

THE PIONEER



THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

WE HAD A RECORD TURNOUT OF PIONEERS AT THE CENOTAPH PARADE AT WHITEHALL



Front Cover

Pioneers paying their respects at the Cenotaph, Whitehall

Picture: Tracy Brown



Back Cover

Clapping Pioneers, before they march down Whitehall

Picture: Paul Brown

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EDITORIAL

ONCE again it is my sad duty to publish the deaths of many ex Pioneers, a large number of these were well known characters in the Corps and several were World War 2 veterans, our condolences are sent to their families and friends.

2017 was, in my opinion, a great year for the Association. We had a very successful reunion weekend (with good weather!), we were well represented at the Field of Remembrance and we had a record of 97 march in the RPC contingent at the Cenotaph. If we count ex Pioneers marching in other contingents i.e. Not Forgotten Association, Aden Veterans etc we would have over 100 ex Pioneers marching

The Officers' Club had a very successful dinner in October, the WOs' & SNCOs' Pnr Reunion Club is taking 165 to watch the Army v Navy Rugby at Twickenham and are to hold a delayed Ladies Dinner Night on 11 Aug 18 at Bicester. The two new Branches (the Northern Branch and the Bicester Branch) have both held successful functions and the Northampton Branch held a very good Burns Night (that is, apart from the Disco!). The 39/93 Club had a successful meet at Aldershot which was supposed to be organised by Ian Dewsnap but

we found out that his wife Laura had done most of the work. As most of the wives went shopping the males watched the rugby at various pubs. These pubs supplied free buffets.

As we are going to press the Nostalgia Group is organising a reunion at Skegness which normally attracts large numbers. Other mini-reunions have taken place at other various locations including the Liverpool Tour! It is pleasing to note that Pioneers are still keeping in touch with one another.

In addition to above we had 30 new members join the Association in the year, there is still a lot of ex Pioneers out there.

Of the new members two were World War 2 veterans and another four were National Servicemen. Please do your utmost to get non members to get in touch with the Association, membership is free!

We sent the application form for this year's Reunion out with the October 2017 Newsletter, if you have lost it and require a replacement either telephone us or send an email to royalpioneer corps@gmail.com The outline programme for the weekend is shown on page 13, although we may have to make slight changes. The Association Shop will be open on

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STOP PRESS

■ Bids for next year's (4 May 19) Army vs Navy match to be submitted by 1 Oct 18.

STOP PRESS

■ 72nd Past & Present Dinner to be held on Fri 19 Oct, Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess.

STOP PRESS

■ If not already submitted place your request for tickets for both Field of Remembrance and Cenotaph Parade.

■ The RLC Museum are doing a short survey. Please fill it in at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6VH73GZ



the Friday afternoon, orders, in advance, can be made.

If you want to come let me know as soon as possible. I have booked some good weather!

You will notice that once again we will be travelling to the National Memorial Arboretum on the Saturday. Here we will be holding a short Church Service at the Logistic Grove this will be preceded by a short march to the Grove from the hospitality tents.

We will have time for members to have a tour of the National Memorial and then from there we will be visiting the Royal British Legion Club at Alrewas where we will have a finger buffet (and a beer or two).

For those that do not wish to travel to the Arboretum a mini bus will take them to Wellesbourne market.

Fantastic entertainment has been booked for the Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights.

As usual on the Friday night we will be holding a raffle, if you could donate a prize it would be appreciated.

On the Saturday evening there will be an auction, we have already received some very interesting items to be auctioned, so please bring plenty of money with you also if you have

a suitable item to be auctioned please bring it with you.

Last year 14 members arrived on the Thursday evening and at the time of going to press 15 have indicated that they will be arriving on the Thursday.

I have already received 94 applications to march at this year's Cenotaph Parade so we may be able to increase last year's record attendance. If you wish to march and have not yet applied please let me know – I require full name, date and place of birth and service number as well as your address - the Royal British Legion now require this information.

Talking about address, once again following last October's mailing of the Newsletter I had 42 returned "Gone Away", please let me know if you are moving. Out of the 42 about 30 have since supplied their new addresses.

As usual, with this Newsletter are Derby Draw tickets please do your best to either sell them or buy them yourself.

This is one of the main items of fund raising for the Association, if you can sell more tickets we will gladly send them to you!

Norman Brown



Can you spot the mouse?



The winner of "Find the Cuneo Mouse" was Tony Lunn. Well done Tony.

A prize will be on its way to him shortly. It was on page 49, in the tank.

We only had a handful of correct answers this time, so I will make it easier for you in this issue.

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.

Cuneo also painted himself into the painting and he can be seen with his bicycle and his easel on the beach.

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 1st September 2018.

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

Good luck.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE DERBY DRAW
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter





■ THE Army Dependants Trust (ADT) makes an award (currently £15,000) to dependants or next of kin following the death of one of its members, in whatever circumstances, whether on duty or off duty.

The ADT has now extended membership, at no cost, to all ex-Regulars who have a Regular Reserve (RR) liability, for the period of their liability, provided that they were members of the ADT during their Regular service and that they complete their Annual Reporting letter as required, during their RR liability.

■ A LAW has been passed that will allow some soldiers to serve part-time for certain periods to do things like raise children or care for sick relatives.

The Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Act comes into force in 2019.

It means personnel will be able to restrict the time they spend away from their home bases.

Applications will be assessed against the needs of the Army and troops would still need to deploy on operations in emergency situations such as a national crisis.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood, said that consultation with troops had found they wanted more options when personal circumstances change.

He added, "Flexible working is key to retaining the expert personnel we have invested in."

■ WHEN SOMEONE dies, you have to register their passing with your local registrar with the death certificate, which will be produced by your doctor or hospital.

You have to inform all the various government departments that the individual may have been involved with. Passport Office, Council Tax, DVLA, housing benefit service, Pension Office, Income Tax.

Then there is the business of notifying the employer if still working, the bank and credit cards, loans, hire purchase agreements.

Then there is the Mail, both official and the junk which will keep coming unless you let the Royal Mail know; "The Personal Help, Royal Mail" website, and another website the "Bereavement Register", will stop the mail.

There is also a Government Website, "Tell us once-Gov.UK", which provides excellent advice, and will help considerably at this most difficult time.

■ A NEW project has been initiated in Wales for Older Veterans with hearing loss. This programme is funded for three years, with the aim of providing information and support to older veterans including their spouses who suffer from hearing loss or tinnitus.

We will provide this service to: Veterans born on or before 1950 with hearing loss (67 or older), Partners/carers/dependants of veterans born on or before 1950, Veterans/older peoples groups. The fund is run by the British Legion and further details can be found at: <https://www.uk-veterans-hearing-help.co.uk/>

■ WE WERE runners up in the prestigious National Army Photographic Competition 2017 in one of the categories.

We won a rucksack!

Paul completes the epic Yomp!

Well done to Pioneer Paul Parkinson has raised £1450 for the Army Benevolent Fund by completing the epic 56 mile yomp in under 24 hours



■ Paul Parkinson sporting a lovely top, that are available from our Pioneer Shop!

Picture: Paul Parkinson

PAUL served in the Corps from Sep 83 to Oct 94 serving in 521 Coy, 1 (BR) Corps and 9 Sig Regt. In June 2017 he completed the "Yomp" and describes his experiences:

The Yomp is an epic adventure challenge. Teams of 3-6 people take on 54 miles (gold) in 24 hours across the rugged terrain of the Scottish wilderness. There is also a 36.5 (silver) or a 22 (bronze) mile option.

Whatever distance you choose, the Yomp will test you to your limits both physically and mentally. It is also an unforgettable weekend with friends and colleagues, sharing the exhilarating experience and making memories to last a lifetime, whilst raising money for soldiers, veterans and their families.

On the 10th -11th June 2017 I took part in the Cateran Yomp. The Yomp is an epic trek across rural Perthshire. It was going to be tough but we were doing this to raise vital funds for ABF The Soldiers' Charity.

We set our sites high aiming to complete the GOLD route 54 miles in 24hrs.

After a 5.5 hour journey from

Manchester we arrived in Blairegowie, Perthshire at 1930hrs. We then set up camp and went to pick up our numbers and goody bags from the registration tent. Then in to the mess tent we went to feast on plenty of pasta, cake, and of course lot's of brew's (tea and coffee) not the local brew. Then after the safety brief it was off to bed.

0600hrs the alarm clock went off there I lay thinking what have I let myself in for.

0700hrs the first group crossed the start line, at 0740 we were off and across the start we went.

The organisation and planning was extremely well done with hot food at four main check points, also on route they had clay shooting, archery, and an ice cream stands at various locations, the local support was also amazing in one village the locals had set up a gazebo and they were handing out free cake and drinks.

Total that I raised for the ABF is £1,450 Many thanks to everyone who sponsored me.

Now I have a time to beat next year.

Team places are available.



■ WO1 (RSM) Bob Fox and WO2 (SSM) Scoobie Roberts with other RLC RSMs' and the Princess Royal on the formation of the RLC.

Picture: RPCA Archive

RLC 25th Anniversary

| This year marks the 25th Anniversary since of the formation of The Royal Logistic Corps

THE 4th April 1993 was the last day the Royal Pioneer Corps existed as the Royal Logistic Corps was formed on 5th April 1993. This new Corps was the amalgamation of 5 Corps' the RCT, RAOC, RPC, ACC and the Postal & Courier Service Royal Engineers.

23 Group RPC was renamed 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC and the Companies (206 (Long Marston), 187 (Tancred) (Bicester) , 518 (Bicester) and 522 (Kington) were re-named as Squadrons and a new Squadron, 144 HQ Sqn was formed. (521 Coy had already been disbanded in 1991). These Companies over the next few years were all moved to Bicester.

The Corps had served in Bicester in one form or another since 1940 and continued to serve until the disbandment of the Pioneer CEQ in September 2014.

What was Central Volunteer Headquarters RPC with 34 and 68 Companies and 12 PLSU were re-named as 168 Pioneer Regiment RLC(V) and moved to Grantham - this Regiment was disbanded in October 2013.

On 18th April 2018 the RPC held its 25th Anniversary Parade at Brunswick Barracks in

Pirbright.

Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal and Colonel-in-Chief of the RLC, was the guest of honour and inspecting officer and gave an address to the grand parade of 460 troops.

During the parade HRH, The Princess Royal inspected the first rank of troops before issuing stable belts to 36 of the soldiers on parade.

In this special anniversary year, the presentation of the belts symbolically marked the return of the Corps to wearing the uniquely coloured belt that identifies the wearer as a member of The RLC.

You can listen to the Royal address by following the link: <https://youtu.be/iEmqFn9pIBs>

The RLC badge was designed by Sgt RR MacNeillage RAOC in 1991 and is made up of the following:

From the RCT - the outer star

From the RE - the wreath

From the RPC - the crossed axes

From the RAOC - the shield and belt

From the ACC - the motto

The following is the farewell message

from Brig CB Telfer CBE ADC the last Director Pioneers and Labour and Inspector The Royal Pioneer Corps:

I have had the privilege of serving as the last Director and the honour of delivering the Corps into the Royal Logistic Corps on the 5th April 1993.

Now that has been done it is for those who will serve on in the new Corps to uphold the traditions and standards that the old Corps has bequeathed to the new.

I now invite all past members of the Corps to renew and maintain their contacts with colleagues and friends through the Association and the Dinner Clubs now established for the Officers' and the WOs' and Sgts' Messes.

It is more important now than it has ever been that these contacts are not allowed to fade away prematurely.

I send to all Pioneers and their families my very best wishes for the future.

The Colonel In Chief of the Royal Pioneer Corps, HRH The Duke of Gloucester sent a message to all Pioneers, both serving and retired, his personal good wishes for the future.



■ A 24 hours helpline aimed at serving personnel and their families has taken more than 270 calls in its first month.

The service, run by Combat Stress and endorsed by the MOD, connects troops with charity specialists and was launched in late February.

The number – 0800 323 4444 – was announced by Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson alongside extra cash to bolster Armed Forces mental health services by £220 million over the next ten years.

Surgeon General Maj Gen Martin Bricknell said it represented a “deeper partnership” between the charity and the MOD.

Combat Stress Chief Executive Sue French added, “Left untreated, mental health problems can become more complex and have a devastating impact on those with the condition, as well as their loved ones. It is vital that people seek help as soon as they notice a change in their mental health.”

A Combat Stress number set up in 2011 for veterans and their families will continue to operate as normal.

■ TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR has launched the largest veteran recruitment scheme by any Premier League outfit as the club prepares for life in its new stadium.

A total of 50 full and part-time positions will be offered to former Service personnel and successful candidates will take roles as stewards, security staff and hosts at the ground, which is due to open later this year.

It follows the club's partnership with military charity Supporting Forces in a bid to offer more opportunities to ex-soldiers.

Those passing the interview stage will complete a training course, becoming fully qualified in time for the 2018/19 season.

“We are proud to be offering meaningful, long-term employment opportunities to former personnel through our new stadium development scheme,” said Donna-Maria Cullen, executive director at the club.

Sporting Force founder Tommy Lowther added, “After leaving the military, adjusting to civilian life can be challenging. Many veterans are unable to find work and suffer financially.

Working in partnership with Tottenham Hotspur is a brilliant opportunity to give ex-Servicemen and women a new sense of purpose and a feeling of belonging”.

The new ground will be the largest capacity football stadium in London, with seating for 62,062 fans.

To register your interest in a job visit www.sportingforce.org/register

■ THANKS TO all members who supported the Christmas Draw.

This is one of the few areas in which we raise money to keep the Association running. The lucky winners are:

1st Prize £1,000	- T Gould Chichester
2nd Prize £500	- T Jeeves Bury
3rd Prize £200	- G Evans Cannock
4th Prize £100	- M Hudson Halifax
5th Prize £50	- S Stevens South Weald

Pioneer returns to the D-Day beaches

In December 2017 Pioneer WW2 Veteran John Jenkins MBE returns to where he landed on D-Day for the first time



■ John Jenkins

Picture: Supplied

JOHNS JENKINS MBE has never returned to Asnelles, where he landed on June 6, 1944. On Monday, December 4, 2017, the former British NCO was received at the town hall where a tribute was paid him.

At age 98, British veteran John Jenkins returned for the first time to Asnelles, more than seventy-three years after the D-Day. “The chances of life” gave him the opportunity to travel to Normandy but never to Asnelles where he set foot, June 6, 1944, with the second wave of assault.

Sergeant Jenkins supervised twenty-five men in the Royal Pioneer Corps. The mission of the Pioneer Corps was “to set up an ammunition depot on the land to feed the troops.”

On 4 December 2017, John Jenkins received the medal of the D-Day Landing Committee ... and Asnelles Shortbread, “identical to those that the English soldiers dipped in their tea in 1944”.

More about John's story can be found here...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPDPpOYKOSbg>

<http://www.legasee.org.uk/operation-overlord/.../john-jenkins/>

p.s. Will get you the cap badge you served under sent to you John!

Ed note: Gold Beach, was the code name for one of the five areas of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France in the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944, during the Second World War. Gold, the central of the five areas, was located between Port-en-Bessin on the west and La Rivière on the east. High cliffs at the western end of the zone meant that the landings took place on the flat section between Le Hamel and La Rivière,

In the sectors code-named Jig and King. Taking Gold was to be the responsibility of the British Army, with sea transport, mine sweeping, and a naval bombardment force provided by the Royal Navy as well as elements from the Dutch, Polish and other Allied navies. The objectives at Gold were to secure a beachhead, move west to capture Arromanches and establish contact with the American forces at Omaha, capture Bayeux and the small port at Port-en-Bessin, and to link up with the Canadian forces at Juno to the east

Forces attacking Gold faced elements of the German 352nd Inf Division and German 716th Inf Division. About 2,000 men were stationed in the immediate area.

Improvements to fortifications on the coast had been undertaken under the leadership of Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel.



■ Shrouds of the Somme Project

Picture: Supplied

Shrouds of the Somme

The 'Shrouds of the Somme' project brings home the sheer scale of human sacrifice in the battle that came to epitomise the bloodshed of the 1914-18 war – the Battle of the Somme

A MAJOR piece of art, depicting the more than 72,000 Service personnel killed in Britain's bloodiest battle, will form a focal point as the nation

commemorates 100 years since the end of the First World War on 11 November 2018.

The shrouded figures will be laid out in London to represent every name on the Thiepval Memorial. Liz Woodfield, the CWGC's Director of Information and Communications, said. "We are delighted to support Shrouds of the Somme. Our memorial at Thiepval is an awe-inspiring sight. It was designed by the great architect Sir Edwin Lutyens and described as the absolute, ultimate pure monument. Thiepval was the practical and artistic response to the loss of so many men with no known grave in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Each year, tens of thousands of visitors make the pilgrimage to Thiepval. Some come out of curiosity, others to see a particular name, but all depart moved by the experience."

The 'Shrouds of the Somme' project will bring home the sheer scale of human

sacrifice in the battle that came to epitomise the bloodshed of the 1914-18 war – the Battle of the Somme.

Somerset artist Rob Heard has had the painstaking task of making more than 72,000 hand-stitched shrouds, each wrapped around a 12-inch figure, one for each of the Servicemen killed in the Somme but with no known grave.

This unique and thought-provoking project will also give members of the public the opportunity to take part as a plea goes out for relatives of the dead to participate. Shrouds of the Somme is 'Asking the Nation' to search their family archives for pictures and details of those who died during the Battle of the Somme and are commemorated on the largest Commonwealth war memorial in the world: the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in France.

Members of the public will be able to upload their own photographs and stories of these men to the digital archive via the Shrouds of the Somme website at <https://shroudsofthesomme.com>. Speaking as the

Shrouds of the Somme was officially launched, project chairman, Cdre Jake Moores OBE DL, appealed for members of the public to get involved: 'Remembering those thousands who fell as individual men is crucial to honouring their sacrifice – but so little is known about so many of them.'

We are calling out to the nation, asking them to send us photos and stories of those remarkable men – these fathers, husbands, brothers.

Tell us who they were, where they were from, what they did – make them real, give them dignity. Bringing the individual to the forefront of these unimaginable numbers will help the nation to truly understand the scale of the loss of those who gave their all.'

Although Shrouds of the Somme is aimed at creating a visual memorial in the 100th anniversary year of the end of the First World War, it will also act as a rallying point for public donations to military charities still supporting the veterans of today, such as SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity.

To find out more, visit <https://shroudsofthesomme.com>

PAST EVENTS



■ THE 71ST Past and Present Pioneer Officers' Dinner was held in the Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess on Friday 20 October 2017 when 67 Officers' sat down to a wonderful meal. The principal guest was Maj Gen DF Capps CBE, GOC Regional Command.

The evening was organised by Maj Billy Dilkes who received the following letters:

"Dear Billy, Thank you so much for organising a superb Pioneers Officers Dinner Night on Friday at Bicester.

I was honoured to be invited to join you and to have the opportunity to catch up with so many old friends and comrades. It is clear that the Pioneers are still setting the standard and leading the way and I remain exceptionally proud of my association with them. Yours Duncan Capps"

"Dear Billy, Or should I say, perhaps more formally, Dear Earl of Bicester? I just wanted to drop you a line (albeit slightly tardily) to say a massive thank you for taking the time to organise a truly first-rate evening last week.

It was an amazing opportunity to catch up with so many old friends, yourself included, and the craic was mighty.

The number of people who came and the very obvious strength of feeling and friendship is a reflection on a very special Regiment that I'm sure we will all continue to remember very fondly indeed. Hope to see you next year! Yours aye, Lord Comer" Colonel M Comer, Chief of Staff Enabling Command, HQ ARRC.

■ THERE WAS, once again, a good attendance at the Royal Pioneer Corps plot at the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 9 November 2017.

Mr Dusty Bryant and Mr John Kear fronted the plot, unfortunately Prince Harry failed to stop at our plot. In attendance were two of the daughters of Sgt JP Scully GC.

Following the service a large number retired to the Wetherspoons pub in Whitehall for a meal, a drink and a chat.

Tickets are required for the Field of Remembrance, if you wish to attend please contact the RPC Association.

