact them on 020 7882 3931. Email lac@qmul.ac.uk. Website: www.lac.qmul.ac.uk

Bereavement Support

A not for profit community organisation run by Volunteers, and members of the Armed Forces Covenant.



Picture: Paul Brown

THE VETERANS Bereavement Support Service along with Veterans Funerals UK was created by those who have served in the Armed Forces and Merchant Navy for those who serve and have served and to ensure that they have full access to a specialist bereavement support network at the time of need for their family and friends.

They are a not for profit community organisation run by Volunteers, in a clear effective way and we are signed members of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Amongst the diversity of our services that are available across the UK are:

- Access to affordable funeral care at the time of need.

- The Veterans Pre-Paid Funeral Plan (for those who serve, served and their spouses).
- The Veterans Funeral Fund (access to small grants to help with funeral costs).
- Bereavement care and support.
- Ceremonial Funerals for those who have served.
- Campaigning for better rights of service men and women past and present.
- Support for children affected by loss.
- Assistance with benefits and social care.
- Social interaction and meeting points
- Advice and information helpline (Freephone).
- A Free Will Service

You can contact them by phoning them on 0345 222 1525 or via their website at www.veteransfunerals.co.uk



Camo pants

Steve Bone shows of his camouflage pants at reunion

Picture: Paul Brown

Bill Sears

Bill describes his early life in post-war Merseyside and the hardships he had to endure, his antics growing up, his hatred of his schoolmaster, the outbreak of World War 2, "It will be over by Christmas" he told his mother! He saw service in the Middle East where his speciality was finding water in the desert.



Report: Bill Sears
Picture: Paul Brown

MY NAME is William Henry Sears, I was born on 2nd June 1917. At that time the First World War was at its height so on the home front things were grim. My earliest memory is when I was about three years old wearing a blue coloured frock because boys did not wear trousers until they were three years old (at that time it was called being britched).

I remember having a little three wheeled tricycle and as we lived in a street on a hill I believe, according to my mother, that one neighbour said, "He is Mad!" The speed he goes down that hill he will kill himself." Also I believe folk could see my knickers during these speed trials!

During these times there was a lot of poverty about and our family was no exception. Most men were away in France – my father was a seaman so we did not see much of him. When I was four I was rigged out in a sailor's suit with a peaked hat.

That brings me to 1921. At that time my mother had a baby girl who was born on 26th April. Her name was Mary. I had another sister, Ann, who was two years older than me – that was our family. At that time I found I wanted to discover new things further afield so I decided to escape and time after time I got lost, ending up in the Police Station. Eventually the Police warned my mother that if I escaped anymore they would prosecute her. Mother had a gate fitted. This was a challenge to me and once again I escaped by climbing over it. This time I was found near Islington and I remember mother collecting me from a place called the Sheltering Home at the top of Islington and Moss Street, Everton. A final warning came from the Police and so from then on I had to have a large cardboard tied on my back with my name and address on it.

The next thing I remember was being in Alder Hey Hospital. I believe I had pleurisy and at that time I couldn't understand why I was four and a half and yet I was only four. Next I remember standing in a line along with other boys and girls all stripped to the waist being examined by a doctor on our first day at school, this was Penrhyn Street Council School, off Great Homer Street in Liverpool. I went to that school for

nine years.

About 1922 my mother became a one-parent family and things became very difficult but nevertheless we survived. She was very strict with us and we never brought any trouble to the home. Some of my pals ran foul of the law but I always remembered my mother's words, "Fetch no trouble here or woe betide you!"

During my school days I was an average scholar. One of my teachers who moved up to the seniors with us was a bully. I was with him for three years, he would throw chalk and give you the cane for the least little thing, in fact my nerves were bad with him. The more I tried to be neat and tidy in my writing the more I made lots of ink blots. He decided to call me "Dirty Dick" and "Filthy Richard on a Sunday" in front of the class so on my way home from school the other children would shout "Dirty Dick" after me. When my mother heard of this she went to the school and confronted the teacher demanding an apology, telling him that the boy had no father and that he should be ashamed of himself. She got one from him. So you can understand why I hated school.

During those schooldays we had a holiday with Mum and the three of us in a large tent at Moreton on the Wirral and I spent a week at a place called The Lower Flash near Winsford in Cheshire. These are the only times I can remember quite clearly my school holidays from Penrhyn Street school. I also remember vaguely being sent to a holiday camp near Dyserth in North Wales for boys with no fathers. I was about seven years old then and it cost my mother three shillings which was a lot in those days.

We never had the luxury of pocket money so Mary, my sister, and I would run errands for neighbours and if we were lucky we would maybe get a half-penny or a penny for our trouble. I used to go to the local market on a Saturday and offer to carry lino for ladies who had bought some. My reward would be about three pence which would cover my entrance to the cinema. I remember one particular Saturday near Christmas. I had done well that day carrying lino and was the proud owner of a silver sixpence. Mary was about seven at the time and I asked her to come to Woolworths in Great Homer Street with me. The store advertised that "nothing was

being sold for over sixpence". So, when we got inside I said, "Mary now choose any present you would like here". Her eyes nearly popped out with excitement. I thought she may have chosen a doll but no, she chose a tin violin with a bow – all for sixpence. That was Mary's finest childhood Christmas. Later on in my story I will tell you how she has never forgotten that experience.

Our fun and enjoyment as boys in those days was to make steering carts out of lids of fish boxes. We would buy them from the fishmonger for a penny. We used to get old pram wheels and fix the two axles to the wood and then have races on them down the hilly street where we lived – we were mad! We also used to hire bikes for two pence each for a quarter of an hour – some pals wouldn't return on time and the man would send out a big lad on a racing bike (called a Tout!) to get the bikes back. Eventually I built my own bike out of old bike parts. One day Jimmy Hickey, my pal, and I decided to swap bikes. Jimmy had obtained a racing bike with cane wheels from Charlie Peak. Not long afterwards a policeman called at my house and said that the racing bike had been stolen a couple of weeks before so Jimmy and I had to go to a Juvenile Court. We told the magistrate we knew nothing about the theft. We were given half a crown each for being witnesses and told to beware of being involved in such deals in the future. We were very relieved as we had no idea it had been stolen.

My grandfather used to make and supply oven parts to local bakers' shops. He used to take me with him to push his handcart and he would give me a shilling which I would then give to my mum. She would give me a penny back – we were both satisfied with the arrangement. One day I asked my granddad if he would ask the bakers if anyone had an old carrier bike to give away and, lo and behold, a baker called Louis T Kelly on Sleepers Hill presented me with a tricycle – rusty with no pedals or chain, just like the Walls ice cream type. We got it home and I decided to make it roadworthy.

It was then about 1928 and part of Great Homer Street from the cinema called The Homer to Rosevale had been tarmacked so it was ideal for road trials on my tricycle! As I was sitting astride my machine being

pulled by about a dozen lads, two policemen appeared out of a shop doorway. I abandoned ship and ran as fast as I could for home. About ten minutes later a multitude of children plus the policemen with my machine in two arrived on the doorstep. The children were shouting to the policemen, "There's where he lives!" My mother answered the door. The policeman asked her, "Does your son own this thing?" She said, "Yes." "Where did he get it?" they asked. "He made it", she said. "Never," they said. They also said I was a menace and if they saw me again out with it both my mother and I would be in trouble. The contraption was put in our back yard and when I got a chance, when mum was out, I worked on it fixing the pedals and chain with bits from the scrap yard. Once again I was ready for the road but unfortunately for me my mum discovered my secret and when I came home from school one day my world was shattered – Mum had given it to the ragman. Poor Me!

At lunchtimes after our meal at home my sister Mary and I would sit near the fireside and sing duets. We got so carried away with it all that one day we weren't watching the time. Mum shouted, "My goodness, you are both going to be locked out of school." We ran as fast as we could but no luck, the gates were closed. I tried to lift Mary over the gates but unfortunately I failed – she was a bonny lass! When we got home we had to face Mum and as she was very strict we got a severe dressing down.

At that time religion was the main thing people were interested in so when 17th March or 12th July came around people would decorate the streets and march to the bands. When we were going to school gangs of lads would surround us and say, "What are you, CHIPS or PEAS or I or O?" which meant are you Catholic or Protestant? If you weren't the same religion as them you were in for a bashing!

After the 1914-1918 war thousands of men were unemployed so many men and youths would hang about on street corners. Some would play pitch and toss which was illegal and others would place Ollies which was a game rolling your marble into a hole, the winner getting a halfpenny from each of the other chaps who were in the game. That was the nearest to miniature golf we got. At the sight of a policeman everyone would scarp for safety.

I enjoyed myself during the summer holidays. We would go camping to Formby on our bikes with just one tent between six of us. The rent was three shillings for the week – sixpence each. We also went potato picking for wages of about four shillings a day – in today's money 20 pence. We also played a game called Lally Ho where the girls ran and hid and we chased after them. When all the girls were rounded up it was then boys' turn to run and hide. I remember in those days there was a pub on every street corner.

I used to go to a boys' club in Portland Place called Shrewsbury House – it was sponsored by a public school in Shrewsbury and every Whit Monday we would be taken to Shrewsbury School for a lovely day out.

Christmas time in our home was just an ordinary time. We were given two shiny pennies each and an orange. When we asked mum why Father Christmas didn't

visit us she said it was because our chimney was too narrow for him. It just goes to show how naïve we were when Mary still believed in Father Christmas until she was about ten years old and it was me who broke the news to her that it was only a myth – I remember she cried.

I remember one time during the six weeks' summer holidays my pal and I went to the Pier Head (we used to go there quite often) and he found a shilling so we decided to have a tramcar ride to Seaforth, we also bought a packet of cigarettes (Woodbines). We had a fine old time with smoking and sweets, finally landing home about 5pm. By then my face was green and I felt awful. My mum asked me that I had been eating and when I answered nothing" she sent for my pal. He told her we had been smoking. My pal had a bad stammer so before he had finished the word 'smoking' I threw up!

There are a few more activities I remember from these days such as going to the sewing class that was held in St Matthews church on Scotland Road. This church was demolished and is now a petrol station. At the sewing class we were given a big mug of cocoa and a treacle butty – you can see why I went there – and I was the only boy amongst all the girls!

There were two free entry swimming baths in Liverpool at that time – one in Mansfield Street and the other in Burlington Street, and, believe me, you had to watch your clothes like a hawk otherwise you would walk home naked! We also used to go swimming in the Leeds and Liverpool Canal behind the Fairies Sugar Refinery because hot water was always coming from the refinery into the canal. We called this part of the canal the 'THE SCALDIE'. We played football on the 'LOCKFIELDS' where the canal barges entered the docks. We sometimes rode on the backs of the horse drawn carts along the dock road – there were many of them because Liverpool was a thriving seaport in those days. The dockers were employed on a casual basis – maybe half a day at the north dock area and then walk for 3 or 4 miles to the south for another half a day's work. The rest of the week then maybe nothing, things were really bad.

One day my mum decided to buy a mangle (a wringing machine). She thought she would do some washing and mangling for neighbours to earn a few shillings so one night when she had gone to see a neighbour Mary and I decided we would mangle some sheets – what a calamity! We got them caught in the oil cogs! Poor mum went frantic and had to buy new ones to replace them.

LEAVING SCHOOL

When I fourteen I left school. I should have stayed until the end of term but because of the situation at home the headmaster decided I could leave as soon as I was fourteen. Not only that but he also got me a job working in a fish shop – I hated it! I used to fillet codfish. I learnt how to make herrings into bloaters. I used to put cod fillets into strong brine for two days and then hung them out in the sun where eventually they became salt fish which was very nice. Most families had it for Sunday morning breakfast after it had been soaked from Saturday night to get the salt out of it.

Well I finally decided that it was no life for me in the fish shop especially when I had a septic poison finger due to a fish bone penetrating the skin and my next job was in a blacksmith's shop in Thirlmere Road in Anfield. I got ten shillings a week and worked 7.30am to 5.30pm each weekday and five hours on a Saturday. I used to pump the bellows by hand to keep the furnace going and use the sledgehammer when making new horse and pony shoes. I had my own leather apron and tools and would remove the old shoes from horses and ponies. I learned to use the drilling machine and when horses had been shod I would ride them back to their owners. We also fitted the iron rims on the cartwheels. That was hard work because I would have to pump the bellows for at least an hour. I also had to turn the handle on the clipping machine when a horse had to be clipped. The job was really hard work and once again the wanderlust gripped me. I remember one summer's day when we were making new shoes Mr Hall, the blacksmith, said to me, "Son, you have to be strong in the arm and weak in the head for this business." So the more I thought about it the more I realised he was right so after two years at the Smithy, I left.

I had a yearning to become a Motor Driver so I went out every day looking for a job connected with transport and I got taken on by a firm call 'Cottles' who owned a bakery and restaurants – The Bear's Paw, Palatine, St George the Kings City and a Laundry and also about six model T Fords. I was employed as a van boy to assist the driver. My wage was fourteen shillings a week for working each day from 7am to 5pm. I was very happy there. When I reached the age of seventeen and a half I was told I was too old for a van boy's job and I could work inside washing trays. But my heart wasn't in that job so once again I was off.

In between regular jobs I got six weeks temporary work cleaning up the first Mersey Tunnel before it was opened by King George in 1934. We were paid 12/6 a week.

After about three weeks out of work I got a job in a Transport firm called Preasons Transport assisting the bodybuilder making new bodies for the lorries. The manager was very pleased with my previous experience in the Smithy so all was going well. After a year no more bodies for the lorries were required so, to my delight, I was made second man on the lorries. In those days all goods or bulk loads were all loaded by hand the lorries were all tippers. Soon I passed my driving test on one of the lorries and became a spare driver. After one of the drivers left to work on the buses I became a permanent driver. All went well and when I became 21 I applied for a Heavy Goods Licence. I passed that test first time and my wages then became £2/10 per week. My brother in law, who was unemployed at that time, said he would like to work in Transport so I asked my boss for a job for him. He was given a job as my second man for 30 shillings per week. It was hard work because every load we put on our lorry was by spade off the ground be it sand, ashes, coal, shale or whatever and we working in all kinds of weather. After a few weeks I realised that my brother in law was finding it hard only earning 30

shillings a week so I arranged with my boss to take 10 shillings off my wages which meant that we both earned £2 per week. Eventually I was transferred to Preston and was given a ten shilling rise. My brother in law was transferred to a larger vehicle which meant he could still retain his £2 per week.

So off I went to work at the Preston depot in Frank Street. I had to pay my own lodgings which was 25 shillings a week – there was no such things as subsistence allowance in those days! I lodged at the house of the foreman driver in Preston. He had a younger brother of my age who was also a driver – his name was Tom Hargeaves, the elder brother was Fred. Unfortunately there was no spare bedroom or bed for me so Tom and I slept in a double bed. Later on in my story I will tell you about a strange meeting I had with Tom in a foreign country!

Well, my job at the Preston depot was to load and deliver coal slack from Townsley Colliery in Burnley to Preston Power Station – 3 loads of 5 tons one day and 4 loads the next day making a total of 7 loads every two days. It was all loaded by shovel and by hand from out of the railway wagons. Eventually I returned to our Bootle depot and my brother in law was put back with me. He still retained £2 a week and I was given a rise to £3 a week. My job was mostly delivering ashes from the gas works in Liverpool to building sites for mixing with hard-core for new roads. Sometimes I had to start at 6.30am with a load of coke breeze to take to Wigan depot, unload and take a load of rough coke to Blackburn Power Station where I had to shovel that into railway wagons to go into the Power Station. When they were emptied I had to load up by hand ashes from the floor and deliver them to a new by-pass road being built at a place called Great Eccleston. I tipped them then onto Blackpool Gas Works and loaded up out of a hopper – no shovelling, thank goodness.

I remember once I had to deliver 5 tonnes of ashes to Speke Aerodrome where the new runways were being constructed in 1936. On arrival the general foreman signed my delivery note and pointed to where the ashes had to be tipped then off he went. I started to back up to the spot but unknown to me a trench had just been filled in so my lorry got bogged down. My only way out was to tip my load, which I did, but the foreman spotted me and ran towards me picking up a shovel en route, so naturally I took off! He threatened to kill me if he caught me, talk about a jet taking off, I was the fastest man on two legs that day. Incidentally, the foreman’s name was McClusky.

One particular day, I remember I was going through Preston en-route to Great Eccleston with ashes from Blackburn Power Station when people were waving and shouting to me. I pulled into the kerb and discovered smoke and flames were coming from the rear of the lorry – remember in those days the bodies were built of wood. I realised some of the ashes had rekindled in the breeze whilst travelling. I drove as fast as I could into a builder’s yard nearby, grabbed a hosepipe and managed to extinguish the fire. It had left a hole about a foot square. Eventually I got tired of being given all the rotten jobs because I was the

youngest driver so once again I was on the move.

Immediately I got a job driving for a haulage firm in Liverpool called L F Briggs. It was similar work to the previous job on HGV tipping lorries. The firm paid Union rates. I became a member of the Union and was then on £3 and 12 shillings per week – not bad in those days. I used to hand over £2 and 10 shillings to Mum to help out so we were doing all right at that time.

After about 6 months I was given a much larger vehicle called a Berliet. It wasn’t like the other lorries because instead of a propeller shaft and differential it had a chain driven system with cogs and chains on either side of the lorry and the tipping gear was wire rope. I think the vehicle was a French make. Nevertheless, the class of work on these larger vehicles fetched in more money in overtime so I really was very happy there. There was no starter on these vehicles; you had to turn the engine over by a starting handle. Occasionally I had to shovel load but more often than not we were involved in dock work unloading Ore and delivering it to a tin smelter’s firm in Bootle. My sister Mary worked there at that time. We also used to do 5 loads of salt a day from Marsh Lane railway yard. I shovelled this alone but I had been used to shovel work so I took it in my stride.

One of my pals who was a lot older than me used to dread that job. The starting handle on those lorries was very low so instead of turning the engine over by hand it was easier to get the compression up and then put your foot on the handle and give a kick – on one occasion I broke a bone in my foot doing this!

I worked hard in those days but still enjoyed myself at night, cinemas, dancing etc. You could have a good night out on a Saturday for half a crown, in today’s money twelve and a half pence. It would cost 4 pence for the dance, a penny each way for the tramcar, 2 pence for 5 cigarettes, 5 pence per pint for beer, 2 pence for chips and peas. With four pints under your belt the world was your oyster!

I had a wonderful pal in those days called Henry Pierpoint. He was a gentleman who worked in the building trade. We dressed in the best, always smart. But, unknown to us, a certain person by the name of Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany and before long he had declared war in Europe. Our country told him to stop or else we would go to war to stop him but no joy. On 3rd September 1939 England declared war on Germany. I remember it well because that day I had hired a car to take Mum and the family to Blackpool – it cost me £2. I remember it rained and I also had three punctures in the baldy tyres.

THE WAR YEARS

Mum was very worried about war being declared. I said, “Don’t worry, Mum, it will be over by Christmas” – wishful thinking no doubt. Very soon everyone had to register for government work or the forces. After a medical examination I was drafted into the Royal Artillery, had I been over 25 years old I would have been exempt as an HGV driver. So off I went to Hadrian’s camp in Carlisle. After three months training I was posted to an anti-aircraft regiment in London – my rate of pay was fourteen shillings a week. Seven shillings a week

were taken from me to help Mother and the army gave her 3/6 a week making a grand total of 10/6 and I had seven shillings for myself. In all that was 17/6 old money – less than a £1 per week in today’s money! I got nothing from the firm, not even a packet of cigarettes, in the six years I was in the army. So I lost £3 and twelve shillings and only gained seven shillings. Most firms made up wages for chaps like me who were called up to fight. There were only three drivers called up from this firm – two who were territorials and me a conscript.

In London I was given the job of despatch rider on motor bikes and me a HGV driver – typical! My sister Mary had to work in a Munitions factory. She was doing very dangerous work. The air raids were very bad in Liverpool in 1940 and our home was fire-bombed so my Mum, two sisters Mary and Ann and my two year old nephew George went to live in Southport. Mary had to travel to Chorley catching the bus at 5am each morning.

Our Regiment took part in defending London during the Battle of Britain and on 15th February 1941 we left London. We travelled overnight to Liverpool and embarked on a 12,000 mile voyage to the Middle East via South Africa. It took us about nine weeks to get there. The ship, called ASCANIUS and owned by the Blue Funnel, was an old cargo boat converted into a troop ship. En route we called in at Freetown, Capetown. There were approximately 1,000 men aboard the ship so some sort of entertainment had to be arranged for the troops. I was called to do my part so I wrote a comedy melodrama and I also played the part of the villain in it. It was so funny as my punch line on my entry to the stage was to shout, “Ha Ha My Love Nellie” who incidentally was a rather stout Jewish boy called Phillip Harris dressed up as a girl, and for days some of the lads were running around the ship shouting this line.

It took such a long time to reach Egypt because we had to zigzag in convoy out in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Even though it was hazardous, it was also fascinating watching flying fish, porpoises and tropical storms. The weather was very hot when we crossed the Equator. One night I remember it being very hot so instead of sleeping in a hammock below decks, I took my inflatable lilo on deck. I settled down for the night, and fell asleep. The next thing I knew I was floating around the deck! We had had a very heavy rainstorm. Out there the rainwater was warm and the sky at night was a sight to see – thousands of stars!

On our visit to Capetown the people were very kind to us. We were invited to their homes, taken out in cars and given meals. It was wonderful after being cooped up on a troop ship for weeks. After 5 days there we set off north to Egypt.

We finally arrived at a place called Port Tewfik by the Suez Canal. We disembarked and sat down to the roadside. Eventually we got orders that we were going to move and we then marched to a nearby railway siding and boarded a freight train – no such comfort as a passenger train. It was an awful journey – just like cattle trucks, no toilets, iron floor to sit on and no ventilation. After about two hours we arrived at a place called ‘El Tahag’. We

paraded and were told which tent we were to sleep in. We were also told that our vehicles and guns would soon arrive. It was a huge camp with about 500 large tents and a cinema on site, the cinema was awful though because the films kept breaking down and it had no roof overhead! The toilets on the camp were 6 single wooden huts – no flushing water and the flies were in their thousands! Most of the soldiers, including me, spent hours on them suffering from diarrhoea.

We spent about 3 weeks at that place and one Saturday we were allowed a pass out to go to a place called Ismailia. Whilst in conversation with an Arab selling watches I put my haversack on the ground. All of a sudden an Arab grabbed it and ran away. Well I chased him and started to gain on him so he dropped my haversack – believe me I could move in those days! We used to call these thieves "Clifty Wallahs".

Shortly after this, sometime in May 1941, we moved off on our journey to the Western Desert. It was three days journey before we arrived at a place called 'Sidi Barani'. There was nothing there only desert to our left and the Mediterranean on our right. We sometimes had a swim in the sea – that was nice. We also had a tent where we could buy cigarettes and beer etc. Whilst we were there our guns moved up to the forward area around a place called 'Haifia Pass' – our boys had another name for it – Hell Fire Pass.

My job was to deliver water to the gun crews. This was delivered to us by the Royal Army Service Corps. One of our drivers, called Jack Pile (he came from Leeds) wanted to see this Hell Fire Pass so he volunteered to deliver rations there along with a long service Sergeant. Whilst unloading at a gun site of ours the German Artillery started to shell our troops and Jack Pile was killed. Sgt Saunders, who had about 30 years army service, was badly wounded in the head – we never saw him again.

We were at that time attached to the 4th Indian Division and stayed with them for about 6 weeks. I developed a skin complaint and had to go into a tented hospital at a place called 'Mersa Matru'. During that time the Allied Army decided to attack a place called Fort Csapuzo which was at the top of Hell Fire Pass and as Mersa Maitru was the nearest supply port to the front line I had more than my share of Aerial bombing. One night at bedtime I asked some of the patients if they would wake me up in an air raid warning sounded – I was a heavy sleeper. They agreed so off I went to bo-boes. The next thing all hell was let loose – an air raid was on and nobody had woken me up-. Believe me, I was last out of bed but first down a big trench which was our air raid shelter. All I could see of the Indians was their white teeth and the whites of their eyes.

One day in this hospital I was asked by some soldiers (from the Seychelles Islands) if I would like to join them playing cards for cigarettes. I said I would like to but I only had about 5 so they generously gave me about 20 between them. As the game progressed I won the whole lot and so big hearted me gave them 5 each back – in those days cigarettes were like gold. At that time there was another chap from my regiment with me. His name was Joe

Rawling and he had the same complaint. He was a very religious chap and every day without fail he would read a chapter from his Bible. His hometown was Burnley and I didn't come across him again afterwards so I don't know if he survived.

I returned to my Unit after the hospital visit and after about a month our regiment was transferred to the 7th Armoured Division – The Desert Rats. We went about 30 miles south into the Desert – the heat and the flies were dreadful! Another thing was that the desert was very hot during the daytime but freezing cold at night. In the desert there were no such things as toilets – men took a spade and went off to a 'Wadie', which was a small valley. The officers had an improvised WC very close to their vehicle which consisted of two empty 4 gallon petrol cans with the tops and bottoms cut away and a home-made wooden seat. Surrounding all this were 3 feet poles with sacking fitted similar to a windbreaker. The officers named this contraption 'A Desert Rose'. Usually the officer had a batman who had to attend to these things but our Major's batman had been left behind the forward area because we were going to be involved in a major battle. He was desperate to use the WC so he detailed me to fire the toilet (this meant pouring into it and lighting a match and throwing it down into it to kill the flies). Unfortunately for the officer, I took too much time doing this and therefore it was still alight when he sat on it. Before long he had to go off to the First Aid Tent and then the hospital – I never saw him again!

Our gun teams consisted of 12 men which included one man who took over the duty of cook. The means of heating for the cooking was to mix sand and petrol inside a ring of stones. One day the cook on the gun site near my lorry poured more petrol on the fire because he thought it had gone out. Unfortunately it hadn't and consequently he was killed. He was about 19 years old and from Birmingham.

Water in the desert was very precious so when I shaved I would drain some from my lorry radiator and put it back afterwards, soap suds, hairs and all. We were rationed to about 2 pints of water a day. To get the sand out of our hair we would wash it in petrol. Eventually it was decided that our battery would be issued with a water cart complete with filters, water pump and hoses and guess what? I was detailed to drive and operate this vehicle. I was also told to go and FIND water! Using my initiative and survival attitude I discovered that 'Bir' (e.g. Bir Hackiem, Bir Thalata) on Egyptian Desert maps meant old wells which the Bedhouin people used. So off I went into the desert with a chap who could purify water – he had been on a course of instruction for this. His name was Jones Fuller and he came from London. He was very good at his job but unfortunately the flies used to settle on his nose. He had to scratch it and the skin became damaged – it was red raw and always bleeding.

One particular day after we had filled our tank up (and remember this water was extra to our ration) we decided to have a shower bath. I rigged up one of the pipes outside of the tank, started up the pump and Hey Presto, we had our shower. This was a well at a place 123 kilometres from Alexandria, which was about 2 miles behind

the front line. So when we got to the front line our gun teams were delighted to get extra water. Some of the gunners would coax me to the front of my vehicle to tell me something or perhaps a joke so that others could fill up their pots and pans. I soon cottoned on to this lark!

This job with the water cart was very dangerous because there was no protection and enemy aircraft used to spot us out in the desert and machine gun us knowing that water was very important. So, once again I put my thinking cap on and decided to get a canopy over the tank to that we were less conspicuous. About 6 months later when we attacked the enemy and they retreated they poured loads of salt into the wells so from then on it was a waste of time getting water from the wells.

After about 12 months in the desert things quietened down and it was decided that we could go on leave to Cairo in batches of 20 at a time. Whilst I was there I was told by some of my pals that I had been promoted to Lance Bombardier which meant one stripe. Well I knew then that when Hitler got to know about my promotion that would be the turning point of the war against Germany (Ha Ha!).

On arriving back to my Unit up in the desert I was informed that I was now a driver mechanic. Apparently I had been seen doing running repairs and I could change a broken road spring on a lorry in a very quick time (that's where my experience on tipping lorries during peace time came in useful). So from then on I became entitled to go into the Corporals' Canteen. This was a dilapidated tent but nevertheless I was now on the bottom rung of the ladder.

As time went on I got some injuries on my hands by spanners slipping etc and these sores became infected because we had no green vegetables for vitamins. All we used to eat was corned beef and very hard biscuits. The medical officer used to write on our report "Desert Sores". Whilst my hands were getting better I was assistant to the MT Sergeant whose name was Selwyn Pugh. He was a reservist called back in at the start of the war. He was Welsh and he and I became the best of pals. Even after the war when I was a long distance lorry driver I looked him up and visited him about 6 times. He died 2 years ago at the age of 86.

One day I had to go to a certain point in the desert with my lorry to collect rations from the RASC. With me was a chap called John Hogan. He had a haversack containing mail to be handed over to the RASC for posting home. That day I spotted 8 of our aircraft flying overhead and much to my surprise below them was a German plane and I shouted to my pal John to get under the front end of a nearby armoured car for protection. Unfortunately he dived under the back end and he got wounded causing blood to get on the mail for posting. I was OK but shaken. John was taken to a First Aid depot and sent on to a hospital ship in Tobruk Harbour and when he finally returned to our Unit he told me that the hospital ship was bombed that night in Tobruk.