■ THE NORTHAMPTON Branch once again had a very successful Burns Night on 27th January held at the Conservative Club, Billing Road, Northampton.

The haggis was "Killed" by Brig Charles Telfer after being piped into the hall. Unfortunately the disco let us down, he had too much Guinness before the night started and had to be told to leave. This did not affect the atmosphere as it allowed members to have a chat and reminisce. During the evening a large raffle was held with the money raised going into the Branch funds.

■ ARMY NAVY, 165 Pioneers attended the annual Army v Navy game at Twickenham on 5 May 2018. 98 of these travelled from Bicester on a coach and a mini-bus. 34 met up on the Friday night for a catch up and to sample the beers prior to the game on the Saturday morning. After a hearty breakfast and a few more beers it was time to board the transport ready for the bar on the coach to open. Once again this match was a complete sell-out (it sold out in early Nov 17!). Orders for next years march have to be ordered by 1 Oct 18,

Bishop of Lincoln and D-Day Pioneer

On 22 October 2017 the Bishop of Lincoln dedicated a plaque placed in our village church to remember Pte David Cheavins



■ Bayeux Cemetery

Picture: Supplied

DAVID served in 243 Company Pioneer Corps and was killed by a mine during the D Day landings. The aim was to add his plaque to the one remembering his 2 uncles who were both killed in WW1. All 3 were born and bred in the village and as you can imagine this was a heavy hit for a village of what is now 11 houses.

A very good Order of Service was produced which contained a note of the action he was killed in.

For a Corps history point of view, this is just to let you know that he is now formally remembered in St Margaret's Church in Braceby.

(Ed note: Pte David Cheavins (13079430 – date of birth 25 February 1911) enlisted at Nottingham and joined 6 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 16 Jan 41, he is buried at Bayeux War Cemetery Grave Reference XIV.M6)

The following is an extract from the war diary of 243 Company:

3 Jun 44 Embarked and transhipped to the RHINOS they were to

man in operations. The Coy provided 15 crews for KING Beach, 7 crews for MIKE beach and spare crews and administrative staff.

JIG/KING beach – 1st Tide – Lts E V Carlton & E V P Kew and 10 crews and 58 ORs on 10 LSTs

JIG/KING Beach – 2nd Tide – OC, 2IC and 5 crews and 25 ORs in 5 LSTs

LOVE/MIKW Beach – 1st Tide – Lts L C G Gebbett & McKechnie with 7 crews and 5 ORs on 5 DSTs working 7 RHINOS

6 Jun 44 Landed in NORMANDY. Disembarkation hindered by the state of the sea and being dependant on availability of shore room, and safety for landing vehicles which took place at various times. A number of RHINOS were put out of action by standing beach obstacles and mines. Pte Cheavins killed following a mine explosion under a RHINO loaded with ammunition and petrol. Ptes Hunt, Gascoigne, Palmer & Bradford – injured and evacuated. RHINOS proceeded from LSTs to shore fully laden and commenced ferry service between shore and LSTs.



■ Stalag 344, later to be known as Stalag VIII

Pictures: Tony Ryan

Palestinian Pioneers

Tony Ryan visits Stalag VIII and offers his thanks to Mr Sherriff for the decision made by his grandfather RSM Sidney Sherriff

ON Saturday 17th of March I travelled to a place in Poland that a lot of people will not have heard of, Lamsdorf. This is the location of Stalag 344 later to be known as Stalag VIII a prisoner of war camp where Members of the allied forces were held. The reason that I was going is because on that date it will be the 73rd Anniversary of the liberation of the camp. I would like to share something that some of you may or may not find interesting.

The Regimental Sergeant Major of the camp was RSM Sidney Sherriff, he was the senior ranking soldier in the camp and therefore the man in charge of the allied prisoners.

During the war, prisoners would receive comfort parcels from the Red Cross, as it happens there were Prisoners in Stalag 344 who were Palestinian Jews, we all know how the Nazis felt about Jews and true to form they decided that the Palestinian Jews could not receive care parcels as they were meant for British Soldiers. RSM Sherriff made the decision on behalf of all prisoners in the camp that if the Palestinians could

not have their parcels then no prisoner would accept theirs. This decision was backed by every man in the camp despite threats from the German authorities, they stood firm and united and eventually the authorities changed their decision.

The reason that I am sharing this with you is twofold, firstly the Palestinian Jews were members of our beloved Corps they were indeed fellow Pioneers recruited from Palestine. Secondly on Saturday I will have the honour of the company of a Mr Andrew Sherriff and his daughter, the Grandson and Great Granddaughter of RSM Sidney Sherriff.

I will be offering my thanks to Mr Sherriff for the decision made by his Grandfather on behalf of our Pioneer Brothers.

(Ed note: Stalag VIII was initially occupied barracks to house British and French prisoners in World War 1. At this same location there had been a prisoner camp during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. During World War 2 approximately 100,000 prisoners passed through this camp. A new Soviet camp was set up close by.)





■ AN RLC Pioneer CEQ update and dinner for all current serving RLC Pioneers still serving was held at Grantham on 10 Feb 18.

Guests for the dinner were Col D Clouston (Chairman of the RPC Association and last CO of 23 Regt RLC), WO1 (Corps SM) S Owen and Mr Norman Brown Controller of the RPC Association.

WO1 (BdeSM) NK (Oz) Orrell hosted the dinner which was held in the Sergeants' Mess.

During the afternoon an update was given by APC personnel who had travelled from Glasgow this was followed by a question and answer session. This update gave those Pioneers still serving (at the time of the update 88) a brief on their future promotion prospects and future postings.

A quick visit to the bar followed to watch the England v Wales International Rugby match.

48 sat down in the evening to an excellent meal and more importantly excellent company, it was nice to see so many serving Pioneers in one place. Thanks must go to Oz Orrell and Paddy Donaghue for organising such a unique event.

■ THE 39/93 Club met in Aldershot during the weekend 9/11 March, this was supposed to have been organised by Mr Ian Dewsnap but it was obvious his wife Laura had done most of the work!

The only blight on the weekend was the Saturday evening meal in the local Harvester. The meals had been ordered the week before hand and the table booked for 6.00 pm.

After waiting nearly an hour and a quarter for the first meal to arrive five members decided to leave.

Of the first three meals arriving it was noticed that they were cold and dried up, the remaining 22 members then decided to leave, not a good night for the Harvester. Most then went to the local Wetherspoon's where the prices were much cheaper.

A visit to one of Ian's local pubs followed where the landlord very kindly supplied a free buffet.

We had already enjoyed another free buffet while watching the 6 nations rugby in the afternoon.

Well done The Dewsnaps for organising this weekend.

■ NOSTALGIA GROUP this year are once again held their "Get Together" in Skegness on the weekend of 11/12 May 18. The Friday night consisted of a fancy dress and raffle. Following breakfast on the Saturday attenders were free to enjoy the delights of Skegness. Meeting again at 1800 hrs for an evening of more fun and laughter. An auction and name the teddy was held, with entertainment proved and also a buffet = a good night was had by all.

Pioneers tag found on D-Day beach

How a little piece of personal history made its way from the Normandy landing grounds to the family of the Yorkshire soldier who lost it more than 70 years ago



■ Chris Woofenden with a picture of his Pioneer uncle Arthur

Picture: Supplied

A 70 year-old find from the battlegrounds of Normandy has been returned to the family of its original soldier owner in the UK after a remarkable piece of detective work.

Matthieu Bonamy from Sommervieu, Calvados, loves to go out with his metal detector in search of little pieces of history on the local beaches and fields. In 2014, he came across an identification plaque with a name and address from Pontefract, Yorkshire. Intrigued, he began to search for its owner.

The name, A Womack, eventually took him to a newspaper article about a woman who was part of an association which helped old soldiers. He contacted the writer, Chris Woffenden, via Facebook, but there was no reply for some time.

Chris Woofenden with a picture of his

uncle Arthur taken during World War Two

Mr Woffenden told Connexion the rest of the story: "Incredibly, one day my phone fell on the floor and for some reason scrolled on to a message I had received two years earlier, but had not seen until then.

"I have been fascinated by World War Two since I was a child, so imagine my surprise when I noticed this message relating to a find on a battlefield belonging to a family member.

"I immediately contacted Matthieu Bonamy. The plaque turned out to belong to my Uncle Arthur who was stationed at the munitions dump at Creully just after D-Day with the 67th Company of the Pioneer Corps.

"Soldiers were not allowed to carry anything with their address on it in case they were taken prisoner and I have often wondered whether he lost the plaque or



■ Arthurs address tag

Picture: Supplied

whether he dropped it deliberately to get rid of it. I think it must have been for his house keys, but we will never know. I had already traced some of his story during the war and visited Normandy several times, so it was just fantastic that this find should come back to me."

After the war, Mr Womack returned to Pontefract. He died in 1995, aged 83.

Mr Bonamy sent the plaque to Mr Woffenden with coins, buttons and a cap badge he had also found in the area. He says metal detectorists often have a bad name and wishes the regulations in France were the same as in the UK where he says the finder can share the reward with the land owner: "It was very moving to have been able to trace the owner. What I love is to find something and know that the last person who touched it did so more than 60 or 70 years ago and it brings you close to history."

(Ed note: Arthur Womack (10669925) (date of birth 8 January 1912) enlisted into the RASC on 27 Nov 41 and transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 13 May 42. He was later posted to 67 Coy PC and served until 4 Aug 46.)

The following is an extract from the war diary of 67 Coy PC:

16 Jun 44 Landed in NORMANDY and moved to LES PLANCHES near CREULLY
29 Jun 44 Joins 41 Group – working on ammo

Officers:-

Maj P A Leslie – OC

Capt T K Scott – 2IC

Lts Weir, W E G Simmonds, N W Fearnside & J Montgomery

27 Jul 44 HQ moves to NEUF MER

30 Jul 44 HQ moves to BELLEROY

6 sections at 51 FNC ammo dump
3 sections at 230 Petrol Depot
1 section at 122 DID
17 Aug 44 Moved to LE RECULEY
9 Sep 44 Moved to
QUARTREMARE

For the crossing of the Channel, the Company was formed into three parties:-

a. Lieut. N. W. Fearnside, drivers, and loaded transport, consisting of 1 Austin Utility, 1 x 15 cwt., 1 x 3 tonner and 1 motor cycle.

b. Major P. A. Leslie (O.C.), Capt. T. K. Scott (2i/c), Lieut. G. A. Weir, and the C.S.M., with approximately two thirds of the Company.

c. Lieut. W. E. G. Simmonds, Lieut. J. Montgomery with the remainder.

Parties b) and c) landed on 'Nan' beach, Courseulles-sur-Mer, at 0800 hrs. on Sunday 18 June, 1944, D+12, after a quiet crossing in L.C.Is. The landing was wet and was accomplished in spirits which varied directly in proportion to each man's height. The only casualty was one steel helmet, which floated away whilst salvage operations for the owner were in progress.

There was no enemy activity over the beaches and the Company formed up and marched in land to a marshalling area, and later to a disused quarry near Colombiers-sur-Seulles, where the Company established and dug in. This camp was referred to throughout the campaign as 'The Gully', but was always known to a certain portion of the Company as 'Dead Man's Gulch', owing to the inadvertent disinterment of some very dead bodies, believed to be victims of the Germans, whilst digging operations for the establishment of a cookhouse were in progress. The cookhouse

was NOT established at that particular spot, nor was anything else!

Party a, proceeding separately by a longer sea route, were storm bound off the beaches, and after an uncomfortable time through weather and enemy action, joined the main body of the Company in 'The Gully' on 24 June.

The Company was first committed to the preparation of compo sites for Second Army Headquarters, but as operational needs became more urgent, this work gradually diminished and in a few days the whole Company was employed on Ammunitions (50 FMC - CREULLY), working in shifts of four sections around the clock.

About this time, the Company left 21 Group and became administered by 41 Group.

By 6 July the pressure on ammunitions had ceased and 6 sections were employed by the CRE in the forward areas on road construction. On 7 July this party, working in the CHEUX-COLVILLE area, came under direct enemy mortar and shell fire, but were fortunate in escaping with one case of shock. Accompanying personnel (drivers) suffered most, having two killed and one seriously wounded and two 3-ton vehicles put out of action. During the rest of the month, the Company was variously employed on POL, Ammunition, Supplies and helping with the construction of a Rest Camp at ST AUBIN-SUR-MER.

HQ moved to NEUF-MER on 27 July, to the proposed site of 51 F.M.C. This installation, however, was not set up, and on 30 July the Company moved from its various locations to BALLEROY-52 FMC and was wholly employed on the installations. As a sideline, H.Q. staff doused fire-bombs in the woods at night!



FUTURE EVENTS

2018 - 2019

ARMY v NAVY RUGBY MATCH – 5 MAY 2018

■ The WOs & SNCOs Reunion Club are, once again, organising tickets (and a coach from Bicester) for this event. It is again been agreed that all members of the Association can apply for tickets. However we must have your request as soon as possible as last year Twickenham was sold out by early November.

NOSTALGIA GROUP MEETING – 11/13 MAY 2018

■ The Nostalgia Group are to hold a meet in Skegness on the weekend of 11/13 May 2018. Further details can be obtained from Allan Sutcliffe on 01287 654850.

SHERRINGHAM JOLLY – 1 – 3 JUNE 2018

■ Following the success of the 2016 Sherringham Jolly, Mr Peter Wegg is organising another for 2018. The itinerary for the weekend is as follows:

Fri 1 Jun – arrive at the Breck Farm campsite (you can book in advance on 01263 588236 – the postcode is NR25 6QL) from 1400 hrs onwards. Report to reception on arrival and you will be pointed to “Camp Chunk”. Personnel not camping and who intend to come to the evening BBQ please use JMX Taxis (01263 820000) who have a special price for Pioneers – the magic word is “Pioneers”

Sat 2 Jun – Meet at the town memorial at 1055 hrs for laying of wreaths. Blazers, ties and medals etc please. The remainder of the day is for you to enjoy the delights of Sherringham.

Sat evening – Jolly buffet at the Tyneside Club from 1900 hrs, casual wear for the evening. It is intended to hold a raffle in aid of the RPC Association (£230 was raised in 2016)

Sun 3 Jun – for those camping pack up and maybe enjoy a good breakfast in town before heading home.

PIONEER REUNION WEEKEND – 15/18 JUNE 2018

■ The Reunion Weekend is, once again, to be held at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry from 15/18 June 2018. The provisional programme for the weekend is as follows:

Thurs 14 Jun 18 – nothing planned just a chat and a beer in the lower bar (or outside if weather favourable)

Fri 15 Jun 18 – arrival (after 1400 hrs) – coffee available in foyer from 1600 hrs
Association shop open until 1800 hrs
Association Council Meeting (Council Members only) 1900 hrs

Dinner with entertainment from the “Dreamettes” together with a disco. During the dinner a raffle will be held – raffle prizes will be very much appreciated.

Sat 15 Jun 18

Breakfast

0930 hrs – coach departs for National Memorial Arboretum

1000 hrs – for those not travelling to NMA a mini-bus will do a shuttle service to Wellesbourne Market

1130 hrs – at the NMA short service to be held in the Logistic Grove – after a short march

1330 hrs – depart NMA for Royal British Legion Alrewas for finger buffet

1700 hrs – depart RBL Club to return to hotel

1930 hrs – gala dinner with entertainment from “New Vintage Plus” together with Disco. During the dinner an auction will be held, items for auction will be appreciated. Please bid high!

Sun 16 Jun 18

Breakfast

1000 hrs – RPC Association Annual General Meeting – points for the agenda should be sent to RPC Association by 1 June 2018

1045 hrs – Annual General Meeting of WOs’ & SNCOs’ Pioneer Reunion Club (Members only)

1100 hrs – A mini-bus will do a shuttle service to Coventry City Centre – last mini-bus returning at 1600 hrs

1930 hrs – dinner with entertainment from “Out of Order” with disco.

Monday 17 Jun 18

Breakfast and then depart

WOs’ & SNCOs’ PIONEER REUNION CLUB 11 AUGUST 2018

■ The Club is to hold a Ladies Dinner Night in the WOs’ & Sgfts’ Mess, St George’s Barracks, Arncott, Bicester on Saturday 11 August 2018. Members wishing to attend should contact Association Secretary.

OFFICERS PAST AND PRESENT DINNER - 19 OCTOBER 2018

■ The 72nd Past and Present Pioneer Officers’ Dinner is to be held on Friday 19 October 2018 in the Bicester Garrison Officers’ Mess, Ambrosden, Bicester.

Officers’ wishing to attend should contact the Association Secretary (royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)

FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE - 8TH NOVEMBER 2018

■ The Field of Remembrance will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 8 November 2018.

If anyone would like a cross or wreath placed on the RPC plot on their behalf they should contact the Association by 1 Aug 18.

Tickets are now required for this event and these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association. As has become practise we will hold a London Lunch immediately after the Field of Remembrance, this year it will be held

at the Lord Moon of the Mall which is just below Trafalgar Square in Whitehall.

CENOTAPH PARADE - 11 NOVEMBER 2018

■ The Cenotaph Parade is to be held at Whitehall on Sunday 11 November 1918. Last year we had 97 members march in the RPC Contingent. At the time of going to press we already have 95 names of members who have indicated that they wish to march.

Members are reminded that they must be on Horse Guards by 1010 hrs. The Northampton Branch of the Association will once again be running mini-buses to the event, if you wish to travel with them please inform RPC Association.

Following the Parade we will meet in the Civil Service Club, Old Scotland Yard, Whitehall for a chat and a beer.

NORTHERN IRELAND VETERANS ASSOCIATION – Op BANNER 50TH ANNIVERSARY PARADE - 17 AUGUST 2019

■ August 2019 will be the 50th anniversary of British military forces being deployed in the province on Operation Banner.

Please be advised that a Northern Ireland Veterans Association sponsored event is in the planning stage to commemorate this on Saturday, 17th August 2019. The venue for this parade will be Lisburn, Northern Ireland and all are welcome to attend as are Regimental/Corps Standards and Banners.

Unit seniority on the parade and march has yet to be agreed although it is expected that the largest contingents are bound to be those of the RUC and UDR/RIR veterans and each unit will no doubt want to have their standard leading their contingent. However, regardless of anyone, the NIVA standard will lead the parade.

Please get the word out to friends, Facebook groups and your various Regimental Associations. Although this is still some time away, the earlier we can get the word out, the better. Further details will be circulated nearer the time so please keep in touch with the NIVA website.



Nearly a ton at Cenotaph

We were three short of hitting 100 marchers in the Royal Pioneer Corps contingent at the Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall on 12 November 2017

WE were three short of hitting 100 marchers in the Royal Pioneer Corps contingent at the Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall last November.

We did have, however, ex Pioneers marching in other contingents i.e. Aden Veterans and The Not Forgotten Association so we probably did have 100 Pioneers marching. We also had a good mention on the BBC with Heather Wood, Dusty Bryant and Glen Lath all being interviewed.

The Pioneer contingent was led, once again, by Brig CB Telfer and this year most kept in step for most of the Parade (there is always one exception isn't there Paddy McPhillips!). The Pioneer wreath was laid by Glen Lath.

Dusty was lucky to attend as someone forgot him in Northampton and the two mini-buses left without him! Who could forget Dusty!! A quick telephone call and the mini buses pulled into the services just before junction 15 of the M1 and Dusty's wife enabled him to catch up.

After the Parade a large proportion once again visited the Civil Service Club in Old

Scotland Yard to talk about old times but specifically to remember colleagues who are no longer with us.

At the time of going to press we have already received 97 applications to march this year so we are finally confident on hitting a century! If you have not yet submitted your details please do so as soon as possible. I can remember in the 90's when we only had 6 march, how times have changed.

This year, there's a maximum of 10,000 places available which will be allocated through relevant veteran associations. However if you wish to attend as a spectator, the following points should be noted:

Starting at 11am, the service will commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women involved in the two World Wars and later conflicts.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) is the coordinator of the event, alongside colleagues from across government, the Armed Forces and veterans' organisations.