Another time I was detailed to take a number of soldiers to a railhead to catch a train to go on leave to Cairo. The lorry I was driving had no cab roof and one chap who had been watching me drive from the back

said that he thought he could drive by watching me. So, unbeknown to the other soldiers, including sergeants, I began to under the nut that held the steering wheel to the column. I then asked him if he would like to have a turn at the wheel. When he said “Yes” I lifted off the steering wheel and handed it to him! Well it was hilarious but believe me there was no danger because we were the only vehicle in the area. Word of this must have got back to the Regiment because a couple of weeks later I had to take an officer to Alexandria and as we crossed the desert he said to me “None of your funny business with steering wheels.”

Later that year on a November morning we were given a rum ration. It had never happened before so it must have been to bolster up our courage. It certainly was because we had to load up and advance westwards towards the enemy. We travelled all day and saw nothing but towards evening the enemy stopped retreating and a battle commenced. It was the battle of ‘Sidi Rezegh’ and it lasted three days. On the second day we were surrounded but on the third day we broke through and the enemy were put to flight. By then we were running short of petrol and ammunition so an officer and 5 drivers, including Sgt Pugh and I, were detailed to go to Tobruk to replenish.

The next day we loaded up with ammunition and petrol in Tobruk and set off west just as the sun was setting. Just then German aircraft arrived and started bombing Tobruk. I thought how lucky we were to be on our way missing the air raid. As we headed away to the west the sun was sinking fast as it does in the eastern countries. After about 20 miles it was quite dark and for some unknown reason I decided to put my brakes on and right away there was a heck of a bang at the back of my lorry. Sgt Pugh was shouting and swearing at me and wanted to know why I had done such a stupid thing. I said I didn’t know but I felt something was wrong. When all the commotion and dust settled we discovered that the lorry in front of me with officer and driver in it had gone into a large bomb crater that the Germans had made to destroy a bridge over a culvert. Luckily no one was hurt. We managed to retrieve the ammo and the petrol which was in Jerry cans. We also worked all night to try and salvage the lorry but unfortunately Sgt Pugh and another driver had to return to Tobruk for repairs. I still can’t explain the reason why I jammed on my brakes but I remember at the time everything in front of me became blurred. It must have been the driver in front seeing the danger at the last minute and swerving to avoid it. When sometime later Sgt Pugh and the other driver came back to us they said it was a nightmare in Tobruk due to the bombing taking place all the time they were there.

We set off once again heading towards Bengasi and we met up with our regiment at a place called Barci. In that area were about 20 bungalow type dwellings and our officers decided to stay in some of them. We were delighted because we were looking forward to sleeping under cover after months in the open air. We began to make the place cosy. One chap had managed to find a sweeping brush and we

put it near the window in the front room. I remember suddenly hearing the sound of an aircraft. I went to the door, looked up and saw a Germany plane with its bomb doors open. A large bomb had been despatched and it was heading towards our billet – I dashed inside and shouted to my pals to get down as we were being bombed. We all threw ourselves towards the ground and we heard glass windows breaking. The funny thing was that the bomb had landed 200 yards away in the soft ground causing no damage – the broken glass had been caused by me knocking the rather large sweeping brush through the window!

Whilst we were in this place I was exploring some of the other bungalows and in one of them I found an envelope which had been addressed to a soldier from the “Welsh Regiment”. I realised that they were an Infantry Regiment who were in the advance on Bengasi – my brother-in-law, Peter Hughes, was in that Regiment. I began to make enquiries at this headquarters to try to find out if he was all right but the Sergeant Major there held up hundreds of company records of his men and said that they didn’t know whether they were captured, killed or missing. It wasn’t until about two years later that I was informed by my sister Ann that he was a prisoner of war along with some of my regiment.

We finally arrived in Bengasi. It was a lovely seaside place. Our guns were defending an aerodrome we had captured from the enemy whilst we were billeted in a local post office. In this post office I found a lovely single bed and mattress which must have belonged to an Italian soldier. I thought it would do me fine but it was not to be because a certain Staff Sergeant by the name of Charlie Groves said to me, “Sorry, sunshine, but that bed is for me”. As I had only one stripe and he had 3 stripes plus a gun and crown above them, who was I to argue? Nighttime came and we settled down. The following morning SSgt Groves had to have treatment from the medical orderly because the mattress was alive with fleas and he had been bitten all over. Lucky me again!

After a couple of weeks the enemy had regrouped and re-equipped and decided to attack us. By this time the NAAFI had built up a very large store of goodies such as cigarettes, tins of beer, chocolates, razor blades, pineapple chunks etc and they told the troops to help themselves. We didn’t need to be told twice so into the warehouse we went. It was pitch black in there but we soon discovered where the cartons of beer were stacked. Unfortunately an officer (Captain) was busy loading his vehicle up with beer cartons so my pal, a certain George Reece, and I devised a plan of action. As the officer loaded the beer into the back of his vehicle we undid the front straps of the canvas cover and hijacked most of his ‘loot’ – we then made our getaway! When the officer thought he had about 50 cartons on the lorry he decided to leave but when he arrived at headquarters he discovered he only had about three! He was so angry and said, “When I find out who stole my beer, he will wish he had never been born”. George and I were never found out. I discovered that George had also helped himself to about 10 cartons of

beer belong to our Sgt Cook called Ginger Greenwood who was from Yorkshire. George also loaded a single iron spring bed onto the back of my lorry and during the evacuation from Bengasi, whilst the Germans were bombing us en route, George was drinking the beer and singing his head off and waving to the German aircraft. I was more scared of the officer and the Sgt Cook finding George and I with such a load of their beer – fortunately we got away with it!

As we retreated we had to go deeper into the desert. Suddenly vehicles were being blown up on either side of us, one was an ambulance. Somebody shouted that we were being bombed but it turned out that we had run into a minefield. During that retreat over half of our battery were lost – either killed or captured.

Remember earlier on in the story I mentioned a Tom Hargeeaves who I shared the same bed with when I worked in Preston. Well one day, after I had a full tank of water in my water cart, I headed across the open desert back to my unit. I came across 4 soldiers who were working on the top of telegraph poles putting up new lines of communication wires. One shouted to me, “Any chance of a drink of water?” “Yes”, I said. I let them fill their water flasks and lo and behold I discovered that the soldier who had shouted to me was Tom Hargeeaves. After a natter with him I set off and I have never seen him since that day.

Our retreat continued for a very long way and we lost all the territory we had won from the enemy. We also had to get reinforcements of men, guns, vehicles etc. It was a very sad time because apart from being a battery we were also friends and we did not know the fate of those who were missing. Also we lost some officers and a Sergeant Major who had been promoted from Sgt due to the fact that a Sergeant Major had to be in the forward areas when any major battles took place. Eventually things settled down for a while.

A new padre came to our unit and I was detailed to be his driver. I thought it could be a nice job but after a while I found that it was a very dangerous job because we were always on the forward areas taking religious services around the gun sites. At times shells would be bursting quite close and if any advance by the enemy took place you could either be killed or captured. The padre was a man who showed no fear – unfortunately I wasn’t of the same disposition! Nevertheless I soldiered on and after about 6 weeks the padre asked if I would like to be his permanent driver. Not wishing to say No, I nodded my head. However when the padre asked permission of my commanding officer he said no. The reason he gave was that I was a tradesman and not an ordinary driver – I was then transferred back to my battery. That night when I crawled into my bed roll beneath the stars, I looked up into the sky, said a prayer and thanked the Lord that I had not got the job as the Padre’s driver.

Whilst things were static and there were no pitched battles we were still subjected to being bombed and machine gunned. One day I was given a three ton four wheel drive Canadian Chevrolet vehicle and told to go to a certain place to collect rations, ammo and stores. I was told to take a chap with me to assist. So, off I went and as I neared

the pick-up point my vehicle just keeled over. Thinking I had gone down a slit trench I got out to investigate and found that the front axle had snapped. Now I was marooned out in the desert miles from anywhere and all I could do was sit by the side of the lorry along with the other chap and hope that somebody would rescue us. We must have been sat there for about 8 hours in the blazing sun with no food or drink. Nighttime would soon be upon us. Before long we decided to bed down but we couldn't get to sleep because we didn't know what fate was in store for us. At about midnight we heard a rumble of vehicles heading in our direction from towards the front line. It began to worry us because we knew it may have been the enemy but once again the good Lord must have been looking over us because it turned out to be Australian soldiers. When they spotted us an officer came and said that the two of us had better go with them because the enemy had broken through our lines and there was a 'flap' (retreat) on. I was concerned about my vehicle but he was telling me to leave it behind. I knew I couldn't because if I lost my vehicle I would be put on a charge and have to pay for it for years. I told the officer I was sorry but I couldn't leave it and he said that was up to me and off they went. Once again we were left to our fate.

About two hours later we heard the noise of a lone vehicle. We feared the worst but it was help – two Australians with a breakdown lorry came and rescued us. We were hitched up to the breakdown truck on a suspended tow held by wire ropes. I also had a tow bar attached to my front bumper from the rear of the breakdown truck. Well I was jubilant, saved at last! But it wasn't to be because as we set off to join the Australians the breakdown truck driver did not see a slit trench ahead. He went into it but the speed he was doing managed to get him out. The next thing I was in the trench. The wire ropes all broke, the tow went right through the radiator and we crashed to the ground. Disaster! We were lucky we weren't injured. The Australians said we had better leave it and go with them but once again I declined, knowing what would happen to me if I arrived back to my unit without the vehicle. Once again we were left along in the desert!

At dawn, after a sleepless night, the Australians sent another breakdown vehicle for us and this time we joined the Australian soldiers at their camp about 5 miles away. They looked after us for 3 days. The front axle was replaced with a new one but the radiator could only be repaired, not replaced. The damaged part was cut away and the pipes soldered at the ends. So after being well looked after we bade them farewell and set off to the forward area to find the Unit. Being with the Australians was quite an experience! They did not salute their officers and the men and officers were on first name terms with each other – it sure was different to our way of soldiering.

I eventually found my Unit and explained what had happened. There was a meal ready so I was told to report to the Cook and get some food – it consisted of corned beef, tinned potatoes and hard biscuits, but I enjoyed it. I then got orders to load up my lorry to go to the front line with petrol and

ammunition. I loaded it up and got into convoy awaiting a signal to move off from the officer but once again someone up above must have been looking after me because the solder that had stopped the radiator on the lorry leaking started to come apart. I informed the officer and he sent for another driver and lorry – I could then stand down. I was glad of the rest and I could see that the area where I would have been heading was being shelled very heavily. Once again, I was lucky!

We were sent to Tobruk on the coast – I have mentioned this place before in my story. Tobruk was cut off by the enemy but was heavily defended by the British and Australians. It had been a lovely place in peacetime – it had a large harbour. When we were there the harbour was littered with sunken ships, 27 in all I counted and in the middle of them all was an Italian Cruiser called "San Georgia".

Our regiment spent about 2 years in the desert and when we were away from the front line we would be guarding the RAF landing strips with our guns. We also spent 6 weeks defending the Suez Canal. I liked that because we could have a swim there. One day whilst we were swimming one of our men who could not swim slipped down into the canal. I saw him try to shout for help but the water entered his mouth and he could not. I dived in and Sgt Pugh assisted and we managed to get the chap out. His name was Roy Moore and he came from Norfolk.

After the rest on the Suez Canal zone we were sent back to the desert and we could see that new guns, tanks, lorries and men were being sent up the line so we knew something big was afoot! It turned out to be the build up to the final push to defeat the enemy. The Battle of Alemain was about to begin (by the way, Alemain in Arabic means 'Heaven').

Whilst the Allies were building up in preparation for a showdown so were the enemy but seeing our lines of communication were shorter and our supplies delivered much quicker, the Allies commenced battle. Our Regiment was held back in reserve about a mile behind the line. Most of the troops who took part were fresh – we had been in the desert that long we were weary. Maybe that is why we were on standby instead of in the front of the battle. The barrage that was fired at the enemy was terrific. The ground was shaking. How anybody at the receiving end of such a barrage could survive it was a miracle. After about 3 days the enemy left and decided to retreat and our troops continued the advance into Libya. Another Allied landing in North Africa took place putting the enemy into a very difficult situation. This was the 1st Army.

Our Regiment did not take place in that advance, instead we were sent back to Cairo to a place called Heliopolous. We had about a month's rest and re-equipped and guarded an airfield nearby. We put our vehicles into a compound along with some new motor cycles. The compound was inside a barbed wire surround. No guard was put on because it was so secure nothing (as we thought) could be removed. But, we were wrong because one morning on inspection we discovered the motor cycles and the batteries from the lorries were missing – there was no sign of a break

in, the crafty thieves had got over the wire fence, dug deep holes and buried the bikes and batteries hoping that we could move on so that they could retrieve them! We found out it was a gang of local Arabs who were responsible for that robbery but we recovered all the hidden things so all was well.

During our spell in Cairo we were allowed to go to town after duty. We could get a tram car from our camp to the town centre – a street call Emass Eladene – for the price of 7 Milleams which in English money was about 2 pence. The journey was about 3 miles. Whilst there I picked up a little of the Arabic language so a few of my pals would ask me to buy some presents in Cairo for them to send home. Word had got around that I could get bargains! I used my sense of humour whilst shopping – for example when I entered a shop the Egyptian shopkeeper would say "Sieeda Effendi" which meant "Hello Friend". I would reply "Adeeni Bosa Yak A Beebee" which meant "Give me a kiss darling". I kept a straight face whilst I said it. They didn't know whether to laugh or feel sorry for me and unable to control themselves, they would burst into laughter. I knew I could get a bargain when doing a deal because I did a lot of bartering. I would pay the shopkeeper instead of counting 1-2-3-4, I would count backwards in Arabic. They would try to correct me thinking I was muddled but I would disagree keeping a straight face. When I finally left the shop I could imagine them saying, "Poor chap, the sun must have got the poor Englishman". When I got back to camp and handed over the goods my pals would say, "How do you do it?" I would then be given a packet of cigarettes for my trouble.

Cairo was a very exciting place with cinemas, cabarets, servicemen's clubs, the River Nile and the pyramids of Geisa. I went inside one of these. It was no wonder that they are one of the 7 wonders of the world. Each stone weighed two tons and remember there were no cranes in those days thousands of years ago.

Our time in Egypt was coming to an end. Our next journey was to Aleppo which was on the Turkish border with Syria. It was 3 days journey crossing the Sinai Desert. On our arrival we were billeted in an empty house. When I unrolled my blankets, which I had used to sleep on whilst crossing the desert, curled up inside was a huge scorpion. What a shock! Once again I was lucky.

The reason we had gone to Aleppo was to join up with the Turkish army but the Turks changed their minds and we had to return South. Our next stop was then Beirut where we stayed about a week then it was on to Palestine. Here we assisted the Palestine Police on internal security because Jewish Terrorists were causing havoc. We were stationed in a place called Haderia near some orange groves. Nearby was a place called Nathanya where some terrorists – the Stern gang – killed two British Sergeants and hung their booby trapped bodies on trees, hoping for more casualties. Fortunately, our soldiers discovered what they had done and nobody was injured when the bodies were removed.

Whilst in Palestine I became ill with Sand Fly Fever – it is similar to Malaria – and I spent about 9 days in hospital. I felt awful

as one minute I was shivering and the next minute sweating, my body was full of aches and pains and I was stiff all over with a very bad headache. I hadn't had a cigarette for over a week so I decided there and then that there would be no more smoking for me. When I returned to the Unit I contacted the pay clerk and told him that I wished to put 2 shillings a day into army savings. I could then see the benefit of not smoking and I could also see that smoking was a dirty, unhealthy, habit. When I came out of the army I had saved over £70 and healthwise was demobbed as A1. I have never smoked since so just imagine how much I must have saved in the last 56 years!

I must tell you about an Arab friend I met whilst in Palestine. He invited me to his home and to meet his wife. He lived in Nazareth. I thanked him and asked if I could take one of my pals with me. I got a weekend pass and off we went to Nazareth. His wife was charming and we were made very welcome. These people were so kind that we knew if we said that an article was nice and we liked it we would be given it. There was only one double bed in the house so they insisted that we use it as their guests – they were happy to sleep on the floor.

The next day my Arab friend took us to see his neighbour, a man call Aboo Achmed. He was a Christian Arab who had 5 sons. When we went into his house he had them lined up to welcome us. Their names were as follows: Mohamed, Ally, Ibrahim, Mustaph and his last but not least the youngest Hitler. I said to his dad “Adolf Hitler won't win the war, what will your son do about his name then?” The father replied that was the son's problem, not his. I suppose at the time when Adolf was doing what he was doing to the Jews some Arabs liked him hence the boy being christened Hitler.

On Christmas Eve in 1944 I had to take 25 soldiers in my lorry to Bethlehem. What a wonderful feeling that night! I bought a Bible there for my mother and when she died I gave it to my daughter Ann.

Our tour of duty in Palestine was drawing to a close and we had to load up our vehicles to move but we didn't know where we were going next. Eventually we went to an airfield called Ramid David in Palestine. All our gunners boarded Dakota aircraft and flew off – to where we did not know. Those of us on transport delivered the guns to a seaport. The Navy delivered some of them to destinations which we discovered later were Leros and Kos in the Aegean Sea.

We then set off back to Alexandria in Egypt and loaded our transport onto cargo ships. We didn't move for 3 days then orders came through to unload our vehicles and return to Palestine. We found out later that before our troops could get dug in, German paratroopers had landed in their thousands and our regiment had been wiped out.

After about 3 months we embarked on a troop ship in Haifa. It was called Al Cantara and on it we set sail for England. The ship arrived in Glasgow 11 days later. I believe our convoy was the last convoy of the war. In the meantime my brother-in-law, Peter Hughes, had been freed by the Russians from his prisoner of war camp in Odessa. We both arrived back home in Liverpool

within 6 hours of each other. I was the first to arrive.

After 10 days leave I had to report to the Royal Artillery Depot in Woolwich, South East London. It brought back memories to me because when I first went there in 1940 for posting I was detailed to be an ammunition number to feed and load the guns in case of air raids. Well the air raid warning did sound. I jumped out of bed, got dressed etc and took post at the Ammo dump. After about a quarter of an hour we discovered that it was a false alarm. I ambled back to the barracks, sat on my bed to take off my boots and discovered they were on the wrong feet! Another memory of 1940 – before we left for overseas we were told to be on parade to receive our close quarter weapons which were in fact sandbags half full of broken bricks – I couldn't see that lot being any defence against paratroopers!

We were guarding a high profile RAF station near London in 1940. One night a concert was arranged in the NAAFI and inside there was a stage and about 20 rows of seats. Just before the show started an RAF officer got onto the stage and explained that in the event of an air raid we were to make an orderly withdrawal out of the exit allocated to each row. There were four exit doors in the Hall. Soon all the rows were full of RAF personnel so we the soldiers had to stand in the aisles. Soon the show started and after about half an hour I felt tired so seeing a fire extinguisher nearby I sat on that. Suddenly it went off and everybody nearby, including me, was covered in white foam. Everybody thought it was a bomb so panic broke out. Instead of an orderly withdrawal it was chaos! The culprit was never discovered so once again I escaped retribution.

We did have some hectic times in London due to the air raids but we enjoyed ourselves too at some nice dances we had at our barracks near Edgware Road. It was there where I met a very nice, good looking Scotch girl. We both promised there would be nobody else and shortly afterwards our Unit set off abroad.

I had been in the Middle East almost 2 years when I received a letter from a female I did not know. The message in it was that my lady friend was going out with somebody else and was planning to get married. Well that was all I needed to make me unhappy but as I was so far away I just had to soldier on.

After being posted to Woolwich on my return to England I was given a job as a orderly in the Senior Chaplain's Office. This meant that after 4pm on Fridays until 8am on Monday I could have a weekend pass. I didn't have the cash to travel to Liverpool so I decided to look up my ex-girlfriend's family because I had got on very well with them before going overseas. They were delighted to see me and welcomed me. They said how sorry they were that their daughter had married another chap but I said that it wasn't to be. After a couple of hours I decided it was time to go but they asked me to stay on and they would telephone their daughter to come as she would be glad to see me. She arrived, still as nice as ever, and her parents suggested that we went to the cinema. We did and I was also invited to go and stay with her mum and dad the following weekend.

Martha was there again so once more it was off to the cinema – it was like old times! When we came out of the cinema Martha told me that she had made a big mistake not waiting for me and wished that the clock could be turned back. I too felt that I was falling for her all over again so when I returned to the barracks on the Sunday night I said a little prayer at my bed and asked the good Lord to get me moved from London. Believe me, on the following Thursday I was posted to Scotland.

When I arrived at my Unit I was given 10 days paid leave. I was being sent to Germany army of occupation which I was looking forward to but I was taken off that posting and was very disappointed. Up in Scotland there wasn't much to do so we were sent out to work assisting farmers and the army charged one shilling and sixpence an hour for our services. So if we worked 8 hours a day that was 12 shillings a day. We felt that we should get some of that money so along with the farmer we booked 6 hours for the army and we got 2 hours for us.

On one particular small holding I worked on, the man and his wife were in their 70's, so I asked if she had any clothing coupons to spare instead of paying me the 3 shillings per day. I wanted to buy a scotch kilt for my sister Mary. The lady said it was a deal and she took me to see a lady who made kilts for a pipe band in Bowness. The kilt cost me £5 and Mary has still got it to this day. It is in wonderful condition. The tartan is of the Hunting Menzies. My mother was a member of the Campbell family but beggars can't be choosers so I settled for the Hunting Menzies Tartan.

When the season working on the farms ended all we did was drill, PT and had lectures – all very boring because we were waiting to get demobbed. One of my old Unit pals from the Middle East days was the Cook in this Regiment. His name was Hector Leeke and he came from Birmingham. One day he told me that there was a job as a cook going in the cookhouse. I told him I couldn't cook but he said he would teach me so I agreed.

Well, I thought a job in the cookhouse would keep me off parades, lectures, PT etc so why not – go for it. The next day on parade the Sergeant asked if anyone had any experience in cooking so up went my hand. He told me to fall our and report to the cookhouse. Well my pal and I were delighted but this time disaster was just around the corner you might say! My pal got posted to the Midlands and there was I supposed to be a cook but I didn't have a clue. I burnt the custard, the cabbage was raw and the rice pudding thick – I was in an awful mess but as time went by I got a bit better and survived. Those poor Scotch soldiers had one of the worst cooks in the British Army and when the day came for my demob all names were put onto the noticeboard – name, rank, trade, etc, well, next to my name it had trade – Mechanic. The lads in the camp said, “No bloody wonder he can't cook, he is a bloody mechanic!”

Whilst at that camp we had weekend dances and concerts and at one of these dances I met a Scotch lassie whose name was Cathie Sweeney – she lived in a nearby village called Philipson near Linlithgow. She was a conductress on the buses. We got on

very well and when I was granted a week's leave I took her to meet my family. My poor mum could not understand a word she said! We had a nice week and saw the Grand National. After she went back home I never saw her again. I managed to visit Philipson village about 20 years ago but all the miners' cottages had been demolished and new council property was built there. I made enquiries and was told she had married a chap from Linlithgow.

RETURNING HOME

Eventually I got demobbed and found mother had moved address, so instead of living in Everton we now lived in Aintree. It was a nice modern house with three bedrooms and a large back garden. There was a dance hall and cinema nearby and to be back again as a family was wonderful.

After about six weeks I decided to report back to the Haulage firm where I had been when I had been conscripted into the army. They weren't all that pleased to see me but by law they had to give me a job. I was given a 6 ton tipper lorry and a large size hand shovel and instructed to report to council workers in the streets of Liverpool who were demolishing air raid shelters. I had to hand shovel bricks and rubbish onto my lorry and take it to the tip.

After a couple of weeks of that carry on I approached the transport clerk and asked if they could put me on the big dock lorries which is what I was doing when I was called up. He replied that he couldn't take men off that job to give it to me because I had been away for 6 years. In no uncertain terms I told him what to do with his shovel and his lorry.

After telling the haulage man what to do with his lorry and shovel I got a job at Jacob's biscuit firm driving an 8 wheel HGV lorry. I used to deliver 16 ton loads to Jacob's depots in Leeds, London, Cardiff, Newcastle and Southampton. The wages were very good for those times – my take home pay was £15 per week and that was including working overtime sometimes – 12 hours in a day. So, financially I was doing fine.

One night I decided to go to a dance at Queens Drive Baths. I was always alone at that time after my army service and I missed the company of my army pals once I got back into civilian life. At this dance I met a young lady whose name was Elsie McCabe. She told me she had been in the Wrens. We got on very well and soon started courting. During our courtship we went to many dances and for our summer holidays we went to holiday camps. After two years courting we got engaged and on 23rd December 1950 we were married at Walton Parish Church. The reception was at a hall over the Co-op shop in Rice Lane. It cost £3 for the hire of the hall, £2 for the piano player, £4 for the photographer and about £10 for the wedding cars. The food was supplied by Mrs McCabe – Elsie's mother. At midnight my wife and I were taken home to our own house near West Derby Road which I had bought about 3 months earlier for £300. It was a small terraced house with 3 bedrooms, no bathroom, no hot water and a small back yard. Seeing that it was Christmas and winter we went home and that was our honeymoon.

Elsie did not like me going away for 2 or 3 day journeys so she asked me to look for

another job at home. After a short time I passed a PSV test on double deck buses for Ribble Motor Services. The wages were £8 per week which wasn't much so I bought a set of ladders and took up part-time window cleaning when I was off duty from the buses. After a couple of weeks one of the other bus drivers asked me if he could assist me with my window cleaning. I agreed but to cover his wages I had to take on more customers. All went well for about 4 weeks then this other driver said he wouldn't be coming anymore. When I asked him why he said it was too much like hard work. So I had to go and tell the extra customers that I would have to revert to the originals.

Wintertime on the buses was a very lean time financially, the weather was bad for my window cleaning and my wife Elsie and I weren't too happy with our house so we decided we wanted something better.

One day we got news that the Ministry of Supply in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire had vacancies for HGV and PSV drivers and that new council houses were being built for the drivers who were being taken on. So I made enquiries and was fortunate to be taken on. All was going well. We left Liverpool about March and made the journey on my motorcycle and sidecar to a village called Wescott. We managed to get accommodation with my wife's cousins but as it was a prefab we decided we would have to move. I saw my boss at the Ministry and got fixed up in the old Sick Bay quarters of an ex-RAF aerodrome. It was a one bedroom flat badly in need of decorating. The rent was 3 shillings and sixpence a week. It had a little kitchen and bath and I made the place a bit more cosy. The new houses had not been built as yet so we just had to be patient. About every six weeks Elsie and I would go back to Liverpool to see our families. Going to Liverpool was wonderful but going back to Wescott was awful because Elsie couldn't settle there. So, after 18 months we decided to return to Liverpool.

I managed to get back on the Ribble buses again and we started to look for a house. We found one for sale in Moffat Road, Aintree – it cost £270. There were only gas lights in it so I got a relative who was an electrician to fit electric lights. I also made some new window frames and fitted them and eventually we got the place nice.

FAMILY LIFE

I was almost 40 years old now and it seemed as though we would just be a couple but No! because on 19th August 1957 we were blessed by becoming Mum and Dad to a lovely little blonde headed daughter who we called Ann. She was born in Walton Hospital. I was very happy to be a dad and Elsie was happy to be a Mum. As the wages in my job were low and we had another mouth to feed I decided to leave the buses and I got a job at Schweppes delivering to pubs and clubs. It was hard work but the wages were good.

After nearly three years we had another daughter born on 27th July 1960 who we called June. She also was a lovely girl – we were a happy family. Prior to the birth of our daughters my wife had a part-time job at the Co-op but now she stayed at home.

As time went by and the girls were getting a bit bigger we decided we would

like a house with gardens, a bath, hot water etc, and, as it happened, my mother was in a two bedroomed council house in Croxteth complete with those things. She said it would be nice if we exchanged houses as she liked our little house. So off we went to the Council Office stating what we would like to do. The Council agreed so we went to Croxteth (25/- a week rent) and Mum went to Aintree. We gave our house to Mum so everybody was happy. Unfortunately after 12 months Elsie wanted to return to Walton again so once more we were on the move again.

At this time I had a car and Elsie told me about a nice terraced house for sale in Ripon Street, Walton. The price was £500 so I sold my car and with savings bought the house. With the help of a friend I fitted a bath with hot and cold water and we made a comfortable home for us all.

In the next street was a primary school called Arnot Street where the girls went. They both passed the eleven plus examination and went on to Evered High School. Ann became Head Girl with 10 'O' Level passes and June wasn't far behind either. The girls used to go to dancing lessons and 'mind' cars on 'match days' as where we lived was just down the road from Goodison Park – Everton's ground.

I was still lorry driving at this time and when the girls got older Elsie went back to the Co-op part-time. I still longed for the wide open places away from the narrow streets and back entries so I bought a static 32 foot caravan at Formby and at weekends off we would all go to it. I was very happy there. When the girls became teenagers they started going to the Bethel Baptist Church in Bootle so home we came on Sundays. They had many friends at the Bethel and Ann met her future husband, Paul, there. Seeing the girls had lost interest in the caravan we decided to sell it and it was once again back to the narrow streets.