No tickets or passes are needed for the event and the public are welcome to watch the ceremony from the pavements along Whitehall and Parliament Street. There will be video screens north of the Cenotaph, near the green outside the main Ministry of Defence building and mounted outside the Scotland Office and south of the Cenotaph on the corner of King Charles Street. If you are thinking of attending the commemorations in London, please note the schedule of the event below:

Attending and taking part

08:00: Whitehall opens to the public. The public are advised to arrive early to secure a good view, as space is limited. Please allow time to clear the police security procedures and you are advised not to bring suitcases or large bags.

09:00: Royal British Legion (RBL) detachments form up on Horse Guards Parade and in Whitehall.

10:00: All detachments march out from Wellington Barracks.

11:00: Two minutes silence marked by the firing of guns from King's Troop on Horse Guards Parade. Cenotaph Service commences.

11:25: Cenotaph Service concludes and Royal British Legion detachments disperse past the Cenotaph.

Extensive police security procedures will be in place on the day. Please allow plenty of time for clearance through security. We advise against bringing large bags or cases as these could delay your entrance into the public viewing areas.

Please note that the unauthorised use of any drones (including quadcopters/helicopters) in this area and the roads surrounding Whitehall is strictly prohibited at all times.

Photography is permitted, but the Metropolitan Police have powers to remove obstacles (such as camera tripods) where they obstruct public access or views.

A space will be available for wheelchair users and other spectators who might find it difficult to view from the general public areas. This area is located on the west side of Parliament Street, close to the junction with King Charles Street.

Space in this enclosure will be offered on a first come, first served, basis only. Temporary public toilets will be located in Whitehall Place. First aid facilities, provided by St John's Ambulance, will be available at various locations along Whitehall, whilst their personnel will also be patrolling the area.

Please note that due to the number of people likely to attend, it may be difficult for you to leave Whitehall before the end of the RBL march past.

If you do not wish to stay for the march past, we recommend that you position yourself close to an exit point.

Pictures: Paul Brown / Tracy Brown



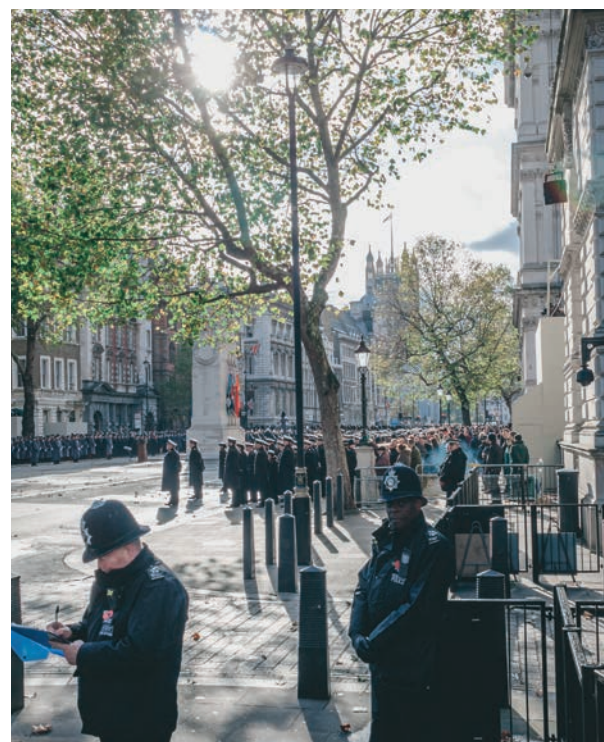


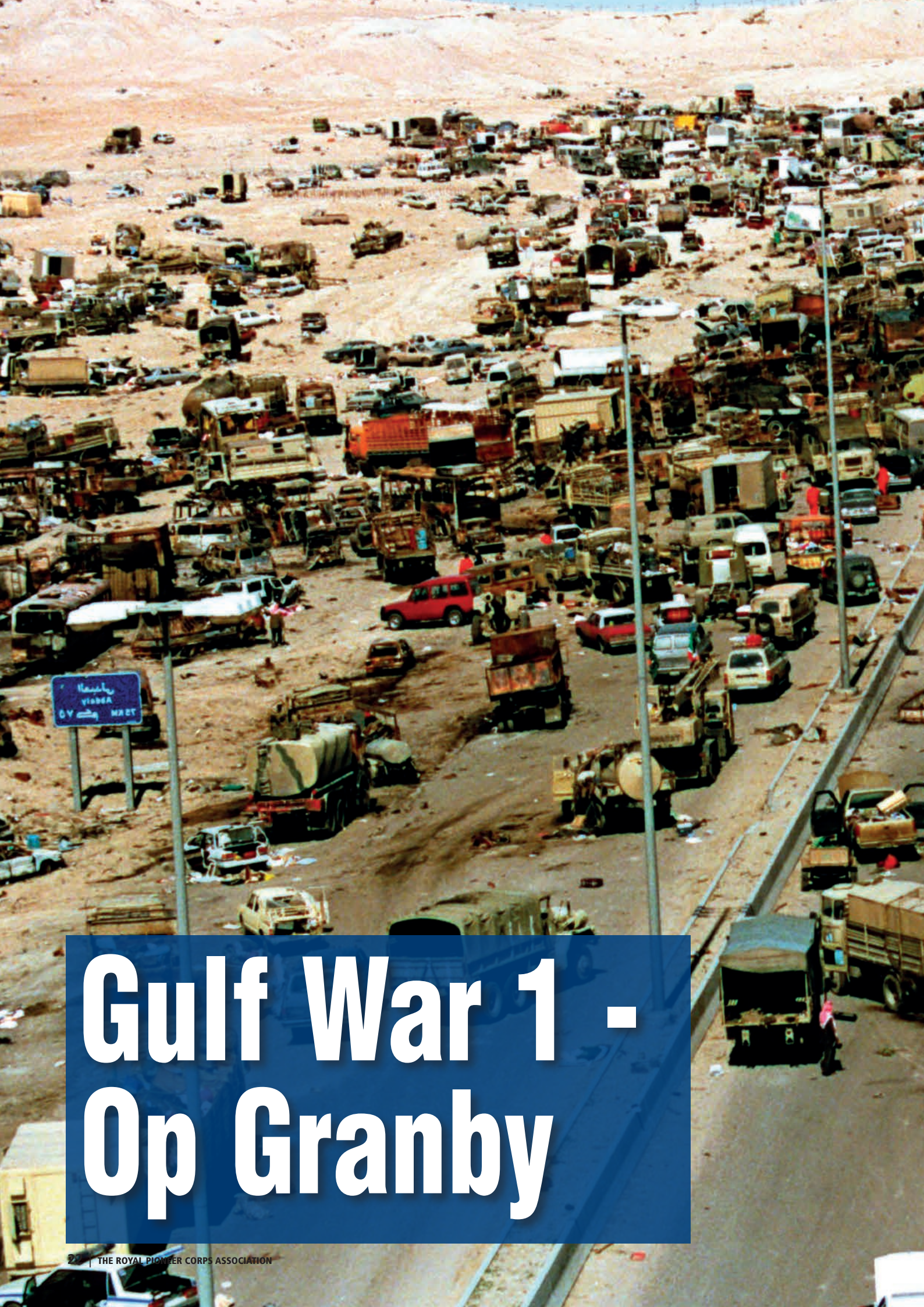












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Gulf War 1 - Op Granby



DAILY Mirror
Newspaper for the British
Thursday January 17 1991

600 jets attack Saddam

WAR

2am NEWS FLASH



Bombers hit Baghdad in Operation Desert Storm

WAR jets hit Baghdad at night in a massive attack on Iraq's capital. 600 jets were also involved in raids on Baghdad and Kuwait.

ALL OTHERS: America launched its sophisticated and precise strikes for a devastating attack on Iraq last night. 600 jets were also involved in raids on Baghdad and Kuwait.

THE B-52 STRATEGIC BOMBER WAS THE HEAVIEST OF THE AIR FORCE'S STRATEGIC BOMBER FLEET. IT WAS THE FIRST BOMBER TO BE DESIGNED AND BUILT IN THE 1940s. IT WAS THE FIRST BOMBER TO BE DESIGNED AND BUILT IN THE 1940s. IT WAS THE FIRST BOMBER TO BE DESIGNED AND BUILT IN THE 1940s.

Turn to Page 7

In previous issues of The Pioneer we have published details of the Corps' exploits in World War 2, the Suez Crisis and the Falklands War, the last major Operation before the Corps was amalgamated into the RLC was the First Gulf War (Op Granby)

IN previous issues of *The Pioneer* we have published details of the Corps' exploits in World War 2, the Suez Crisis and the Falklands War, the last major Operation before the Corps was amalgamated into the RLC was the First Gulf War (Op Granby). This first report was written by Lt Col MC Le Masurier and published in the *The Royal Pioneer Spring 1991* edition. We shall feature at the end of this report, various other reports that you may find of interest.

The RPC participation in Op Granby began on 3 October 1990 when a platoon of 518 Company RPC commanded by 2Lt Hold – six weeks out of RMAS – arrived in Al Jubayl as part of the Activation Party. Their first task was to assist 39 Engineer Regiment with the erection of a tented camp, later to be named Baldrick Lines. They were the first Granby Pioneers, by the end of the war there were many more.

The Platoon from 518 Company was followed within the week by the Force Maintenance Area (FMA) Pre Advance Party which included 518's recce party commanded by Maj Code (OC 518 Company) and also Lt Col Le Masurier from BAOR who assumed the appointment of SO1 (Labour Resource) at HQ FMA. Within the next few days the remainder of 518 Company arrived, accompanied by a second Pioneer unit, 908 PLSU. After a few days' living in Shed 13, a warehouse on a hot and sweaty pier, the Company and the PLSU moved lock, stock and barrel into Baldrick Lines, at this stage unfinished.

518 Company remained based on Baldrick Lines in support of the FMA until January 1991. Their first task was to complete the camp, not just by putting up tents, but also assisting the Sappers by providing carpenters and plumbers. Until the end of October most tasks were in support of the reception of 7 Armoured Brigade from BAOR and the establishment of the FMA. They included stores handling for 62 Ordnance Company, artisan support to the Engineer Park, escorts from the airhead to the port and local security. The most important task began on 28 October when a Platoon from 518 Company took over from a Company of the US Marine Corps and assumed responsibility for the defence of Ammunition Supply Point 2 (ASP 2) in support of 53 Ordnance Company. This delightful spot had been known to the Marines as Hell Camp 2, although with time, and the construction of better accommodation, the Pioneers came, if not to love it, certainly to tolerate it.

At the beginning of November, 7 Armoured Brigade deployed into the desert to carry out work up training. A small tactical HQ and three platoons of 518 Company went with them. From the Brigade Maintenance Area they helped with the construction and security of the brigade supply area, a bulk fuel installation, water point and breaking bulk for the brigade transport regiment. Other tasks included providing chemical documentation teams for the dressing stations and delivering engines and major assemblies from armoured regiment to the medium repair group. By mid November the brigade was declared operational, 518 Company returned to

Baldrick Lines and for the remainder of the month was tasked from Al Jubayl.

With the arrival of 1st Armoured Division from BAOR between December 1990 and January 1991, a second Pioneer Company – 187 (Tancred) Company, was sent to the Gulf, and arrived in Al Jubayl in January. They took over FMA tasks from 518 Company and initially deployed two platoons to ASP 2 on 4 January; one platoon for the ongoing security tasks, the second to fuse and palletize artillery ammunition.

518 Company, after a few days' rest, came under command of 1st Armoured Division, and deployed into the field with them on 9 January. The Divisional Administrative Area was initially in a quarry some 70 kilometres north of Al Jubayl and then moved up north of the tapline road which runs parallel with the southern border of Kuwait. The Company's main tasks here were to support the dressing stations and protect the Divisional Supply Area; a platoon provided artisan support to 45 Field Support Squadron and three platoons returned to the Al Jubayl area in order to help 62 Ordnance Company sort and distribute the immense quantity of stores of all descriptions arriving in the theatre.

On 24 February 1991, the land battle commenced, shortly thereafter 1st Armoured Division moved north into Iraq through a breach constructed by 1st (US) Infantry Division and on the 26 February the Pioneers of 518 Company followed them. The progress of the war is now history and by the end of it 518 Company were with the remainder of 1st Armoured Division to the north of Kuwait City.

The remainder of 187 Company under Maj Langford, meanwhile, were not left long in the dubious comfort of Baldrick Lines. In early January FMA deployed a forward element, FFMA, some 300 kilometres north to control logistic units and stocks just south of the tapline road in order to shorten the supply loop. This was a true field location, dug in and surrounded by earth berms in the middle of a vast, flat gravel desert. The headquarters was administered by HQ 187 Company and guarded by the majority of a Pioneer platoon, reinforced by a further 11 Pioneers from Admin Company. The remaining platoons were detached, one to guard the two bulk fuel installations of the forward stocks, the other the newly established ASP 3. To give an indication of the size of this task, ASP 3 was four kilometres square and consisted of ammunition stacked in the open, approximately 200 metres between stacks. To the casual observer it appeared like a vast field of misshapen mushrooms as far as the eye could see. A considerable task for a young sergeant.

The second Pioneer unit to arrive, back in October, was 908 PLSU, commanded by Maj Wykes. The unit's predecessor, 908 PCLU, had departed Bahrain in 1969, and since then all Labour Resource experience had been in BAOR. In September, the PLSU was hastily constituted on the basis of SOPs of the old 908 PCLU, plus to date information gleaned from commercial firms working in the area. It was formed from various BAOR and UK units, trained at Sennelager and arrived in Al Jubayl nine strong.

Once a requirement for civil labour had been confirmed the PLSU set about





recruiting. In Saudi Arabia there is no equivalent of the labour exchange. Workers are Third Country Nationals (TCN) immigrant contract workers, at this time primarily from the Indian sub-continent. The contractors hire camps from the Saudi Authorities, in this case the Royal Commission and are responsible for the housing and feeding of their workers. The PLSU's task was to establish the labour requirement, locate and haggle with the contractors and deliver the labour daily to its place of work. In the early stages labour was scarce and relatively expensive. As time went on – and the PLSU became more adept at haggling – it became more available and cheaper.

By the end of the war 908 PLSU had expanded to a staff of 15, by using RPC in theatre reserves, and was employing some 600 civilians. The majority were labourers, but there were also drivers and clerks, translators and mechanics, carpenters, electricians and even a desert navigation instructor. Two hundred labourers were employed as a labour pool, formed into platoons and supervised by one or two young Pioneer Junior NCOs or private soldiers, and tasked daily. The high point of their week was undoubtedly the weekly muster parade conducted by Capt Pratchek and WO2 Les Jones. Men wandered about, sat down, chatted to their friends or were cuffed into line by their superintendents. It was a truly wondrous sight to behold, though it would probably have caused a

Guards RSM apoplexy.

As a result of the 1982 Falklands War the RPC was given responsibility for the recovery of the remains of British military war dead. Since then much of the work has been done and an Army War Graves Service (AWGS) formed and officers and men trained to form a pool of qualified manpower. In early January, three Graves Registration Teams (GRT) were tasked and arrived under command of Maj Jones. Two were located at Al Jubayl, the third at Riyadh. In late January a fourth team was added.

Very shortly before hostilities started the AWGS was almost doubled in size overnight by the addition of in theatre reserves, RPC and otherwise. All volunteers were recruited by Capt Ralph. Maj Jones and a reduced team remained at HQ BFME in Riyadh, the remainder, now some 70 strong, deployed to 1st (UK) Armoured Division under Capt Ralph on 24 February. Throughout the course of the land battle they remained with the Division, recovering the remains of British fatalities for return to Al Jubayl and subsequent repatriation, and burying Iraqi dead.

Apart from these units there was a number of other Pioneers deployed to the Gulf. The 1st Armoured Division Signal Regiment provided a 21 man defence platoon for 7 Armoured Brigade and HQ 1 (BR) Corps Defence Company, 11 men for the Brigade Admin Company. Other individuals played a part – Lieutenant

Colonel Hill was SO1 (GS) at HQ FMA, Maj Milne SO2 (P&L) at HQ BFME in Riyadh, Sgt Dave Chambers, an NBC Instructor while Lts Bye and Johnson kept watch at Headquarters 1st Division. By the end of the war there were over 400 Pioneers in the Gulf theatre, a significant number for such a small Corps.

THE WAR GRAVES SERVICE (Middle East)
(The following articles appeared in the Spring 1991 and Autumn editions of The Royal Pioneer)

1. By Maj IE Jones

The title of our organisation sounds very sombre, however, we must all remember that we are at war and inevitably there are casualties. Thankfully, so far, we have not had too many fatalities. But they do happen and our services have been called upon to carry out the duties normally associated with the coroners department and that of contracted undertakers. Our four teams have dealt with most of the fatalities encountered in theatre, including air crash victims, Road Traffic Accidents, accidental deaths and those who have died of 'natural causes'.

One aspect that most people do not realise is that our small group is responsible for dealing with British fatalities throughout the region (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Muscat) and no doubt as things develop may be much further afield.

Our teams are spread throughout the theatre of operations and are very well self

contained. They are a close knit community where everyone from the team leader to the most junior member have to be able to rely upon each other in this quite difficult task. Like most other things it is quite apparent that the Pioneers have mastered yet another skill and there is much praise and high regard for the teams from all who have dealt with them.

The officers, NCOS and other ranks associated with this task can be justly proud of their role in "Operation Granby". They have carried out tasks which have sometimes required them to travel hundreds of kilometres across the wastelands and deserts of Saudi Arabia, in order to repatriate those who have died while on active service. The fact that we have been able to return the casualties to their families while we are still in hostilities, is a first in British military history. We are doing this not for ourselves, but for those families left behind. Let us all hope that we do not have too much work to do in the next few months.

All members of the War Graves Service send their regards to all Pioneers and their families worldwide, and to those friends who have shown us all so much kindness since we came out to Saudi Arabia.

2. Maj IE Jones

In the Spring 1991 edition of The Royal Pioneer I outlined the background of the War Graves Service (Middle East) and its

responsibilities. Well, as you all know Op Granby is now over, and the number of UK casualties were fairly small.

During the hectic 100 hour war we were kept busy with our advanced elements of the AWGS under the command of Capt PJD Ralph moving with 1 (UK) Division and its forward elements. By the end of the fighting our teams were spread out over a distance of some 600 kilometres with elements in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait.

I will not go into details of what we were required to do, but I will say briefly how the organisation worked. The War Graves Service was composed by members of the Royal Navy/Royal Fleet Auxiliary, Army and Royal Air Force personnel who were trained, at very short notice, in casualty handling. Teams were based with all major airfields, naval groups and especially in support of 1 (UK) Armoured Division. The AWGS was by far the largest of these organisations.

Initially we deployed with three specialist sections to the Gulf around Christmas and the New Year. They were later joined by a fourth section from UK/BAOR. As things developed it was considered prudent to have a few more personnel "just in case". Capt Ralph and his recruitment team managed to acquire an amazing number of volunteers from the In Theatre reservists in the Gulf. After a short period of intensive training the AWGS became a mini-company which acquired kit and vehicles from all

sorts of unlikely places! Altogether, six cap badges worked together on this task (RPC, RE, RSigs, RMP, ACC and Scots Guards). Their tasks ranged from clearing up enemy positions and the now famous Basra Road – which was recently shown on TV, to the recovery of UK and Allied war dead from the battlefield for preparation and repatriation to their own countries.

We had problems with command, control, communications, plus vast distances and adverse weather conditions to contend with. I was amazed to find that SSgt Driver and his small team managed to move the first batch of UK bodies to our facility in Al Jubayl within 24 hours from the middle of the desert, 'somewhere in the Middle East'.

Most people will have learnt from the media that the number of UK dead was small some 25 plus another 19 who died or were in road accidents etc, prior to the ground war beginning. We repatriated the bodies to the UK on two special C130 Hercules flights which were arranged by the RAF. I accompanied both flights on behalf of HM Coroner for Oxfordshire as the person responsible for formal identification. This was the end of a three month task for most of us where no one really could have foreseen the eventual outcome. There are too many names for me to mention in the article but for all those who served with me in the ad hoc organisation, I have the

highest admiration and am pleased to have worked with your all. We did this not for ourselves but for the families who lost their sons or husbands. Although this was a 'low profile' and unglamorous task, all those members of the three services who took part in the War Graves Service can be justifiably proud of their small contribution to the success of Operation Granby.

3. Pte McCourt (187 Coy)

I started training for the AWGS on 6 November 1990. We did most of our training at Yardley Chase where we were shown how to recover remains. LCpl Hulls was part of the training team, and was also sent out to the Gulf on the advance party. The other members of the team were LCpl Sellstrom, Pte Wakelin and myself.

We were told to report to 522 Company at Kineton on 2 January 1991. We departed RAF Brize Norton on 4 January and landed at Al Jubayl where we split into two teams, one going to Riyadh, and mine staying at Al Jubayl.

At Camp 4, which was originally built for

oil workers, we did a variety of work, from guard duties to carpentry. 518 Company built some morgue benches but they were a bit too big, so we had to demolish them and build ones which were smaller in width but with an extra bench on top,

We were detailed to work in teams, with each team doing 24 hours on standby at a time. Sometimes we had a couple of teams out at one time, attending road traffic accidents on the MSR.

We made a few contacts at the American military hospital in Dharhan. If we needed extra kit they tried to get it for us, sometimes at short notice.

Then came the big day. We moved out of Camp 4 and joined up with the main battle group somewhere in the desert south of the Iraqi border.

We arrived at the Divisional Admin area – somewhere in Iraq which became our base. We were detailed to go and work on the Basra highway and spent about three days clearing bodies from vehicles and the surrounding area. The worst thing about it

was the civilians just helping themselves to AK47s and any other weapons which were lying around, including RPGs and mortars. I was more scared of them than any Iraqi soldier because at least the Iraqis had some form of training.

I think the best day of our tour was the day we drove through Kuwait where we were stopped and searched for any contraband. SSgt Troop, who had all the souvenirs but no contraband in the back of the Rover, told them we had nothing to declare, and got through.

Back in Camp 4 it was back to life as usual, cleaning vehicles and sorting our kit, waiting for our flight home. The AWGS phrase – 'Did Capt Ralph confirm our flight home?' – became part of any conversation. Never mind, we made it, so obviously, he did.

I would just like to say to everyone in the AWGS, including the lads from Scots Guards, RAMC, RMP, RSigs and RE, we made a great team but I hope we never have to do it again.

4. Capt PJD Ralph

How many times have you heard the saying, "Give us the tools and we'll do the job"? In true Pioneer fashion the Army War Graves Teams did the job. Without all the tools but with a great deal of initiative, scrounging, and by far the most important, a tremendous sense of humour.

You may be forgiven for asking what job we did. You may even be forgiven for asking who we are anyway, most people do not seem to have heard of the AWGS.

The AWGS came about as a result of the work that had been done in the Falklands by Maj Robb and his team when they were tasked to repatriate the bodies of fallen British servicemen to UK or to bury them in the military cemetery in the Falklands. As a result of this work, the Corps was tasked to produce Graves Registration Teams for any future conflicts. A limited amount of training was done at Northampton but unfortunately the full equipment required for the teams was not forthcoming, due to financial constraints.

As more and more troops were earmarked for deployment to the Gulf, efforts were made to prepare the way for the possible deployment of the AWGS but to no avail. There were more important things to worry about. Nothing was done until November when Maj Jones (522 Company) and Capt Ralph (521 Company) were sent out on a recce for ten days. Capt

Ralph was then told to return to UK and deploy with one team, fully equipped, three days later! It's good to see that even as the prospect of war loomed ever closer staff officers could still crack a good joke.

Fortunately, virtually between the time of stepping on the plane to return to UK and stepping off in UK, things had changed. Deployment was delayed until 18 December. This gave us a fighting chance to get a minimum of kit together, at least to get us started. As it turned out, due to the efforts of the QM, Maj Paterson and his staff in 23 Group, almost all the kit we thought we would need for three teams was provided.

The first team flew out of RAF Lyneham in a Hercules on 18 December with their kit and soon settled into the relative luxury of Camp 4 at Al Jubayl.

It was not long before we were called upon to deal with our first casualty. An officer had died in a road accident some 800 kilometres away from Al Jubayl. At first it was suggested that we drive to the locations. Since we did not have suitable vehicles the RCT was going to provide a 14 tonner. We would have to carry all our own fuel and be totally self contained for the journey! Fortunately, the sight of Capt Ralph tearing his hair out had the desired effect and a Hercules was provided to take us to Riyadh. We would then travel by road to pick up the body and return it to Riyadh

for repatriation to UK.

After numerous cups of tea in the local police station and again in the hospital, we took possession of the casualty and he was duly repatriated to UK. Unfortunately, he was the first of too many. We were to become quite used to picking up casualties from hospitals or dressing stations over the next few weeks.

Just prior to the land war starting all our cunning plans were thrown in the bin. We were told that we would be advancing through Iraq. There would be no opportunity to recover bodies after hostilities, therefore we would have to evacuate the dead immediately. It was obvious that in order to do this we would need more men. We were reinforced by some 40 plus in theatre reserves (ITRs). We were given another 16 vehicles and five days to train the reinforcements, paint the new vehicles, equip the new team formed and go to war. But we made it. True, some of the vehicles were not in a very good state, but we were going into battle and they were battleworthy. We were also short of some equipment but we had weapons with which to protect ourselves and we could always improvise the rest.

The last few days before we deployed were hectic. People rushing around painting vehicles, collecting kit, packing vehicles, unpacking vehicles, repacking vehicles as every last inch of space was taken up – and

then wondering where we could fit in. Eventually we were ready and were warned for deployment on 24 February, to be in position when the land battle started. We awoke on that morning to find that they'd started without us! We drove to the assembly area along the tapline road. There was a constant stream of traffic in both directions, both on the ground and in the air. Articulated lorries were carrying everything from water to artillery shells at ground level, helicopters at 300 feet were following the rules of the road and C130's at 800 feet were driving up the right hand side of the road and returning down the left, (yes, in Saudi they drive on the wrong side of the road!).

After a certain amount of difficulty in locating our units, most teams married up with their formations by the end of the night and started the long move that was eventually to lead us right into Kuwait. Due to the rapid advance of the coalition forces things became a little confused. "Get on the wagon, get off the wagon", reigned

supreme.

The team attached to 4 Brigade soon found themselves very busy dealing with the casualties which resulted from the 'blue on blue' contact that received so much publicity. They had to cope with these casualties virtually on the move and eventually, called in a helicopter to transfer them to the reefer section which was based at Al Qasumah.

After the conflict, most teams were quite busy dealing with Iraqi casualties, particularly along the Basra Road where a fleeing convoy had been caught by the American forces and totally destroyed. I'm sure the sights had a profound effect on a lot of people. It was then decided that Iraqi casualties should be left for the Iraqis or Kuwaitis to recover unless there were operational or hygiene reasons that necessitated our involvement. Thus it was decided that one team should remain in Kuwait and the remainder should return to Al Jubayl and the luxury of Camp 4..

Capt Messenger remained behind with

his team. Rather than sit around doing nothing they continued to clear casualties from various areas. In this they were assisted by Padre Geoff Sussex who managed to terrify all and sundry with his rather unique style of driving!

The return to Saudi Arabia was fairly uneventful. It was interesting to see all the oil wells set alight by Saddam Hussein's troops but less pleasant to see the brown stains on the windscreen and realise that we were breathing that pollution into our lungs. The attitude of the customs officials was extremely annoying, as they unceremoniously removed some of the souvenirs we had collected. On route we passed through the town of Khafji which still bore the marks of the brief occupation by Iraqi troops and the battle to liberate it.

After arriving at Camp 4 we started to dismantle all the racking that had been constructed prior to the battle, to hand back vehicles and kit and prepare for the move back to our respective units in UK and BAOR. There was, however, one final,





very important job to be done. The International Red Cross had negotiated with the Iraqi authorities the release of the bodies of those who had died behind enemy lines, either aircrew who had been shot down or Special Forces who had been killed.

A team commanded by Capt Ralph went down to Dharhan airbase and collected the remaining eight bodies after all the formalities had been completed. These bodies were brought back to Al Jubayl and the following day were flown to UK by the RAF. Watching the television news we saw their arrival at RAF Brize Norton. We then knew that despite the unpleasant nature of our job it was all worthwhile. We had returned the bodies of all those who had died in the name of freedom.

908 PLSU Maj MJ Wykes, Capt NDS Pratchek, WO2 LJ Jones, SSgt BE Hynard, SSgt ME Smith, Sgt J Prescott, Cpl M Cowell, LCpl J Abercrombie, Pte ST Smalley

WHO? You may well ask. 908 PCLU was reformed on 5 October 1990, which was the day of German reunification, to tackle the many civil labour problems that were inevitably to arise during Op Granby. The unit was originally known in the dim and distant past as 908 PCLU who were located in Bahrain.

During the build-up, prior to deployment to the Gulf, we spent an early two weeks running all over BAOR and carrying out multiple raids on Unit QMs Stores. In the main we had to beg, steal and borrow all our stores and equipment. This means that we owe a big thank you to all those units that helped us out, but does not mean that we are going to sign any 1033s....

Our stay in Minden was very pleasant except that we spent the majority of the time on military training, which included NBC< First Aid, Weapon Handling, Fitness training as well as how we envisaged the PLSU being organised. We also spent some considerable time going through the skills of Desert Navigation which consisted of Maj Wykes going through trips down Memory Lane and explaining how to keep direction and drive in a desert environment. It is a pity really, because we now live in a large car park.

Our deployment to Saudi Arabia, affectionately known as Sunny Saudi, was by courtesy of a C130 laid on just for the boys by the RCT. This is not the most luxurious mode of travel but when one has to rely on the RAF one cannot be too particular. We flew from Gutersloh at Al Jabel via Akrotiri, which was a long old haul as they say.

During the flight the in house entertainment was nil but we did have to keep a close eye on Maj Wykes who suffered severely with flashbacks to previous life. For some reason he kept insisting on trying to jump from the plane and we had to patiently explain that he is now a Pioneer and not a Para, on top of which we had no parachutes.

Upon arrival the view of Saudi was breath-taking and the sweat flowed freely, except for the officers who barely perspired. We were then escorted to what may be our home for some considerable time. We have all decided that when we return to our parent units, we will be selling all our

property and taking up residence in the local multi-storey car park, as this is where we were accommodated. Accommodation is in the form of a 12 by 12 tent and air conditioning is an optional extra as the flaps can be left open during the day. This helps to air the bedding. It must be said that the resources when we first arrived were meagre to say the least. But in our midst we have a budding tycoon, LCpl Abercrombie who has managed to make life that little bit more comfortable. It is rumoured that in the near future we may be moving into a more solid form of accommodation, but we are concerned that we will not be able to adjust to civilization.

As you are probably aware there is no alcohol allowed in Saudi Arabia which means that the officers will not be able to scrounge drinks from the Sergeants Mess this year. But all those out there who wish to contribute to our home coming, are welcome to forward any invitations for a good booze up.

Those of a religious persuasion will be happy to note that the local Ayatollah wakes up each morning at 0400 hours when he says his prayers on top of the mosque through a megaphone!

Obviously vicarious comments have been passed, all of which are unprintable in this outstanding publication.

The local ladies are strictly out of bounds, as the nationals view their women in a completely different way to us Westerners. Mind you, we have not been able to view their attributes as they wear black from head to toe so we cannot even see the whites of their eyes. To this end they have been nicknamed Stealth Women.

Since our arrival we have managed to get the office tentage up and running which is not bad considering that 30 per cent of our strength are clerks. The employment of civil labour, I can honestly say, is not what the majority of us imagined. To those with prior civil labour experience you may think that it is similar to Germany, but this is not the case.

Any unit that wished to employ civil labour puts their bids into this unit, we then go to a Civil Contractor, negotiate the cost and he eventually submits a proposal. To date there have been no Court Martials regarding 'under the table dealings' but Capt Pratchek's Range Rover has raised a few eyebrows, especially when it is a better model than the Brigs (SO1 lament, this is not true, it's a Cadillac)

We are obviously maintaining our level of military training and NBC must take priority, as in the present climate it could be for real. Our only hope is that the RCT, who administer the camp in which we stay, will eventually realise that we exist. So when a real SCUD drips in, we are informed prior to the big bang. SSgt Smudge Smith has been known to comment that one out of five attempts is not that bad, all things considered. Then again, we all make mistakes, do we not?

Another military skill that we are all taking seriously is First Aid which is taught by Sgt Joe Prescott. We are still wondering if we have Field Dressings large enough to cover Pte Smalley. The only aspect of training which some of us a weak in, is running. Some revel in it which others avoid it! 'Q' obviously detests it and SSgt Hynard has

been known to submit to the surgeon's knife rather than participate.

The main work load for the officers of our little enclave, is to negotiate with the Contractors for civil labour and then to liaise with the Staff so we all know that is going on. For the GD side it is mundane but necessary, task of escorting the labourers to and from the various worksites. This tends to be a thankless task, as units will issue on demanding for English speakers from people whose first language is Hindustani – so cannot read the instructions on our 'go faster' brooms. The command of pidgin English of our Duty Liaison Teams, to give them their posh title, has become remarkable during our short stay.

We have decided to promote LCpl Abercrombie to the dizzy heights of Head Chogiewaller, as his communications skills are far superior to the rest of us. If the workload becomes too much for the Chogies we have a secret weapon in the shape of Cpl Cowell. We have found that after five minutes with him all industrial disputes are settled and they wish to go back to work.

Well that is it for this edition. No doubt we will still be here for the foreseeable future unless someone, somewhere decides we have done long enough.

Gulf Employment5 Recruiting Team (GERTs) by SSgt ME Smith

In the previous article, others have written, better than I, on the day to day running of 908 PLSU. To this end I wish to introduce the personalities behind the GERT's.

Our Officer Commanding, May Wykes, who each morning utters the immortal words 'Briefing' whereupon we pull up a sandbag and listen attentively.

Then there is our Second-in-Command, our very own, 'Lawrence of Arabia', Capt Pratchek who is fast becoming just like one of the locals. I think this is because two months ago he promise3d to have some T-shirts printed and each time he is cornered he mutters 'Inshallah bad bukra' which roughly translated means, 'God willing, this week'.

The OC's right hand man is WO2 L Jones who should be employed as the ORQMS but dreams of the day when he can return to being a real soldier in a large headquarters somewhere in Germany. Our Chief Clerk, SSgt T Hynard is one of life's failed musicians.

He keeps reminding us all of the pleasure of The Pixies and the other 600 plus titles in his record collection. All I can say is that if his poor wife keeps sending them to him, then she is going to be a lot happier than we are!

The better half of the Orderly tent is Cpl 'Smokey' Cowell, we live for the day when he lives up to his nickname.

The Q Tent is manned by Sgt Joe Prescott who had no prior experience of Stores but found the hand book and now is a firm believer in the First Commandant (Stores are for storing and not for issuing!).

On the Clerical Driver side is LCpl Jock Abercrombie who should be a clerk but does all his typing from the back of a Land Rover. He has been likened to Harry Corbett our of Steptoe and Son.

Penultimately there is the 'Biggun' himself Pte Tiny Smalley. Why anyone decided to call him Tiny we have yet to discover, as he is well over six feet tall with the width to match.

Lastly there is the author of this literary masterpiece SSgt Danny Smith, the only real soldier on the established strength of the unit. I am the one who runs around all day shouting, "Gas, gas, gas in between escorting buses to and from units. I have also tried to teach SMG handling to the unknowing and ungrateful should our 'friend' from across the border pay us a visit.

Well, these are the GERT personalities who live to employ someone else to do Gulf jobs. So if you wish to come and join us bring nine air tickets made out to a dream destination and you can have it!

187 (Tancred) Company RPC 1 Platoon

New Year's Eve at South Cerney Air Movements Centre may not sound much of a party but for the men of 187 Company it was a party with a difference. We were about to be flown out to the Gulf and take part in one of the biggest military operations since World War 2.

We flew out from Brize Norton at 0500 hrs and landed on Saudi Arabian soil, or should I say sand, six hours later. After processing and long periods of waiting around in the port of Al Jubayl, we moved to our first home, known as Baldrick Lines or, more commonly, Tent City.

Our stay at Tent City was short lived and our only complaint was the early morning calls from the Arabs singing prayers at 0400 hrs every day; or were they complaining about us? We left after five days and set off, in convoy, into the unknown.

Fifteen hours and 250 miles later we arrived at the Force Maintenance Area (FMA) and bedded down for the night. The following morning, 1 Platoon moved out to the Ammunition Supply Point (ASP), one mile from the FMA, and we took over our duties from a platoon from 518 Coy, who looked relieved to see us.

After establishing our positions, we quickly got to work constructing our location. Tents went up, holes went down, pipes went through, cam nets went over, bunkers went round. In no time at all we were ready for anything ... or so we thought! The weather caught everyone out. Waterproofs were the last thing on everybody's mind prior to leaving the UK and how everybody wished they had brought them. We were convinced that the British weather had followed us to the Gulf.

Another problem was navigation at night, as LCpl Taplin found out when he went on a magical mystery tour with his fire team in a Land Rover. Communications over the radios also proved a challenge but Pte Harwood proved to be an asset and so became my permanent radio operator.

Our main role at the ASP was security, which consisted of mobile and foot patrols around the ammunition site, which covered 16 square miles. On our time off from patrolling we got on with personal admin, military training and PT, in which we became experts at making a human pyramid with Pte Blinston trembling at the top! Morale boosters came in the form of

airmail letters known as blueys, and we constantly received as lot of them.

As the deadline approached for Saddam Hussein, who we had nicknamed Madman Insane, we spent sleepless nights getting in and out of our NBC suits and running back and forwards to the air raid shelters as the alert state went up and down.

The high morale and determination in the platoon got us through these anxious moments and before we knew it, it was all over and clearing up started very enthusiastically.

A trip to Kuwait was arranged and we spent the whole day there taking in sights we will not forget for a very long time.

The experience gained in the time we were in the Gulf was priceless. The men of 2 Section coped well under the circumstances, especially Pte Ward, who had just come out of training prior to Op Granby.

3 Platoon (attached 187 Coy RPC)

After carrying out several weeks of training at Northampton the Platoon started linking together and looking forward to just getting there no matter what lay ahead. However, it was not until the last week in December that all was confirmed and we received our flight dates (31 December).

As Army and RAF planning would have it, we spent New Year's Eve in the waiting area of RAF Brize Norton, but the plane that was to take us to Saudi Arabia turned out to be a Kuwait 747 jumbo and I ended up in the first class area with the mod cons ("Were we actually going to war?" I had to ask myself).

Once in Saudi, and after going through the process of checking my NOK for the one thousandth time, we arrived at Baldrick LINES (Tent City), where after people had started calming down. We settled in only to find that we would be on the move within a couple of days (to where was anybody's guess).

Deploying from Baldrick Lines we found ourselves on the MSR heading northwards. After nine hours' travelling and a couple of stops for refreshments, we found ourselves looking at a couple of dirt mounds in the middle of nowhere.

This turned out to be the start of HQ FMA. With the guiding hand of Sgt Staples, from Defence Company HQ 1 (BR) Corps and his Section, the Platoon soon got into the swing of things with building Ops. We had to travel to American sites to try and persuade them that we needed their timber more than they did, in order to finish our jobs. However, if we used the immortal words of, "We're going to kick some ass", then we got what we wanted.