After living for 20 years in Ripon Street I felt that we deserved something better. Whilst living there a lot of money had been spent on the house – we had a new bathroom fitted with an indoor toilet, a new extension kitchen, new roof and new windows but I still wasn't happy. I still had the feeling that I would be on the move again and not only with the house but also with my job.

I went to the Labour Exchange on Church Road West, Walton and enquired there whether there were any jobs driving a light van. I was then 55 years of age. The clerk said a pools firm were looking for a driver for a 5 ton van. I explained that I was already working but would like a lighter job so, to cut a long story short, I passed the interview and started work at Vernons Pools. I was quite happy there. After about a year I was promoted to a supervisor and chauffeur driving Rolls Royce, Jags, Mercs, Aston Martin and Ferrari. I was also fitted with a lovely grey uniform. I was on extra money there and I also had to work some evenings but Elsie had the girls and I had the best job of my life.

Whilst still living at 25 Ripon Street I used to keep doing jobs at home. When my two daughters wanted their bedroom decorated I bought rolls of wallpaper and showed them what to do. Believe me they made a wonderful job of wallpapering!

After 18 months as a chauffeur I was

asked if I would consider a job as Traffic Superintendent in charge of the drivers, the loads, maintenance schedules, holiday rosters etc.

This meant I would have to give up the driving and work indoors. I hesitated thinking I would never last in an office.

The Transport Manager could see I had doubts so he said that if I took on the job I would get a new company car, a telephone at home with all the bills paid, a new office all to myself and a lady to answer my phone. He asked me to think about it and let him know the next day so I agreed. The next day I asked him if I could have my old job back if I failed on the new one. When he agreed to this I said I would take the job.

I had two telephones in my office and I didn't know what to expect.

The lady who was supposed to assist me started making her own decisions and made me feel that she wanted to be "top dog" so I told the boss I would rather work on my own and he transferred her elsewhere.

I now faced the future like I had faced the enemy in the war – full of apprehension.

Well I survived and every year got better at being a boss. I was then told that I was being promoted to Assistant Transport Manager. After my promotion I had to have my meals in the Executive Dining Room so I said farewell to my friends in the Supervisors' Dining Room. So in a matter of four and a half years I had graduated from the Canteen and the Supervisors' Dining Room to the Executive Dining Room – not too bad for a lad with no qualifications!

I must have been doing a good job because one day the Managing Director asked me (I was nearly 65 years of age) would I like to stay on at work. I said, "Yes" so I stayed full time for another two years then at 67 decided to call it a day. Before I left I was offered the job of Transport Manager at Vernons Distributions on a part-time basis for 20 hours a week. I accepted the job and it also involved chauffeuring, security and tacograph checking. I was nearly 71 years of age when I left.

About 3 months after I retired the phone rang and when I answered it I was asked if I would like to return to Vernons once again. The temptation was there but I said, "No thank you".

We had a lovely celebration on the occasion of my 80th birthday in Jun 1997. The family went to Briars Hill Restaurant in Burscough where we had a meal.

Earlier in this story I told you about my sister Mary and the violin she chose from the shop. Well at my birthday party I received a wrapped up parcel from Mary and what a surprise when I unwrapped it – it was an exact replica of the one I had bought her 70 years ago!

A week before my 81st birthday I was enjoying a holiday with my daughter Ann and her family in the Isle of Man and during the holiday we went in the car to the foot of Snaefell – the highest mountain on the Island. It was a lovely day and there was no tram to take us to the top so I suggested we tackle the climb unaided. Ann agreed but only under protest!

So we set off. I must confess it was hard

going but we achieved our target. We climbed to the top and embraced! I now know how Hilary and Sherpa Tensing felt on Everest. We had our photographs taken at the summit so I now have proof of my finest hour.

My wife Elsie and I spend many holidays on the Isle of Man with Ann and her lovely family – husband Paul and Natalie and Hannah, their two teenage daughters. Ann works as an Executive Officer with the Department of Trade and Industry and Paul is the Co-ordinating Adviser for Secondary Education with the Department of Education.

My other daughter lives in Aughton near Ormskirk. She is married to Raymond who works as an Income Tax Officer. June is in Recruitment Management for Nursing and is an RGN. They have a seven year old son Timothy. Both families have nice homes and the grandchildren are all doing well at school.

Elsie and I now live in a rural area near Sefton Church, Maghull. We have lived here for 22 years now. There is plenty of fresh air and nice walks for me to do along the old Cheshire railway lines and the towpath of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal. I am now 99 years of age. I still own a little Ford Fiesta car and a bicycle. When it is raining I can enjoy myself riding my exercise bike at home!

Well I think that just about puts an end to my story and it is one that I wouldn't like to be any different so I think I will saddle up and mosey into the sunset wishing you all farewell... ■

WW2 Pioneer Postcard

Ed note: The post card below was recently purchased by the editor. We know that Stewart Walter Gooch enlisted into the RAOC on 23 Oct 39 and landed in France with the BEF on 30 Oct 39. He was transferred to the Pioneer Corps in Feb 40 and for a short period in Jun 40 was declared missing. He transferred to KSLI on 26 Aug 41 – we also know that he survived the war.





Association Shop



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▲ **Buttons**
both badges available
£1.50 each
or **6 for £8**

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Two different styles are available. One with the older 'Blackpool Tower' cap badge and one with the newer cap badge.
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◀ **Blazer Badge**
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◀ **Blazer Badge**
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▲ **Tie Pin**
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▲ **Tie Pin**
lovely
£2.00



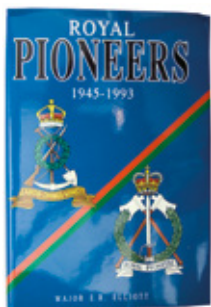
▲ **Wall Shields**
hand painted
£20



◀ **Pioneer Mug**
Drinks taste better out of these!
£6

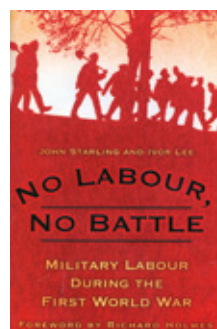


▲ **Wall Shields**
85-93 badge
£20



◀ **"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



◀ **"No Labour, No Battle"**
Military Labour during the first World War
by John Starling and Ivor Lee

A new addition to the shop and only just published. Price includes a £10 donation to the RPC Association.
Hardback.
£30

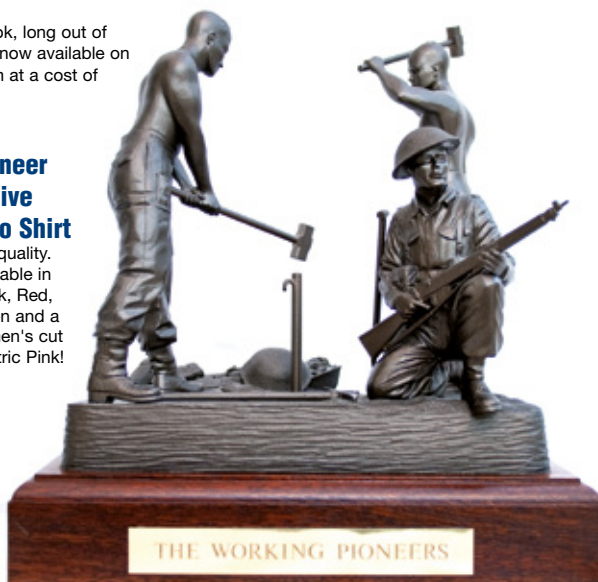


◀ **"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"**
by Major E H Rhodes Wood

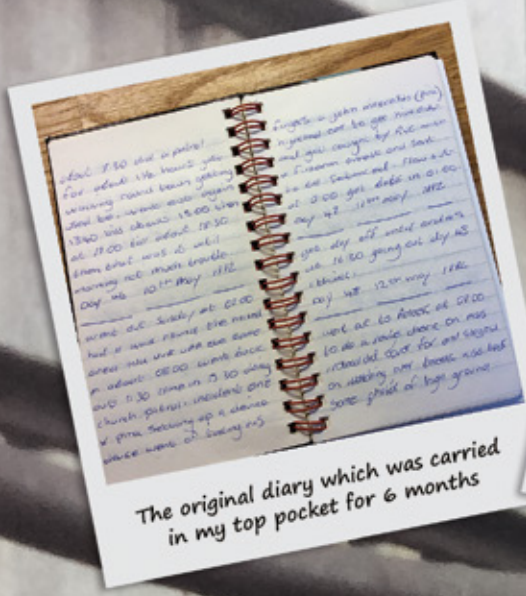
This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of
£11



◀ **Pioneer Active Polo Shirt**
Top quality. Available in Black, Red, Green and a women's cut Electric Pink!
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The Working Pioneers
£195



The original diary which was carried in my top pocket for 6 months



View from the ARF bunker next to the heliport



South Armagh from a Lynx helicopter - GPMG viewpoint



178 days in South Armagh

The following is a day-to-day diary entry from Pte Parlby of Yankee 32 - Pioneer Platoon. 24 Royal Pioneers from 187 Company were attached to 2nd Battalion the Light Infantry (2LI) to form A Ops Company and began their training with 2LI in November 1991 to begin a six month tour of South Armagh in March 1992.



Snap VCP's - vans crossing the border into South Armagh were always a priority



GPMG gun position with trench and sandbags



Temporary shed accommodation Cloghoge top left in bits, note line at back which was used to launch the device



Snap VCP's - Lynx in the background circling ready to lift us back out



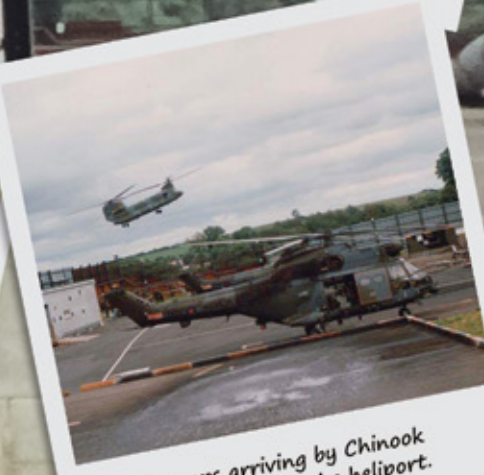
Happy 20th Birthday!



On patrol in Belleeks - Belleeks Church in the background



Y32 behind Newry Station blast wall



Troops arriving by Chinook at the back of the heliport.



Patrolling into Cloghoge



The dreaded use of vans around South Armagh - Bessbrook Mill in the back ground



PIRA signs around South Armagh



Bessbrook Mill Heliport - busiest heliport in Europe at that time

THE South Armagh Brigade of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) operated during the troubles in South County Armagh. By the 1990s, the South Armagh Brigade was thought to consist of about 40 members, roughly half of them living south of the Irish border.

It was alleged the South Armagh Brigade was commanded by Thomas 'Slab' Murphy. Compared to other brigades, South Armagh PIRA was seen as an 'independent republic' within the IRA movement, retaining a battalion organisational structure and not adopting the cell structure the rest of the IRA was forced to adopt after repeated intelligence failures. As well as paramilitary activity, the South Armagh Brigade has also been widely accused of smuggling activities across the Irish border to fund paramilitary activity.

Between 1970 and 1997 the South Armagh Brigade was responsible for the deaths of 123 British soldiers and 42 Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers. A further 75 civilians were killed in the area during the conflict, as well as ten South Armagh Brigade members. During 1970 and 1997 the RUC recorded 1,255 bombings and 1,158 shootings around a radius of ten miles from the geographic centre of South Armagh.

24 Royal Pioneers from 187 Company were attached to 2nd Battalion the Light Infantry (2LI) to form A Ops Company and began their training with 2LI in November 1991 to begin a six month tour of South Armagh in March 1992.

The following is a day-to-day diary entry from Pte Parlbry of Yankee 32 - Pioneer Platoon.

Day 1 - 25th March 1992

Arrived at Bessbrook Mill, South Armagh via RAF Chinook on the field behind Bessbrook heliport (Europe's largest heliport at the time). Arrived at 09:30 – ran off the Chinook going past the Royal Green Jackets, the regiment we were replacing after finishing their 6 months (lots of jibes between the two passing regiments). Was shown to our accommodation, unpacked and prepared kit, weapons and ammunition ready for immediate action.

Day 2 – 26th March 1992

Helicoptered out at 05:30hrs before sunrise to secure a cordon around three South Armagh farms so they could be searched. Stayed all day and through the night tagging-on providing cover for the search teams. Was put on stand-by to switch to Newry town centre due to an armed robbery on the Post Office but stood down soon after. Stayed out around the farms through the night.

Day 3 – 27th March 1992

Patrolled out from the farm cordon areas carrying out random search and rummage tasks around the local area. Lots of 'dickers' (local spotters passing information to PIRA) out that day walking past our patrol, everyone on edge as they had the ability to bring in a sniper attack from across the border. Helicoptered back into Bessbrook at 14:00hrs.

Day 4 – 28th March 1992

Incident in Newry, 2 platoons left Bessbrook to provide emergency cover for the scene early hours of the morning – mark 12 PIRA mortar attack on a RUC patrol car, 1 RUC killed, 1 seriously injured. We stayed behind and was put onto ARF (Air Reaction Force) which consisted of sleeping in a separate accommodation block on the heliport to get into the helicopters as quick as possible should an incident arise anywhere in South Armagh.

Day 5 – 29th March 1992

Went out 17:00hrs by helicopter to carry out snap-VCP's (Vehicle Check Points – often carried out at random around South Armagh or sometimes at pre-determined locations) – carried out 3 VCP's throughout the night and back to Bessbrook for 10:00hrs – no issues.

Day 6 – 30th March 1992

Day off. Days off consisted of checking/repairing kit, washing clothes, pipe range (25m firing range within a concrete pipe duo to space and noise restrictions at Bessbrook), writing a letter home, trip to the NAFFI shop to stock up on chocolate.

Day 7 – 31st of March 1992

Started ARF at 07:00hrs – went up in helicopters at 08:20hrs to provide air cover for search operations on the ground, up and down all day coming back to re-fuel occasionally then back up. Came off ARF the next day at 08:00hrs.

Day 8 – 1st April 1992

Day off and routines.

Day 9 – 2nd April 1992

Day off and more routines, platoon and section briefing sessions – intelligence updates.

Day 10 – 3rd April 1992

Started ARF at 07:00hrs - up and down all day providing cover for ground operations. Lynx Helicopter pilots started getting bored so they began throwing the helicopters around more aggressively, dive-bombing, sharp turns, skimming mountain tops, railway bridges and lakes – everybody holding on for dear life and feeling sick.

Day 11 – 4th April 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs but put back on again at 10:00hrs to cover for another platoon which had been called out. Sent out to Newry at 21:15hrs to do patrols, stayed out all night came back in at first light.

Day 12 – 5th April 1992

Tagging on (security duties) – covering main Bessbrook gate and Heliport entrance all day, checking-in patrols and vehicles coming in and out, and anyone else presenting at the gates which could range from a pilot to special forces walking in and out of camp alone or COP patrols (Close Observation Patrols) who could be out for a number of days/weeks out of sight from everybody.

Day 13 – 6th April 1992

Started ARF at 07:00hrs – up and down a couple of times during the day and once at night - no major issues.

Day 14 – 7th April 1992

Stayed on ARF till 13:00hrs then given the rest of the day off.

Day 15 – 8th April 1992

Day off.

Day 16 – 9th April 1992

Local election day in South Armagh – went out at 17:00hrs to provide satellite patrols for the polling station in Belleeks, a small town West of Newry. Laid up in a hedge row overnight overlooking the village providing cover for when the RUC arrived with the ballot box in the morning. During the night the local church bell was ringing which put everyone on edge as the local church priest was an alleged PIRA sympathiser; we all thought this could have been a signal for an attack. The night went without incident.

Day 17 – 10th April 1992

RUC arrived with the ballot box by helicopter at first light for the local polling station which was a small school in Belleeks, the school had been searched by another platoon beforehand. Carried on patrolling until 22:00hrs until the ballot box was collected by the RUC. Moved out to a helicopter RV (rendezvous) – picked up at 03:00hrs back into Bessbrook.

Day 18 – 11th April 1992

Helicopter out at 22:50hrs to carry out snap VCP's (Vehicle Check Points) – 'snap VCP' meant circling round in a helicopter at high altitude then swooping down onto a road (usually near the Irish border) to set up a surprise VCP with the hope of capturing weapons being moved, disturbing PIRA movements or smuggling activity. Carried out 3 different VCP's checking ID's and searching cars around the Cullyhanna area. Cullyhanna was nicked named 'The Cullyhanna Gun Club' by British Forces as it was an PIRA stronghold of support – over the years the area had been used for sniper and land mine attacks on British Forces. Back into Bessbrook at 03:30hrs.

Day 19 – 12th April 1992

Start ARF at 08:00hrs – flew out to a possible contact (PIRA attack) but it was a local farmer using his shotgun near a local patrol unit everyone was flapping (panic stations/everyone running around on edge, people getting woke up, pilots running to helicopters).

Day 20 – 13th April 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs – rest of the day spent at the pipe range zeroing weapons (checking weapon sights were still accurate and had not been banged or damaged during previous patrols).

Day 21 – 14th April 1992

Put on extra guard reinforcements at 07:00hrs due to a British Army Generals visit. Came off at 17:00hrs for a briefing for 'Operation Plunder'. Full company operation so all available helicopters, vehicles and equipment required.

Day 22 – 15th April 1992

Started Operation Plunder at 09:45 – flew out to Belleeks to search road junctions and possible PIRA attack points for landmines/IED's (Improvised Explosive Device's) – took

lots of photographs of different areas to take back to Bessbrook for intelligence. 2 RUC officers were flown out to join us in the afternoon to carry out house searches around Cullyhanna – stayed out all day and into the night with RUC officers carrying out random VCP's.

Day 23 – 16th April 1992

Picked up by helicopter at 06:30 and moved location closer to the border – carried out more VCP's and house searches. Due to be picked up at 23:45hrs but weather and low cloud preventing lift out – long walk back to Bessbrook, about 9k but when fully loaded with kit felt more like a marathon distance.

Day 24 – 17th April 1992

Back in Bessbrook at 02:30hrs tired and wet through. Briefing at 03:30hrs – moving out to Newtownhamilton at first light.

Day 25 – 18th April 1992

After a couple of hours sleep we were helicoptered out to Newtownhamilton which had a small military/RUC station in the town centre. Headed out with an RUC officer after a quick breakfast to carry out VCP's and house searches – back in at 16:30hrs for an hour to grab some scoff then back out for more VCP's. Back into Newtownhamilton station at 22:30hrs had some supper and got head down - slept like a log.

Day 26 – 19th April 1992

Briefing at 10:00hrs, prep kit, going out at 12:30hrs. Covered about 15kms of patrolling, searching and observing. Back into station at 20:30hrs after a difficult day everyone soaked through.

Day 27 – 20th April 1992

Back out again on patrol – more climbing fences, jumping hedgerows, falling down bogs and being chased by cattle. Covered about 11kms.

Day 28 – 21st April 1992

Back out on patrol – heading North of Newtownhamilton with RUC officer to deliver a court summons. Followed RUC Officer around while he did some more house calls around the town. Lifted out by helicopter at 00:30hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 29 – 22nd April 1992

Started ARF at Bessbrook at 08:00hrs. Put on the helicopter back out to Newtownhamilton at 10:00 due to someone in the platoon dropping a magazine of ammunition the day before whilst on patrol. Told not to return until found. Retraced our steps over every km covered in the last few days. Everyone fuming, tired and wet – magazine not found. Picked up at 03:30hrs. Everyone back at Bessbrook taking the piss for being sloppy and losing kit. Everyone's morale at rock bottom.

Day 30 – 23rd April 1992

Back on ARF at 08:00hrs up and down all day, jumping out for short patrols and snap VCP's. Came off ARF for a special briefing. Had a briefing off an SAS guy who was going out that night as a 2 man patrol at 22:30hrs and needed some cover in case the shit hit the fan. Was not told what they

were up to just a briefing about their rough location and how to identify them from a civilian as they didn't wear military clothes in South Armagh. Everyone on standby to move, pilots sat in their helicopters listening on the radios.

Day 31 – 24th April 1992

Stood down at 05:00hrs SAS mission cancelled. Rest of the day off.

Day 32 – 25th April 1992

Guard duties all day at Bessbrook. Received orders for Operation Plunder at 19:00hrs taking place the next day.

Day 33 – 26th April 1992

Started Operation Plunder at 06:30hrs. Helicoptered out to a location outside Crossmaglen, picked up RUC officer and started house checks and VCP's. Moved by helicopter during the night to Cullyhanna stayed out overnight.

Day 34 – 27th April 1992

Stayed in Cullyhanna – more patrols and VCP's.

Day 35 – 28th April 1992

Lifted out from Cullyhanna at 02:00hrs back to Bessbrook. Started ARF at 06:00hrs – no sleep feel goosed – stayed on ARF all day people grabbing every opportunity to sleep, leaning against a wall, sat on a chair or in the back of a helicopter.

Day 36 – 29th April 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs rest of the day off. Got a call to move out at 14:00hrs – bomb attack at Cloghoge checkpoint near Warrenpoint – PIRA fitted a van with train wheels that allowed it to move along a railway line. The van contained a 1,000lb bomb, was rolled along the line to an Army checkpoint compound and was remotely detonated. The whole compound was flattened killing 1 soldier (Fusilier Andrew Grundy) who was firing at the van to try and stop it rolling forward. 23 soldiers were injured who managed to run behind a blast wall. We replaced the platoon that flew out as part of the ARF.

Day 37 – 30th April 1992

Came off ARF at 13:00hrs – taken straight out to the Cloghoge and Warrenpoint area to relieve the ARF that went out there in response to the incident yesterday. We could see the devastation from the helicopter when we flew in. Set up a wide cordon area so the place could be cleaned up.

Patrolled in and around the cordon for the rest of the day. Stayed out for the night and ended up bumping into an SAS guy who walked straight up to my position during the night – he was in civilian clothes with a baseball cap on with ARMY written on the front which he later concealed with a Velcro cloth. He was a short Scottish guy who had a pistol strapped to his jeans and carried a black duffel bag over his shoulder. He murmured a few words then went off on his own into the night.

Day 38 – 1st of May 1992

Started patrolling again at first light 06:30hrs. Lifted out back to Bessbrook for 14:30hrs.

Day 39 – 2nd May 1992

Guard duties all day at Bessbrook.

Day 40 – 3rd May 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – up and down all day and through the night providing cover for the Warrenpoint clean-up.

Day 41 – 4th May 1992

Stayed on ARF. Company of Kings Own Scottish Borders (KOSB's) arrived as back-up for a huge Battalion search operation that was taking place that day which included a detachment of RUC officers. Sections being lifted out all day, chinooks arriving to take troops and equipment out. Lots of TV coverage about the operation and media reporters hanging around the gate to the heliport and Bessbrook. Given an intelligence report that there could be a riot in Newry tonight in response to all the searches.

Day 42 – 5th May 1992

Stayed on ARF to provided cover for the search teams – up and down all day with the occasional drop off to provide some patrol presence.

Day 43 – 6th May 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs. Got some time to sort kit out until 22:00hrs when we go out to Newry. Arrived at Corry Square RUC Station at 23:00hrs – had a briefing, picked up an RUC officer and went straight out into Newry town on patrol. First time in a town centre fully armed. Quite an intimidating time to be in Newry after a huge search operation had taken place unsettling the locals, Friday night and kicking out time from the pubs. Lots of people shouting abuse, spitting at us and following us around the streets. Between the two sections on patrol we had 4 SA80's, 2 Long Range Support Weapons (LSW's), 2 GPMG 7.62m Machine Guns with amour piercing rounds, 2 baton guns and a handful of Rocket Propelled Grenades... we could have started a mini-war that night... but we didn't.

Day 44 – 7th May 1992

Stayed in Newry RUC station on standby grabbing bits of sleep in the RUC canteen overnight. After an immense Irish breakfast from the RUC (still a vivid memory of that breakfast to this day) we were back out in Newry town centre for about 07:30hrs. Patrolling around the town for most of the day, same bits of abuse but not as intense as the night before.

Day 45 – 8th May 1992

Back out on patrol in Newry with the RUC. Overseeing Sunday church gatherings and parades – everyone on edge waiting for something to go off. Some of us getting a bit sick of the abuse and starting to give some back which we were not meant to do – tensions running high. Moved out of Newry around lunchtime to cover an incident – PIRA man setting up a roadside bomb outside Newry blew off his own fingers – he hijacked a car to drive back over the boarder but was stopped before he did by the RUC – RUC had everything in order we were just sent over for back up. He was arrested with a firearm and sent by armed guard to the RUC holding station further up North. Lifted out at 00:30hrs by

helicopter back to Bessbrook.

Day 46 – 9th May 1992

Day off until 16:30hrs when we have orders for the following day.

Day 47 – 10th May 1992

Lifted out to Beleek to do route checks (checking roads and junctions for roadside bombs) intelligence reports indicated this was on the PIRA's radar. We were told the PIRA wanted to hit the civilian road convoys that were bringing equipment to re-build Cloghoge Check Point. Stayed out watching over Beleek from the hillside and taking photos for intelligence officers back at Bessbrook.

Day 48 – 11th May 1992

Stayed out overnight on hillside overlooking Beleek. Lifted out at 14:30hrs back to Bessbrook. Rest of the day off.

Day 49 – 12th May 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – not much going on – time to catch up on some post and writing a letter home.

Day 50 – 13th May 1992

Stayed on ARF – no flying today – intelligence reports showing a threat of a possible helicopter attack by an PIRA sniper or machine gun fire from over the border (PIRA preferred to take long range shots from Southern Ireland to Northern Ireland across the border knowing the British Army could not cross the border). Transit vans on stand-by - the worst way to travel around South Armagh in the back of a blacked out van driven by soldiers in civilian clothes. Hot and sweaty, can't see a thing and being thrown around the country roads. Vans were vulnerable to driving into random PIRA checkpoints which would be a disaster.

Day 51 – 14th May 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs. Day off. PT day today running round the running track that was built inside Bessbrook perimeter. Did an hour in the make shift gym.

Day 52 – 15th May 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs up and down all day.

Day 53 – 16th May 1992

Called out to Newry early hours – post office done over again. Provided cover and carried out some patrols whilst the RUC CSI went in.

Day 54 – 17th May 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs rest of day off apart from briefing at 18:00hrs for patrol out tomorrow.

Day 55 – 18th May 1992

More patrols around Newry on the outskirts of the town centre – red hot day.

Day 56 – 19th May 1992

Back out to Newry again to provide a protection patrol for a visit by the Irish Secretary of State to Newry Hospital. The hospital was next to the worst council estate in Newry 'Derrybeg' and we had to patrol all over it. We were met with abuse as soon as we arrived and it came thick and fast all day – men, women and children shouting. Secretary of State left at 14:00hrs

by helicopter and we left Derrybeg as quick as we could walk – headed to an RV and was lifted out to Bessbrook. Went straight onto ARF till midnight.

Day 57 – 20th May 1992

Back on ARF at 08:00hrs went up a couple of times during the day for searches going on in and around South Armagh.

Day 58 – 21st May 1992

Day off.

Day 59 – 22nd May 1992

Back on ARF at 08:00hrs – up and down all day not much happening.

Day 60 – 23rd May 1992

My Birthday – 20th. Stayed on ARF. Army Chef's made me a Birthday cake and between the four of us we scoffed the lot in about 3 minutes flat – all felt sick after that.

Day 61 – 24th May 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs – went onto guard duty for Bessbrook Mill – grabbed sleep in-between guard shifts.

Day 62 – 25th May 1992

Back on ARF at 08:00hrs – called out at 21:15hrs to a dead body found floating in the Cregan River. Everyone on alert as the body could be booby-trapped which had been done before and killed soldiers/RUC retrieving bodies. Thought body had been dumped following PIRA interrogation on an informer – turned out to be a civilian suicide victim.

Day 63 – 26th May 1992

Came off ARF at 07:00hrs got time to sort kit out before a briefing at 17:00hrs.

Day 64 – 27th May 1992

Lifted out at 04:00hrs to do some search patrols on derelict farm buildings near Silverbridge – nothing found. Moved into an overnight lye-up position stayed through the night carrying out night observations.

Day 65 – 28th May 1992

More searches during the day finished at 17:15hrs started patrolling back. Back into Bessbrook at 21:15hrs.

Day 66 – 29th May 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – up and down all day providing cover for various ground operations.

Day 67 – 30th May 1992

Came off ARF at 07:00hrs – went straight onto to stand-by to move out. Nothing happened just hanged around in full kit all day.

Day 68 – 31st May 1992

Still on stand-by to move – all feeling a sense of something big going down but all feeling frustrated that we are not moving out.