After being in the HQ FMA location for about a month, it was decided that two sections and I would move down the road to BFI (Bulk Fuel Installation). Unfortunately, it meant Cpl Boyle's section had to stay behind and put up with the Company HQ who were due to move to HQ FMA within a couple of days. So with the sections of Cpls Jordan and Suttinwood (187 Coy), we headed south for a quick ten minute journey to the BFI, where we found a Platoon (513) of Pet Ops, setting up and getting fuel distributed to those who need it. Our task for this job was to establish the defences needed and to handle the security



with low level patrols, and permanent manning of sangers around the FP (Drop off Point) site. Despite constant nagging and the ordering of two ISO containers, we were unable to set up a permanent watch tower, (so if anybody out there knows what happened to our ISO containers, then keep it to yourselves), It was reported that they had left Al Jubayl and were on the way up the MSR, but this was on the 6 February (they are probably two houses for the locals by now).

After spending approximately 1 month in this location another of Pet Ops (523) Platoon set up location no more than two kilometres away and asked for Pioneer support, so the obvious choice was to bring Cpl Boyle's section to our location and we would look after both. (Besides, his men could do with a break after being trapped with the Company HQ for a whole month).

From then on in the only fighting to be done by the Pioneers was the boredom which quickly set in once we had got into a routine. This gave us the chance to design our own T-shirts, keep the ladies board up to date from the numerous letters that the Platoon were receiving from Pen Pals and play some sport.

After receiving the order that it was time to pack up because the war was over, a task was given which required us to go to

Bahrain to dismantle some BFIs, which the RAF had been using. However, this time with Cpls Suttinwood's and Nichols' sections taking their turn, we headed across the causeway into Bahrain, and without pushing the subject too far, a jolly fun time was had by all in the hotels and swimming pools available to us. Some members of the detachment namely Turrell, McGrath and Bishop brushed up the bartering skills with the local shopkeepers and got some good bargains.

After the War by Cpl Jones

Following the cease-fire, and once a stable peace had been established, 187 Company began to be tasked with the withdrawal from theatre of spare kit, vehicles and ammunition. As the teeth arm and longer serving support units began to move out, we were employed on security duties as well as preparation for the removal of stores.

While working with 41 Ordnance Company, we were involved in sorting by size, the many thousands of sets of body armour used during the war. We also filled containers with various other items of equipment for return to the UK, and assisted in the burning of hundreds of cam nets.

At ASP 1 and 2 we helped in the

palletisation of all natures of ammunition that was to be either returned to the UK or Germany – or the Americans – or safely destroyed. Others within the Company were working at the port itself, putting vehicles onto ships for the journey home. We have now returned to UK and are enjoying our leave, having done our six months in Saudi Arabia.

518 Coy RPC

HQ Platoon. On 6 January the Company started their move out of Baldrick Lines to join the Divisional Admin Area (DAA) part of 1 (UK) Armoured Division. The HQ stayed with the DAA while the Platoon were given separate tasks in the HQ Divisional Rear. The HQ element was made up of four separate functions which acted as the hub of the Company at all times right up to our final RV 12 miles North of Kuwait City.

We first came into contact with the DAA approximately 30 miles outside Al Jubayl where we set up location in a quarry. We soon settled down into our strange surroundings setting the HQ element into motion. This consisted of a Command Post (CP), a Rear Echelon, CQMS Stores and MT. These departments jelled together with the OC, Maj Code, steering the ship and WO2 (CSM) Shield taking care of personnel. Capt Hancock, the 2IC and LCpl Sommerville, the

Clerk, ran the operations from the CP under the close scrutiny of the OC. This involved many hours of taking/planning routes, collating intelligence and changing maps by the dozen.

The Rear Echelon was controlled by Lt Smalley whose staff included Sgt Woodward RAPC dealing with pay matters and the Chief Clerk SSgt Way who was responsible for all administration War and Peace, which included documentation, mobilisation, casualty and PoW procedures. The administrative tasks were at times intensive but more satisfying, especially seeing so many smiling faces at mail call.

SSgt Field and Cpl Anderson had the unenviable task of issuing and receiving stores which became a headache in many occasions although they were ably assisted by LCpl Ockenden.

With the Company's Platoons being spread to all four corners of the operations the CQMS found it rather difficult to replenish them. In addition, he had the responsibility of supplying the HQ DAA and without the aid of an equipment table, this became very fraught.

Cpl Lees, who handed over to Cpl Kirkham in February and returned to UK, also had his work cut out as the MT Corporal. At the start he had a small pool of vehicles and drivers which invariably caused a hold-up in transport requisitions. This was also exacerbated by the shortage of spare parts in the Gulf region. Thankfully, after the OC's justification for additional transport, it was agreed, and alleviated the problem once and for all.

From January, the HQ element must have moved to more than eight locations with the DAA, right up to the penultimate

move with the final assault when 7 Armed Brigade went through the breach into Iraq on 24 February 1991, closely followed by the Division Rear and a day after the DAA convoy.

Owing to the surprisingly fast and unaffected progress of Division and Allied Forces it took only 24 hours to move a lot further into Iraq to our objective.

By this time, all vehicles were dressing a multiple of victory flags of all shapes and design. It was quite an experience although we had to overcome many obstacles in the process, including appalling weather conditions and a change of manning as we had lost Lt Smalley who was casevaced back to UK, leave the way for WO2 Crasca RAF to take over.


Mercifully, it all came to a pleasant conclusion in Kuwait. However, this was only a respite as we proceeded to recover all Platoons from their different tasks before the final recovery back to the UK into the arms of our loved ones and a well-earned rest.

1 Platoon

1 Platoon finally deployed out to the desert in preparation for greeting the coming deadline – 15 January 1991 -. On a chilly, damp morning we boarded trucks belonging to Dressing Station (DS 1A), soon to become our appreciative, friendly medics. Just our luck to arrive on a day on exercise – task 1 – to provide 20 men to play casualties for DS 1B. After five days of exercises, including heli-handling, our orders to move west toward the Wadi-al-Batine were issued.

We were to depart at 0500 hrs the following morning. This was not a good time to be welcoming a new addition to





the Platoon, but Pte Wayne Lowe was duly taken into the fold, and settled in very quickly.

The move into location was uneventful. We slept through the first air strike on Iraq, and also several NBC alarms, arriving in the location refreshed and with the "Noddy Suits" still packed away, unlike most of the convoy behind us! We first heard of the start of Op Desert Storm from the American Forces Radio Network. Our initial euphoria was quickly dampened by three assorted warnings, ranging from air raid to NBC, and several quick changes into and out of our IPE. Things settled down, we started setting up the dressing station, and were back into the routine of more exercises prior to the final push.

During the month that followed, the Platoon was split, with 2 Section flying back to Al Jubayl by Chinook, getting dropped off in the wrong area, but nevertheless, eventually arriving at 62 Ordnance Company Battalion's location to help handle the clothing and spare supplies which were by now arriving in an uncontrollable torrent. Again the Pioneers gained themselves an excellent reputation for their efforts.

After two weeks or so in Al Jubayl, we moved back to our original location by Hercules and Sea King to join the rest of the Platoon at 1 ADTR, in preparation for a practice move which would take us into our final position, from which we would out flank the Iraqi forces to our North. Two days later, with about 25 to 30 miles (as the crow flies) covered, we arrived ready to commence our final preparations. Having moved back to our friendly dressing station again, the order came for the teeth arms to advance.

So, with lots of elaborate models to help us on our way, we set off in our convoy and all did something, which, from our limited view point, bore little resemblance to anything we had been

briefed about!

100 hours later and thankfully, with very few friendly casualties, we heard the news on the radio that a ceasefire had been declared by President Bush. We gratefully discarded our NBC suits to reveal a new fashion in black desert combat suits! The war brought with it several memorable sights.

Perhaps the one that will stick in the minds of all who saw it will be the thousands of military vehicles of all sorts as they passed through the breach into Iraq to continue the forward motion begun by the Americans. Other memorable sights must also include the spectacle of multi-launch rocket systems being fired, blazing trails across the night sky.

The men of 1 Platoon were responsible for the taking of several enemy PoWs and Sgt Townsend now fancies himself as a qualified brain surgeon, having helped at the operating table as an Iraqi soldier with severe head injuries was put back together.

The following two weeks brought much uncertainty, as it was gradually realised that someone had to determine who was going to decide how to organise the move home! During this time, 1 Platoon became the undisputed volleyball champions of 518 Company (ME), after several close games with 6 Platoon.

Finally, the day came to return to Al Jubayl in preparation for our departure from the land of the eternal beach. Unfortunately, our departure was delayed by low smoke so the RAF could not find the runway! In the words of Pte Blake, we adapted and overcame, and after moving to Kuwait International Airport we flew out over the spectacular sight of burning oil wells.

Being processed through Camp 4 was a little tedious, but as the wheels left the runway at Dharham Airport, and the cans of beer courtesy of the RAF, made it all

worthwhile. Thanks also go to Capt Hancock, the Company 2IC, and the advance party plus SSgt Woods and the rest of the rear party, we were able to get ourselves sorted and away on some well-earned leave just four hours after arriving back at Bicester.

For the Platoon it is now business as usual. 2Lt Holt returned to 187 Company to be replaced by 2Lt Yates. Sgt Townsend is going to be a drill instructor for the Intelligence Corps, Cpl Moore is now tasking NCO. Pte Foster got his dream posting and is now in Cyprus. A section of men have been in Northern Ireland for several months, with others dispersed around the Company and in some cases the Corps. Finally, congratulations to Pte Mick Breen on his marriage during post Op Granby leave.

2 Platoon

The Platoon carried out various tasks during OP Granby One, some of which are detailed below and should not be read by the nervous or weak hearted. The reason the Pioneer refers to Op Granby as "One" is because we are currently on our second tour of Saudi. So make sure you get your next copy of the Corps magazine to read the exciting adventures of Op Granby Two, the legend returns.

Once again, the Platoon was tasked with undergoing more Chemical Decontamination Cover (CDC) training. However, the majority of the Platoon were now feeling that due to the amount of CDC training we had done, we could teach the medics a thing or two ourselves. Not letting our spirits be dampened by heavy rain, we set off from Baldrick Lines to join Dressing Station 5 Bravo.

After the standard, bumpy journey we arrived to discover that the heavy rain had now turned into very, very, heavy rain. The tents were put up and a wet Platoon began to settle into its new surroundings.

The dressing station was being support by Ghurkhas from Hong Kong and the Platoon was about to be introduced to a Nepal dinner – rice, cheese and fish, and just to add to the a la cart menu the rain started again, the fish began swimming, the cheese went gooey and the rice began to sprout roots as if back in the paddy fields. Luckily for us, Pte 'for a small price' Wiley (now a Lance Corporal, congratulations), managed to acquire some clatty bars – enough for a whole-dressing station. Later in the afternoon Cpl 'it's on the boat' Anderson turned up looking like a seedy arms dealer. After his explanation about him having nowhere to put it, he proceeded to give us enough ammunition, 66mm Law, radio batteries and anything else he could think of before driving off, chuckling to himself. The rest of the time at 5 Bravo was spent revising our CDC, security of the location and looking forward to our departure.

(Lessons Learnt: 30 men into a Bedford with kit won't go, wet tents when covered in sand will eventually dry out, thus turning into an effective sand blaster, (internal), man can live on Mars bars alone).

After months of waiting, frustration and anticipation, 2 Platoon received orders to move into Iraq. In support of Dressing Station 1 Bravo (DS1B) we moved across

the Iraqi border on the morning of the 24th. Our task was to supply Chemical Decontamination Cover (CDC) plus Defence for 1B, who were supporting the US 1 Corps, (the big one), who were going to make the breach into Iraq.

Five kilometres from Iraq, DS1B was set up and we waited for the first allied casualties from artillery raids. Incoming Iraqi artillery fire was encountered and luckily their accuracy left a lot to be desired.

A nervous night was spent by all, within Iraqi artillery range. Just before first light on the morning of the 25th, DS1B was switched to supporting 7th Armoured Brigade who would push as far forward into Iraq until the enemy fire halted their advance.

The first Iraqi defences which the platoon encountered were being cleared by US Engineers and they included minefields, some of which were chemical.

Movement through the minefield was slow, due to the amount of British artillery who were also pushing through in support of 1 Staffords, who by then were encountering enemy positions. Once through the breach the Platoon was able to see the capability of British artillery and we moved through enemy positions which had only been cleared minutes before by the Staffords.

Burning tanks and bodies lying in trenches brought home the reality of war to the men in the Platoon.

Our training was about to be put to the test as our flank section reported an Iraqi Platoon advancing on our position. 1 Section, under Cpl Teague, deployed as point section towards the enemy. However, as 1 Section closed in they reported back that the Iraqis were flying a white flag. Hasty preparations were implemented and a PoW holding area was set up under Lt Berry and Sgt Hamilton.

The Platoon was praised by the Int Cell for their professional handling and processing of the PoWs while Cpl Motley and LCpl Jackson proved to be excellent interrogators. However, the battle group was still advancing and DS1B were preparing to move with them. The PoWs were handed over to the 16/5th Lancers HQ to wait for the Queen's Own Highlanders to collect them. Throughout the next 24 hours the Platoon pushed through Iraq following the Advance of 7th Armoured Brigade.

Throughout this time the Platoon saw and felt many things. Iraqi soldiers lining the road of Basra in defeat and the sorrow of passing a British armoured vehicle which had been taken out.

3 Platoon

After Christmas and New Year we started to prepare for the move forward into the desert, ready for the forthcoming events. Our Platoon moved first of all to the Dressing Station 5 Bravo (DS5B), where we would be trained in casualty decontamination in the event of chemical weapons being used.

It was becoming more unlikely that chemical weapons would be used, so the OC moved 3 Platoon to 43 Ordnance Company's location about 15 kilometres north of DS5B. We joined them as they were preparing to move north-west of Hafer al Batin, to a new location, Log Base

Echo, approximately 350 kilometres away. The Platoon moved up by helicopter minus Cpl Openshaw and me, who moved up by road with the rest of 43 Ordnance Company. Our job was to carry out defensive duties along with 7 and 2 Platoons but as the ground attack was becoming more likely, both were re-tasked leaving only my Platoon to cover 26 square kilometres previously covered by all three of us.

During the 40 days 3 Platoon were there, we saw vast amounts of stores and equipment coming into Log Base Echo, only to see it being moved forward again and wondering when it would be our turn to move. As time went by, the lads' minds started to wonder as the job was becoming boring.

Then came the day when we received information about the forthcoming breach operation in three days' time. The lads were on a high.

The brief informed us how everyone would go through and how 43 Ordnance Company would support the teeth arms on the advance. However, the ground offensive left us still in Saudi and then after 100 hours of battle the war was over.

The order eventually came through for 3 Platoon to move forward and rejoin the Company which was situated approximately 12 kilometres north of Kuwait City. We remained there for the next ten days before the run for home began, to start 30 days' well earned leave.

5 Platoon

In the early days of January, 5 Platoon had been given the interesting task of providing a Chemical Decontamination Cell (CDC) for the Dressing Station (DS1B).

At the dressing station we carried out many tasks to kill time, ranging from supervising trench construction by Cpl Topping (522 Company RPC) and LCpl Sear, to helping out around the location and in various medical exercises run by DS to confirm everything would run smoothly if real.

We were also tasked back to 62 Ordnance Company in Al Jubayl, to help distribute various items of kit which the front line troops were in desperate need.

On the whole, the Platoon pushed three weeks out at 62 Ordnance Company until relieved by another Platoon.

We then returned back to our war time role at the DS. On 17th January things started to heat up for the Platoon and the emphasis on getting as much rest as possible was enforced by the Platoon Commander, 2Lt White.

On 23rd February it was time to pack our kit and get ready for the move forward, however, that morning our role changed within the dressing station, due to the fact that the chemical threat had lowered considerably.

The Platoon's role was now to give flank protection, which suited the men down to the ground.

We had one Rover per section, fully kitted out with enough ammunition to take out light armoured vehicles and a Platoon stores wagon, driven by Sgt Paton and Pte Nixon, carrying a further supply of ammunition and specialist equipment.

G-Day had arrived and it was now time



for preparing the move. Although the Platoon was tactically ready at all times there was always something that you can forget, i.e. the photo session.

G+1, time to leave the assembly area and move through the breach approach route, the men were now prepared for they knew that from now on, anything could happen.

On 26th February, we crossed the start line (New Jersey) and within an hour of moving, the station was taking casualties. Fortunately, they were Iraqi soldiers. Because the battle group moved so quickly, the dressing station did not have time to advance to set up and deal with the casualties and so they had to treat them in the back of ambulances.

Unfortunately, one of the Iraqi soldiers came through in a bad way and lasted no longer than a few hours. Meanwhile certain members of the Platoon had the task of giving the soldier a respectable burial service.

Whilst on the move we encountered something that the Platoon will never forget: visibility had dropped considerably throughout the day and a thick mist had set in. The next thing we heard was an MLRS battery going off less than 300 metres away. Fortunately for us they were locked on to an enemy position where an attack was going on.

After all the confusion we were on the move again. Later that evening we had somehow overtaken, or should I say passed, the battle group which made the men feel

rather dry mouthed. Anyway, we went firm for a couple of hours and started taking PoWs by the handful.

The following day was a glorious one for the members of 1 Section, led by Cpl Davis, for they captured an Iraqi position observed by Pte Lees from over a mile away. The platoon contained two officers and nine other ranks who were by no means reluctant to give themselves up, until they saw the firepower they were up against. The men of 1 Section showed no fear and bravely cleared the position. On 2nd March we crossed the Iraqi Border and received word of a ceasefire. The men stayed constantly switched on until it was time to go back to the Company.

6 Platoon

During January, February and March 1990 6 Platoon was kept extremely busy on a wide range of tasks. Firstly, we were tasked to provide eight HGV drivers to MRG 7 Bravo to assist the REME with the transportation of AFV engines. This ad hoc section which included three JNCOs was commanded by Cpl Fraser. The lads thoroughly enjoyed the task but began to get quite nervous when they were sent nearer to the front to deliver replacement engines to forward units.

Our next task was to drive one section to 43 Ordnance Company for security duties. This section was commanded by Cpl Kwantreng, who was thoroughly cheesed off with the idea, as this meant he would

miss out on his invite to the New Year's Eve dance in Camp 4 (hard luck, Scouse!).

Two and Six Platoons were given six days to erect 'Blackadder Lines' to provide accommodation for further Op Granby troops and this meant erecting 170 marquees.

Needless to say, it was achieved well within the allocated time. To illustrate our versatility, our next task was providing local security for HQ DAA where the "sanger building extraordinaires" – Cpl Fraser and LCpl O'Prey – got down to business and built two of the finest sangers/NBC shelters ever seen.

These were sited on the edge of a quarry and where we were located we had the honour of dining with the likes of the BBC's news reporter Kate Aidey, everyday.

Our next stop was 62 Ordnance Company where we assisted the unloading and escorting of the vital supplies to the forward units.

This proved to be one of the more enjoyable tasks because, for the first time since deploying, we had the use of hot showers, proper toilets and we could get our sleeping bags cleaned. It was also the place where we had the scare of our lives when a Scud missile landed in the port some five miles away, but sounded as though it had landed right outside our accommodation.

After that, we were all thankful when we were given the order to move back into the desert again.

We were flown from Al Jubayl to Al-Ka-Zouma on a Hercules aircraft, then by helicopter to HQ DAA. On arrival, 6 Platoon was tasked to supply two sections to 27 Squadron RCT, the unit in charge of the Divisional Distribution Point. The other section was tasked to the dressing station to assist casualty decontamination, a task they did not actually carry out, although they remained with the dressing station throughout the ground war. The ground war was an anti-climax for us, we spent the few days that it lasted in our vehicles – I hope Pte X's stomach problem has cleared up! We all thought Saddam had gassed us! A few days after the ground war had ended, we joined the Company at HQ DAA, somewhere in Kuwait.

This proved to be the most frustrating few days of our tour of duty; waiting to be told our flight dates for coming back home to our loved ones. However, we were cheered up by the generous volume of parcels and letters we received from the British public.

During this time we were kept relatively busy helping to prepare the Iraqi vehicles and weapons that were to be sent back to both BAOR and the UK.

We were finally given the order to move to Al Jubayl, an air strip approximately one hour's journey away, but because of the burning oil wells, the aircraft could not land. We were then given transport to Kuwait City Airport, travelling via the Kuwait/Basra Road – driving through the bombed out Iraqi convoys was an unbelievable experience. Eventually, we arrived at Al Jubayl where we had our first meal of fresh rations for some time. With our stomachs full, we did not mind sleeping under the stars for the second night running.