Day 69 - 1st June 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – providing helicopter cover for Chinook and Puma replenishment supplies to Army watch towers along the border. Towers needed constant re-supplies and troops moving in and out. The towers were inaccessible by

road vehicle only helicopters or on foot. Occasionally we walked up to watch towers but it was a highly risky manoeuvre as the towers were heavily booby-trapped with mines, phosphorus trip flares and barbed wire to keep out the PIRA.

Day 70 - 2nd June 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs – grabbed some kit to move out to Newtownhamilton. Arrived in Newtownhamilton at 09:15hrs. Provided some guard cover at the base until we had a briefing 19:00hrs.

Day 71 - 3rd June 1992

Left Newtownhamilton base at 03:00hrs on foot. Moved into a lie-up position in the hills until sunlight. Started field and hedgerow searches at sunlight. Searches all day, 11 different farm buildings and fields nothing found. PIRA spotter joined us in the afternoon walking close to the patrol and watching us – everyone on edge again as we were only a couple of clicks from the border which was within easy reach of the infamous PIRA sniper with his powerful .50 calibre rifle (it was alleged the sniper was an American PIRA sympathiser) who was using the protection of firing from across the border. It was everyone's goal – ground troops, intelligence, special forces and helicopter pilots to nail this guy who had caused havoc over the years killing many soldier's and RUC officers over the years. Moved into lie-up position for the night.

Day 72 – 4th June 1992

Up at 03:30hrs first light, back out on patrol – more searches of farm buildings, hedgerows and fields. Nothing found but made lots of notes about possible future hides or hides that had been used before but were now empty. Lifted out at 18:00hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 73 – 5th June 1992

Briefing at 09:00hrs going back out at 11:00 to Forkhill to check a possible weapons stash found by troops a couple of days before. Found hide and it was empty – searched local area, took photos'. Lifted out at 14:30 back to Bessbrook.

Day 74 – 6th June 1992

Moved onto ARF at 05:15hrs to cover the section that had been called out.

Day 75 – 7th June 1992

Stayed on ARF – up and down all day again with the occasional drop off.

Day 76 – 8th June 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs after almost a full two day shift – knackered. Rest of the day off – loads of admin to sort out for my up and coming R&R.

Day 77 – 9th June 1992

Put onto stand-by ARF and doing guard duties for the heliport.

Day 78 – 10th June 1992

Relived at 00:00hrs to get kit ready to go home. Dropped off by van at the back entrance to Belfast City airport – opened the door into the main airport and walked in – back in civvy street and time to blend in. Flight from Belfast to Manchester. Picked up at Manchester Airport by parents at 12:30.

11th June – 18th June

R&R

Day 85 – 18th June 1992

Picked up at Belfast City airport using the same back door entrance – taken by van to helicopter pick up – arrived back in Bessbrook at 17:00hrs. Taken to main hall for briefing on events over the last week. Couple of people pulled out for random drug testing – zero tolerance drugs policy existed in the Army, if anyone tested positive they were lifted immediately. Joined my section on ARF at 00:30hrs.

Day 86 – 19th June 1992

Stayed on ARF all day – up and down not much happening.

Day 87 – 20th June 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs rest of the day off.

Day 88 – 21th June 1992

Briefing at 13:30hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 89 – 22nd June 1992

Helicoptered out at 09:15hrs to the border near Crossmaglen to support Army Bomb Disposal unit disarming an IED at the side of the road. Provided cordon and set in some GPMG gun positions overlooking the local area. Stayed throughout the day and into the night.

Day 90 – 23rd June 1992

Lifted out at 07:00hrs back to Bessbrook – rest of the day off.

Day 91 – 24th June 1992

Day off sorting kit and pipe range.

Day 92 – 25th June 1992

Headed out to Newry again at 07:45hrs on patrol. Picked up an RUC officer from the station and went out doing house checks and VCP's around Newry. Carried out patrols into the night.

Day 93 – 26th June 1992

Managed to grab some sleep in the RUC station canteen – back out again at 06:00hrs for more house checks, snap VCP's. Helicoptered out from Newry to border near Crossmaglen with same RUC officer to carry out more house checks and VCP's. Lifter out at 18:45hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 94 – 27th June 1992

Back on ARF at 08:00hrs – up and down again all day covering tower replenishments. Landed at the towers a couple of times and jumped off – had a brew and chat with the tower troops then back up providing cover.

Day 95 – 28th June 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs rest of the day off.

Day 96 – 29th June 1992

Day off and back on the pipe range, admin, washing kit and catching up on some post. Jocks arrive today (Black Watch) – small forward unit starting to prepare for their full company takeover of Bessbrook when we finish.

Seen by many as a rough half way point in the tour and a good moral booster for all.

Day 97 – 30th June 1992

Went on ARF at 08:00hrs all day and through the night.

Day 98 – 31st June 1992

Moved onto guard duties as we have lost our Platoon Commander Lt White (The Boss) who had gone back to the UK for a resettlement course – he was leaving the Army. All the section on guard duties and stand-by ARF until he comes back.

(Lt White had stepped in at last minute to do this tour to cover for someone who couldn't, which was a risky thing to do considering he was soon getting out - I heard later that he passed-away shortly after leaving the Army and died following a brain tumour – he left behind a young family.

He was a great Platoon Commander that let nothing phase him; laid back guy never lost his temper and had a great sense of humour. We all thought him leaving would be a great loss to the regiment).

Day 98 – 1st of July to 5th of July 1992

Guard duties and stand-by ARF until the 'The Boss' gets back.

Day 103 – 6th July 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 06:30hrs to Camlough Lake to carry out search patrols around the lake area. Covered about 10k then moved to Helicopter RV - lifted back to Bessbrook at 19:30hrs.

Day 104 – 7th July 1992

Day off – orders at 21:00hrs for a patrol early hours tomorrow.

Day 105 – 8th July 1992

All ready to move at 04:00hrs sat in the back of an RAF Puma – helicopters not given the all clear to fly due to bad weather – stayed ready to move till first light but there was no break in the weather so patrol cancelled.

Day 106 – 9th July 1992

Orders at 15:00hrs for patrol tomorrow around Forkhill.

Day 107 – 10th July 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook to Forkhill at 06:30hrs. Left Forkhill base at 08:00hrs on foot to carry out search patrols. Came back into Forkhill at 20:00hrs having covered about 15k. Stayed overnight in Forkhill.

Day 108 – 11th July 1992

Picked up an RUC Officer and left Forkhill again on foot at 08:00hrs – more search patrols, house checks and VCP's. Moved to helicopter RV at 18:00hrs – lifted out at 18:45hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 109 – 12th July 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs.

Day 110 – 13th July 1992

Came off ARF and moved straight onto guard duties for Bessbrook. Parade day today so had to provide extra back up – watched parade from the main gate – went without incident.

Day 111 – 14th July 1992

Day off and admin. Orders at 14:30hrs for

patrol tomorrow.

Day 112 – 15th July 1992

Left Bessbrook on foot at 08:00hrs to carry out search patrols around the Bessbrook area, did a couple of snap VCP's and took pictures of possible PIRA attack points. Patrolled back into Bessbrook at 18:30hrs.

Day 113 – 16th July 1992

Helicoptered out of Bessbrook with RUC Officer at 06:00hrs heading over to Silverbridge to search farms. Nothing found. Lifted out at 11:30hrs back to Bessbrook. Rest of the day off.

Day 114 – 17th July 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – up and down most of the day covering ground searches.

Day 115 – 18th July 1992

Stayed on ARF – no flying day on Sunday's unless it's an emergency – it must be annoying for the people living around Bessbrook with helicopters coming in and out all day and through the night. No flying day on Sundays.

Day 116 – 19th July 1992

Came off ARF at 10:30hrs – orders at 17:00hrs for patrol out tomorrow.

Day 117 – 20th July 1992

Lifted out at 07:00hrs and flew around Newry trying to locate a green van which was a suspected PIRA weapons transporter – couldn't find it. Carried out some random snap VCP's swooping down onto roads and road junctions – nothing found but took allot of abuse off people we had stopped to search their car. Back into Bessbrook at 15:30hrs.

Day 118 – 21st July 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs.

Day 119 – 22nd July 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs – briefing at 15:00hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 120 – 23rd July 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 07:30hrs going to the border near Crossmaglen. More search patrols and VCP's – lifted out at 15:15hrs back to Bessbrook. Went straight onto ARF.

Day 121 – 24th July 1992

Crashed out at 02:20hrs and helicoptered out to Warrenpoint – PIRA mortar attack on the new Warrenpoint station (being built to replace the old one which had been flattened). Another section already on the ground so provided air cover. No one killed or injured.

Day 122 – 25th July 1992

Stayed on ARF for the day – up and down most of the day providing cover for ground troops.

Day 123 – 26th July 1992

Taken off ARF at 00:15hrs going out to Forkhill – a patrol on the ground had an 'UJ Alarm' British Army device that detects IED detonation devices – all patrols carried this kit. Turned out to be a 500lb roadside IED. Put in place a cordon area whilst the Bomb Squad were dropped in to disarm it. Disarmed safely no casualties. Stayed out

throughout the day setting up GPMG positions and patrolling the cordon area whilst RUC SOCO went in. Stayed out overnight.

Day 124 – 27th July 1992

Stayed out at the scene until 14:00hrs then lifted out back to Bessbrook.

Day 125 – 28th July 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs

Day 126 – 29th July 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs. Briefing at 14:10hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 127 – 30th July 1992

Lifted out to Newry at 12:30hrs on the outskirts of the town into the hills. Moved into observation lie-up overlooking Newry. Stayed in lie-up for the rest of the day and the night taking pictures and observing movements.

Day 128 – 31st July 1992

Patrolled out of lie-up position carrying out VCP's. Moved to another lie-up position outside Newry and stayed through the night again.

Day 129 – 1st August 1992

Lifted out of Newry at 07:30hrs back to Bessbrook. Crashed out of Bessbrook at 14:20hrs – PIRA mortar attacked on R16 (border watch tower number 16) – six mortars fired, three exploded on impact and three failed. Mortars fell short of target so no one injured but it was a close call and proof that despite best efforts from the British Army, Intelligence and everyone else, the PIRA still had the ability to carry out attacks under everyone's radar. Stayed out and patrolled around the watch tower whilst Bomb Squad and RUC SOCO cleaned up the area. Lifted out at 20:30hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 130 – 2nd August 1992

Going out on patrol at 03:00hrs to do some snap VCP's around Newry. Lots of heated intelligence reports that something was going to go down in Newry – everyone tense and fired up. Lifted out of Newry at 18:30hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 131 – 3rd of August 1992

Supposed to have the night off but straight onto ARF when we got back to Bessbrook.

Day 132 – 4th of August 1992

Stayed on ARF. Briefing at 14:30hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 133 – 5th of August 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 05:00hrs going back to Newry where the alert was still very high.

Covered a section of road for some Army/RUC vehicle movements – carried out some VCP's. Patrolled into Newry RUC station and stayed the night.

Day 134 – 6th August 1992

Patrolled out of Newry station at 06:00hrs and patrolled around Newry town centre with RUC. Lifted out of Newry back to Bessbrook at 16:30hrs.

Day 135 – 7th August 1992

Back on ARF for the day.

Day 136 – 8th August 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs. Went out to at 13:00hrs to Cloghoge Check Point to provide satellite patrols for the re-build. We didn't know it at the time but the next few days would be gruelling for everybody. Stayed patrolling around the check point until midnight then went into overnight lie-up.

Day 137 – 9th August 1992

Stayed at Cloghoge Checkpoint which consisted of manning a temporary VCP and providing satellite patrols. The ground covered was unforgiving, peats and bogs, high fences and lots of cattle wanting to chase us.

Blistering hot day in full kit. Patrolled over to R15 (watch tower 15) for replenishments and a decent meal. The tower was on top of Cloghoge Mountain, 534m above sea level. Carrying all the kit including wearing a flat jacket and helmet meant it was a gruesome climb, in any weather. Picked up some more ration packs and water and headed back out.

Day 138 – 10th August 1992

Stayed at Cloghoge Checkpoint. Patrolled out and dug-in a few gun positions overlooking the rebuilding work.

Day 139 – 11th August 1992

Still patrolling round the area and back up to the tower for a decent meal and some replenishments then back out. Everyone shattered and in need of a shower.

Day 140 – 12th August 1992

Lifted out of Cloghoge at 15:00hrs – put onto ARF as soon as we arrived back at Bessbrook. Started packing for our mid-term training starting tomorrow.

Day 141 – 13th August 1992

Lifted out by RAF Chinook at 09:30hrs to Ballykinler which was a MOD training camp on the southeast coast of Northern Ireland. Had a day on the ranges firing and testing kit then everyone into the NAFFI for a piss-up.

Day 142 – 14th August 1992

Had a few briefings and updates then back in the NAFFI starting on the beer about 16:00hrs and carried on through the night.

Day 143 – 15th August 1992

Hangover... big time – lifted out by Chinook and taken back to Bessbrook arrived back at 10:30hrs. Had some update briefings and prepared kit for going back out to Cloghoge Checkpoint tomorrow.

Day 144 – 16th August 1992

Lifted out to Cloghoge at 10:00hrs. Straight onto manning the VCP – 6 hours on, 6 hours off – during the 6 hours off we walked up to the tower for some food and rest – 1 hour walk to get there and 1 to get back. Did this throughout the night.

Day 145 – 17th August 1992

Same as day before 6 on, 6 off and more walks up to the tower and back.

Day 146 – 18th August 1992

Lifted out of Cloghoge back to Bessbrook for 18:30hrs. Orders at 21:00hrs for patrol

tomorrow.

Day 147 – 19th August 1992

Back out to Warrenpoint area at 07:30hrs to do some satellite patrols – walked over Slieve Gullion mountain which was a killer carrying all the kit - carrying out VCP's along the way. Lifted out at 18:30hrs.

Day 148 – 20th August 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs. Up and down all day providing air cover for the re-build.

Day 149 – 21st August 1992

Finished ARF at 09:00hrs put on stand-by ARF. Crashed out at 18:15hrs to Crossmaglen – sniper attack from the local church on a section patrol walking through Crossmaglen town square. Private Paul Turner from The Light Infantry shot in the chest area from a .50 calibre sniper rifle – although he wore a British Army Fragmentation jacket (INIBA 'flak jacket') the size of the round used tore straight through it and he died within a few minutes. We dropped in at the scene by helicopter and carried out an immediate search of the church and graveyard – nothing found. Patrolled back to Crossmaglen station. (The mood in the station that night will stay with me forever). The rest of the contact team made it back to the station with a member of the team dead. An Army Padre was flown in almost immediately to consolidate the troops and say prayer. Went back out on patrol around Crossmaglen carrying out satellite patrols – we were all on edge and worried about being the next victim, not able to see your enemy, knowing they had the advantage of using a nearby border as an escape route, the use of a .50 calibre weapon and someone trained to use it with pinpoint accuracy.

Day 150 – 22nd August 1992

Lifted out of Crossmaglen at 16:45hrs back to Bessbrook went straight onto stand-by ARF.

Day 151 – 23rd August 1992

Finished stand-by ARF at 09:00hrs and had a kit check (every single item of kit, weapons and ammunition laid out on the floor to be counted and checked). Orders at 18:00hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 152 – 24th August 1992

Lifted out at 07:30hrs and dropped near Folkhill. All day patrolling, searching and snap VCP's – carried on into the night before going into a lie-up position.

Day 153 – 25th August 1992

Up at first light and back on patrol and snap VCP's. Lifted out at 19:30hrs back to Bessbrook. Went straight onto ARF.

Day 154 – 26th August 1992

Finished ARF at 08:00hrs. Orders at 15:30hrs for patrol going out tonight. Lifted out at 23:00hrs to Corry Square RUC Station in Newry to provide cover for a unit change with the RUC. Patrolled out of Newry Station around Newry for a couple of hours.

Day 155 – 27th August 1992

Went back out at 03:00hrs till 04:30hrs. Lifted out of Newry at 06:15hrs by RAF

Puma from Newry golf driving range which was the nearest place we could find and headed back to Bessbrook. Started ARF 22:00hrs.

Day 156 – 28th August 1992

Came off ARF at 08:00hrs – briefing at 17:00hrs for patrol tomorrow.

Day 157 – 29th August 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 04:30hrs to go over to the A1 near Jonesborough – previous patrol found something suspicious which could be a weapons hide. Searched area and found an abandoned hide. Took some photos and notes. Picked up at 08:15hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 158 – 30th August 1992

Day off.

Day 159 – 31st August 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – lots of flying today covering ground movement and tower replenishments.

Day 160 – 1st September 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs and went straight onto stand-by ARF.

Day 161 – 2nd September 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 10:00hrs back onto the A1 to provide some satellite cover for road movements which were civilian convoys helping re-build Cloghoge Checkpoint. Lifted back into Bessbrook at 21:00hrs.

Day 162 – 3rd September 1992

Back out to the A1 at 04:00hrs for satellite patrols. Meant to be lifted out at 16:15hrs but confusion around finding the helicopter RV so missed it. Stayed out till 21:30hrs and was lifted out.

Day 163 – 4th September 1992

Day off.

Day 164 – 5th September 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – put on stand-by to move to support a patrol that had a PIRA

contact – false alarm, local farmer using shotgun near a patrol.

Day 165 – 6th September 1992

Stayed on ARF. Whilst providing ARF cover we were dropping down and carrying out snap VCP's. Pilots would identify a certain vehicle to be stopped and try fly ahead of it then drop us in a field near by to run out and set up a snap VCP. Carried out snap VCP's all day.

Day 166 – 7th September 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs. Lifted out of Bessbrook at 13:30hrs back up to Cloghoge Checkpoint – spent the day and night manning the checkpoint in shifts.

Day 167 – 8th September 1992

Continued manning the checkpoint – lifted out at 21:00hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 168 – 9th September 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs. Crashed out at 13:45hrs. A 500lb roadside IED found (which was later termed our 'leaving present from the PIRA') in Silverbridge. Provided a cordon for a huge clearance operation. Stayed overnight.

Day 169 – 10th September 1992

Intelligence put Silverbridge on high alert for an PIRA attack everyone on edge expecting a contact on the clearance operation. Carried out more patrols around Silverbridge area. Stayed out overnight.

Day 170 – 11th September 1992

Clearance operation finished at 15:30hrs – no helicopters flying, everyone back at Bessbrook flapping after a known PIRA terrorist was found walking around Bessbrook. Eventually lifted out at 17:50hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 171 – 12th September 1992

Lifted out of Bessbrook at 09:30hrs with two RUC Officers over to patrol around Drumintee and carry out house checks and VCP's. Patrolled into Drumintee Forest Park estate and had contact – Y33 had a

weapon fired over their heads, everyone dropped into cover whilst slamming a round into the chamber to return fire, everyone looking for the firing point but couldn't see it. A few of us thought it had come from the back of a van which then drove off. Very lucky. Lifted out at 17:40hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 172 – 13th September 1992

Lifted out at 08:30hrs to cover the A1 again – patrolling round all day covering civilian road convoys. Picked up at 18:30hrs back to Bessbrook.

Day 173 – 14th September 1992

Back out to the A1 at 09:30hrs – more patrols and VCP's around the Killeen area. Lifted out at 19:45hrs.

Day 174 – 15th September 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs – loads of flying today just landing to refuel then back up again.

Day 175 – 16th September 1992

Stayed on ARF – up and down all day again.

Day 176 – 17th September 1992

Came off ARF at 09:00hrs and went onto stand by ARF.

Day 177 - 18th September 1992

Started ARF at 08:00hrs for last time – Kings Own Scottish Borders Regiment turned up at 14:00hrs to take over ARF – so happy to see the Jocks. Stood down, packing up kit getting ready to leave South Armagh and go back to the UK.

Day 178 – 19th September 1992

Whole of A Company stood down at 06:00hrs – Jocks now in control. Lifted out by Chinook at 14:00hrs passing the rest of the Kings Own Scottish who were coming off the Chinook. Chinook to RAF Aldergrove in County Antrim. Hercules C130 from Aldergrove to RAF Brize Norton in the UK.

END X ■

Last chance to buy the Fighting Pioneer

I only have half a dozen signed prints left, get your orders in. First come, first served...

HAVE Pioneer cufflinks, Pioneer badges, Pioneer books, Pioneer shirts, Pioneer this and Pioneer that, however in my view this is the must have Pioneer item that needs to be on every Pioneer's wall.

It is signed by the last Commanding Officers of both 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments and the picture depicts the role of the Pioneer through many campaigns.

If you have not got one of these prints, than the time is now to get one! First come first served.

The cost is £20 - this includes postage which is around £5.00 each. Payment can be made via cheque or Paypal. To make payment via Paypal login to payment and send payment to: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

p.s. I forgot to mention the size! It is 750mm x 650mm in size!



40 Porter Group

A very interesting short history of the 40 Porter Group, Indian Pioneer Corps, originally formed to supply our forces advancing through the dense jungles of Burma and Assam.

Group Commanders

Lt Col T L Lane 1 Feb 44 - 25 Mar 44 (KIA)
Lt Col A H Day 9 Apr 44 - 6 Jun 44
Lt Col E N Jameson 6 Jun 44 -

Second in Command

Maj P D Hunt 1 Feb 44 - 4 Jun 44
Maj A H Day 6 Jun 44 - 3 Nov 44
Maj P D Hunt 13 Nov 44 - 21 Nov 44
Maj J Hodgson 11 Jul 45 -

Adjutants

Capt Gurdev Singh 1 Feb 44 - 27 Sep 44
Capt E P Nickless 27 Sep 44 - 18 Oct 44
Capt C Morrison 18 Oct 44 - 21 Apr 45
Capt E Glover 21 Apr 45 - 23 Aug 45
Capt L W Pooley 23 Aug 45 -

Subedar-Majors

SM Ransing Thapa 1 GR
10 Dec 42 - 26 Nov 44
SM Motiram Thapa 6 GR
27 Nov 44 - 30 Nov 45
SM Asbadadur Limbu 7GR 1 Dec 45 -

Coy Commanders

1611 Coy
Capt D A Fox 10 Dec 42 - 6 Dec 44
Capt R R Pilkington 7 Dec 44 - 26 Jun 45
Capt D A Fox 26 Jun 45 -

1612 Coy

Capt Sardar Khan 10 Dec 42 - 4 Sep 44
Capt J Hodgson 4 Sep 44 - 10 Jul 45
Capt E P Nickless 18 Jan 45 - 14 Jul 45
Capt R R Pilkington 14 Jul 45 -

1613 Coy

Capt R J Leach 23 Sep 43 -

1582 Coy

Capt W C Kicks 29 Mar 44 - 16 Jan 45
Capt J Hodgson 16 Jan 45 - 10 Jul 45
Capt W C Kicks 10 Jul 45 ?
Capt R Rignall 28 Oct 45

1432 Coy

Capt D G Carroll 5 Feb 45 - 10 Jun 45
Capt T C Payne 11 Jun 45 - 27 Jun 45
Capt M B Turner 11 Jul 45 - 31 Aug 45
Capt R MCT Guppy 1 Sep 45 - 30 Sep 45

1466 Coy

Capt Mohamed Hanif Sadiq 15 Jul 44 -

Report: Lt Col E N Jameson
Picture: RPCA Archive

THE DOTIYAL PORTER GROUPS of the Indian Pioneer Corps were originally formed as Porter Companies and battalions to assist in supplying our forces advancing through the dense and uninhabited jungles of Burma and Assam, where neither vehicle or animal could go.

The primary task of these units was the carrying of heavy loads in the shape of baggage, ammunition and supplies over steep and difficult paths in the wake of the forward troops engaged in the almost super-human task of driving the Japanese armies from Burma.

The DOTIYAL is a Gurkha from the hills of western Nepal, imbued with all the characteristics of the fighting race of Nepal. They are men accustomed to the carrying of heavy loads over long distances and before the war were chosen for their fortitude, toughness and cheerful dispositions to work as porters in such tests of endurance as the Mt Everest expeditions. With Gurkha officers and NCOs from Regular Gurkha units they therefore provided excellent material for the formation of Porter companies for the fighting forces in the Burmese Jungle.

These units were originally designated No 1 and 2 Porter Battalions, but when the Group system was introduced into the IPC

they were renamed No 40 and 41 Porter Groups respectively.

A short account of the activities of No 40 (Porter) Group is

Operations on the Tiddim Road, June 1943 to February 1944

In 1943 the Tiddim Road was the sole artery of communication and supply to our forces fighting in the densely wooded and hilly area of Fort White – Kennedy Peak and Tiddim. Originally this road was little more than a mule track cut out in the hillside and had been widened for the use of motor transport. The maintenance of such a road, vital to the existence of our troops in the forward area, was a task requiring the employment of a large number of Engineers and Pioneers, especially during the torrential rains of the monsoon. In June 1943, therefore, No 1 Porter Battalion (Dotiyals), of the IPC, found themselves engaged with Indian Engineers in working on the repair and improvement of the road between MS 103 and MS127. Here they remained until the end of December 1943 doing magnificent work under the most trying conditions, through the heaviest rains of the monsoon, having to be constantly ready day and night to go out at once to attend to some emergency in order that the road might be kept open and the train of supply not interrupted. A letter received from the CRE, 17 Indian Division, by Maj T L Lane, then commanding the Battalion, will give

some idea of the magnitude of the task they performed and reads as follows:

“As I have now handed over to CRE, 14 Army Troops, I am writing to thank you, your officers and men for the magnificent work they have done during the most unpleasant months of the rains on the Tiddim Road. The original estimate for the maintenance of this road was that it would require 5,000 men to keep it open, instead of which we have kept it open with only approx 2,000 men. The road was only closed for a total of 5 days between MS 82 and MS 164 – a smaller number of days than any other road in the Corps Area. This was solely due to your unit's exertions and keenness. Again many thanks for all you have done for me during the last few months, and I hope that we shall serve together again sometime during the future.”

During this period in addition to the work on the road, demands for porters with the forward units had also to be met. It was at this time that the Battalion sustained its first casualties – one man killed and another wounded by a booby trap while portering for a Gurkha Battalion at Tiddim and Tuitam.

At the end of Dec 1943, Bn HQ and 2 Coys moved forward to Tiddim and Kennedy Park. Here at the highest and narrowest part of the road they were engaged in widening it behind and forward of Kennedy Park, and in cutting new tracks

for Jeeps and guns to Tuisan. These tracks had to cut through dense virgin jungle in the most difficult and precipitous country, dropping down 3000 feet in a distance of 5 miles.

In the second week of Feb 44, 'C' Coy (now 1613 Coy) took part in the first real operations in close proximity of the enemy, portering supplies and ammunition for 3 days and nights to our forward troops on Vanoa Ridge during the attack on the Japanese strong point at MS22 on the Tiddle-Kalemyo road. The men stood up well under mortar fire and earned congratulations from 48 Brigade.

Towards the end of Feb, 'A' Coy were ordered back from Kennedy Peak to Tamu, this being the first move into what was to develop into a general withdrawal. It was at this point that the Group system came into operation, and No Porter Bn became 40 (Porter) Group with Coys re-numbered 1611, 1612 and 1613 respectively.

Withdrawal with 17 Indian Division from Tiddim to Imphal

With the enemy threat to their L of C increasing, 17 Div began to withdraw towards the end of Feb. The first Coy of 40 Gp to move out was 1613 who withdrew direct by MT before the road was cut. After the road was cut by the enemy, Gp HQ, which was still well forward, withdrew to 1612 at Mile 124. From here they marched out with the rest of 17 Div to Imphal. This was a time of great anxiety, hard work, and test of endurance for everybody, particularly for the commanders who had to overcome almost insuperable difficulties in

maintaining communication with each other and keeping the men together in dense jungle. More often than not the road as a route had to be abandoned, and long and difficult treks carried out across country.

During all this time the Dotyals, although unarmed Pioneers, were playing a vital part in the battle and did sterling work in pulling 25 pdrs, Bofors, 6 pdrs and 2 pdr anti-tank guns into position, portering rations and ammo to troops on the protective screen, and evacuating wounded from these same positions.

They also gathered in supplies dropped by air, sometimes having to climb down several hundred feet of steep hillside to retrieve loads that had missed the mark. Several parties accompanied 48 Bde Commandos on long treks behind enemy lines. Although under fire on many occasions their behaviour was exemplary and casualties few – only one killed, 2 wounded and one missing.

It was during the withdrawal that the Group had the misfortune to lose their CO, Lt Col T L Lane, who was unluckily killed by a shell fragment in a 'defended' box at Mile 120. The withdrawal concluded with a long and tiring trek across the hills to Imphal.

Meanwhile 1613 Coy who were the first to move when the road was cut had not been idle. Having received warning orders to move at 0730 on March 10th they left Tiddim at 2130hrs the same evening and on arrival at Imphal were put to work erecting Corps HQ. This task, however, was very quickly changed into the rather more urgent one of digging defences and putting up wire obstacles. The Coy was also issued

with 30 extra rifles for defensive purposes.