The following afternoon we moved to Camp 4 to do our final admin prior to flying back to good old Blighty the next day. The flight back was pleasant, the food was good but the booze was even better. We arrived in England in the early hours of Wednesday 22 March – home, happy and on leave.

1 ADSR Defence Platoon

Early September 1990 saw the Platoon centrally formed at 207 Signal Squadron, Soltau, planning to undertake the defence of 7 Brigade HQ. Aside from those unable to participate, the Platoon underwent an intensive period of training lasting about five weeks. In addition to the standard ATDDs, the Platoon covered heavy weapon skills, enjoyed a game of football in NBC dress state 3 foxtrot (so much so that it ended with a chorus of, "You've got that Saudi feeling", to a visiting TV crew, who did not know whether to be impressed or stunned, and we had a flight in a Chinook helicopter to the ranges (enjoyed particularly by one of the signallers who left his breakfast on the aircraft as a tip for the loadmaster). All very good and we did that too. I HEAR YOUR SAY. True, perhaps, but the Platoon created history by being the first ever mechanised RPC unit in combat.

Sandy Yellow 432s (Armoured Personnel Carrier) were duly handed over, with LCpls Pateman and Tatlock. Ptes Parnell and McNeil thrust into the driver's seat to attain licences. The remainder were taken through

'track handling', turret, radio and familiarisation procedures. Once training was completed the Platoon of 21, commanded by SSgt Whalley, deployed as a very competent and very professional body of men confident enough to take on the world... providing there was a battle group in front of them.

Once deployed the Platoon spent a couple of weeks acclimatising at the port of Al Jubayl, where the biggest threat to safety was being fed by the Americans.

Work centred around preparing some of the kit that was issued "in-theatre" and waiting for the rest that was not. The next move found the Platoon in the desert. Here the mech (that is mechanised to you REMES who never have been), exercises began in earnest. Once it was established that the RMP rarely ventured too far from the port, most took their turn at driving the panzers (more mech jargon).

It was probably more by luck than judgement that nobody flattened any camels. The exercising aspect continued through all the deadlines until the big day.

The war is well known by most. It will not be recounted here. Instead, we wish to share with you some of the lighter moments of desert warfare. Soldier X (recovered but will remain nameless), became the butt of many jokes after he had the misfortune to be almost killed by his own rifle.

Whilst jumping down from the back of a Land Rover, he slipped. Of the two, his rifle hit the ground first but stayed pointing upright. He fell on to the muzzle, landing on his most valuable possession ... his wedding tackle.

This was made worse by the fact that his inside leg measurement was less than the length of his rifle. Just before being casevaced, witnesses state that he thought he was dying. Pte Stevenson found himself using one of the small petrol fired water boilers, when it exploded. He was close enough to sustain injury and was heard to scream, "My eyes are on fire", SSgt Whalley quickly directed Stevenson to duck his head in the water to ease the effects of what he thought were serious burns. Stevenson raised his head a few seconds later and, minus his eyebrows declared, "That's better, they are out now".

During the Prime Minister's visit to the HQs Kuwait location, a certain Signals officer, in a horrified frenzy, told all and sundry that on his walk round, the PM had almost trodden on a live Iraqi mine.

He then tasked an RPC soldier to stand guard over the mine until the PM had left and the bomb disposal team had arrived. He raced off muttering something about telling the Bde Staff before the press found out. The soldier, meanwhile, calmly took out his bayonet and prized a torch reflector from the sand.

A short while after, the 'mine' was presented to a rather red faced officer. Pte Savage was the defence man of one particular panzer that became separated from the Squadron. It had been driven into a sabka (a table of wet sand) and had become stuck fast. Worse was to come when it was realised that the vehicle was slowly sinking.

They quickly radioed for help as they were not sure where they were. As the

vehicle was slowly filling up with water (yes, even in the desert), the RPC panzer sent to recover it embarked on what became known as "The Hunt for Red October". Despite a few other close calls, all are now safely back enjoying the no-exercise lifestyle of the Division, awaiting the rest of its equipment to be sprayed green again.

We must mention the considerable effort give by those who stayed behind on the respective rear parties. The traditional hearty welcome is extended to those recently arrived, and to those now departed we wish you all "bon voyage".

You may see one of the RPC Desert Rats (the real 7 Brigade ones) in future days.

He may be wearing the unique T-shirt of this unit. If you do, do not argue about Op Granby. You may have been there first, you may have even been there longer. Rest assured you did not cover as much, or work as hard while being close to the front line.

On one particular occasion in Iraq, the lads were the front line. Don't argue, just buy him a beer.

3 ADSR

It has been an extremely busy and varied period, since Christmas, for the Platoon. The majority of the Platoon, having undergone pre-Op Granby training before Christmas, left for Saudi Arabia straight after Christmas leave. The Platoon arrived in the Gulf with 187 Company but was immediately re-deployed to 518 Company becoming No 7 Platoon. Whilst in the Gulf the Platoon, which also included one or two members of 1 ADSR, Defence Company HQ 1 (BR) Corps and various members of 4, 6 and 33 Brigade Signal Squadron Defence Sections, undertook a variety of tasks, too numerous to list, but they varied from stores handling to being the first Pioneer Platoon through the breach when operating as Security and Defence for the MLRS/Artillery exchange point. Another member of the Platoon was in the Gulf working with an Army Graves Registration Team.

At the end of hostilities, instead of returning home with 518 Company (who had admittedly been there since September/October), No 7 Platoon was re-deployed to join 187 Company and returned to a month's well-earned leave on 26 May 1991. At the time of writing they are still on leave so all the hair raising war stories and action photos will have to wait until the next issue of the Corps journal.

4 ADSR

July hailed the return of the Defence Platoon section detached to the HQ LSG in the Gulf. The section, commanded by Cpl Spencer, was deployed to the Gulf, post war, to carry out security duties for the LSG at Old Port Camp near Al Jubayl. The section had ample opportunity to see, first hand, the effect of the Gulf War has had upon the region.

During their tour of duty the section visited Kuwait City and the burning oil fields beyond, all were amazed by the amount of wrecked and abandoned Iraqi military hardware which festoons the desert. Back at Old Port Camp some of Cpl Spencer's lighter duties included the welfare of the camp mascot, a stray dog named 'Chunky'. I hasten to add that the mascot

was not named after his handler.

OP Granby through the eyes of a PLSU 2IC

After being called back from Newcastle Airport (destination Greece) on 16 September 1990, I rapidly deployed back across the Channel to Hohne then Minden. Here I met up with the rest of our merry band (nine in total). After training (nearly four weeks of frustration loading and unloading Rovers and trailers), we finally deployed to Al Jubayl.

We quickly settled into our home for the foreseeable future, a tent. Initially work was very frustrating, endless trips, discussions etc but eventually things began to take shape. From small beginnings, we rapidly formed a nucleus of basic labourers. This expanded over the months to encompass a large varied workforce whose duties ranged from toilet cleaners to translators.

The bulk of the workforce were from the Indian Sub-Continent: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. Part of my job entailed compiling all new contracts as well as paying the contractors. Not quite the Desert Rat image portrayed on the TV back home. For myself, life evolved around talking, arguing, adding and paying, to say nothing of donning NBC kit with ever increasing speed. Arabs are different to my 'native' Geordies. This is what I thought, however, with time they merged quite well. They did have a sense of humour somewhere, a very keen eye for a bargain, that elusive deal. The way they did differ was that they never really spoke their minds.

Personal contact and building up a rapport were all important. It was no good trying to bully an Arab businessman, far better was to try to coax, persuade and 'charm' him into delivering whatever it was needed. All Arabs are rich? Well, an awful lot of them are. The ones I dealt with were very, very rich. This often made business interesting and they really didn't care about profit. To them the 'chase' – the game of contracting, was the incentive to work. It's certainly true that all Arabs like to argue and haggle.

All our employees were taken on via contracts with local businessmen. These contracts often took weeks to finalise before I could take the finished edition to be signed by my masters at HQ FMA. I had a choice of about five or six different potential contractors to choose from. They all competed to gain those lucrative contracts; some were worth up to £3,000,000 over a six month period. They would go to great lengths to discredit the opposition in order to secure any contract. This often had interesting results, such as Arabs jumping up and down accusing me of stealing the food out of their children's mouths. They never taught me how to deal with this situation at the Pioneer School...

New contracts came on line throughout our time in the Gulf. Once they were up and running and employees were working, the contractors had to be paid. The fact that I'm in Hohne and not in Hawaii is proof of the checking systems we imposed. We never handled cash. Driving around with £500,000, twice a month, would have been unwise, even in a country where thieves have their hands cut off. With the help of my Scouse assistant, WO2 Jones, we

frequently spent frustrating days chasing around trying to get the Arabs to sign for their money.

The OC devised a scheme to employ a pool of labour along CWG lines. This pool would be on hand on a daily basis to do 'rush jobs'. I was given the job of looking after these 200+ men and arranging them into Platoons, with each Platoon being given an Indian supervisor as 'Platoon Commander'.

I was very lucky to have the likes of SSgt Smudge Smith and Sgt Prescott to do the physical checks on these workers. This was a thankless task which kept the men busy for up to 17 hours each day. This task they carried out without any (well, only a little) moaning. They should be rightly proud to have managed to maintain order where chaos reigned.

Very quickly the workers were given a host of nicknames: Chogie, Wobbly head and Joe Joe were just a few. Once a week I held a parade of the pool workers. Patience is a virtue when trying to communicate to 200+ men in 12 languages and dialects. The sight of them all squatting down will remain with WO2 Jones and myself for a very long time.

Needless to say, there was a humour amongst the work, chaos and stress. As a unit we rarely saw anything of the desert but there was the odd Scud (I have a piece to prove it).

Immediately after the land war ended a few of the lads went as lorry escorts to Kuwait. They certainly brought back with them the closeness of the war (150 miles away). I too spent a few days with Capt Messenger from the Graves Registration Team, travelling through Kuwait. Kuwait City and up to Basra. The normality of Al Jubayl seemed unreal compared to the pitch black skies and the destruction which existed beyond Al Jahra.

The war won, our job was nearly over, we awaited our return with baited breath. Eventually we flew out, at the end of March for some leave. Some of the moments I will always remember are: Pte 'Tiny' Smalley driving me at 150 mph to catch my compassionate flight; Nabil Fakhoury's face when I told him he had got a contract worth over £3,000,000 and Khalil Katib's face when he didn't get it; the first real air-raid siren; the road to Basra.

The Corps Secretary has Capt Messenger and me to thank if the tank (we named it the Eclipse) arrives in Northampton. We found it in the desert north of Al Jahra and bagged it for the Corps Museum. We are both waiting to see what happens. (Editor's note – Nothing so far).

Finally, I would like to thank all the lads for keeping going, often during stressful times, especially WO2 Jones, without whom none of the bills would have ever been paid on time.

To the Gulf! by Cpl G Bain

1 October was the fateful day when we were paraded and told that a number of us would be required to deploy to the Gulf. Then came the inevitable question, "Would you go to the Gulf?".

Eleven members of the Company were asked and all responded positively, without hesitation, WO2 (CSM) Nelson, Sgt Staples, Cpls Carter, Bain and Kilbride and Ptes

Horsburgh, Butler, Davis, Hopkins, Stadius and Brannigan were the lucky few who jumped at the chance of putting into action all their experience and training. Then came the hardest part, telling wife's, parents and loved ones that we were off to war.

The next two weeks were hectic with extra training and endless trips to the Medical Centre for jabs, to the Stores for kit and the Clerks for the documentation and paperwork.

On 8 October we were to leave Bielefeld for Sennelager to run through the system of further field documentation and final practice of all training aspects, with NBC being a major priority. The advance party deployed on 11 October while the remainder, us, had the luxury of spending a final two days at HQ Rheindahlen.

This proved to be a very worthwhile experience as everyone soon managed to consume enough alcohol to last six months with a few funny moments to remember that unfortunately may be too incriminating to divulge.

The morning of 15 October 1990 started with an eight hour drive to Hamburg and our awaiting plane. After the inevitable admin nightmare we boarded and took off at 2200 hrs en route to the Gulf via Cyprus. We landed at 1115 hrs the next day, to blistering heat and immediately consumed

litres of water. At Al Jubayl we were processed, fed and paid then taken to our home, which was later to become famous as the Baldrick Lines.

After setting up our camp beds we were instantly put to work, which was to take over the two sangars at the port head from the American Marines. Within four hours of landing we were tagging on!

Over the next two weeks we rebuilt and upgraded sangars using a lot of acquired equipment from the US Marines which they are probably still looking for! During the following two weeks soldiers poured in, in their hundreds, and went through the same process.

Our next task was to secure the ever growing FMA Headquarters and in particular, to sandbag and make blast proof an ISO container to act as an air raid shelter.

As Usual we were given a time limit of three days, so working every hour God sent we set to work, still having to supply the guard force for the Port Head.

As we were almost finished, a visiting Engineer officer decided that it wasn't quite right and altered the design, we took this in our stride and did as he instructed. On completion we were well relieved of the excess work, but only to have sand kicked in our faces (literally) as three days later we

were told to dismantle the ISO, because the HQ was moving to Old Port Barracks. Still undeterred, we did so taking with us all our furniture the boys had made – there were some budding chippies amongst us – proving just how resourceful a Pioneer can be.

At Old Port Barracks, we helped the Engineers to make it liveable while building even more sangars and gun positions in some very awkward locations; such as on roofs, at the top of stairs and just about everywhere, but still our sense of humour prevailed.

Things ran quite smoothly for the next few months until just after Christmas when the order came that half of us were to deploy to the desert to set up the FMA Headquarters.

They departed about a week later to help with the mass job of trying to secure an HQ area. It was to be very hard work and long hours.

We built four Ops which took nearly a month to complete but it gave us a purpose and a chance to do a real job, it also proved to have one very funny memory.

After spending some time in the Ops everyone became a chef except Pte Stadius who is immune to pain and heat.

We had used the top of a grenade tin as



a makeshift frying pan to cook breakfast. After ten minutes on the cooker, the sausages were ready and he decided to take it off using his fingertips which sizzled and cooked nicely onto the side of the red hot pan; after releasing the pan he spent the next half an hour running around banging his fingers together, cursing the rest of us for rolling around on the floor in absolute hysterics.

He also managed to gain the name of 'Wobbly' due to the fact that he was forever banging his head on things and still had no sense knocked into him. He was, however, a good morale booster.

As time went by, more and more work arrived and we were constantly filling sandbags and building standto and anti-tank positions and even more sangars.

By the time the ground troops went in, Camp Bob was like Fort Knox and we could have quite easily held off any attack the Iraqis or anyone else made.

We had ammo coming out of our ears in

all shapes and sizes, Link, Ball, Grenade, 94's, 66mm, Smoke, Illum, everything, even a .50 calibre Browning kindly donated by the EOD Team which we used in the air defence role – in all, an arsenal of weapons any military group would be proud of.

The stops were pulled out on the requests for night aids, I never saw half the kit we got, but I had heard of it, so it does exist believe me!

We had one real scare not long after moving into the desert when after an air daily brief, we were told that an Iraqi Armoured division was pushing its way down the Wadi Al Batan and we were the first line of defence.

There was a distinct lack of officers and SNCOs that day and people looked anxious for the first time since we had arrived in the Gulf. However, our RAF flyboys soon put a halt to their advance, and they retreated back to safer ground.

Our first air raid proved to be quite an experience, with many people being caught

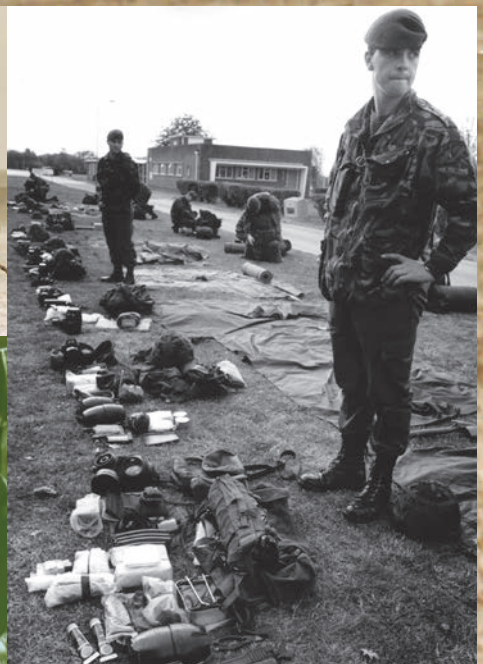
in some rather compromising positions, e.g. on the toilet, eating breakfast (which ended up on the floor), while a few others were trying to get some shuteye.

After the war we were quickly returned to Al Jubayl, but while everyone else went on to Pearl Beach and relaxed waiting for their flights, we went to Old Port Barracks again where we were to strip all the sangars previously built, until the day of departure.

We arrived at Gutersloh on 13 March to a magnificent reception laid on by the RSM, CO and the Company.

Our thanks go to them all, especially to SSgt Shields for the beers. After day of clearing we began five weeks' well deserved leave.

Finally I would like to say a special thank you to our attached personnel who were: Gdsm Armstrong, 1 Irish Guards, Cpl Mountjoy, 1LI and Cpl Williams (59) 1 RWF. Their efforts were greatly appreciated as was their friendship. Thank You. ■



Regimental March of the Pioneer Corps

The following appeared in The Royal Pioneer issue number 24 dated September 1950, I thought readers might be interested

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archive

THE Corps Regimental March was composed by Captain Norman Demuth when he was an Instructor at the Corps OCTU, Buckingham, and was originally intended for the Passing-Out Parades of the Officer Cadets. The march was composed at the request of the then Commandant of the OCTU, Lt Col AJ Vernon DSO MC.

It became the official March of the Corps in 1945 when at the Army School of Music, Kneller Hall, it was selected from a number of other compositions after a try-out with Maj Gen ALI Friend CB CW MC, and other officers as a selection Committee.

Norman Demuth was born in Surrey in 1898, and educated at St George's, Windsor, Repton, and the Royal College of Music.

He saw service with the London Rifle Brigade in the First World War, and was invalided out in 1916 as a result of wounds received on the Somme.

The Second World War saw him first as an Home Guard Instructor, and finally in 1942 as an Officer in the Pioneer Corps.