On 5 April 1944 the Coy received orders to send a detachment of 1GO, 6 NCOs and 150 porters to report to 17 Ind Div HQ for work on operations. The detachment did a forced march of 45 miles with 48 Bde, which was carried out in 2 night marches. On the way they carried 100 3" and 200 2" mortar bombs to MS33 on the Tiddim road, all along jungle tracks and under Jap shell fire. During all this time the porters were taking ammo to the front line, bringing back wounded and collecting air drops under shell fire. Finally they received orders to return and meet 63 Bde. On the way they picked up 50 wounded, carrying them through an ambush and coming under shellfire in a waterlogged paddy field. Their only casualties were one killed and five wounded. They remained with 63 Bde for a month portering ammo up to Silchar track, during which they experienced some air raids. In all the detachment remained out for 3 months.

The Siege of Imphal

When the Group reassembled at Imphal there was little time for re-organisation. Porters were in great demand everywhere and the Group soon found itself scattered in all directions supplying detachments for portering up to forward positions for 5 divisions. Gurkha officers and NCOs were scarce as the Group had not had time to receive its full complement on reorganisation from the Battalion to the Group system. Consequently small detachments, sometimes under the command of a Gurkha officer, but more



often of an NCO, had to be sent to work with Divs for long periods with little opportunity for the few British officers then in the Group to visit them except on rare occasions. In every case, however, the detachments carried out their work well although living under the most appalling climatic conditions and generally on very short rations. One detachment of 60 men went without rations for 3 days.

The CO of a Scottish Battalion at Kanglatongbe remarked upon the skill and gentleness exercised by the porters when evacuating wounded off a steep and slippery ridge in the face of the enemy and inferred that it was mainly due to the steady and tireless efforts of the porters that the wounded were all able to get away. One porter was killed and another wounded while evacuating wounded with this particular battalion.

Back in Imphal, those who were not employed on portering were busy unloading supply planes and working on roads and in installations.

Operations up the Ukhrul Road with 20 Division – June to Sep 1944

Towards the end on June 1944 another detachment was called for to take part in a Long Range Penetration Patrol by troops of 20 Division moving up the Chindwin. 1611 and 1612 Coys being fully committed to other operations, the detachment was provided by 1613 Coy. Its strength was 1 BO, 2 Jemadars, 7 NCOs and 150 porters. They were split into 2 parties, one being allotted to 80 Bde and the other to 100 Bde. Their chief task was the carrying of rations and ammo to forward battalions in the hills and bringing back casualties. When not engaged in this they collected supplies dropped by air which very often necessitated a descent into deep nullahs and a climb back of between 2000 and 3000 feet with heavy loads. All this had to be carried out in the middle of the monsoon, sometimes under shellfire, one detachment marching 200 miles with heavy loads in the rain. On their return to Imphal the following letter was received by the Group Commander from the Column Commander.

“On the return of Tarcol from its march to the Chindwin River I wish to place on record my appreciation of the excellent work of your porters. Under the worst possible climatic conditions they have carried their loads along some of the most difficult tracks I have ever seen, forded rivers with water up to their arm[pits], always completed a march and always remained cheerful. All commanders working under me have praised their work and remarked upon their cheerfulness.”

Operations with 268 Brigade – Oct to Dec 1944

In Sept 1944 yet another detachment of 1613 Coy was called forward to join 268 Bde working forwards towards the Chindwin. They set off from Imphal in ‘DUCKS’ and were attached to 3rd Battalion of the Bde. It was towards the end of the monsoon, the weather was still bad, and the country a sea of mud and water. They carried sick and wounded, wading through knee-deep mud for 36 miles at a stretch. One party crossed the Chindwin in two small assault boats in establishing the first

bridgehead. The river was then in flood with whole trees floating down stream, and no one knew whether the Jap was waiting ready on the other side or not. After the crossing the party went on with the forward Coys of the Battalion portering rations and ammo. During these operations the detachment marched a total of 350 miles, from Moreh to Kabo which is 20 miles from Shwebo. The most trying part of the march lasted for 3 days in a chung, knee deep in water. One party carried a wounded man for 16 hours under these conditions.

Advance of 5 Division from Imphal to Kalemyo along the Tiddim Road.

5 Indian Division began their advance along the Tiddim Road towards the end of August 1944. A coy of porters were required to go with them. 1611 Coy, under strength and one platoon of 1612 Coy were detailed for the task. During this advance which continued until the whole Division appeared at Kalemyo in December the Coy had a variety of dirties to perform which comprised almost every task than any Pioneer Coy can be asked to do. Detachments were sent out with forward Battalion carrying rations and ammo; one large detachment of 55 porters going out with ‘V’ Force from Mile 81 portering rations and evacuating wounded. 61 porters accompanied 123 Bde on their flanking movement through the Zalui Valley round Kennedy Peak to cut the road at Fort White. They went through difficult country covered in dense jungle, the ground rising to a height of 3000 feet in a few miles. During this advance mountain guns had to be dismantled and carried by porters in places where mules could not be taken, and casualties had to be evacuated. Another party of 103 porters went with 9 Bde along the valley to Maulbin where they worked a Dropping Zone in full view of the enemy and under almost continuous shellfire. There were no casualties.

When not working on detachments, the main task of the Coy was collecting supplies from dropping zones. At the Fort White Zone there was a high wind causing most of the ‘chutes with their loads to go down the khud, a drop of 1500 feet. On one occasion when motor spares were being dropped, a complete truck front axle assembly went down the khud side. It took 40 porters 3 hours to retrieve it.

The Coy finally finished up at Tankkyan off-loading supply planes on the airstrip and a large number were soon able to fly out on some badly needed and long awaited leave. For their work in these operations they earned the highest praise from the GOC and the staff of 5 Division.

Some individual acts of gallantry during above operations. Where all did so well on every front it is difficult to particularise, but there were some outstanding deeds performed by individuals which are worth recording as examples of the sterling character and indomitable spirit of the Dotiyals. These were performed by men of all 3 coys.

1611 Coy – No LB525896 Porter Nandbir Dunar, Dotiyal of village Chiyarkule

Was a member of a party working at the Ordnance Depot on Mile 109 of the Tiddim Road. He and a British Officer and 5 British

soldiers of the Depot staff got cut off and had to make their way out. Porter Nandbir led this party for 5 days through thick virgin jungle and brought them out on the road at Mile 82. They had only 2 days rations with them but thanks to Porter Nandbir’s jungle sense and knowledge of jungle vegetation they managed to maintain their direction, substituting on their 2 days rations augmented by jungle plants for the whole 5 days and arrived safely at their destination.

1612 Coy – No LB515501 Porter Dunichand, Dotiyal of village Paletta and No LB525671 Porter Damarsing, Dotiyal of village Setigaon were in a party of 16 men carrying ammo up to forward positions and evacuating wounded. They saw a badly wounded man unable to move lying close to a Japanese bunker. Without a thought for themselves they went straight to the man and carried him out to safety under fire.

1612 Coy – LB525405 Porter Tularam Thapa, Gurkha and LB525805 Porter Jagbir were on duty with their Coy collecting airdrops on the edge of the jungle when they noticed two figures lying down some distance away in the jungle. On creeping nearer they found them to be Jap soldiers resting. Although unarmed the 2 porters went forward, surprised the Japs and brought them in as captives.

1613 Coy – No LB525536 Porter Tilaram of village Kural, Nepal was in a party repairing a bridge some distance from the road. The bridge and the ground between it and the road were under heavy shellfire. When one of the party was wounded, Tilaram carried him across the intervening open ground for a distance of 500 yards under heavy shellfire and brought him to safety.

1572 Coy on operations with 19 Division from Jan 45 until the fall of Mandalay. Towards the end of Dec 1944 the Group arrived in the valley of the Chindwin where it remained for some weeks, with Group HQ and 2 Coys at Indaingyi and one Coy at Kalemyo. It was at this time that 1582 Coy, Dotiyals, joined the Group. It was a new Coy raised in India only a few months before and had been operating up the Ledo Road after only a short period of training. They were now with 19 Division and remained on operations with them until after the capture of Mandalay.

The 1st Jan 1945, found the Coy, less detachments, with 62 and 64 Bdes marching to Kawlin. The Coy to date had marched about 300 miles operating DZs along its route. In addition, it had during this time helped in the construction of a light plane airstrip at Tonhe, an airstrip for transport plans at Le-U, both taking only 3 days to complete, and helped improve existing tracks to take MT up to 3 tons capacity, and had greatly assisted 19 Div in the efficient and speedy crossing of the Chindwin by helping units in the loading and unloading of rafts and the speedy clearance of all equipment’s from the beaches on either side of the river. The Coy was at times stretched out over 200 miles and it says a great deal for the efficiency of the Officers and NCOs concerned that the responsibility thrust upon them by this

decentralisation did not entail any loss in the high standard of discipline and work of the unit.

The Coy arrived in Kawlin on 2 Jan and were joined by all detachments which had been left behind. Here again the work consisted of collecting supplies dropping in the area. By 4 Jan the Coy, less 2 detachments, already well forward with 62 and 64 Bdes, were once more on the move still on foot. They remained at Zigon until 11 Jan when they moved up in MT to Onbauk. Here work consisted of picking up supplies dropped and loading and unloading aircraft. On 12 Jan there was an enemy air strike while men were unloading a plane and 3 men were wounded, only one seriously. This appeared to have no effect on their morale for immediately after the strike ended work proceeded normally. After this incident planes landed only after dark and as airdrops went on during the hours of daylight the men were working long hours. On average 50 planes were dealt with each night and as there were no ramps or loading bays, and only room to park 10 planes at a time, the work was very strenuous and continued until the early hours of the morning. Onbauk was the first place since the Coy crossed the Chindwin where the whole Coy was in contact and the Coy Commander able to visit detachments with 62 and 64 Bdes.

While at Shwebo the Coy was armed by order of the Divisional Commander. This was done so that the Coy would be able to protect itself against small parties the Japs were sending out. It meant that every spare minute had to be used in teaching the men the rudiments of the rifle. The Coy was not fully employed at the time, as all supplies were being drawn from Shwebo, so 100 men were sent to Group HQ to assist other Coys.

As soon as the bridgehead was made, the first party under a Jemadar went across. Here they were used to unload DUKES and carry supplies to the forward troops. One evening 3 men were wounded by shellfire while portering to a Gurkha Battalion. The detachment came under some of the heaviest shelling that had ever been experienced in Burma, but they kept to their posts and remained cheerful and full of spirit. As the bridgehead was expanded to Pear Hill and Singu so the remainder of the Coy were moved over. At Pear and Kule the men were often under fire and another man was wounded when a heavy attack was made on Kule. From there the Coy moved to Singu and the men distributed to Brigades for the attack on Mandalay. The DZ was repeatedly shelled and one Jemadar and 2 porters wounded and one killed.

The distribution of the Coy was now 40 men to each Bde, and 80 with Div HQ. The remainder stayed in Singu to operate the strip and send supplies forward. From then onwards to Mandalay it was one long slog by day and digging and guards by night. The men refused to become rattled and stayed quiet. Not on any occasion did a man fire his rifle indiscriminately.

The advance was so rapid that a new DZ was operated every day up to 10 to 12 miles forward of the last. This meant double work for all. One day's drop would be collected and sorted, the next morning half of the men would be ferried to the new DZ, prepare it and start collecting as soon as

the planes had finished dropping. The half that remained would help the RIASC personnel to issue rations to the units and then be ferried forward to the new DZ where they would assist to collect the drop, dig, and prepare if necessary to stay up all night guarding their perimeter. The dropping was often very bad and most of the supplies landed in water-logged fields. This necessitated a carry of 300 to 400 yards and as only 80 men were present it meant hard and long hours before the zone was finally cleared.

At last the pagodas on the top of Mandalay Hill were seen in the distance and no unit in the Div could have been higher in morale or more pleased than the men of 1582 Coy. They had marched from the Sittang, been under heavy fire, lost comrades, and although not playing a spectacular part had helped to a large extent in the capture of Mandalay. It was thought that Mandalay meant a well-earned rest and refit before the next stage but unfortunately this was not to be. While the men were collecting supplies from the DZ at Obo our guns were still hammering away at the lower slopes of Mandalay Hill. By now the Coy had assembled in one camp with the exception of the party with Bde which made an epic march to and the ultimate capture of Maymyo. These eventually returned and the Coy went to Mandalay airstrip. Here the work was not heavy and the men had a reasonable rest and some very essential training in the handling of their rifles. Three weeks later they moved to Taungtha and operated 33 Corps airstrip and installations. From Taungtha the Coy moved to Magwe to help the airfield Engineers to 'all weather' the strip. On the capture of Rangoon the Coy moved to Hmawbi to prepare a medium bomber strip which they finished in record time. With the end of the war their work is not yet over. They still work hard while others can take a much needed rest.

Advance of 33 Corps from the Chindwin to the Irrawaddy.

While 1582 Coy were operating with 19 Div, Group HQ, 1611 and 1612 Coys accompanied HQ 33 Corps through the Kabaw Valley until finally arriving in Rangoon area at the end of June 1945. The main task was handling supplies, working with 22 FAMO unloading aircraft, collecting from DZs, and stacking and sorting in the FSDs and ammo dumps. A hard, gruelling and monotonous task, often involving long hours at a stretch by day and night in pouring rain and sticky heat. Yet life was not without its minor excitements. On New Year's Eve 1944, at Kalewa there were rumours of a threatened attack by enemy paratroopers on the Bailey Bridge over the Chindwin. New Year celebrations, such as they were, had to be curtailed and everyone extra watchful that night. At Shwebo there were endless alarms of threatened ground attacks on the airstrip by small parties of enemy marauders. Although these invariably came to nothing they kept everybody alert and in a state of continual anticipation. The last night at Shwebo was marked by the one and only hostile air raid experienced by the Group during the whole of the operations. It can hardly be compared with the blitz in other theatres as the enemy air force consisted of a single

aircraft which dropped a few very ineffective bombs.

From the beginning of 1945 until the end of the operations in August the only two Coys on an independent task were 1613 and 1582. The former were lucky in working with their old friends of 20 Div where they had many adventures during the crossing of the Irrawaddy. At Budhalin and Myinmu beach they experienced some heavy shelling and a party with 80 Bde on a flying column to Magwe had 3 direct hits on their cookhouse. There was only one casualty.

One of the most noteworthy events of this period was the move of 1612 Coy from Indaingyi to Pyingaing, a distance of about 90 miles. Transport was very scarce and the move had to be made by foot. The march, however, was accomplished in 3 days and there were very few sore feet in evidence at the end of it.

1432 and 1466 Coys IPC

Before closing some mention must be made of 2 other non-Dotiyal Coys which joined the Group at the end of 1944. These were 1432 Bengali-Mussulman Coy and 1466 Madrassi Coy.

1432 was employed continuously in loading duties on airstrips and earned a high reputation for hard work and speed. They too had their periods of excitement. Towards the end of the War when encamped at Palon railway station they were attacked one night by a party of 60 Japs with a mortar. Three bombs fell inside the camp and exploded behind the Coy Commander's tent, and there was some quite heavy small arms fire. The Coy stood to and remained at their posts all night and in spite of great temptation resisted the impulse to fire indiscriminately by night, earning the praise of the Div Commander for their steadiness and good discipline.

Unfortunately, owing to its being very much under strength this Coy was one of the first to be cannibalised and a good team was lost to the Corps.

1466 Coy worked with 33 Corps Signals and L of C Signals throughout the operations, assisting in putting up line and maintaining telephone communications. This often entailed the Coy being extended out in small detachments in isolated places, sometimes in very close proximity to the enemy.

On 5 April 1945, at Hnawdin a detachment of British signallers and Pioneers of 1466 Coy camping for the night by the roadside were attacked at 0100 by enemy infantry. 3 Pioneers were killed and one wounded. The discipline of this Coy was always exemplary and their reputation for good work second to none.

Conclusion

The end of the war with Japan brought the inevitable period of disintegration. When demobilisation has been completed the majority of the present members of the IPC will have returned to civilian life.

Many of them indeed have themselves been in the fighting line and shared the dangers of battle equally with the forward troops. It is the great regret of these Coys who were honoured by being cannibalised that this privilege came too late for them to have an opportunity of proving their worth as fighting soldiers as well as Pioneers. ■



Arthur Day BEM

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

ARTHUR Day was born on 8th July 1913, the son of Edward Day and Margaret Ann (nee Clark) Day. He was the youngest of four children, his siblings being: Emily Day (1907-1934), Henry (Harry) Day (1906-1996), Mary Day (1911-1980).

Arthur's birth certificate shows that his address at that time was 24 Johnson Street, Sunderland, Co. Durham and that his father was a journeyman baker. Arthur lived at this same address until he joined the army in 1939. The census form for 1911 shows the family living at 53 Waterworks Road, Sunderland, so they must have moved to Johnson Street, just around the corner from Waterworks Road, just before Arthur was born. I believe the street sign above was on the wall of the bakery where Arthur grew up. Indeed, the shutter could well be that of the shop window.

On looking through old photographs we found one of a couple taken by Jerome's in Sunderland and didn't know who the couple were. The man in the picture was in Army uniform and after asking around the photograph was published in the Sunderland Echo by Arthur's great niece Joyce, asking if anyone knew who they were. Within hours Joyce received four phone calls from relatives of the couple in the picture. The subjects turned out to be George Stanton (d.1989) and his wife Nellie (d.2004). Arthur was supposed to have taken their wedding photographs but didn't have a film in the camera! So they went to a photographer in Sunderland and had this picture taken instead. The copy I have, that they must have sent to Arthur, has the message 'Balls to you' written on the back!

According to Nellie Stanton's sister Dorothy Dodd (in a telephone conversation

March 2005) Arthur, George, Nellie, Dorothy and several others used to go to the beach every Sunday afternoon (this was before the war when they were in their teens/early twenties) and 'go swimming, mess around, have a good time'. Dorothy said they were wonderful times. On their way home they used to call in to Notarianni's ice cream parlour and sing. Mr Notarianni was very good to them and would give them sweets and ice creams.

Dorothy said they called Arthur 'Little Arthur' because he was so small (only 5' 1") - she could beat him up (in fun) because she was 5' 8". Dorothy thinks he was "a lovely man"; in fact the Days were "a lovely family". This old and tatty photograph could well have been taken on one of these trips to the beach. As can be seen from this picture Arthur, holding the banjo, had a thick mop of wavy, very dark hair. I don't know if he played the banjo, I presume he did, but he did not talk about his childhood when I was a child living at home.

When WWII broke out Arthur enlisted on 26th October 1939 and joined the Pioneer Corps, Private A Day 13001261. His records show that his occupation at that time was barman. His first posting was to B1 Company and on 24th November 1939 they disembarked in France. In June of the following year Arthur was reported missing, but he must have turned up because there is no further mention of this. On 22nd July 1940 he was posted to Horley, Surrey, and this is where his future wife, Ethel Mabel Tickner, lived and worked.

Not much information is given in Arthur's army records about his movements, but the company war diary shows that they company moved to various places in France and Belgium until May 1940, when they were preparing to evacuate from Dunkirk.

Here is an excerpt from the Company

diary which shows how hard this period was for the men, who had to move from pillar to post until they were eventually picked up from the beach:

20 May 40 Ordered to move to LIBERCOURT the roads are crowded with refugees as far as THUMERIES. At 1630 hours Coy ordered to return to DEUXVILLERS which it did so.

21 May 40 Ordered to NOYELLES and then to EMMERIN. Convoy of troop carriers moved all men of 48 Division from the camp. Coy destroyed all stores which could not be moved. Streams of refugees now moving back in the opposite direction towards LILLE

24 May 40 Moved to DEULEMENT via ARMENTIERES. CO's car destroyed in bombing raid and commandeered a French car. Much air activity.

Lt Ireland - mentioned as being on strength but evacuated sick

25 May 40 Air attacks on POPERINGHE, KEMMEL and ARMENTIERES

26 May 40 Moved to BRAY DUNNES

27 May 40 About 2130 hours marched to beach and stood by ready to embark. Waited all night. 2 or 3 men may have got away in one boat but no more boats came.

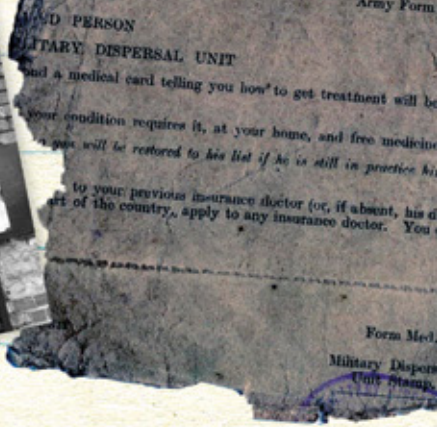
Ordered to destroy all documents and carry only personnel equipment.

Capt C J A Smith - wounded in cheek by bullet

28 May 40 Heavy rain. Still on the beach until 0700 when returned to billets and fed. Stood by again at 1600 hours. Unable to get embarkation space and found temporary billets for the night in the houses near the shore and tried to dry cloths.

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





and DUNKIRK.

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

30 May 40 0400 hours it was found that all troops had left the area and moved to between BRAY DUNNES and DUNKIRK. Went there and reported to Movement Control and then bedded down in the sand dunes. Embarkation proceeded very slowly, the boats were grounded and there were very few of them. Masses of other troops came through and were given priority. 1600 hours under German artillery fire but no casualties. Later on the advice of a Brig returned to where we had been the previous day (about 2 miles away) and slept. There have been no rations for 4 days all food has been scrounged.

31 May 40 At dawn we returned to the position near the hospital. Movement Control said our embarkation serial number was still valid but we must be patient. Got men in groups of 4, and go down to the water's edge. About 0900 hours a column of 23 Division came by en route to DUNKIRK. Joined the column and marched the 6 miles into DUNKIRK (with full packs having had no food for 4 days). Company about 80 men strong with 20 other oddments picked up and attached. Embarked on 'Malines' at 1150 hours. Landed DOVER and entrained for SWINDON."

Arthur survived the evacuation from Dunkirk and when I was a child he told me the story of how he received his only wound of the war. He was waiting on the beach to be picked up and went behind a boulder to answer a call of nature. He was literally caught with his trousers down, as the beach was targeted by enemy fire from a plane, and he was hit in the behind by shrapnel. He had to come home on his front.

The next four years the Company spent in various parts of England, moving around between various counties including Surrey,

Berkshire and Devon. Later the company returned to Europe and on 1st November 1944, when they were in Bethania, Belgium, a rocket bomb hit the company billet. Eleven men were killed, two died of their injuries and twenty were wounded. Arthur's action when this happened earned him the British Empire Medal. Arthur never spoke about this event and when I, as a child, asked him why he got a medal he replied that their billet had been bombed and, as the smallest soldier present, he was volunteered to go in because there was only a very small gap in the rubble and everyone else was too big. This official citation tells a slightly different story.

While serving Arthur was batman to Captain Eric Noel Flook, and Captain Flook was the only Pioneer with whom he kept in touch after the war. Indeed, Captain Flook was godfather to Arthur's second daughter. After the war Capt Flook became a theatrical agent, living in Maida Vale, and every year he would take a suite at the Strand Palace Hotel and Arthur would meet up with him there one evening for dinner. Cpt. Flook had no immediate family and when he died he left his estate to Arthur.

The company was disbanded on 31st July 1945, at Horstmar in Germany. On 25th January 1946 Arthur was released to the Royal Army Reserve. His testimonial on release from the army reads:

"Trade: Barman.

Military conduct; Exemplary.

A very good man indeed. He can be relied upon to give of his best under all conditions He has given splendid service to his country in the N.W. Europe campaign, and was awarded the B.E.M. for bravery and devotion to duty. I can thoroughly recommend him to any employer.

BAOR 20 Oct

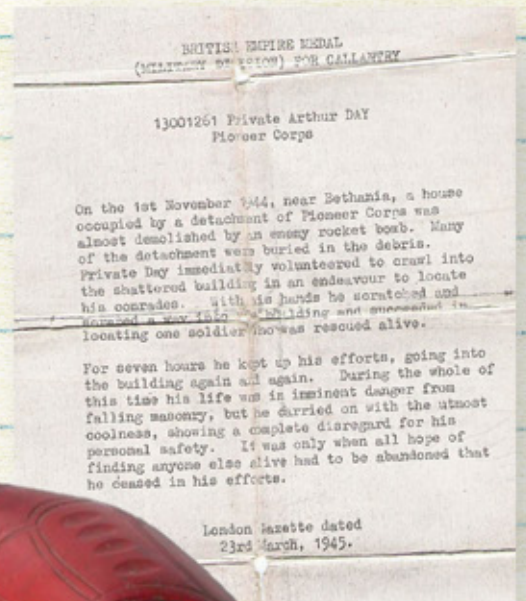
1945

D.V. Cooper

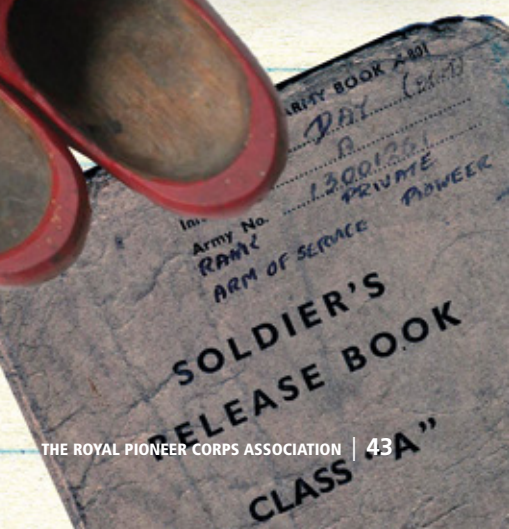
Major, Pioneer Corps Bournemouth"

Meanwhile Arthur's private life moved on. He and Ethel M Tickner married on 8th February 1941 at her local Register Office; I know of no photograph of this event.

In July 1942 Ethel gave birth to their first child, Suzanne, in the Redhill County Hospital. At the time their home address was 12 Hevers Avenue, Horley, Surrey. About six months later Ethel and their daughter moved to Sunderland. I was told that this was to help Arthur's sister Mary who had a seriously ill child. I imagine that Arthur's father Edward may also have been ill and would have needed help in the bakery, as he died in November 1944 of heart disease. Ethel stayed with Arthur's sister Mary in Ogden Street to begin with, and then later rented a property at 7 Waterworks Road, which was just round the corner from the bakery. All this area has



This is a souvenir Arthur brought back from Dunkirk - a pair of child's clogs that he found on the beach



now been redeveloped as part of the University campus and none of these properties now exist. In 1944 Ethel produced their second daughter, Mary, in Sunderland and the family stayed there until the war ended.

I do not remember seeing my father when I was very young but one of my earliest memories does involve him. I remember a small red van arriving at the house in Waterworks Road to deliver a parcel.

The parcel contained a bright red dress that Arthur had bought for me in Belgium which had smocking on the bodice and a long sash at the waist.

Mother sat me on the edge of the table and sung "Alice blue gown" as she tied the sash. I remember feeling very confused, telling her that it was red, not blue. I still have a picture of the dress in my mind.

My sister Mary remembers the verse Arthur would write in an autograph book when asked to sign one:

"Black is the raven, black is the rook
Black is old Hitler, the dirty old crook but
blackest of all is the black hearted louse
who stole the glasses from this public
house."

It was when he was discharged after the war that Arthur and his family returned South to Redhill, where his wife was born, because there was not much work available in Sunderland.

He became a labourer for the local Fullers Earth plant in Redhill and remained there until the plant closed in the early 60s. He then worked as a ganger for British Rail and later, when his health deteriorated, he moved into the Permanent Way office at Redhill Station, where he worked until his death in 1972.

Arthur was a very quiet man and had a circle of friends with whom he enjoyed a game of dominoes in the pub on Sundays; The Gatton when we lived in Colesmead Road and The Flying Scud when he moved to Earlswood.

When I was a child and we lived with my grandmother, Rose Bowler, in Meadvale he would go to the local pub, The Old Oak, Sunday lunchtime and come back with a bottle of lemonade for us children.

At first the family lived with Ethel's widowed mother Rose Tickner until they were given a council house in 1946. They lived there, in Colesmead, for many years and their son, John, was born in 1952. I remember Arthur working in the garden with his shirt off in the hottest of summer weather, and he got a very dark tan on his back and arms which never really left him even in the winter when he was covered up.

Eventually Arthur and his wife had to move to a ground floor flat, in Earlswood, because of Ethel's medical problems, when she could no longer cope with stairs.

Very sadly both died young and within three months of each other. Arthur developed cancer of the lung and died in hospital on 8th February 1972 (his wedding anniversary).

We were told by Arthur's niece after his funeral that he had known for two years that he had terminal cancer, but didn't want to burden his wife and children with the knowledge so kept it secret from all except the niece and a brother-in-law, both of them being sworn to secrecy. Another brave thing he did, as he bore this knowledge alone.

Ethel was unable to attend his funeral because she was herself in hospital with diabetes and pneumonia.

She died three months later, on 8th May 1972, having suffered a series of strokes. He was aged 58 and she was only 55 and both of them worked until they went into hospital.

It left me forever with a great feeling of injustice because they worked hard all their lives and never lived to enjoy retirement.

They are commemorated together in plaques on a wall in the Surrey and Sussex Crematorium.

When Arthur died we found two very interesting items in his wallet that he had carried with him since his days in the army; one was his army discharge papers and the other was a signed photograph of Vera Lynn. ■

Newspaper Cutting

Ed note: I recently purchased the above newspaper cutting on EBay. I have managed to identify the five soldiers mentioned, they are:



13039148 Norman Hampshire, DOB 5 Nov 1900, enlisted at Sheffield and joined 4 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 20 Jun 40 and served until 28 Oct 45. He re-enlisted into R Sigs TA on 6 Mar 51 and was given the new service number 22537409

3879464 William R Kirkpatrick, DOB 11 Dec 1904, enlisted at Glasgow into the R Scots on 4 Nov 39, transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 24 Dec 41 and served until 14 Oct 45

13015756 Edward Alexander Burton, DOB 3 Apr 1903, enlisted at London and joined 2 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 31 May 40 and served until 17 Dec 45

13115665 Alan Lewis Benford, DOB 1 Jul 22, enlisted at Nottingham and joined 5 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 14 May 42 and served until 10 Mar 47

13017433 Thomas Fagan, DOB 29 Jul 1894, enlisted at Belfast and joined 5 Centre Pioneer Corps on 19 Apr 40 and served until 26 Oct 45. ■

The following are trying to re-establish contact... can you help?

Long Lost Trails...

CAMP WOLF MORTUARY

Trying to catch up with some of the lads who worked next to us at camp wolf mortuary in Kuwait February/ March 2003. I do remember young Tim he was a scouser, also the chaplain I believe his name was Paul. I was born and raised in Scotland but joined the us army 25 years ago, I was a staff sergeant at the time. Before my unit headed north I stopped by the tent and dropped of mattresses, magazines, MRE packages. I believe the Sgt. Major was a Geordie fella, also a guy from Arbroath, I sat and watched Coronation St and had a brew a few times. It was very sad to be at that location for obvious reasons. The American forces operated there mortuary for a while next door. Vincent Byrne (on Facebook).

CONTACT US

The following are some of the April 2016 Newsletters returned to the Association marked "Gone Away" or "Not known at this address", if you are in contact with any of these members please request them to contact the Association with their new address:

- 24288084 DA Brown
- 24242045 ML Brown
- 24687790 S Brown
- 250689567 Benjamin Bryant
- 24291386 A Carter
- 24698816 GDH Clarke
- 549489 Samuel George Cooke
- 24957756 Simon Dale
- 27436045 DI Davies
- 24645105 AJ Davis
- 24705692 S Dixon
- 24293822 D Dolphin
- 24156788 WC Ferrie
- 24767806 TS Finch
- 24336631 J Holland
- 24326554 KA Hough
- 25003728 Andrew Stephen Hudson
- 24477274 PL Law
- 24763685 K Murray
- 24327758 CA McNeil
- 22722709 PR McDonald
- 24711386 H Ogden
- 24410216 PWE Richards
- 564021 Kelly Richardson
- 24322258 K Robinson
- 24479820 SD Samsa
- 24577951 RW Sivell
- 24515786 Paul Slater
- 24555151 TS Smith
- 24957637 Paul Snelling
- 24907761 Edward Stalker
- 24583878 Ian Steele
- 24156899 RV Sweetland
- 25151701 Akuila Tutora

24961643 Jonathan Whelan
14693328 Fred Yates

JIMMY COLLINS / BOB YATES

Dear Sir, I am trying to contact 2 ex-Pioneers I served with, can you help? Did they join the Association. The first one is Jimmy Collins, I served with Jimmy at 521 Coy in the early 80's. He was a very good footballer. The second is Bob Yates, I served with Bob at JHQ Rheindahlen Garrison in the 70's. Can you help! Yours Robert Moore.

I am trying to contact personnel who served with me at Kineton. Contact Tony Mallon anthony.mallon@icloud.com

RPC OFFICER 1940

The photo on the right shows an RPC Officer – on the reverse is RPC Officer 1940 – can anyone identify him?



LONDONDERRY 1977

I came across this old photo of when, 518 company were in Milligan Camp in Londonderry in 1977. I cannot remember the other 3 guys that were in our section. Ivan bailey

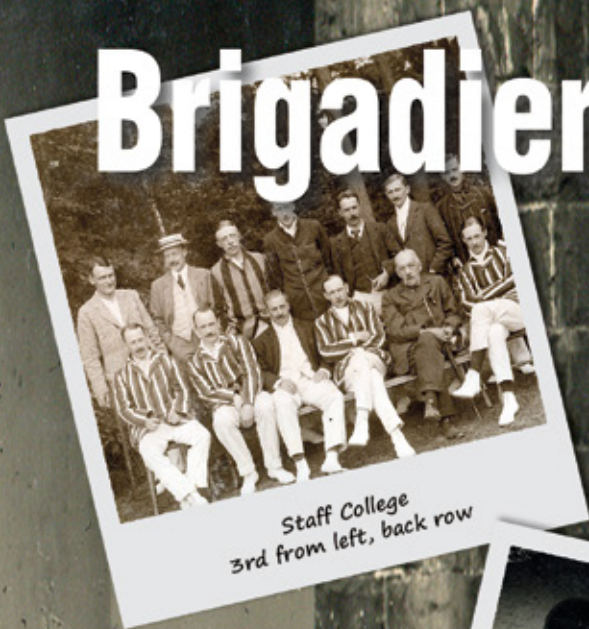


IF YOU ARE TRYING TO FIND A LOST PIONEER THAN SEND US THE DETAILS AND WE WILL PUBLISH THEM ON THIS PAGE...

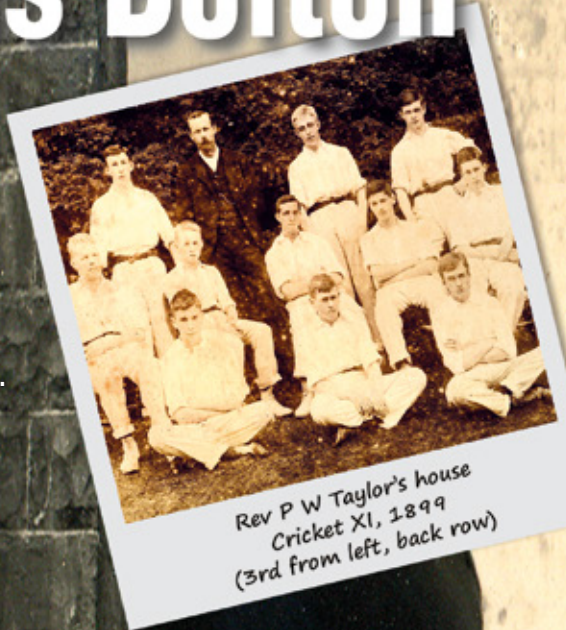


Brigadier Charles Bolton

Brigadier Charles Bolton was the director of Pioneers and Labour. He also represented England at Rugby and was in the same team as Captain Mobbs from Northampton.



Staff College
3rd from left, back row



Rev P W Taylor's house
Cricket XI, 1899
(3rd from left, back row)



Armoured Car Company
Royal Tank Regiment, 1925
(2nd from left, front row)





Rev P W Taylor's house, 1899
(2nd from left, back row)



That's me just there!



Rev P W Taylor's house, 1900
(far right, middle row)



BRIGADIER Charles Bolton served as DPL Middle East until 1941. He had a distinguished career being commissioned in 1902 into the Manchester Regiment. In 1910 he represented England at Rugby (in the same team a Captain Mobbs from Northampton - there is still a Mobbs Memorial Game). He then attended Staff College in 1912.

His medals are now owned by Lt Col Starling (RPC Association historian) and were on display in the Mess at Bicester. Recently Brigadier's Bolton's grandson has provided some personnel papers which may be of interest to readers. The following are notes in his own words (from letters etc) with comments in italics from our Historian.

In August 1914 I was nearly completing my second year at Staff College and with others was sent as RTO to France. I helped detain the BEF and withdrew with them from Valenciennes to near Paris. I was then DADRT to help reopen Havre as a base. I was mentioned in Sir John French's second despatch and in December, owing to a shortage of officers, was recalled to my regiment.

In March 1915 I was appointed GSO3 on Sir Ian Hamilton's GHQ. At the first landing at Gallipoli I was the GHQ representative at the Lancashire Fusiliers Landing and was mentioned in despatches.

Nine years afterwards Aspinall-Oglander met me when he was going through all documents for the Official History and said "You ought to have had something for your work at the first landing. If we had only acted on the messages we got from you, we might have done very much better than we did."

However I did not get anything and later I became Brigade Major of the 88th Inf Bde, 29th Division.

I was with that Bde on August 6th at Helles and later in that month at Sulva, but in September I fell victim of dysentery and was carted off to a hospital ship and thence home to England.

That was the beginning of my ill luck. When I was fit again I was appointed GSO2 to the 60th (London) Division under Bulfin. Was 20 months in that appointment and during that time I was once again mentioned in despatches but Bulfin never recommended any of his Divisional Staff for an award, saying that it was sufficient reward to know that one had done one's duty - no doubt a noble sentiment, but not a principle adopted by other Divisional Commanders.

When Bulfin took over 21st Corps, I came up against Shea, his successor in command of the Division, and, although I was suffering at the time from a bad recurrence of dysentery, that I did not interest him and my service with the General Staff ceased.

I become AQMG within three months and was in 1st grade "A&Q" appointments until 1919 when I returned to England. Someone seemed to think I have been badly treated, for in the last twelve months I received another mention in despatches, a brevet Lieut Colonelcy a CBE and two foreign decorations.

I began to think my luck had changed but it would appear I was wrong. My brevet

brought me to the top of the Colonel's list at 53 at the time of the institution of the block system promotions to make room for rising juniors and, although I was recommended for promotion to Major-General by Sir Hugh Ellis and his successor as DMT, McNamara, I was not one of those selected and had to retire young.

So much for my Brevet award.

And now my other award, the CBE - incidentally I was informed that I had been recommended for a CMG - appears to be another millstone round my neck when I am considered for an award in the present war.

Following the war he reverted to Substantive Major. In 1919 he transferred to the Tank Corps from the Manchester Regiment.

It is believed that he realised he would never command a Regular Battalion as competition would have been fierce from younger (junior) officers who having not been selected for Staff College would have significant front line experience (and decorations).

Following service with an Armoured Car Squadron in India he returned to the UK and commanded 6th Battalion Tank Corps at Bovington.

In 1926 he was instrumental in the establishment of an Independent Armoured Brigade which included Armour, Infantry, Artillery and Engineers under a single command.

Yet again he was not selected for promotion and had to retire early in 1935.

On 1 June 1940 I was appointed as Director of Pioneers and Labour in a Brigadier's appointment and recalled from the RARO.

On 11 June 1940 I started the Directorate with one Staff Captain (Major C N Ades) and literally nobody and nothing else than that not even an office.

My Staff Captain had experience of Egypt but not of staff work and was not able to write any form of official letter or minute. After a few months Ades was very good once he had learnt the ropes.

By the time I left, 18 months later, there were 110,000 civilians and I have obtained sanction to form 190 companies of armed Pioneers.

These were recruited in India, Cyprus, Palestine, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, and the native territories of South Africa i.e. Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, a total of 67,000 soldiers.

Between 1200 and 1300 officers were employed with the Companies and civilian labour.

On the civilian side the Directorate had drawn up Rules and Regulations for wages, terms of service, etc for all civilians in the Middle East.

I was informed by the Assistant Financial Advisor that many thousands of pounds sterling had been saved owing to the supervision exercised by the Headquarters. The Director of Labour at the War Office covers one eighth (or less) area and has a Colonel Representative in each Command HQ and no civilian labour responsibilities and was made an acting Major General in August 1942.

The Staff Officers whom I recommended for awards were given an OBE and MBE

and my senior staff officer has since received an OBE.

My area of responsibility ranged from Benghazi to Aleppo and Greece to Cape Town. There were no Colonel representatives at Army and Corps HQ.

On August 23rd I was a perfectly fit man. The following day I was in hospital and on the "Dangerously ill" list. As a result I was invalided home (South Africa). I was 4 months short of my 60th Birthday. On 3 January 1942 (my 60th birthday) I was retired.

Whilst on sick leave he was informed he would have to be retired as he was 60 years old. He tried to obtain an extension but was refused and the following correspondence indicate his feelings over his treatment and his wish to be rewarded for his work and the opinions of his colleagues.

**DPL
GHQ ME
12 September 1941**

Dear General

Your letter 324/Q of 12.9.41 has come as complete shock to me. I have up till now realised that I might be relegated to the Reserve when I reached the age limit for my batch of full Colonels, namely 60 years of age on January 3rd 1942, and I have always understood that the War Office could not relegate me until I had reached that age limit.

I had hoped, however, that I should be allowed to continue in my present appointment in spite of my age. From your letter it would appear that this contract is being broken, or am I still to be employed until I reach the age limit on January 3rd 1942? In view of the shortage of man power, is there a possibility of the War office considering my case as a special one, that is, of course, if you wish to retain my services as Director of Pioneers and Labour, and the Commander-in-Chief would recommend.

If this is impossible I entirely agree with you that there is no one in the Directorate suitable to take my place, and you must go outside or get someone out from the UK.

I am terribly sad at the idea of having to give up the Directorate especially when there seemed a possibility of having a sufficient number of Pioneer Companies to be of some value to the Force.

Thank you so much for letting me know so soon about this and for your kindness to me always as Director.

**Yours sincerely
C A BOLTON**

**M Hutchinson
AG
HQ MEF
12 September 1941**

I hear the War Office have issued a telegram under which officers of your age are all to be released to the reserve.

I am extremely sorry to hear that this step is necessary, for you have given me invaluable service in Egypt in organising the Labour Directorate in the Middle East.

I do not think there is anybody in the Labour Directorate suitable to take your place, and I think we will have to introduce somebody else from outside, but I should be glad if you would confirm this.

**HQ Troops Sudan
27 September 1941**

Thank you so very much for your letter. I was very sorry to read the contents. I feel quite sure that if it had not been for your illness, the powers that be would have had the sense to prolong your appointment beyond the age limit. They could presumably have kept you on by making you a Major-General. You have built this enormous show up from nothing, and it will obviously have to suffer from your departure.

Yours sincerely RENTON

**PCBD
30 September 1941**

Dear Brigadier Bolton

I have received your farewell message on handing over the Directorate.

In common with many officers I will not forget the kindly reception we received on arriving in the Middle East. It has been a privilege to serve under you, Sir, and to help in some measure in the really enormous task you had in bringing into being the Pioneer Corps here.

I hope that freedom from worry and a better climate will soon restore your health.

**Yours sincerely
H G L PRYNNE**

For Brigadier Prynne's experiences in establishing the Depot at Quassassin see the April 2014 Association Newsletter (page 38).

**East-King
GHQ MEF
28 February 1942**

This end has been if anything more difficult - The new DPL with Grundy has not 'played' and I came up in January to find that all our Companies had been spread all over the universe, only half of them were in EA Groups and one of our EA Groups with not a single EA Company under its command. In one town for example - Lowth had two of his companies being commanded by another CO although these companies were actually in the same building (literally true). I had many arguments with Mills and Grundy - the latter by the way ought to get some outside experience and learn over again (if he ever did know) what loyalty means - but have had to fight the matter out with Higher Authority in order to insist upon the conditions that you agreed with EA being carried out.

You will be glad to know that I have been backed up and only this very week has the position been clarified and instructions given to the DPL to carry them out. It has been beastly and something I never dreamt of being called upon to do, when you appointed me ADPL in ME.

It was a blow to men when you left and ever since, a very definite antipathy has been shown to the EA Pioneers by the Directorate which has not made things easier - however this week the LGA DAG and "Q" have taken a hand, we know where we are and I fancy there will be some

cooperation in the future.

Brig Bolton was not extended in service and the following correspondence was undertaken in 1942 concerning Honours and Awards. He was not awarded a CBE (as he had already earned one 22 years earlier in WW1) and ended up with a Mention in Despatches which considering his role in building a Directorate could rightly be regarded as little reward.

When the present war broke out, I did my best, as you are aware, to obtain some appointment so that I could do my bit to help. I came out to the Middle East with every intention of making good at my job, without any question of honours and awards.

To the best of my belief and from the comments made on my work, I did make good. Now I have once more had to retire for age, the fact that my fellow Directors and subordinates have been given awards and that I have been given none must and does give my relations and friends the obvious impression that I failed in my appointment and makes others, not my friends, think my illness afforded the "powers that be" a very welcome excuse for getting rid of a "dud."

**174 Ashley Gardens
SW1**

1 May 1942

My Dear Brigadier

Though I am no longer the Colonel Cmdt of the Pioneers, I took action on the receipt of your letter mainly because I remembered you years ago at Bovington. I am glad to know that you were able to take part in this war.

I have consulted with the Military Secretary who has been into the whole matter, but I am afraid that the decision is that services recognised by a mention in despatches cannot be recognised by an award. CBs for Brigadiers are given only for very special services. Higher authority decline to re-open the subject. I am sorry, but can do no more and if I were you I would leave well alone.

**Kindest regards
Yours sincerely
Milne**

**Commander in Chief
India**

23 July 1942

I am afraid that there is nothing I can do to get you a CB. Though Colonels acting Brigadier are eligible in exceptional cases, it is for practical purposes confined to officers of the rank on Major-General and upwards and the numbers available are extremely limited; I am quite sure that there would not be the least hope of the award being approved if I submitted it to the Military Secretary.

As far as my recollection goes, I mentioned your work in despatches and I am afraid you will have to be content with this and with the knowledge that you did and extremely good and valuable piece of work in the Middle East. I realise that there have been some instances of an officer

having the bad luck to have already been awarded a CBE and not being eligible for any other awards, since there is, I am afraid, no "bar" for the CBE.

Archie Wavell

**George
Cape Province
South Africa
16 August 1942**

Dear Sir Archie

I appreciate very much your consideration for me in replying so promptly to my letter of July 6th when you must be so busy with other more important affairs and I am most grateful. I should not be honest if I did not confess to being very disappointed and, as I am unable to have a personal interview with you, I must make just one more plea and ask your forgiveness for doing so. If you are still unable to change your opinion, I shall at least feel that I have done all I possibly could to state my case and fight for myself.

**George
Cape Province
South Africa
3 December 1942**

Dear Sir Archie

Very many thanks for your letter of November 10th. I appreciate very much all you have done for me and I am more than grateful especially when I realise how busy you must be with other important things. I am, naturally enough, disappointed but I quite understand your position in the matter. Incidentally I was twice mentioned in despatches but I fear that, as far as feelings are concerned, that is not the same thing as that for which I had hoped.

At the end of the last war, there was a "consolation prize" Gazette for those who had not received awards. If there is the same in this war perhaps you might remember and consider my case again. I shall quite understand if you do not do so, but even at the risk of becoming a nuisance I do enclose a few more words about my case. ■



| We dig through the archives of the many thousands of Pioneer photographs, picking out the



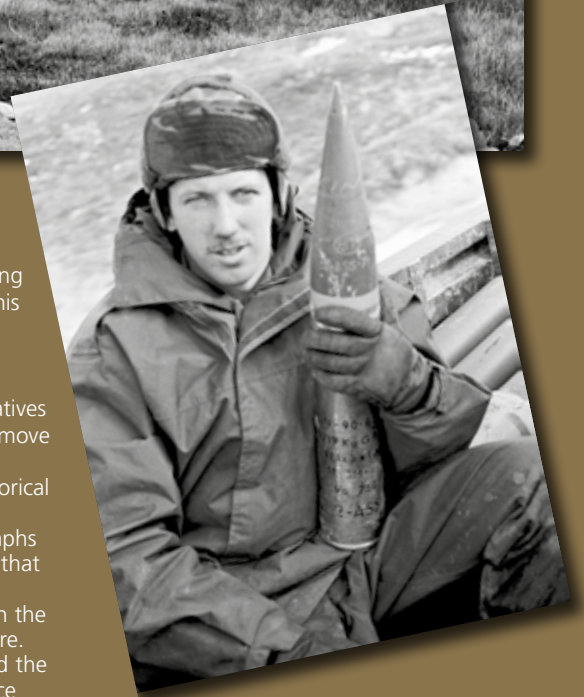
Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: Old RPCA box file

FOR THIS issue I was wondering what to use for this page. This problem was soon resolved when I found an old box file packed to the brim with thousands of old photographic negatives when I was helping the old man to move office.

I started to see if any were of historical interest and after wading through hundreds and hundreds of photographs depicting sports days, I found some that immediately stood out.

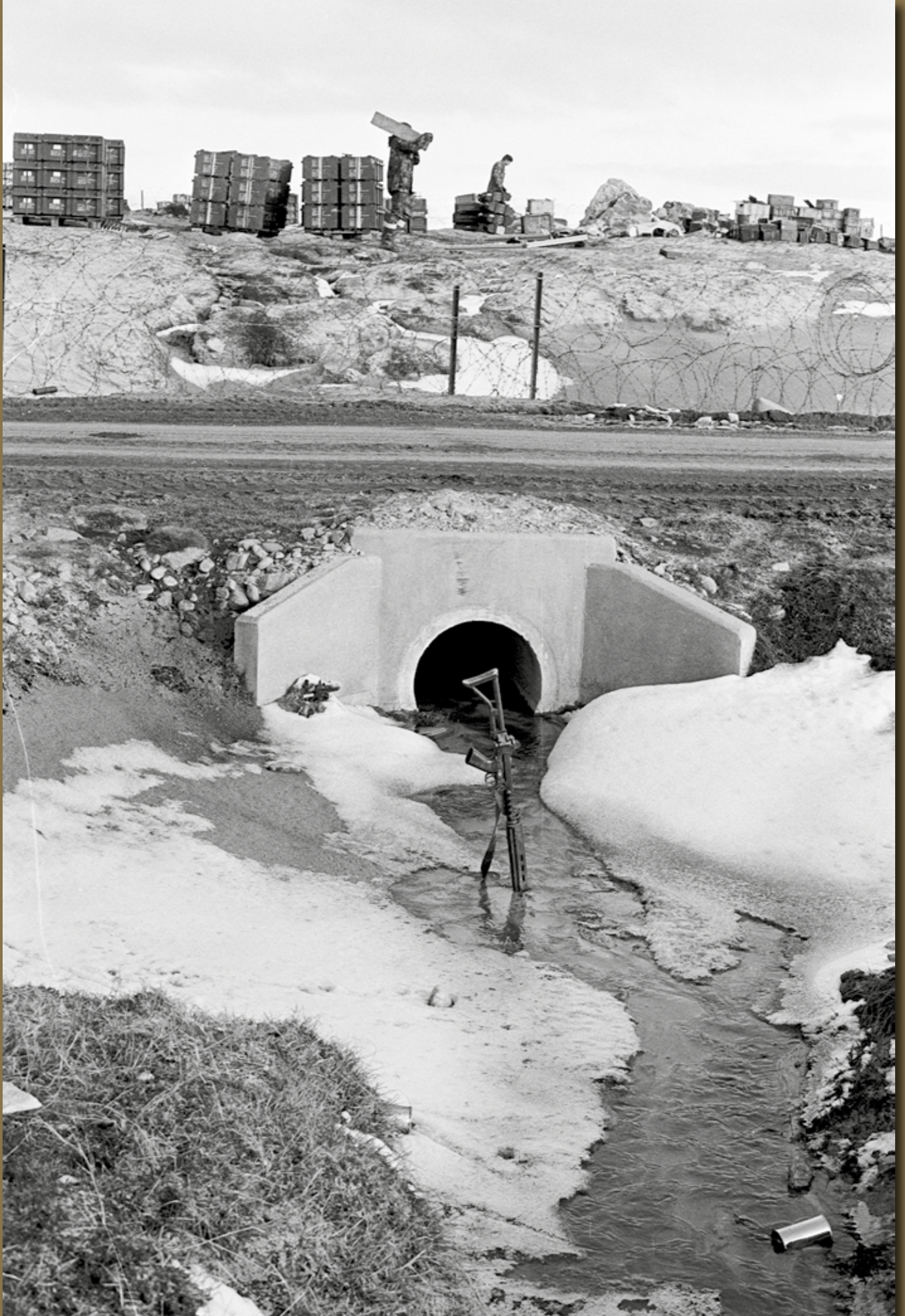
I found some depicting Pioneers in the Falklands that I had never seen before. The negatives were very detailed and the quality of them were excellent. Hence what you see here on the next few pages are some of these great photographs.

There are hundreds and hundreds of other interesting looking negatives that looked interesting as well, such as the Queen in Northampton, the Queen Mother at Chelsea Royal Hospital and some passout parades etc which I will get the old man to scan in first. ■



Digging through the archives...

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





**Digging
through the
archives...**



AGM Minutes

The 68th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association held at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry on 18th June 2016

President: Brig CB Telfer
Chairman: Colonel A Barnes
Secretary: Mr N Brown
Members Present: 54

THE President opened the meeting at 0900 hrs by welcoming all present and hoped everyone has a good weekend, before handing over to the Chairman and the Secretary.

After receiving apologies from Col RF McDonald, Col D Clouston MBE, Lt Col G McLane, Mr T Wyeth, Mr J Bourne, Mr A Spearman, Mr W Dougherty, Mr D MacDonald, Mr H Booth, Mr R Dixon, Mr S Henderson, Mr A Batchelor, Mr A Hinchliffe, Mr T Fairhurst, Mr N Allardice, Mr P Wegg, Mr J Mountford, Mr D McAllister, Mr N Eason, Mr D Pearsall, Mr L Holloway, Mr D Eaton, Mr C Lewis, Mr M East and Mr R Jones.

The Chairman requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year after their names had been read by the Secretary. They were: Ex Pte Raymond E Wicken, Ex Pte Arthur Robert Kennedy – ex WW2 veteran, Ex WO2 Ron Morris – former CSN 521 Coy, Ex Sgt Robert Roberts, Ex Pte Roy Anslow, Ex Pte William James Rose – ex WW2 vet who landed on D Day on his 22nd birthday and thought it was very good the Government to arrange such a good party for him!

Ex Sgt Derrick Elphwck, Ex Pte Roy Wright, Ex Cpl Ian Anderson, Ex Pte Brian Ockenden, Ex Cpl David Charles Burwell, Ex Pte Stephen John Carter, Ex Cpl Peter McNally, Ex Cpl Philip Frank Cramer – another WW2 Veteran, Ex Sgt Frank Mercer – another WW2 veteran who saw service in N Africa, Sicily, Italy, D Day in Normandy, Holland and Germany, Ex Pte Rex Burton, Ex Lt Col Eric Arthur Vallis – another WW2 veteran, Ex Maj Patrick Legge – commissioned into the Pioneer Corps in 1943

Ex Pte Thomas Cox – another WW2 veteran who sadly passed away with no family, however, thanks to the power of Facebook over 300 attended his funeral, with ex Pioneers carrying his coffin., Ex Pte Hugo Klaus Adam – another WW2 veteran who transferred from the Pioneer Corps to the RAF, Ex Cpl David Raphael – died in Dec aged 100, initially in the Non Combatant Corps before transferring to the Pioneer Corps in 1940, Ex Capt John Jervoise, Ex Pte Henry George Rawlings – another WW2 veteran, Ex Cpl Noel Graham – a well-known boxer for the Corps, Ex Pte David Cox. (After minute note: unfortunately Ex Sgt Nigel (Billy) Stout was omitted from the list).

ITEM 1. MINUTES OF 67th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 67th Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

2. In accordance with the Constitution one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year. The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected: Maj N Smith, Lt Col G McLane and Mr P Thomas

ITEM 3. REPORT ON BENEVOLENCE

3. Maj R Corbey, Controller Benevolence RLC, gave the following report on Benevolence:

RPC Grants made during 2015. A total of 117 applications for financial assistance were received, which was a 7% reduction over the previous year. The RLC Benevolence Committee authorised 94 grants totalling £44,692; an average grant of £475. We also managed to secure generous grants from ABF The Soldiers' Charity totalling £32,534. RPC applicants therefore benefited by an overall total of £77,226 from the two charities; an average grant of £821 each.

Examples of recent RPC Benevolence cases include: 9 electric scooters (EPVs), 6 riser/recliner chairs, 11 funerals, 5 property repairs, 7 white goods and 6 brown goods. The number of cases continues to decline but the average grant is increasing. The Controller Benevolence RLC continues to deal with RPC Benevolence matters and your Secretary is the RPC representative on the RLC Benevolent Committee.

The Controller briefed that money is available for benevolence purposes but any unspent funds are returned to the RCT ring-fenced fund so use it or lose it. If you hear of any veteran who is in real need, suffering hardship or distress, then please put them in touch with a suitable organisation.

The RLC Benevolence team are neither qualified nor staffed to carry out casework so the advice is to contact SSAFA in the first instance. The controller has contact details for most of the SSAFA branches so give him a call if you cannot find details locally. (After minute note: he can be contacted on 01252 833 633).

ITEM 4. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

4. Col A Barnes gave the following

report:

It is good to see you all here – for many, welcome back and for others, welcome to the 68th Annual General Meeting of the RPC Association, this second to be held here at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry.

I am pleased to say that since last year's AGM the Association has continued to be busy and it is particularly pleasing to report to you that a new RPCA Branch, the Northern Branch, has opened.

I understand that the branch meets regularly in Barnsley in Yorkshire with Mr John Hatfield as its Chairman. My congratulations and thanks to John and all those involved in getting the Branch up and running. Good luck to you.