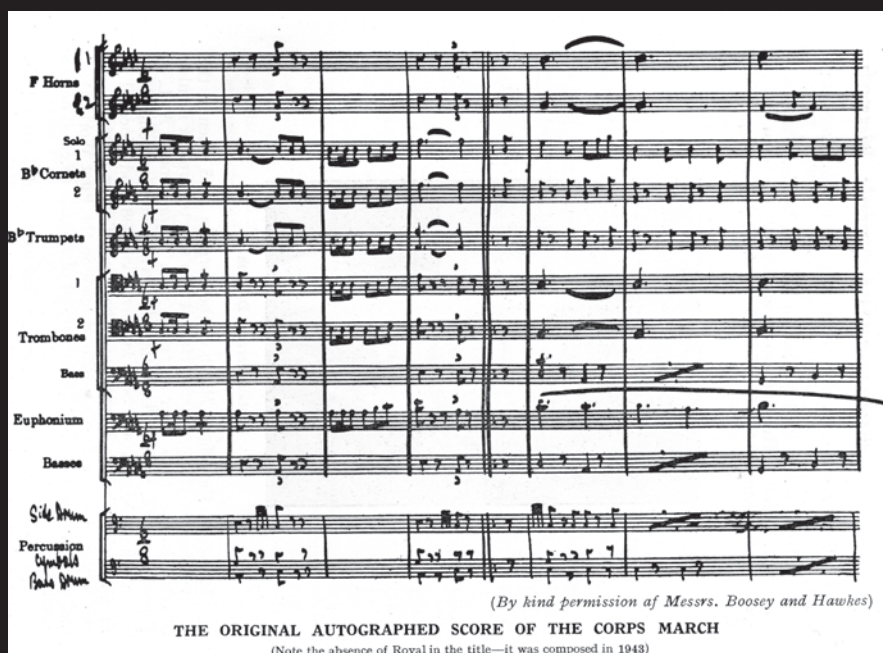
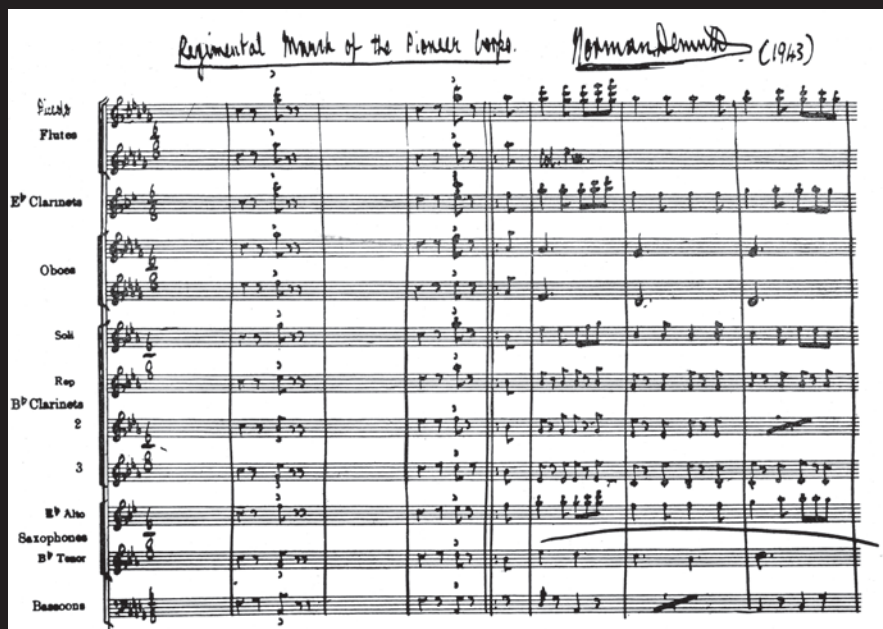
He was a man of many musical parts. His works, which include Symphonies, Concertos, and Sonatas, have been performed in the leading Cities of England and Europe, and have been broadcast by the BBC in Third Programme Plays.

One of his three Operas was performed in Brussels in 1948. Of his four ballets, one is in the repertoire of the International Ballet Co, and another was produced in Antwerp this year.

Demuth is a prolific writer on musical subjects – his works include books on Ravel, Albert Roussel, Cesar Franck and Gounod. As one would expect of a Professor of Composition of the Royal Academy of Music, he has written much on musical composition, and has done considerable musical criticism for musical periodicals and gramophone companies.

He is Hon RAM, Hon ARCM and closely associated with various music societies.

Mr Demuth states that his hobbies are: playing the gramophone, foreign travel, reading, avoiding all kinds of exercise and making people "rise". ■



Mutiny

Mutiny is one of the most serious charges to be made against the military. Cases are very rare but recently the Association Historian (Lt Col John Starling) has obtained, via auction, a series of Court Martial Records

Report: Lt Col John Starling
RPCA Historian

MUTINY is one of the most serious charges to be made against the military. Cases are very rare but recently the Association Historian (Lt Col J Starling) has obtained, via auction, a series of Court Martial Records concerning the defence of members of the Cypriot Pioneers against the charge of mutiny under Section 531 of King's Regulations.

The Cypriot Pioneers (Companies numbered between 1001 and 1013) were formed in late 1940 for service in North Africa. As is normal with these companies they consisted of 4 British Officers, 6 British ORs (incl CSM, CQMS, Chief Clerk) and 350 Cypriots.

The ORs "these men are simple men; they are "Hillmen" in many case illiterate who are simple although to believe in folklore and not at all the type we are used to handling as English troops. Let me give you one or two examples of this simplicity of their mind and how it functions – when these men write home they actually cry in their letters and talk about the natural things when professing their love for the dear ones at home.

They are God fearing and frequently will make a collection which is sent to Cyprus as a thank you offering to Saint Andrew – the Cypriot soldier's Patron Saint. They are volunteers who left their comfortable little homes and proceeded with their Regiment to the desert."

On arrival in North Africa most companies were employed in Dockwork or road construction. 1005 Coy on 24 Dec 40 suffered 9 killed & 16 wounded in an Air Attack at SOLLUM whilst working in the docks.

In January 1941 most of the companies moved to TOBRUK to work in the docks there, this was at the height of the siege and they were under constant Air Attack.

In April 1941 they were removed from Tobruk and sent with the Palestinian Pioneers to Greece. The Greece Campaign was a complete disaster and some 2,000 Pioneers under Lt Col Courage (of the brewing family) were captured at Piraeus port. When the decision was made to evacuate the Pioneers from the port it was too late and priority was given to the Palestinian Pioneers over the Cypriots as it was believed they could 'go to ground' in Greece. The evacuation was not a success as they only went as far as Crete which the Germans subsequently invaded and captured some 36 officers and 2,000 Pioneers.

On return to North Africa the remains of

the companies were reformed at Quassasin.

Promises which were made to them regarding their leave to Cyprus had not been kept and the men were warned off for movement to the desert. They had the unfortunate experience that some of their own officers got some leave.

In July 1941 there were general disturbances and British personnel were assaulted in the camp.

The following are some of the cases where individuals were found guilty:

1. CY/4214 Pte Evipides MANGOLIS (10 years) – CY/4235 Pte Charalambo DENITRION (8 years) – CY/2991 Pte Suleman HUSSEIN (10 years) – CY/1310 Pte Ibrahim MOUSTAFA (6 years) – CY/4266 Pte Demitriou DIOGENIS (3 years) – CY/3594 Pte Polycarpou THEODOROS (5 years) – CY/2991 Pte Charilaos CHRISTFOROU (3 years). When on Active Service, joining in a mutiny in His Majesty's Forces in that they at Pioneer Corps Base Depot on 5 July 1951 joined in a mutiny by combining among themselves to resist on parade the lawful commands of their superior officers given in the execution of their duty.

SENTENCE: to go to prison to undergo penal servitude for (years given in brackets above).

2. CY/2603 Pte Loannou CHRISTODULOU - When on Active Service, being present at and not using his utmost endeavour to suppress a mutiny in His Majesty's Military Forces in that he at the Pioneer Corps Base Depot on 5th July 1941 when present on parade at which a mutiny occurred did not use his utmost endeavour to suppress such mutiny – To go to prison with hard labour for 1 year

3. CY/2252 Pte Christodulou COSTAS - When on Active Service, Conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline in that he at the Pioneer Corps Base Depot on or about 25 July 1941 said to other soldiers of his own Unit who to his knowledge were witnesses at a forthcoming trial for mutiny "You are traitors, Don't you come over here or we will deal with you with our hands" or words to that effect - To go to prison with hard labour for 6 months.

4. CY/2738 Corporal Exadaktilos Apostolis - When on Active Service, Conduct to the good order and military discipline in that he at the Pioneer Corps Base Depot on 7 July 1941, after his unit had been confined to camp entered the tent of 3379 Sgt Panayi Sawa and other soldiers and improperly said "You screwed us at mid-day" or words to that effect. - To be reduced to the ranks and to go to prison with hard labour for 6 months

Following the disturbance the units were deployed into the Western Desert. Most of

the records of the Companies were lost due to enemy action, but they do not seem to have left North Africa and 1013 (Cypriot) Company is shown as going on STRIKE at Quassassin in November 1945. By this time there are possibly only 2 or 3 Companies still in existence.

Other incidents included:

April 1941, 1402 (Aden) Coy a 1 day strike in Aden

April 1944, 1860 (East African) Company at Tel-el-Kebir refused to drill/parade

August 1944, 1913 (Basuto) Coy in Italy refusing to work

March 1946, 1824 (East African) Coy in Tel-el-Kebir when the OC (Maj M H W Rahn) and 2IC Capt C W L Armitage) were injured.

Finally the following letter was kept in the Association Archives:

2210 Coy EAPC. 28th June 1954

To

OC, 211 Group RPC (Lt Col W N Caddell) Sir

1. We ask you to be transferred from this Company, if not so, we shall shout MAU MAU.

2. We shall kill Sergeant Major (African) of this Company as he does not wish us to stay in this Company.

We shall kill the under names Sgts:-

Sgt John

Sgt Masore

Sgt Wambura

and Sgt Mukwahpi

As they are the people who don't like us to be in this Coy, and who are always giving us troubles.

3. Many askaris of Uganda are always imprisoned from time to time, why not askaris of Kenya?

4. We haven't got any Ugandan askaris in this Coy who is holding any under named ranks, Sgt, Cpl or LCpl why only Kenya askaris who are promoted to those ranks?

5. Also these Cpls are going to be killed by us

Cpl Owinyo

Cpl Muhid

After killing those we shall kill British Sergeant. That will be the first sign to show you.

Sir That is all we have to say

We are here awaiting for your quick reply.

Your obedient servants

Askaris of 2210 Coy who come

from Uganda Protectorate only

(2210 (East African) Coy was formed in Kenya in February 1952. It was working at 11 BOD in Geneifa in Egypt. The OC was Major A C Wilson, 2IC Capt Ackrill, CSM WO2 Ridgway Middlesex Regt (who handed over to WO2 van Dunk RA.) ■



307 Company

The following article describing the work of an “ordinary” Pioneer Company was initially published in the Royal Pioneer in 1947 & 1948. I have included extracts from the war diary.

**Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive**

A BRIEF history of the Company prior to landing in Normandy is as follows: 307 Coy PC was formed at Birmingham on 12 May 42 and then moved to Falmouth where it carried out miscellaneous work in scattered detachment.

It moved to Gourock in October 1942 and embarked for Algiers where it proceeded to Bougie to work in the docks.

During 1943 the Company was split into detachments working at Philippville, Constantine and Bougie working on various tasks including dock work, camp construction and PW guards and then organised PW labour in Bougie.

The Company returned to UK in November 1943 and was then located at Leigh on Sea before moving to Southchurch in March before moving to Codmore Hill, West Sussex for training on 26 May 44. It moved to Haywards Heath (Marshalling Area) on 9 Jun 44.

Operations in North West Europe 1944 – 46

The Landing and Subsequent Build-up By K R Fry (5186687 SSgt Kenneth Reynolds FRY joined 15 Nov 39)

The 307th Coy Royal Pioneer Corps returned to the UK from the North African theatre in November 1943, and after disembarkation leave, took up station, under Mob. Instructions, on the SE Coast. The OC at this time being Major W A Gracey.

Personnel were employed on camp construction and then a ‘hush-hush’ project “Pluto” (Pipe line under the ocean), which was later to make such an important

contribution to the success of the invasion of Europe.

After the usual mob preparations – posting of personnel, requisitioning etc – the Coy prepared to move to concentration Area, and early in May 44, joined 261 Coy (Maj Head) then encamped in Sussex, in company with 22 Group (Lt Col W McClure DSO TD).

The 3-4 weeks spent in this location were very busy ones, with more postings (Maj S H Smith taking over command from Maj Gracey), frequent ‘schemes’ range practices, and finally the shedding of all surplus clothing and personnel, until the early days of June, we stood ready, with personnel alert, fit and fully equipped, vehicles loaded and water proofed, and everyone not a little apprehensive as to what lay ahead.

9 Jun 44 Moved to HAYWARDS HEATH (Marshalling Area)

Shortly after ‘D’ Day, the move to the Marshalling Area was made, following arrival, the Company was allocated quarters appropriate to the position we should ultimately occupy on the landing craft, i.e. all huts being numbered and lettered in accordance with the plans made for loading personnel on ships. Our stay was brief, 48 hours, and all personnel were confined to camp. ‘Mae West’ life jackets, cigarettes, 48 hour rations and an item with an ominous potent, vomit bags, were issued on the morning following arrival, and in the afternoon we boarded TCUs and began our short journey to Newhaven, our port of embarkation. Upon arrival, and with very little fuss, we boarded an LCI and for the remainder of the afternoon and evening gazed idly shoreward, and consumed large quantities of soups, malted milk and chocolate, poured piping hot from another wartime wonder, the self-heating can.

Having inspected the rather crowded

troop-deck of the LCI, I selected a hatch cover in the bows of the ship for my station, where, I reasoned, the air would at least be fresh and cool. I certainly did not reckon with the damp fog, drizzle and cold spray that enveloped me as our vessel headed down the channel in heavy seas shortly after midnight.

14 Jun 44 Landed in ASNELLES SUR MER, NORMANDY

By mid-day of the morrow the coast of Normandy was in view and all ranks crowded the rails to discuss our possible point of landing and details of strategy, etc. Our actual point of landing was ‘GOLD’ Beach, at 3 pm approx our landing craft hit the shore and we had arrived. Swiftly disembarking and forming up, the Company moved forward from the beach and picked its way through the rubble strewn streets of the coastal village of Le Hamel. Everywhere was thick dust, tangled wire and ruins, and just beyond the beaches, wrecked tanks, amphibian and the like, knocked out in the initial assault, while in a sheltered odd spot, plain wooden crosses, inscribed roughly in pencil, marked the resting place of those who had fallen in the attack. It was an eerie yet exhilarating atmosphere, punctuated as it was by the dull rumble of our artillery, some ten miles distance away, while over it hung the acrid stench of high explosives.

After a stiff up-hill climb, we joined Major Shepherd Nos 240 and 261 Coys in the bivouac area at St Com-Ne-Tresne, overlooking the town of Arromanches, after a breezy welcome from the Group Commander (Lt Col ‘Bill’ McClure), who had preceded us, all personnel set to work on camp and bivouac construction. Here I must pay tribute to the ingenuity of our cooks, who, with no cooking equipment whatsoever, produced ‘char’ for everyone in

a very short space of time. By late evening, the preliminary on the camp was finished, and with guards and pickets posted, the Coy relaxed into fitful slumber.

16 Jun 44 Commenced port construction

The days that followed, saw every available man on the beaches, unloading the 'dried-out' coasters and other craft which disgorged a stream of rations, petrol, ammunition and supplies, which were rapidly carried inland to the expanding dumps and depots.

A tour of the area at this time left one amazed at the progress made in the first 7-8 days of the landing. Beachheads had been constructed, roads and Summerfield tracking stretched away inland, airstrips were in operation, and DIDs and the like working at full pressure with and exceptionally good postal service in being. Water and Petrol points were functioning smoothly while ADOS of the area issued urgently needed supplies. Our vehicles had by this time arrived and in what seemed an incredibly short time we were collecting our pre-forwarded G1098 stores which were pressed into immediate service.

In my journeying, especially along the coast and particularly in the direction of Couselles and inland at Crepon, I could not help but be impressed by the siting and massive strength of the German pillboxes and defence works (though even tougher ones were encountered later on in the campaign) forming part of the vaunted West Wall. Despite our shattering pre-invasion attacks and those on 'D' Day itself, a substantial number of these strongpoints had remained fully operational and had only been subdued by direct assault. Dugouts subsequently examined revealed the same strength in construction and near luxury in their appointments which in some instances included spring-beds with mattresses, and panelled walls, to say nothing of smaller refinements.

30 Jun 44 Unloading LBVs at CABANE

Our Camp was now nearing completion, with a large and well-appointed cookhouse erected, Coy Office established in a nearby farmhouse, the stores sited, deep-trench latrines dug, and everything generally taking on the usual well-ordered appearance. 22 Group had moved forward and 48 Group (Lt Col Ballantyne) had taken over.

22 Jul 44 Working on 'Whale' at ARROMANCHES unloading stores and ammunition

Off the shore at Arromanches a strange and unfamiliar structure was being assembled. Some having superior knowledge, said a pier was being built, and in truth it was – but what a pier! At something over a mile distant from the shore, and within a breakwater of sunken block-ships and concrete caissons, floated a series of pier heads, while from them in the direction of the shore stretched three roadways supported by pontoons. This then was Port Mulberry, possibly the War's greatest engineering feat, and known affectionately to us who – apart from assisting in its construction, worked its busy quays from its inception until its handing over to other allied forces – as the "Whale."

Daily under the concentrated efforts of RE and RPC personnel, the pier, starting from the sea and shore simultaneously grew

nearer and nearer to each other until in the third week in June misfortune took hand in the shape of the worst June gale in the Channel for many years. For three days the storm raged, buckling the pier, puncturing pontoons and dashing small craft ashore, scattering valuable cargos over an oil-soaked beach and reducing the in-flow of badly needed stores to a trickle. At its conclusion, the second Mulberry in the American sector was considered irreparable and the British project at Arromanches severely damaged, but thanks to the unstinted efforts and ingenuity of all concerned the British Mulberry was repaired and in a very short space of time was in full operation with streams of vehicles heading seawards over floating roadways and returning shoreward fully loaded, over others. The narrow streets of Arromanches presented some difficulty in manoeuvring the massive load-carriers, but with seeming indifference a fly-over Bailey Bridge was constructed over the rubble of the sea front dwellings and work carried on apace.

The large concrete caisson forming part of the breakwater outside the harbour had been suitably equipped with AA Guns, and it was an agreeable surprise to us after our experience in N Africa and at the same time a tribute to the RAF that German air attacks against the port installation were spasmodic and largely ineffective.

Inland, 2nd Army and Canadian troops were battling grimly on the outskirts of Caen against the largest concentration of German armour so far encountered. Daily we read from Area HQ Information Sheets of attacks and counter-attacks with progress slow and painful. It was obvious that unless the lodgement area was extended very soon, the whole system of road communication would fail and out mobility be severely cramped, for at this juncture with the daily stream of men and vehicles coming in over the beaches, all the roads in the area were packed with vehicles of every description and traffic jams became very frequent despite one-way traffic circuits evolved by Movements and CMP. A tremendous strain was also being imposed on the DIDs who were being called upon to supply numbers far in excess of their establishment.

It was during this time that we were treated to what must be considered one of the most heartening sights of the campaign – a 500 bomber raid on Caen. It was late evening before we were warned of the operation, and seeking points of vantage on high ground we waited for the dull roar of the engines heralding the approach. The wait was short, for at 9.30 pm approx, in gathering twilight the first of a stream of Lancaster's and Halifax's crossed the coast and headed towards Caen. Jerry was alert, and very soon the sky was filled with smoke puffs of exploding AA shells. The effect on our planes however was negligible, for they headed straight in, dropped their bombs and headed back towards us in a never-ending stream. The rumble of exploding bombs was continuous and what little could be seen of Caen was soon obliterated in fountains of earth and smoke. As dusk fell the myriad colour tracer streams, gliding idly skywards added to the macabre scene. Still the bombs came and it was very noticeable that as the raid reached its climax the German ack-ack decreased in

intensity, indeed it seemed that nothing could live in such an inferno. The raid completed, the planes flew steadily back and we felt proud and immensely heartened and raised a cheer as they crossed the coast above our heads – homeward bound.

Within a few hours of their shattering blow, 2nd Army began the attack which was ultimately to drive the Germans from the city and open the way for further advances.

With the capture of Cherbourg by the American Forces it was felt that the strain imposed on the artificial harbour and the beach organisation would at last be relieved, but in point of fact it was some considerable time before Cherbourg was making any large contribution to the tonnage of stores landed, due to the very thorough demolition carried out in the dock area by the Germans before surrender. Consequently Port Mulberry continued to operate at high pressure, while other sections of our Company aboard Liberty ships lying within the breakwater, loaded the stream of RASC DUCKS, which in fair weather or foul, plied constantly between the ship and shore trans-shipment areas.

This intensely busy period saw visits from the DL 21st Army Group, Brigadier the Marquis of Reading KG CBE MC and Col Guy de Pass DL 2nd Army, and their comments and words of praise left us in no doubt as to the importance of our work and the great contribution Pioneers everywhere in the area were making to the cause.

With the rout of the German Forces in the Falaise pocket and the swift advance to the Seine and beyond, came rumours of a move forward, probable destination Holland, but the failure of the gallant and heroic Airborne attack at Arnhem, and the grim resistance of the German troops isolated in the Channel ports, prolonged our stay in the rear areas, for it was not until the capture and clearance of Antwerp that the need for a major port was filled.