The Nostalgia Group had their 10th Anniversary at Bridlington last month over the early May Bank Holiday. Although I gather that they had some quite serious issues with one of the hotels they used, in true Pioneer spirit, they still managed to have an enjoyable weekend and in the process, raised over £1,300 for a local charity. What a fantastic achievement, well done to everyone involved.

The 39/93 Club have also been active and had a successful weekend when they met in Bournemouth in March.

The Northampton Branch is still going strong under the Chairmanship of Mr Bob Fox. A Burns Night was held in January this year, and a canal trip is planned for next month in early July. The Northampton Branch also intend to hold a meeting next Saturday to celebrate Armed Forces Day. Further details can be obtained from Bob Fox.

A last one on Branches – Maj Billy Dilkes is moving forward with his plan to create a Branch in Bicester – so if anyone is interested in becoming involved with that Branch please speak to Maj Dilkes who is around this weekend.

The WOs' & SNCOs' Pioneer Reunion Club held a Ladies Dinner Night at Kineton also in March and in September this year the Club is organising a battlefield tour to Arnhem.

I am told that there are still some vacancies on this trip if anyone is interested – if you are, please contact Mr Tom Appleyard for further details. The Club, one again, organised a successful trip to the Army v Navy Match at Twickenham, and Norman has advised me that he had to buy 135 tickets for the event.

The Past and Present Officers' Club will hold its annual dinner again at Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess on Friday 14th October. The event was extremely successful last October and if anyone would like to

attend, please inform Norman Brown, the Association Secretary as soon as possible.

Once again in November last year, we had a good attendance at the Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall where 76 members marched behind the Association President, Brig Charles Telfer.

This year it appears that we may be restricted to just 54 members allowed to march – we already have 42 personnel who have submitted their names, so if you wish to attend please inform the Association Secretary as quickly as possible.

The number attending the Field of Remembrance Service at Westminster Abbey has sadly decreased in the last few years and this continued to be the case last November.

I encourage you to attend if you can this November and if you are able to attend please inform the Secretary. As you may know, it is the custom that the London Lunch is held after the Service, but attendance at both is not compulsory

We were informed at our last Council meeting that some items of Pioneer silver ware have not yet been re-allocated. As a result it is our plan this evening to auction the last items of the Association property to the members of the Association.

I hope you all bid well – all money raised will be given to benevolence! So please be generous.

Almost finally, we have already booked this hotel for next year. The dates next year will be 16/18 June 2017. And of course, I hope to see you all here next year!

Once again I am pleased to see such a good attendance for the weekend, thanks especially those who have travelled long distances.

Unfortunately I cannot attend the full weekend because of work commitments at Fulwood Barracks this afternoon and evening at the Preston Military Show, but I wish you all a great weekend. Thank you all.

Before we move on with the agenda, we move onto a presentation. Our focus last year was on Norman Brown and the very worthy award of his British Empire Medal. Today, I want to focus on someone else, Mr Paul Brown.

Since 2003, Norman's son Paul Brown has been inextricably linked to the continued very successful development of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association through his support to his father, Norman, the Association Secretary/Controller.

Although Paul has never had a substantive role within the Association, he has helped maintain the Association website and all the other Association's social media tools, including the Pioneer Magazine.

The magazine is a key communications portal for the Association and is always a highly professional publication, with a number of quality issues each year.

The magazine provides a substantial historical and current record of Pioneer activity.

I know that Paul commits a great deal of his time for no reward to preparing for and putting together each issue of the magazine and he puts in well over a week of pretty much solid work to each edition in the run up to its submission to the printer.

But aside from this, fairly intense pre-publication period, I know that Paul attends a vast range of Pioneer activities throughout

the year to gather material and record items for forthcoming editions, liaising with contributors, taking photos and generating copy. Overall, Paul contributes enormously to the Association each year.

Paul is not paid for any of this work. He commits his time willingly and without any expectation of recompense or even thanks. If there is an RPCA event, I now 'expect' to see Paul there with his camera, recording the event for posterity.

Paul is an unsung hero. And he is absolutely worthy of recognition. I am personally honoured therefore to be able to present Paul with a new (copy No 1) Master General of Logistic Certificate of thanks for all that he has done for the Royal Pioneer Corps.

Paul, thank you.

ITEM 5. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

5. Mr N Brown gave the following report:

I thought I would start my report by reading a letter received from Col D Clouston the last CO of 23 Pioneer Regiment:

I have received the following from Col Clouston, the last CO of 23 Regt:

Good to hear from you all - and can I once again express my appreciation to you all for the great work you are doing on behalf of the Pioneer community. A particular thanks to Norman who, as ever, seems to be putting in the hard yards.

I'm coming to the end of my year here at the US National War College.

It's been a heady mix of policy papers on National Strategies, instruments of National Power and some great trips. (Covered 20 states in a year and some amazing places.) I feel very lucky - although sometimes when my brain hurts I just miss an old fashioned no pressure chat and pint in the mess!

Fly back to UK in late June ready to start work in July (DCOS FTC - so if any of you are ever in Upavon please give me a shout. I just need to get a house first!)

Enjoy the Coventry weekend. Hopefully I will be able to break clean once I get back, every now and again, to join you all at various points.

As I say, appreciate all you're doing. You're providing a great service and offering great guidance to a great bunch of people.

All the best and take care. David.

Although funding for the RPC Association is mainly from the RLC Association we do need to raise funds to keep our standards high.

An example of this is our Newsletters, the other Forming Corps (RCT/RASC, RAOC and ACC) are restricted to a 16 page Newsletter, ours as you are aware is either 68 or 72 pages. This, of course, costs a lot more. We raise our own monies mainly from our two draws the Christmas and Derby Draws.

We also receive various donations these are normally after we have supplied the service history of former Pioneers to their relatives – this is only possible because of the work done by our historian, Lt Col John Starling, who has built up a data base which is the envy of many other Regiments and Corps'.

We also receive donations from members who have gone out of their way to raise funds, an example of this is Steve Barron who raised £370 following a motorcycle

ride, thanks Steve much appreciated.

I must report that our active membership list is slightly down on last year, this is mainly due to over 80 Newsletters being returned "Gone Away" following the last two postings. Although many have since made contact and supplied their new address a large number have not. If you move please let us know.

The Association has since 2005, been in St David's Barracks, however, it is the intention in the next few weeks to move to St George's Barracks. St George's already give us support i.e. the Past and Present Officers Dinner is held in their mess and the WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club run the trip to the Army v Navy Rugby match at Twickenham from St George's – St David's would not allow us to run it from there.

This afternoon at the National Memorial we were to hold a short service in the Logistic Grove, however, I have been advised by the staff at the National Arboretum that the Logistic Grove is flooded and the service will now be in the Chapel at 1400 hrs.

After the service we will once again have a group photograph. This year we are also taking a few beers with us, these will be available on the coach after the photograph.

Finally may I, once again, thank my son Paul for his work in keeping our website up to date, for his marvellous work on the Newsletters and for monitoring our Facebook page.

ITEM 6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/ AGM

6. The date of the next Reunion/Annual General Meeting will be 16-18 June 2017.

ITEM 7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7. Maj Crook proposed a vote of thanks to Maj R Corbey for an excellent presentation on Benevolence, this was agreed by all present.

8. Lt Col J Starling, the Association Historian, gave a brief presentation on the move of the RLC Museum from Deepcut to Worthy Down, this was scheduled to take place in 2018.

The museum would be outside the wire and the Corps War Memorial (and canons) would be located in a memorial garden outside the museum.

9. Mr F Berry asked if there were any planned celebrations in 2017 to mark the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Labour Corps. Lt Col Starling replied that there were currently non planned.

ITEM 8. CLOSING REMARKS FROM THE PRESIDENT

10. The President closed the meeting by stating how pleasing it was to hear the news about the formation of new branches and wished all present to have a wonderful weekend.

11. There being no further business the meeting closed at 0945 hours.

**N BROWN
Secretary**

Press Cuttings for 1951-1960

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the years 1951-1960. It is the intention in future Newsletters to print details from other years.

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

THE following have been taken from our archives which detail Pioneer related events from various publications. These cuttings are all from the years 1951-1960.

The Times 17 Feb 51 Z RESERVIST RECALL FIRST MEN TO REPORT ON APRIL 21

According to present arrangements, the first Z class reservists needed for training will report at the Royal Pioneer Corps regular unit at Wrexham on April 21, the War Office stated last night.

The first anti-aircraft Z reservists to be recalled are expected to report at 24 Heavy AA Regiment, Sheerness, on April 28.

Hansard 12 Apr 51 PRACTICAL TRAINING

Mr. John MacLeod asked the Secretary of State for War whether, in view of the training and retraining required, it would be possible for men of the Royal Engineers and Pioneer Corps to do some of their practical training in building bridges and roads in the more remote areas, and particularly in the Highland area of Scotland.

Mr. Strachey I am always prepared to look into opportunities for improving the training of the Army such as those to which the Hon Member refers; but, in view of the heavy military duties falling on all units of the Regular Army at present, I cannot say more.

Hansard 5 Jun 51 SUEZ CANAL ZONE

Mr. Gammans asked the Secretary of State for War how many men have been enlisted in the Mauritius Regiment; how many of them are serving in the Suez Canal Zone; and how far it is proposed to increase the number of men enlisted.

Mr. Strachey. There is no Mauritius Regiment but about 6,000 Mauritians are serving in Egypt with the Royal Pioneer Corps.

It is not proposed at the moment to increase the number of men enlisted.

Mr. Gammans asked the Secretary of State for War what is the approximate number of Germans and Egyptians in Germany and the Suez Canal Zone, respectively, who are employed in a civilian capacity as drivers of military vehicles or performing other duties which in the event of war would have to be done by men in uniform.

Mr. Strachey It would not be in the public interest to give this information.

The Times 26 Jun 51 EXPLOSION OF SHELL "UNACCOUNTABLE" INQUEST ON SOLDIER

An inquest was held at Wheatley Military Hospital, near Oxford, yesterday, on Private Thomas Arthur Frankcom, 19, of the Pioneer Corps, who died as a result of a 25lb shell exploding at an ammunition depot near Newbury on February 21. Frankcom was working with a party of Pioneers sticking the shells in boxes when a shell exploded and injured him and five other soldiers. The jury found that death was due to shock after multiple injuries, as a result of "an unaccountable accident."

Captain JR Camburn, an inspecting ordnance officer, said a military court of inquiry could find no technical reasons why the shell exploded.

The Times 1 Aug 51 GEORGE MEDAL AWARDS BRAVERY IN AMMUNITION EXPLOSION

The London Gazette last night announced the award of the George Medal to an officer and two men who risked their lives to rescue injured comrades when there was an explosion of ammunition at Hampstead Norris, Berkshire, on February 21. They are Captain Ronald Victor Harley, The Royal Sussex Regiment, attached to the RAOC, whose home is at Caburn Close, Hampden Park, Eastbourne; John Gibbons, of Newton's Row, Aston, Birmingham, a private in the 28th Battalion RAOC and Lawrence Kevin McGarrie of Coney Burrow Place, Lifford, County Donegal, a private in No 260 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps.

A round of 25-pounder ammunition exploded in a sorting shed, injuring six soldiers, one of whom died later. Other shells were blown to pieces, many more reduced to a dangerous condition, and a fire was started. Captain Harley went twice to the scene of the explosion and made arrangements for the care of the wounded. Gibbons and McGarrie entered the building and helped to remove the wounded and to put out the fire.

(Ed note: Pte Donegal's medal is now in the collection of the Association Historian, Lt Col J Starling).

The Times 9 Aug 51 HEAD MISTRESS'S DEATH - FENTON ARRESTED IN SUSSEX

It was stated at Burton-on-Trent police station late last night that the 20 year old soldier, John William Fenton, whom the police think may be able to help them in their inquiries into the death of Miss Winifred Mulley, aged 52, head mistress of Burton Girls' High School, had been found. He is alleged to be an absentee from the Royal Pioneer Corps, Lockerbie.

The head of Burton-on-Trent police,

Superintendent J Gillings, said early this morning that Fenton had been arrested and would be brought to Burton police station by Superintendent JN Black, of Scotland Yard, and Superintendent T Lockley, chief of Staffordshire CID. He added that Fenton would appear in court to-day.

Fenton was arrested at Worthing by a local police constable who saw him walking along the front.

The Times 17 Nov 51 BRITISH TROOPS' HELP

British troops from Trieste are helping in flood control and relief in the Rovigo area. Royal Engineers and Pioneer Corps detachments and troops of The North Staffordshire Regiment and The Northamptonshire Regiment were moved to Italy to-day after General Marras, Chief of Staff of the Italian armed forces, had accepted Major-General Sir John Winterton's offer of help. A United States Army detachment from Trieste accompanied the British troops.

The Times 21 Nov 51 KENYA FORCE FOR MIDDLE EAST A VOLUNTEER LABOUR CORPS

The Kenya Government announces that in view of the critical labour situation in the Middle East it is intended to raise a volunteer force for labour duties there. It will be called the "East African Pioneer Corps" and may eventually include several thousand men from Kenya and Uganda.

The announcement makes no reference to Tanganyika. The Tanganyika Government has recently been faced by the problem of scarcity of labour, and the trusteeship status of Tanganyika limits the use of its manpower for military purposes.

Members of the corps will be enlisted initially for a period of two years, which may be extended for a further 12 months. They will be liable to be retained compulsorily in the service for a maximum of six months should circumstances make it necessary.

NEED FOR OFFICERS

The Kenya Government believes the formation of the force will not prejudice the economy or labour resources of the colony. It emphasizes the importance of providing as high a proportion as possible of British officers and non-commissioned officers with African experience to lead the force. Ex-officers are being invited to apply for short-term commissions on the same conditions as recently offered for service with the African battalions proceeding to Malaya.

The East African Standard to-day recalled the unfortunate effects on some African units which served in Egypt and the Middle East in the war, when they were exposed to

"debasement temptations and influences." The newspaper suggests that adequate assurances should be required from the authorities in the Canal Zone that these immature people will be protected from similar experiences. "The well-being of the African's mind is of even greater importance in East Africa to-day than the well-being of his body." It adds.

The Times 29 Dec 51 GALLANTRY IN FIRE AT AMMUNITION DEPOT

The War Office announces that the King has approved the award of the MBE (Military Division) to WOII Lloyd John Andres, 27 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps in recognition of gallant and distinguished conduct on the occasion of a fire at an ammunition depot at Ollerton, Nottingham on August 18 last.

The citation states that Andres went with four other soldiers to the fire and found that an ammunition shelter containing about 200 howitzer cartridges, had collapsed. Opposite to the shelter an oak tree was burning fiercely and near it were two piles of shells, on which blazing branches were falling, and two more ammunition shelters. Ignoring all personal risk and vigorously encouraging the men with him, Andres proceeded at once to remove the ammunition to safety.

The Times 6 Jun 53 INQUIRY INTO SOLDIER'S DEATH REOPENED

The inquiry was reopened yesterday into the treatment at Moston Hall military hospital, near Chester, of Private Donald Harrison, Royal Pioneer Corps, aged 18, of Walnut Tree Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, who died at the hospital in April. The War Office required fuller information than that already provided a week ago. The original report on the findings of the inquiry was sent to Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Loewen, GOCinC, Western Command, and to Mr Head, Secretary of State for War.

Brigadier HM Liardet, Commanding Officer of Chester Garrison, who presided at the first hearing, was recalled from leave to resume the inquiry, at which several witnesses gave evidence. It is understood that the suggestion that further information should be obtained on certain points was made in the original report.

The Times 3 Jul 53 WEAPONS FOUND IN CAMP - INQUIRY SUGGESTED BY JUDGE

Mr Justice Finmore suggested at Stafford Assizes yesterday that the military authorities might think it right "to inquire very closely" into what was happening at Nescliff Camp, Oswestry. He had been shown a collection of weapons found in the camp, and he told one of the camp officers, Major Britten: "I am prepared to suggest that the Government itself should consider this."

The Judge made his comments after sentencing Abdul Guraim Sumer, aged 21, a national service man, of South Shields, to eight months' imprisonment for inflicting grievous bodily harm on another man by hitting him with a knuckleduster.

Weapons found in the RAOC and Royal Pioneer Corps camp included rubber

coshes, a home-made extending spring cosh, two pieces of lavatory chain, and a bicycle chain.

The Times 30 Jun 55 MAN KILLED BY GERMAN SHELL CORONER TOLD OF USE AS MONEY- BOX

The daughter of a Birmingham man who died from injuries received when a German 37mm cannon shell – a war souvenir – exploded in a shed in his backyard, had used it as a money box, it was stated at an inquest at Birmingham yesterday. A jury returned a verdict of Accidental Death on William Charles Werrett, aged 40, of Henry Street, Birmingham.

The widow, Mrs Elizabeth Emma Werrett, said that her husband served in North Africa and Italy in the Royal Pioneer Corps during the war, and when he was demobilized in 1946 he brought home two German shells as souvenirs. He told her they were quite safe and for about seven years they stood on the mantelpiece. Her daughter, aged 11, used to screw the caps of the shells and put her coppers in.

The Times 14 Jul 55 THREE KILLED BY LIGHTNING STORM DAMAGE IN WEST COUNTRY POWER CABLES CUT

The hot weather continued in Britain yesterday with temperatures above 80 deg. In many areas and there were heavy thunderstorms. Three people were killed by lightning and there was flooding and damage to crops and electricity cables.

Two men of 405 Company of the Royal Pioneer Corps, stationed at Bulford, who were filling in slit trenches in the rear of advancing troops during divisional manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain, were struck by lightning. Private A Smith, whose home was at St Denys, Southampton, was killed and Lance-Corporal RE Ellis was rendered unconscious. He was detained in hospital for observation.

Hansard 8 Nov 55 DISCHARGED MAURITIAN (CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT)

Mr. Fenner Brockway asked the Secretary of State for War what provision is being made for the 8,000 Mauritian members of the Pioneer Corps who, after serving with the British forces in the Suez Canal Zone and the Middle East, have been discharged and returned to Mauritius, where little opportunity of employment is available to them.

Mr. F. Maclean They were given 28 days' paid leave and interviewed on release by officials of the local government who I understand have had considerable success in finding employment for them either in the sugar industry or in Government works.

The Times 12 Mar 56 "WRONG'UN" GIVEN GOOD CHARACTER

Mr Justice Ashworth said at Warwick Assizes that a man appearing before him, a former private in the Royal Pioneer Corps, Marlborough Farm Camp, Kineton, Warwickshire, had on his release book a character which was assessed as "very good." Yet another report described him as "unreliable" and in need of close

supervision.

Captain Arthur Biggs, of Marlborough Farm Camp, explained that, acting under current instructions, the military authorities did not put on a man's release book, which was in the form of a testimonial, anything which would hinder him. Only his good points were mentioned.

The Judge commented that it was a not very satisfactory situation. "He comes here with a character of 'very good,' and you know he is a wrong'un," he said.

The Times 28 May 56 TOWN'S WEEKEND BAN ON TROOPS

The Chief Constable of Oxfordshire, Mr J Bailey, toured public houses in Banbury on Saturday night, the first week-end that the town has been out of bounds to the 1,000 troops stationed at Marlborough Farm Camp, Kineton, about 10 miles from Banbury. Patrols in the town included a detachment of United States Air Force police.

The ban followed clashes between men of the Pioneer Corps and RAOC, from Marlborough Farm camp and servicemen from units of the United States Air Force stationed in the Banbury area.

The chief constable was accompanied in his tour of the town by the Vicar of Banbury, the Rev RPR Carpenter. In his sermon at a "Mayor's Sunday" service to-day the vicar said that questions affecting the peace could be left with every confidence to the police. "The police deserve and must have our wholehearted support instead of idle and malicious criticism," he added.

The Times 1 Oct 56 ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ROLL OF HONOUR

A glass-topped table which will contain the roll of honour of 2,800 officers and men of the Royal Pioneer Corps who died in the Second World War was dedicated to-day at the Royal Military Academy Memorial Chapel, Sandhurst, by the Rev John Youens, senior chaplain at the R.M.A. In the large congregation representing the Corps were the Colonel Commandant, General Sir Frank Simpson, the Director of Pioneers and Labour, Brigadier G W Eden, and three former directors, Brigadier RAT Eve, Brigadier JHM Edye and Brigadier HH Blanchard.

Stratford Upon Avon Herald 4 Jul 58 BAD BEHAVIOUR OF SOLDIERS

Bad behaviour of soldiers stationed at Long Marston, who have been coming into the town at weekends and after drinking at public houses have been threatening licensees who refused to serve them, using obscene language and keeping residents in certain streets awake by their noise, has resulted in a flood of complaints from townspeople who are afraid that despite efforts of the police the situation will get out of hand.

Several fracas occurred in the town last week, including one involving members of the Royal Pioneer Corps stationed at Long Marston. The first took place on Thursday week when a gang burst into the Thatch Tavern on Greenhill Street. Because of their drunken condition the licensee and his wife refused to serve them, where upon they

threatened to smash "every window in the place".

**The Times 24 Sep 58
FOUR SOLDIERS DIE IN CAMP
COLLISION GUARD DOGS AMONG
CASUALTIES**

Four dead were stated late tonight to have been recovered from the wreckage of a troop-carrying vehicle which had been in collision with a shunting engine on the camp railway at Marlborough Farm Camp, a command Ordnance depot near Kineton, Warwickshire.

When the crash occurred in heavy rain at about 6.45 p.m. the vehicle was taking Royal Pioneer Corps dog handlers and their dogs on duty.

A camp spokesman said: "The troop carrying vehicle is absolutely crushed under the front wheels of the light shunting engine. We don't know what the casualties are but there were about 12 or 13 men in the vehicle. At the moment we have recovered four dead."

The first intimation of the accident was when dogs, still muzzled and trailing their leashes, began to return to camp kennels. The handler in charge realized that something had happened and gave the alarm. Rescue operations began in the dark and ambulances from Warwick took the injured to Warwick hospital, which is about 12 miles away.

Marlborough Farm Camp extends over several miles at the foot of Edgehill. It has its own internal railway system for carrying heavy ammunition from dump to dump.

ROUTINE JOURNEY

The engine was hauling the train loaded with ammunition and was returning on a routine journey to the camp marshalling yard when the collision took place at a point where a camp road crosses the line. The vehicle was struck in its centre and the work of clearing the wreckage was still in progress at a late hour.

Eight injured were taken to Warwick hospital but not all were seriously hurt.

A camp spokesman said they were not certain how many men were on the lorry, as lifts might have been given to people as it went round the camp.

A number of the guard dogs were killed and injured and the driver of the train was also hurt.

**The Times 1 Nov 58
2 SOLDIERS DIE, 9 INJURED, IN
EXPLOSION SEARCHING MOOR FOR
MISSILES**

Two soldiers were killed and nine injured

in an explosion yesterday on Fylingdales Moor, between Scarborough and Whitby. The moor is a former battle training area. Two RAF helicopters from Leconfield, near Hull, took the casualties from the scene to Scarborough Hospital, landing on a lawn.

Private Dennis George Keyes, of Morgan Road, Bromley, Kent was killed instantly on the moor, and Private Brian Walker, of Old Bank Street, Morley Bottom, Near Leeds, died in hospital.

A Northern Command statement said that the explosion occurred as a party of soldiers from 260 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps, stationed at Barnaby Barracks, Scarborough, were searching the area for unexploded missiles. It was not yet known how it occurred.

Major L Rushbrooke, Officer Commanding 260 Company, said: "In this type of practical training area a variety of missiles are found.

Some of them are smoke bombs and as such are not dangerous. It is the work of our unit to spot and mark the position of all missiles found. We do not remove or dismantle them. That is a job done later by experts."

**The Times 31 Aug 60
SOLDIER JUMPS
FROM MOVING TRAIN**

Private Harold Webster, of the Royal Pioneer Corps escaped from a military escort today by jumping from a train passing through Repton, Derbyshire.

He had been arrested in Nottingham and detained for a military escort to take him to his depot at Leamington, Warwickshire.

A railway police officer said: "The train was approaching Repton station when the soldier pushed his escort away and raced down the corridor.

Then a door slammed and he disappeared." Webster is described as only 5ft tall and with long black hair.

**The Times 17 Oct 60
21ST BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR ROYAL
PIONEERS**

The Royal Pioneer Corps is 21 today and at its depot, Quebec Barracks, Northampton, yesterday there was a drumhead service in the morning and a regimental dinner. Companies of the corps elsewhere held similar celebrations.

Happily the anniversary coincides with the Army Council's decision to allot a permanent place for the corps in the new all-regular Army.

The Pioneers' cap badge, a rifle piled with pick and shovel, and their motto Work

Conquers all Things was adopted from the Labour Corps of the First World War from which the present corps traces its descent.

Established as "Auxiliary Military Pioneers" they were at first divided into companies dealing with specific tasks.

But field commanders needed men who could turn their hands to anything and they soon became the handymen of the Army. Corps status was conferred in 1940 and six years later they were granted the prefix "Royal".

TRAFFIC CONTROL

The Pioneer had to know something about everyone else's duties and carry them out if the specialists were not available or needed relief. He could suddenly be switched from railway building to stevedore work, airfield construction to mine laying or traffic control.

He was also trained in every branch of infantry fighting.

During the war the corps served in all theatres and 2,800 men died.

Often pioneers were in the forefront of operations - in North Africa, Italy and Sicily, and on D-day. Amongst their most famous achievements were the help they gave in assembling the Mulberry Harbour and the Pluto pipeline and the vast smokescreen they laid before the crossing of the Rhine.

By 1945 their strength was 12,000 officers and 166,000 men from Britain and many thousands more from all parts of the Commonwealth, and their importance to the Army was such that every tactician was conscious of the axiom "No labour - no battle".

MILITARY ASSET

There are several reasons why the corps was not disbanded completely like its predecessor in 1919.

The jack-of-all-trades traditions with a solidly based reputation for being able to fight as well are decided military assets.

A modern army cannot move in war, even in friendly territory, without carrying a labour force with it.

This was proved time and again between 1939-45 and underlined in 1956 when even the small Suez operation involved the dispatch of a pioneer group of four companies and a civil labour unit to Egypt.

The 1939 expedient of filling the need from reservists trained primarily for other duties is wasteful for a rapidly mobilizing nation, and the Army knows that a small standing Pioneer Corps with its own reserves as a basis for emergency expansion is an insurance worth the extra premium. ■

Have you got a tie?



Regtl. Tie
Thick striped red and green tie. Pure silk.
£16.00 each

Corps Tie
Two different styles are available. One with the older 'Blackpool Tower' cap badge and one with the newer cap badge.
£8.50 each



Reunion Weekend Comments

Just got home from this years reunion. Firstly, I would like to thank Norman & Paul Brown for yet again an exceptional event and for their relentless efforts and energy in keeping the Association live and kicking. Anyone who has not yet attended a reunion must add it to their bucket list. R & G forever.

Steve Baron

Hi there Norman Brown, just on me way home from Spain and looking on FB looks like the reunion has been another great success, you really do now how to throw a party well done to all those involved.

Steve Henderson

Home safe and sound after an uneventful 3 hr journey. Another great reunion under the belt, I was wondering why my belt was expanding. Norman you have excelled yet again and rightly deserve the praise that is heaped on you from all ranks. Same for Paul Brown, the slide show was good fun and yet another example of your unpaid toil for the association; well done on your award. See you all next year.

Paul Davis

Great Weekend Norman Brown, Thank you...

Paul Scott

Thank you again Norman Brown for a fantastic weekend to all that we had the pleasure of meeting and had banter with thank you all THE BROOMES X X

Kev and Paula Broome

Thanks for helping making it a good weekend see you both again soon

Darren Burton

Once again thank you Norman Brown for another great reunion weekend

Martin Smith

Had a great time at the royal pioneer reunion, was great to see great friends I've not seen for 26 years, big thanks to Norman for organising it all, see you again soon

Ian Driver

Hi Norman and Paul many thanks to you both for another fantastic weekend thanks

Roy & Linda Lathwood

I would like to thank Norman Brown his son Paul for doing all the photos and all members who turned up for a great weekend many more to come hope bringing Wellington next year all the best

Steve Earnshaw

Another brilliant reunion again this year I am just wondering if there are any other ex pioneers in the weymouth Dorset area?

Paul Mills

Had a great army reunion at Coventry big thank you to Norman Brown and his son Paul for a great weekend see you all next year

Steve Kohut

Great weekend thanks to Norman Brown and the R.P.C association . The Black country boys are the best and funniest act I've seen for years,

Ray Perkins

Well that's it for another year great time had by all let's keep this going thanks Norman Brown and Paul and all who helped too make it a weekend too remember

John (Paddy) McPhillips

What a brilliant weekend with my lady and my royal pioneer family red & green always

Peter Bevan

Thanks to Norman Brown and Paul Brown for another brilliant weekend. Met up with some old friends and made lots of new. A weekend full of great memories and laughs ?

Jennifer Bone

Thank you Norman and Paul for a brilliant weekend. Looking forward to next years reunion.

Christine Powell

Thanks Norman Brown for a brilliant weekend and reunion and looking forward to next years reunion

David Rumbell

I would like to thank Norman Brown for a brilliant weekend.

Andy Conyers

A big thank you to Norman, Paul and his lovely wife for another great weekend. We had an excellent time catching up with everyone again

Julie Parkinson

Would just like to say thank you for a lovely weekend from myself and Janet. We both enjoyed it and will try to make it next year dates depending.

Ian Driver

Hello Norman by the way you did a brilliant job the reunion was magic it was great to meet you and your wife and your lad was a star

Peter Bevan

To every Pioneer the reunion was brilliant this year. Norman Brown has done bloody wonders to sort these reunions out. A lot of hard work for sure. So let's make the 2017 reunion be the best yet. It's worth every penny as the hotel is beautiful and the food is super. So let's make a big effect for next year my Red&Green brothers and Sister's. Xxxx

James Upfield

Me and wife are going.. enjoyed this yr.. cum on lads u know what they say..more the merrier...so dip in ur pockets and get urself down there... cheers Norman Brown had a good day.

Stephen Smalley

I would like to say a big thank you to Norman and Paul for a fantastic weekend. Hope to see you all again at the Oy Yo weekend next year.

Michael Thompson

Methuen Rifle Shoot

I WAS most surprised to see my email about the Mouse and Alan Sharp but a very pleasant surprise at that. The mouse this edition is on page 13, lucky for some, between the legs of the right hand man on the bottom photo.

I stated in the email that we were awarded a Methuen Medal. As it was over 50 year ago and I had not seen the medal for decades I thought it long gone. I showed the article to my eldest daughter and she informed me that she has the medal. It will be returned into my possession soon.

I have looked on the internet for information about the medal and the competition for which it is awarded; there is little of any help except that I believe it to be a combat shoot style of match.

Are you able to provide any information about the shoot and medal please? Mine is dated 1966 and it was most certainly not for winning the Football World Cup.

In the obituaries this time it mentions the death of Peter McNally, I never, until now, knew his first name we always called him Geordie McNally. I played football with him often for 521 Coy, back in the day. Looks like when we all pass we can get a decent team together where ever it is.

My best to you and yours.

Roy Stevens.

Ed note: I asked Pat Fleming – the font of all knowledge of all things shooting – for details of the Methuen Medal, his reply is as follows:

Dear Norman, The Methuen Rifle Competition is a very famous and is shot in many parts of the world. The Methuen Competition is shot at Bisley Ranges and at many Regimental and Corps Skill at Arms meetings. The RPC Rifle Association had its own Methuen Cup which was competed for at the Corps Skill at Arms meetings. The Methuen competition held at Bisley Ranges, instigated by, and named after, Lord Methuen of the Boer War fame. The full-bore Bisley event a mainly Inter-Service military competition. Shot in the open at 300, 200 and 100 yards, the full-bore match has always been undertaken with the Service rifle of the day.

I am not sure when Roy Stevens was serving, was he a National Service or Regular? He may have won it at Bisley or at Corps SAM. 50 years ago the Corps units would be using No 4 Rifles. The Corps only got the SLR Rifles in about 1962/63? I know the Corps did win the Methuen Competition in the late 50's. I know that medals were presented to individuals winners and members of winning teams. I hope Mr Stevens has enough information to remember where he won his medal.

Hope this helps, Kind Regards

Pat Fleming

Passout photograph

Ed note: I recently received the following email after I had informed a member that I did not have a copy of his pass-out photo:

“Hi unfortunately I’m sorry I don’t believe you, I will take this further. I just feel out all the passing out parades you can’t find my one it looks as if I didn’t pass out how on earth can I pass my records down to my kids if I have no proof that I passed out, I think if the shoe was on the other foot you would feel the same you can’t even find any of my army mates that I served with once again as if I didn’t exist and was in the R.P.C. yes I’m very angry and disappointed

that once again you have or can’t be bothered to look for my request like I said I will take this further.”

Name supplied

Ed note: What I do suggest is to try and find anyone whom you passed out with and try to obtain a copy of the photograph. I do not appreciate these messages, I do not have all pass-out photos (not even my own!) and have spent many hours of my own time in building up the photo library. I would like nothing better than to have copies of every single pass out parade photograph.

My great uncle

THANK YOU for your letter and the information regarding my great uncle who served with your Corps during WW2.

Thank you also for the war diary of 6 Coy Pioneer Corps, the information and details contained within the diary I found to be of great interest and give a good insight into the hard work, bravery and sacrifice of the Pioneer Corps. It is also interesting to note that 6 Coy were front line troops during the

campaign in Tunisia.

I enclose a cheque to purchase a copy of the War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-46 on CD Rom. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for the help you have given me and the information and details concerning my great uncle 13032643 Pte Sidney Frederick Withall. Yours sincerely,
AW Kingdon

Sheringham jolly

HELLO NORMAN, I’m glad that the lads and lasses that came to the Sherringham jolly enjoyed themselves and I look forward to doing it all again in 2018. I had better start fund raising now! Your son Paul did some great photos and it was great to meet him and Tracey.

I hope you are well and truly on the mend and I look forward to the reunion in Coventry next year.

Thank you for your support and great mention in the Association Facebook page.

Thank you and kind regards.
Pete Wegg

My grandfather

MR Solomon Benjamin Tennenbaum was my grandfather who served in the Pioneer Corps from 1940 to 1944.

I contacted the RPC Association and Norman Brown was very helpful in guiding me to further information regarding my

grandfather and the Pioneer Corps.

In memory of my grandfather I wish to make a donation to the RPC Association and attach a cheque for £50. Yours faithfully,

Mrs Malka Kontogheorgis

Funeral service

THAN YOU very much for letting me use the RPC Association flag during the funeral service for my brother Frank. It was a magnificent tribute to his service during the

Second World War. Please accept the enclosed cheque for the Association's funds, with my extreme gratitude.

Tom Shepley

Blast from the past!



■ Recognise this likely lot?

Picture: RPCA Archive

THIS classic old photograph from back in the day was recently unearthed in the Sgts Mess at St David's Barracks, Bicester by Annie.

The photograph features Dinger Bell at

the bottom right (with hair), Scottie Ringer at top left (shouting as usual), Tats Faulkner at middle back (in the background as usual).

Who are the others?

Norman Brown

He spoke very little of his experiences

BOTH ME and my son Kieran are very grateful for the diligent work done by Norman Brown in respect of my father, Fred Marsh's war service in the Pioneer Corps.

Like most men of that era he spoke very little of his experiences, and I, regrettably, failed to press him for his story.

It is commendable that men like Mr

Brown are still willing to give time and energy to such history.

As a mark of appreciation from me and my son I enclose a cheque for £50, I hope this is helpful. Kind regards and best wishes,

Brian Marsh

THE PIONEER

■ THANKS again for another Cracking Pioneer Newsletter, always a great read, and never fails to put a smile on my face.

Ian Clarke

■ THANKS for the Corps magazine excellent as ever (with a picture of me too!). Many congratulations upon your award, very well deserved for all the work you put in.

Darrell Ingle

■ FIRSTLY, let me join the many people, who have already sent their congratulations, having been awarded the BEM.

Ross Bennett

■ THANK YOU for the magazine, you and your son Paul have done all of us ex Pioneers proud. See you at the Reunion Weekend mate, once again thanks to you both.

Taff Wall

■ CAN I take this opportunity to thank you for the sterling work you do in relation to the Magazine and keeping memories of the Royal Pioneer Corps alive.

P Menheniott

■ CAN I just take this opportunity to say how much I enjoyed April's newsletter, especially the article on 518 Company's history; it brings back so many good memories. Thank you.

John Merritt

■ I WOULD like to make this small donation to your Association in thanks to data received from Lt Col John Starling relating to my late grandfather's uncle Pte Edward Crawford (392305) of 137 Coy Labour Corps during WW1, the donation is my thanks to his memory.

Henry Henderson

■ I ENCLOSE a cheque as a donation to the RPC Association, I received an email from Lt Col John Starling on 15th June about my great-grandfather Pte William King, who ended his WW1 career in the Labour Corps. Thank you to everyone

Anne Townsend



Write in or email us...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o BGSU
St George's Barracks
ARNCOTT
Bicester OX25 1PP

or email us at:

royalpioneer corps@gmail.com



Two elves come to the front

I LEFT school at 15 years and worked as a car cleaner, when I was 17 a notice came saying I had to go for my National Service – I thought they had forgotten about me.

On 14 Mar 59 I had to report to Topsham Barracks, the Devon & Dorset Regiment. I reported to an office, given an army number (23612461) and then had to remove my clothes for a medal examination.

The doctor who examined me said Grade 2, you have short arms and legs and I was sent on a train to Hermitage Camp, Wrexham. After passing out I was put on a train to Corsham, Wiltshire to Hutwell Barracks. If my memory served me right the RSM was C Thomas, the CSM WO2 Stageman, the RQMS was called Newman and there was a Corporal Joe St Hill and also a 2Lt C Etherington. I spent all my time in the Sergeants' Mess washing up after the cook. In December we moved camp to Basil Hill Barracks to a spider block. On the first parade the RSM called out for the two elves to come to the front.

We were instructed to go the store where the RQMS asked where he could get a bicycle for a little man. A driver took me to a REME camp and they fixed me up with a little bike, I was then Company runner until demob. We were billeted with the Non Combatant Corps, the Cpl was David Brown from Plymouth.

My doctor cannot believe that I did two years in the army.

Patrick Northover

400 pallets done in a week

HI NORMAN, I noted with interest in this current issue of the RPC magazine, the palletisation 522 coy CAD Kineton in 1972, 400 pallets done in a week, that was palletising I think Wambats (?), but also 105 shells.

I was 6 section "palletisation" Sgt Ray Fielder was Senior NCO, Cpl's were Paddy Crieghton, Cpl Browne, & a L/Cpl I can't remember his name but he transferred in from Worcs & Sherwood Foresters (?). I was with 6 section from Feb 71 to Feb 72. A couple of other names come to mind, Ptes John Oakley & John "Spud" Murphy.

Steve Stainton

Love to meet them



■ 521 Company

Picture: Derek Nash

HOPE you are well and thank you for your hard work. I will join you one day at the Reunions but just don't seem to find time at the moment.

I am enclosing some photos of 521 Coy with some of the guys I served with, I would love to meet them.

One is Martin Selfs and I noticed one of the men in the last magazine was SSgt Phil Pullen, is there any way I can contact him.

Derek Nash

Ed note: unfortunately I do not have an up to date address for Phil.

Roads Memorial

THANK you once again for an excellent magazine.

Roads and District Royal British Legion would like to thank you and Paul for the lovely pictures of our Remembrance Parade

at the village War Memorial. There was at least another 200 supporters behind the camera.

Pat Fleming

Chairman Roads and District RBL

Happy Memories

MANY THANKS for magazine, I was really interested in the article ref 251 Coy RPC as I was in that coy for a couple of years from 1949-1952.

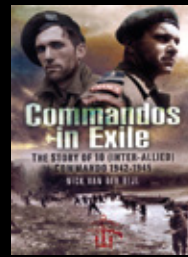
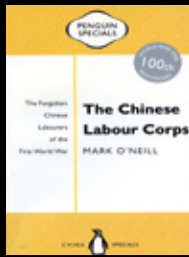
I enjoyed my time there often on detachment with my section on track

removal or renovation.

We had a great football team and won the Birmingham City Shield.

What an achievement, happy memories, regards,

R Worthington ex Sgt



Operation Agreement

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

OPERATION Agreement started out as a relatively simple plan to destroy Rommel's Bombproof oil-storage tanks at Tobruk. But, catching the imagination of GHQ, the plan snowballed alarmingly.

As well as a commando unit led by the plan's originator, Colonel Haselden, it came to include the RAF, the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines and two of the largest destroyers in the Mediterranean.

It was a daring attempt to rob Rommel, at one stroke, of the three essentials to success in North Africa – oil, a supply port and shipping, but the calculated risks began to out balance the chances of success when it seemed that every dockyard worker in Alexandria and every cocktail-party-goer in Cairo knew about the raid before the officers and men set out. Nevertheless, the operation went ahead, only to become a tragedy of slaughtered men and sunken ships.

Tobruk Commando is a classic adventure story of the Second World War. The fast-moving action centres on the small commando force which set out through the desert towards Tobruk.

After a long journey, they reached their destination disguised as a group of prisoners of war with their German captors. Expertly written, this is a wonderful tale of heroic bluff, a venture to test the courage

and nerves of the toughest men.

(Ed note: Several ex Pioneer Corps personnel are mentioned in this book, the following is the citation for the award of the Military Medal to Pte Hillman – one of the blocks in St David's Barracks, Bicester, is named after him.

On Sept 13th 1942 Pte HILLMAN, then a member of the Special Investigation Group, formed part of the force which entered Tobruk from MUFRA under Lt Col Haseldon. Hillman was dressed in German uniform and it was his job to speak to any enemy guarding check posts on the road, and get the party through in their trucks.

When the action started Hillman was in Capt Buck's party which, still in German uniform, took the first objective.

The next morning after reinforcements had failed to land, I saw Hillman with one or two others and Lt Col Haseldon holding off and actually advancing on enemy who were greatly superior in numbers.

The others made for the trucks, but Hillman refused to leave the Col and attacked with him, killing several Italians and forcing others to run. When within a few yards of the enemy Col Haseldon was hit and rolled over.

Hillman went up to him and called his name several times. Not until he was certain that Col Haseldon was killed did he come back to join us on board the stranded M.T.B. Here he kept the guns supplied with ammunition until no more could be found on board and then took to the hills with my

party when it was apparent that no more could be done. For the next nine weeks during which we were endeavouring to get back to our own lines. Hillman showed courage, endurance and cheerfulness which was a great example to the rest of us.

This in spite of the fact that the soles of his boots were torn off during the action and he tore his feet badly on the barbed wire perimeter defences at Tobruk on the first night of our journey, causing sores which were still open when he reached hospital nine weeks later.

Whenever enemy positions were encountered Hillman showed the greatest calmness and courses.

He was entirely responsible for persuading the Arabs to give us food etc.

I have no hesitation in saying that without his example and help we would have had very little chance of escaping successfully. Hillman has been in action with Capt Buck's party in German uniform on a previous occasion, and was in the East African campaign with No 52 Commando.

**TOBRUK
COMMANDO –
THE RAID TO
DESTROY
ROMMEL'S BASE**
**AUTHOR:
GORDON
LANDSBOROUGH**
**ISBN: 978-1-
84832-244-8**



Chinese Labour

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

AS THE young men of Europe were fighting in the trenches, a little known contingent of Chinese labourers crossed the world to provide support vital to the Allied war effort.

Largely illiterate farmers from northern China, these men were simply attempting to make a better life for themselves, ignorant of the war

and its causes.

Under brutal conditions many died for their efforts, and their involvement wasn't recognised for decades – it is still not widely known.

In this fascinating First World War China Special, journalist Mark O'Neill brings their story to light, describing in detail the labourers' recruitment, their daily experiences in a foreign land and the horrific work they carried out – including the clearing of remains from battlefields.

By late April 1917, the British has sent 35,000 labourers to work on the battlefields of Europe.

When the last batch of nearly 2,000 men left China in March 1918, the British had recruited 94,400 Chinese workers, a far larger number than those sent to work for the French, who would send around 40,000 men during the war.

THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS
AUTHOR: MARK O'NEILL
ISBN: 978-0-14-380031-6

Ungentlemanly warfare

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

SIX Gentlemen, one goal – the destruction of Hitler's War Machine. In the spring of 1939, a top secret organisation was founded in London. Its purpose was to plot the destruction of Hitler's war machine through spectacular acts of sabotage.

The guerrilla campaign that followed was to prove every bit as extraordinary as the six gentlemen who directed it. Winston Churchill selected them because they were wildly creative and thoroughly ungentlemanly. One of them, Cecil Clarke, was a maverick engineer who had spent the 1930's inventing futuristic caravans. Now, his talents were to more devious use; he built the dirty bomb used to assassinate Hitler's favourite, Richard Heydrich. Another member of the team, William Fairbairn, was a portly pensioner with an unusual passion; he was the world's leading expert in silent killing. He was hired to train the guerrillas being parachuted behind enemy lines.

Led by dapper Scotsman Colin Gubbins, these men – along with three others – formed a secret inner circle that planned the most audacious sabotage attacks of the Second World War. Winston Churchill called it his Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare. The six 'ministers', aided by a group of formidable ladies, were so effective that they single-handedly changed the course of the war.

Ed note: described in the book is the destruction of the Gergopotamos viaduct in Greece. Fifty trains a day used this viaduct to transport essential weapons to Rommel's forces in North Africa. The sabotaged viaduct was out of action for six weeks between November 1942 and January 1943 depriving Rommel of vital supplies which led to his defeat at the 2nd Battle of El Alamein. A member of the Palestine Pioneer

Corps was a member of this raid and was awarded the Military Medal, his citation is as follows:

"This man was taken prisoner during the operations in Greece in the spring of 1941. Some time ago he escaped from captivity and joined up with the local Greek guerrillas. During the time that the guerrilla bands were collecting to the rendezvous with Lt Col MYERS, Pte KHURI volunteered to join the demolition party detailed to destroy the GORGOPOTAMOS VIADUCT on the night 25/26 Nov 42.

He showed great bravery and devotion to duty under fire." He was awarded a bar to his Military Medal, the citation for this award is as follows

In March 43, Brig MYERS reported that sabotage of the important ASOPOS Viaduct on the main railway line between SALONIKA and ATHENS, and presented a 'chancey' likelihood of success. This viaduct is an example of one of the triumphs of railway bridging engineering and is some 200 meters long. It spans a precipitous gorge whose bottom lies 320 ft below. The railway issues onto the viaduct at either end from a tunnel. Furthermore, the viaduct is on a slight curve, thus making repair extraordinarily difficult. The viaduct is of steel.

Early in May, Brig MYERS reported that he considered destruction of the viaduct with the least loss of time was necessary as, not only was the guard being strengthened, but Italians had been replaced by Germans. Furthermore, workmen had started reinforcing the whole structure at its base with concrete.

A party of eight, under command of Capt GORDON-CREED MC, which included Pte KHOURI, set out to attack the viaduct with 56 fathoms of rope and improvised ropes plaited from parachute rigging lines. Straight away STOTT led six men of the party down to the first waterfall where a

dump was made, and then returned the same day to Gorge HQ. Capt GORDON-CREED and STOTT made a reconnaissance from the Northern cliff top, which enabled the whole party to reach the second waterfall with all their stores and explosives. The whole party then managed to reach a point midway between the second and third waterfall. Here they were stuck and further reconnaissance from the Northern cliff top was made with the result that STOTT and one other managed to reach the third waterfall but could get no further with the amount of rope then available. They decided to give up the attempt until further rope and packs suitable for carrying on the head could be sent to them. So far the party had not got within site of the viaduct, although they had reached within two miles of it. They returned to MAVROLITHARION and a few nights later the requisite stores were dropped to them from an aircraft.

On 12 Jun, the same party, less two of their number, but still including Pte KHOURI, set out once more for the gorge. Pte KHOURI played a major part in carrying explosives and their accessories through water up to his neck and whilst climbing and descending precipitous cliffs.

Without his assistance it is doubtful if the whole party would have reached the target in time or as quickly as they did. He was with the two Sapper officers the whole of the time whilst they were laying their charges. All this was done within a few yards of the German guard and post.

Pte KHOURI is strongly recommended for an award of a bar to the MM for his diligence, courage and willingness throughout the operation which resulted in the successful and complete demolition of this important viaduct.

THE MINISTRY OF UNGENTLEMANLY WARFARE
AUTHOR: GILES MILTON
ISBN: 978-1-444-79895-1

A most unusual WW2 unit

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

COMMANDOS IN Exile is the story of one of the least known and most unusual units in the Second World War. This Commando comprised members of French, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian, Polish and Yugoslav Free Forces who had escaped from German Occupation.

All members of this multi-national Commando had to pass the Green Beret commando course at Achnacarry in Scotland and the book begins by describing the training. In addition to the six national contingents, the author reveals that was a

discreet addition troop, drawn mainly from East European Jews who had either been exiled or had escaped Nazi occupation and persecution.

10 Commando never fought as an entity but loaned troops for specific operation relevant to their origins.

For example One Troop (French) took part in the Dieppe Raid, 2 Troop (Dutch) fought at Arnhem and 5 Troop (Norwegian) raided the Lofoten Islands.

At other times members played key intelligence roles questioning POWs, translating captured documents, conducting reconnaissance patrols and gathering intelligence on the D-Day beaches.

National troops became the nucleus for

their nations' post-war Commando forces and the book reviews the evolution of national Commando forces post-war.

With its full accounts of 10 (inter-Allied) Commando's action and intelligence operations. Commandos in Exile, is a fascinating and revealing read.

Ed note: once again this book contains details of former members of the Pioneer Corps, especially the troop drawn from East European Jews.

COMMANDOS IN EXILE –
THE STORY OF 10 (INTER-ALLIED)
COMMANDER 1942 – 1945
AUTHOR: NICK VAN DER BIJL
ISBN: 184415790-3

The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

**GRINNELL-MOORE MICHAEL J. (MIKE) (450268)
LT COL 17 JUN 16 (AGED 85)**

A member of the Association since 1957. He was commissioned in Sep 56 he served in Bicester (521 & HQ 23 Gp) BOAR (PCLUs in Monchengladback, Verden & Bielefeld). He was winner of the SMG Individual match in the RPC (BAOR) Rifle Club in 1968. Following a course at Strathclyde University he was posted as OC 518 Coy in Dec 71 before returned to BAOR to 6 PCLU Rheindahlen followed by a short tour at HQ 45 Group before being posted to HQ BAOR as DADPL3. In Sep 76 he returned to Bicester as 2IC 23 Group before returning to Bielefeld as CO 13 Gp where he retired in Apr 95.



**RAPHAEL DAVID DAICHES (13039895) EX CPL
14 DEC 15 (AGED 100)**

Served in Non Combatant Corps before transferring to Pioneer Corps in 1940.

**JERVOISE JOHN LOVEYS (22935057) 21 JAN 16
EX CAPT (AGED 82)**

Served in 2212 East African Coy in 1954/55.

**RAWLINGS HENRY GEORGE (14844841) EX PTE
FEB 16 (AGED 89)**

Served 18 Sep 44 to 8 Jan 48 in 71 Coy RPC

**GRAHAM NOEL (24364603) EX CPL 18 MAY 16
(AGED 59)**

Served 1981-1993, will be remembered for his boxing skills.

**COX DAVID (24647001) EX PTE 26 MAY 16
(AGED 53)**

Joined 1983.

**BURNETT MICHAEL (22682090) EX PTE 15 OCT
15 (AGED 81)**

Served Jul 54 to Jul 56.

**SHEPLEY FRANK (14788220) EX CPL 27 JUN 16
(AGED 90).**

Served from Apr 44 - Oct 47 in 428, 205 and 254 Coys.

**WHITTAKER DENNIS (24303705) EX CPL 7 JUL
16 (AGED 61)**

Served 1978 - 1984.

**JOHNSON GEOFFREY PETER (23442201) EX PTE
19 JUL 16 (AGED 77)**

Served 1958 - 1960

**CLOUGH JACK (13070826) EX PTE 22 JUL 16
(AGED 96)**

Served 1940-1946

**MOORE MICHAEL (23961995) EX CPL 17
AUG 16 (AGED 73)**

Served in 206 Coy from 1963-1969

**HOPPER ALLAN ROY (22796941) EX SSGT 1
SEP 16 (AGED 83)**

served from Nov 64 - Feb 79 although he had previous service in the 1950's when he served in Malaya. Until he emigrated to Cyprus he was an honorary member of the WO's & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC.



**MERCER FRANK (13053582) EX SGT 5 JAN 16
(AGED 95)**

Served 1940 - 1946

**POWELL STEPHEN (14755040) EX PTE 17 FEB
16 (AGED 89)**

Served 2 May 44 to 18 Nov 47

**SCOGGINGS MJ (MICK) (23426396) EX CPL 26
MAY 15 (AGED 76)**

Started service as a National Serviceman who completed a full career serving in Aden, Bicester (with both 521 & 518 Coys) and CAD Bramley.



Picture: A Pioneer Soldier in Northern Ireland on duty



And finally...

Trousers up the flagpole, some little known military facts and a reminder about the OY! YO! Pioneer Reunion at Coventry...

**Report: Norman Brown
Cartoon: Peter Brookes**

ALAN PLUMMER sent in the following... I have just received my copy of the Pioneer Magazine, I was particularly interested in the article about 518 Coy.

Congratulations to you and Paul for yet another excellent edition and in particular the article on 518 Coy.

However, there is one omission that I would like to point out, during my time with this Coy in Cyprus between 1956 and 1959 a large amount of the time the Company Sergeant Major was Dick Jones – his name is not included in the list.

I was with the Coy when Willis Togood lost his trews.

I enclose a photo of the trews up the flag pole, the person on the photo was I think Alan Hayward – sorry for the quality of the picture.

Once again thanks to you and Paul for the work you carry out for the Association and to you on your award.

Pictured Right: Trousers up the flagpole!



Don't believe everything you read in the papers Mr Dewsnap!

Continuing on from last month, some very interesting and little known facts from WW1...

1. The Eiffel Tower intercepted German radio messages that led to the execution of Dutch dancer and German spy Mata Hari. British nurse Edith Cavell was shot for helping soldiers escape behind German lines.

2. Initially the only protection against gas attacks was a cloth soaked in a soldier's own urine. British officer Edward Harrison invented the first practical gas mask, saving thousands of lives.

3. The Defence Of The Realm Act 1914 included stopping Britons from talking on the phone in a foreign language, buying binoculars or hailing a cab at night. Alcoholic drinks were watered down and pubs had to close at 10pm.

4. Away from the Western Front the fighting was just as fierce. Lawrence Of Arabia made his name during the war in the Middle East, while during the failed Gallipoli campaign the Allies suffered 250,000 casualties fighting the Turks.

5. The war in the air saw Germany's Baron von Richthofen, dubbed the Red Baron, shoot down 80 Allied aircraft.

The top British ace, Major Edward Mannock, shot down 61 enemy planes. Both later died in action.

6. Soldiers in the trenches were highly superstitious. Some believed that angels had appeared over the trenches to save them from disaster while phantom cavalry were also seen.

7. By 1918 Britain was spending £6million a day on the war. The total cost has been estimated at £9,000million.

8. When soldiers returned there was a baby boom. Births increased by 45 per cent between 1918 and 1920. But the 1918 influenza pandemic killed more people worldwide than the war. ■

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News
- Forthcoming events
- Past events
- Your Letters
- Your stories
- Blast from the Past
- Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery
- Book Reviews
- Press Cuttings
- And much more!



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YO!

OLD? YOUNG? Pioneers 2017 NEED YOU!

**O = OLD!
Y = YOUNG!**



FEATURING



REUNION
30TH JUNE - 2ND JULY 2017

IT WAS pleasing to see some of the younger Pioneers attend this years reunion, such as *Paul Mills*, *Paul Monaghan*, *Steve Barron*, *Steve Bone*, *Reg Lane* and not forgetting *Micky* our in house chelsea pensioner!

It was also pleasing to see many new faces who have never attended a Pioneer reunion before. For 2017 we want more Pioneers, particularly younger Pioneers in attendance!

So for 2017s reunion the theme is **OY!** or **YO!** If you know a young Pioneer than tell them **OY!** or **YO!** and leave a link on their facebook page to the **OY!** **YO!** Royal Pioneer Corps Association Reunion 2017.

On stage on the Saturday we will be having back the award winning comic speciality act from 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014... **The Black Country Boys**.

We have put some video links on the facebook events page showing them in action!

The full itinerary is still in the planning stages and various options are being looked at, such as a BBQ on one of the days/evenings etc.

The venue is centrally located, it benefits from having huge function rooms, heated indoor swimming pool, hot tub, steam room and we are able to negotiate a good price on the bar - this year was £2.30 a pint. Prices when announced will include accommodation, breakfast/s, gala dinner/s and entertainment etc.

The venue is also close to Coventry City Centre, close to the Car Museum (free entry), close to Wellisbourne Market and about half an hour or so from the National Arboretum.

Are you Young or Old ?
Are you Old and Bold ?
Are you Young and Diehard ?
Have you never been before ?

We welcome you all and look forward to seeing you and having a great and no doubt very memorable weekend!

A full itinerary will be published in due course.

SPREAD THE WORD TO PIONEERS YOUNG AND OLD - THE COLOURS RED AND GREEN WILL BE FLYING!
LETS MAKE THIS THE BEST REUNION OUTSIDE OF BICESTER!



Paul Mills



Could be you!



Paul Monaghan



Could be you!



Steve Barron



Could be you!



Reg Lane



Micky!

YOUNG PIONEER AMBASSADORS



THE PIONEER



PIONEERS WIN GOLD & SILVER AT INVICTUS

WELL DONE TO PIONEERS **MATTHEW ELLIOTT** AND **CRAIG WINSPEAR**. ALSO CONGRATS TO PIONEER **GEOFFREY DORRITT** FOR SINGING AT THE INVICTUS OPENING CEREMONY.