And so the battle for the maintenance of supplies went on, with summer fading and the autumn and winter elements increasing, and still the Armies advancing into Belgium and Holland were being supplied from bases in Normandy and the Cherbourg peninsular. It was at this period that the grit and morale of our personnel was strained to the utmost, for with the advent of rougher seas the Whale became a most uncomfortable spot. Gale force wind, lashing spray and rain drove over the pier and 'spuds' rendering the work or our section difficult in the extreme and at times very hazardous. Picture for the moment the lot of the night shift who, having completed their allotted span, wearily trudged shoreward over the pitching, partially waterlogged pier, to return to damp bivouacs – (dug for safety below the ground) lit by a flickering candle and sited amid a sea of mud caused by almost continuous rain and departure and arrival of personnel.

Tentage was very scarce and Pioneer labour did not seem to rate very highly on the waiting list, and despite appeals, threats and the like we never succeeded in obtaining sufficient quantity to house the whole Company until shortly before our move forward, and even then the serviceability of the canvas left much to be

desired. However we did obtain enough to provide dining halls and the like.

I shall never forget the scenes in the Coy Office at evening conferences when, by flickering candlelight (later vastly improved by Tilley lamps) our OC Maj S H Smith in company with the CSM, Orderly Room Sgt and myself, framed the working party and meal details for the following day, our conversation broken spasmodically by the drip of rain through the roof and the scamper of rats in the rafters above.

1 Nov 44 Unloading Whale Pier head, ARROMANCHES

Occasionally 'flaps' occurred and without quibble working parties only recently returned to camp, bolstered by the entire HQ Section personnel – clerks, batmen and cooks – were rushed back to the beach and harbour to clear urgent stores at bottlenecks.

But with all the difficulties the spirit of the boys never flagged and our sense of honour remained, and in the end – amongst other feats – our Company held the highest day's tonnage record for the "Whale", which to my knowledge was never beaten, and I felt honoured to serve with the men who despite appalling difficulties and discomfort had accomplished so much.

Apart from the high tributes paid by employing services to all concerned, two senior NCOs of the Company – Sgt S Price and R Mawer – had the distinction of being Mentioned in Despatches for services of a high order during the period.

Nov Operations in North West Europe 1944 - 1946

After a series of delays due to shortage of troop carrying transport, the Company finally struck camp, and at noon on an early November day, boarded an RASC convoy for the first stage of the move forward.

10 Nov 44 Left ARROMANCHES and staged at ROUEN

Skirting Bayeaux, our convoy headed NE and soon we were in the vicinity of Benouville and Ouistreham where the wreckage of scores of gliders spread over the neighbouring fields reminded us very forcibly of the splendid part played by the British 6th Airborne Division in the initial assault, when the vital bridges over the Orne and Caen Canal were captured intact, and the eastern flank of the lodgement area secured.

As our convoy rolled on through pleasantly wooded country, the magnitude of the German Army's defeat and its disorganised withdrawal became very apparent, for on the road verges and in the ditches lay the shattered remains of enemy tanks and vehicles of all descriptions, with their armament pointing skywards at grotesque angles and with frameworks blackened and twisted by fire and high explosive.

By dusk we were on the outskirts of Rouen where we stayed for the night, and here again, particularly at the river crossings, hosts of wrecked and battered vehicles met our eyes. A silent testimonial to the accuracy and firepower of our armies and the RAF.

The following morning brought an early start, and by midday we were lurching on the bomb-blasted runways of Abbeville airfield. Here we were fringing the Pas de Calais, home of the flying-bomb, but time

could not be spared for an inspection of the elaborately camouflaged launching sites, though later on in the journey several were viewed from a distance.

11 Nov 44 Staged at LILLE

Heading away from the coast our convoy rolled steadily on through the French countryside, passing towns and villages whose names were already part of history.

During a brief halt, two aged Frenchmen approached our vehicle and gratefully accepted a proffered cigarette, indicating with quavering hands a series of ridges which ran uncultivated through the neighbouring fields, explaining that they were the front line trenches of the 1914-18 War where once before the flower of British manhood had engaged the German hordes in bloody battle. We stood gazing for several moments while our thoughts paid silent tribute, and then, boarding our vehicles passed onwards to Arras and a further night's rest.

12 Nov 44 Arrived BRUSSELS

The following day saw our convoy nearing Brussels and by noon we were threading our way through the city's outskirts.

We had heard often enough before of the gaiety of the city and of the hospitality of its inhabitants and it was not long before we were experiencing both first hand. Pausing to obtain direction to our reporting centre (HQ 34 Group), our vehicle and its occupants became the centre of local interest – small children clasped our hands, pretty girls smiled a welcome, while from neighbouring shops came gifts of luscious fruits – this was heaven indeed after the mud and toil of Arromanches.

Obtaining billeting instructions from 34 Group, our convoy headed away from the city centre to Lacken, where at St Anne's Barracks (a famed Belgium military establishment) our journey ended, at least for the time being.

23 Nov 44 Moved to MARCKHOVE near THOUROUT – work at BAD

Our stay in Brussels was all too brief – a mere 14 days – but during that time the city was thoroughly explored by all ranks, and many were the friendships made. My memories of those 14 days were legion; those which come immediately to mind being the immense varieties of goods of all descriptions in the shops (not seen in England or elsewhere since 1939) – the massive Bon Marche with its well-stocked departments – the fascinating atmosphere in the enormous lounge of the Hotel Metropole where, with an orchestra softly playing, we sipped fine lager from frosted, gold rimmed glasses and finally the wonderful ENSA Shows at the Garrison Theatre where stars of screen and radio including Noel Coward, Frances Day, Leslie Henson and Geraldo appeared for our entertainment.

Our duties during this period consisted purely of providing strand-by pickets, for political unrest was abroad in the capital, mainly concerning the proposed disarming of the resistance movement, and while the matter in question was not strictly our business, the maintenance of security of the L of C was.

Our future employment and location was now a subject of earnest discussion, and it was our hope that Antwerp and its massive docks would provide the answer, but alas,

apart from allowing us to watch the nightly spectacle of V1s heading toward the city, the power that dictated operations, sped us off southwards into Flanders where, near Thourout, we took up station with No 15 BAD and commenced the unfamiliar task of ammunition loading within the depot area.

Here dispersal seemed to be the order of the day for our Group HQ (98 – Lt Col Byrne), was located at Ostend, together with Area HQ, DADOS the APO and NAAFI EFI, while the DID was at Bruges, that lovely old-world town with its famous Belfry standing out as a landmark for miles around. Even the Company was not immune, for by reason of lack of suitable accommodation, the personnel were split into two large sections with nearly 2 miles separating them.

The provision of hot meals and drinks to working parties spread out over the Depot Area was in itself a problem, as for obvious reasons meals could not be prepared on the work site, and it was not uncommon for a Unit vehicle to leave Coy HQ at noon with a tea container, etc, and return in late afternoon having clocked between 30 and 40 miles, during the feeding of personnel, some of whom it was difficult to find when the employing service moved them to a different point without warning.

The solid fuel position for civilians and military alike was acute, and with dispersed billets and cookhouses, we found it extremely difficult to fairly allocate the meagre ration between sleeping quarters, mess rooms, cookhouses and baths. After lengthy experiments and aided by technical data issued by Catering Branch, Area HQ, Trombone cookers were installed in the cookhouses and operated with daily increased efficiency. For those unfamiliar with the apparatus, the cooker, as its name implies was in the shape of a trombone slide, pierced at intervals by small jets, and was inserted under the oven as hotplate and fed by a steel pipe for a barrel some 12 or 15 feet above the ground. The principle being that crude oil, under pressure, flowing to the pre-heated cooker (trombone), and the jets emitting a stream of inflammable vapour, which when ignited, burnt with the intensity of a pressure cooker. Of course 'teething troubles' occurred, and often one observed thick black smoke pouring from the cookhouses, while its inhabitants, cursing loudly, with steaming eyes and blackened faces, manfully struggled to clear the jets, the fare subsequently issued having a distinctly oily flavour.

The inevitable transfer and posting of personnel continued on a small scale, and our OC Major S H Smith was appointed CO of a Group HQ and was succeeded by Major F W Hall.

Just before Christmas 44, wintry weather set in and we experienced heavy snow falls which were accompanied by a biting east wind which swept unchecked across the flat country, piling snow into deep drifts. Apart from hindering operations, these conditions made the work of our section a nightmare. Ammunition boxes were frozen into solid blocks, while shells for 25 pounders upwards became encrusted in ice, making handling and loading extremely difficult and even hazardous. Several cases of mildly frostbitten hands being reported, and one or two unfortunates sustained damaged

feet – crushed by slipping shells.

Our peace of mind was not improved by the news of the Rundstedt offensive in the Ardennes, which, though eventually halted and beaten back, caused quite a ‘flap’ even in our remote area, and much apprehension amongst the civilian population of Flanders who were not anxious to experience another period of German rule.

The Company instituted anti-parachutist patrols, guards were doubled, road blocks constructed and arms carried at all times. Fortunately, little trouble came our way, and apart from the almost nightly rumble of explosions from the direction of Dunkirk, where the German garrison still held out, peace reigned over the snow-covered countryside.

Christmas in these circumstances, could obviously not be celebrated in the time honoured fashion, but with roast pork, Christmas pudding, a tot of rum and a dance in the Coy dining hall, attendance by practically all the local inhabitants (who I sincerely believe came for the warmth which our stove offered) the best was made of the occasion.

22 Feb 45 Moved to LEUZE – working at 15 BAD

The New Year opened in splendid fashion, for we received news of the commencement of UK leave. The first allocation was necessarily small and was balloted for, but in turn all personnel set off for their well-earned 10 days at home.

Civilian labour was now being used extensively within the depot, and it was no surprise to us when movement orders were received, and we headed SE to take up station in the small village of Leuze, some 16 miles from Mons and quite near the French frontier.

Our labour commitments were again mainly with a BAD, though detachments were located at Tournai, Ath and Renaix, staffing petrol stations, dumps and depots in connection with operation “Goldflake” already described by Brigadier J B Hillary CBE, in his article ‘A pioneer’s odyssey’, and involved the moving overland from the Mediterranean Theatre several divisions to be used as reinforcements for the assault on the Rhine.

With the approach of Spring came better weather and very heartening news from Germany. The allied armies were continuing to advance and though German resistance was stiff, we could sense that the climax was approaching.

In late March, in a clear blue sky, flew above our heads a great armada of tow planes, gliders and troop-carrying aircraft, bearing our airborne forces to the assault on the last natural barrier in Germany – the Rhine, and following the entire success of this operation, reports of progress, made us daily more optimistic.

Quickly the days and weeks slipped by, with the tempo of the allied advance quickening, until at the beginning of May, rumours of a German offer of surrender became persistent and the villagers told us of the varied announcements made to them over the radio. All these we treated a little pessimistically in the usual British manner, to their astonishment I fear, for they were all ready to hang out the flags and rejoice, whereas we were probing the future and what it held in store. Amidst this confusion came orders for a lightening move, which

after causing much inconvenience and hurried packing, was subsequently cancelled within 3 hours, leaving us slightly bewildered and shaken.

At last official news of the surrender was received and the village went en fete. For our part, we experienced a sense of great relief and later jubilation, and May 8th having been declared a free day, all personnel rested and thronged the Cafes to celebrate. In the afternoon the Company paraded with representatives of all religions, military and civilian organisations of the district, and proceeded to march through the village, headed by a very ‘scratch’ brass band, which at frequent intervals en route fell out, or rather in, to adjacent Cafes for liquid refreshment!

It was a moving and yet exhilarating experience for us, receiving as we did the plaudits of the dense crowd of onlookers, augmented by flowers and gifts of cooling drinks, for the afternoon was very hot and it was with thankfulness that we stood at ease before the Hotel de Ville to receive an address from the Mayor before returning to billets. Celebrations continued far into the night with exploding fireworks and music from the crowded Cafes filling the air. All together a remarkable occasion.

The following day, movement orders were again received and once more kits were packed, detachments withdrawn, equipment boxed and last minute preparations for the move made.

Operations in North West Europe 1944 – 46

Following the receipt of detailed movement orders, the Company entrained on the morning of 10th May 1945, and with farewells of Belgian friends ringing in our ears, our train pulled away from Leuze en route for Holland.

These early May days were filled with events of great importance, affecting all units to a greater or lesser degree, and with the victory celebrations hardly over, it was not surprising that on arrival in Nijmegen, information regarding billets, etc, was not immediately forthcoming. However, after lengthy telephone conversations directions were obtained and forming up outside the much-battered Railway Station, the Company moved off to temporary billets in a children’s school.

Nijmegen was still celebrating the liberation and the streets were gay with coloured bunting and orange flags. In the basement of our billet a tea party was in progress, and as we wearily shed our equipment, the party broke up and several Nuns appeared and, forming a group in front of us, gave a spirited rendering of the National Anthem “God Save the King” completing the delightful and slightly touching welcome by distributing fruit drinks.

During our brief stay in Nijmegen, landmarks of particular interest were observed including the massive 6,000 feet long bridge over the Waal, the scene of violent fighting during the great airborne operation “Market”, and which was finally captured intact.

The exchange of our Belgian Francs to Dutch Guilders was a No 1 priority and accordingly the 2IC and myself set off to the nearest field cashier, located at Goch, some 30 miles into Germany. Heading

eastwards from Nijmegen, we crossed the frontier and entered the Riechwald Forest, a former beauty spot, sadly marred by the devastation of war. Along the roadsides, tall pines shattered by shelling or partially felled for road-blocks, swayed drunkenly in the breeze, while in the Forest itself fluttered white tapes marking de-mined routes; abandoned equipment and sandbagged dugouts added to the sombre picture.

Emerging from the Forest we bumped onwards over the shell and mine-pitted roads, and finally entered Goch. Here the devastation was practically complete; streets and houses had been demolished and roads reduced to thin ribbons running through piles of rubble amongst which rummaged groups of bewildered looking German civilians, attempting to salvage some small item of value from the almost total wreckage. We exchanged our currency and, deeply impressed, returned to Nijmegen.

The following day we embussed for the next stage of our journey with the ultimate destination Rotterdam, and swiftly leaving Nijmegen behind, we were soon approaching Arnhem of immortal fame. Crossing the wide Bailey bridge over the lower Rhine we entered the town and here again we were saddened by the spectacle of ruined houses with furniture lying derelict in the once pleasant and peaceful gardens. Business premises had too been reduced to a shambles, and the glass strewn gutters lay naked tailor’s dummies, mute and shattered.

Pulling out of the town over the wooded windswept common, more evidence of the heroic struggle of the Airborne Forces against overwhelming odds during the battle of the previous September, met our eyes. In the hedgerows and road verges were the simple graves of the British and German dead, the crosses marking them, often surmounted by the familiar ‘crash-type’ or ‘coal-scuttle’ steel helmets, while in scattered heaps were the long, egg-shaped supply containers, dented and rusting.

After a short halt near Utrecht, for tea and haversack rations, we moved onwards over the bare flat countryside and in the early afternoon entered Rotterdam. Here our convoy was greeted by enthusiastic crowds waving the inevitable flags and cheering wildly.

A call at HQ 5 L of C gave no billeting instructions and after a further short journey, Company HQ was established in a modern spacious school. Pioneer Labour in the city was under the administration and control of HQ 22 Group (Lt Col W McClure DSO TD) and after renewing acquaintances, we received details of the many difficulties which at the time confronted the military and civil authorities.

The civilian population had been and indeed were literally on the verge of starvation, for despite the Allied food ‘dropping’ by air and the supplies rushed to the city by relief organisations, the amount of food available was insufficient to meet the demand. Soup kitchens and the like were operating and long queues assembled at midday and early evening, armed with jugs, basins and other receptacles, to collect the meagre ration of soup and biscuits.

Our own ration situation was far from comfortable either, for the rapid advance of the occupation troops had outstripped that of the supply organisation, who were again

being called upon to supply numbers far in excess of original estimates. The collection of rations, in these circumstances, was something of a nightmare, for a wait of 6 or 7 hours was practically normal, and the food issued often of the 'hard-tack' variety, and worst of all no cigarettes were available to meet the weekly issue until something like a fortnight after our arrival.

Here tribute must be paid to the grossly over-worked RASC staff of the DID, who, harassed on all sides by representatives of every organisation under the sun clamouring for supplies, maintained unflinching and impartial service to all concerned.

Apart from the food situation there were other matters worthy of attention. Due to fuel shortage, the electricity supply had failed, paralysing the city's tram system, lighting and heating, and making the job of resuscitation even more difficult.

The value of the Dutch Guilder had fallen to an incredibly low level and cigarettes held the chief purchasing power for any and every commodity. As an illustration, a 'nip' of the famed Dutch Gin could be obtained for a cigarette or two, currency prices being in excess of 5 guilders (10/-). This situation proved rather embarrassing to us, for with our own supplies strictly rationed and stocks dwindling, smoking became a pleasure to be indulged in surreptitiously, for to 'light up' in the street simply invited trouble, or at least a crowd of civilian onlookers, eagerly watching and waiting for the disgorged 'butt-end.'

The acute shortage of petrol had long since forced the majority of civilian cars off the roads, and business men, smartly dressed, rode to their offices on bicycles minus tyres and tubes, the naked rims making an indescribable clatter as the rider traversed the cobbled thoroughfares.

The disarmed and bewildered remnants of the German 25th Army had been concentrated in certain specific areas, and while awaiting orders to return to Germany, wandered the streets aimlessly, practically disregarded by civilian and allied forces alike.

The vicious German bombing of Rotterdam in May 1940, had left an incredible mark on the city's face, for great flat expanses of weed strewn rubble extended in all directions, broken intermittently by pleasant canals and waterways.

Little rebuilding had taken place though a few pre-fabricated shops had risen near the city centre, and on the outskirts a small colony of wood bungalows had been erected.

Much could be written of the beauties of Rotterdam and of the examples of brilliant engineering which exist in and around the city but space will not allow of a detailed description. In passing, however, mention must be made of the amazing variety of swing and lift bridges, including the structures across the Binnenhaven the largest Bascule Bridge in Europe; the Maas Tunnel, a feat comparable only with our Mersey Tunnel; the modern Boymans Museum; the New Zoo, noted for its very modern architecture and the huge Feyenoord Sports Stadium, seating 60,000 people.

As was expected, the primary duty of the Company was to assist in the unloading of

ships carrying relief supplies – food, clothing and food – and without delay working parties were despatched to the dock area. For a day or two work proceeded at full speed and then complications arose over the demands of the civilian Dockers to be allowed to resume their normal task. After negotiations, all military labour was withdrawn and the civilian Dockers commenced work, only to strike a short time afterwards, causing delay and confusion in the distribution of the badly needed supplies.

Other sections of the Company had been despatched to The Hague, where former German billets were cleared and their contents sorted for return to British Ordnance.

The area in the immediate vicinity of The Hague had from time to time been the target for Allied bombs, and it was not surprising therefore that damage to property was considerable.

This was most marked in the neighbourhood of the V2 launching sites, where the terrific blast from rockets, launched vertically, had stripped the roofs completely of tiles and shattered into fragments almost every window, thus adding to the general destruction.

June 1945 saw the commencement of the demobilisation scheme, and the departure of the first batch, Group 1, marked the beginning of the sad farewells to old friends which were to become a regular feature during the following months. Major F W Hall ad CSM Fred Simpson, two of the staunchest and fairest fellows one could wish to serve with, were among the first to leave. Major DWP Gibbs, who had narrowly escaped capture during the Ardennes offensive while in charge of a Pioneer detachment at Larosche, assumed command of the Company from this date.

With the extension of UK leave and the ever quickening demobilization, the need for further continental transit camps became apparent and the construction of a large camp at the Hook of Holland was commenced by RE personnel and some 60 per cent of our Unit was employed there on hut construction and similar tasks. 'The Hook' was not a pleasant place to be stationed, consisting as it did of a small cluster of houses and the port installations, the whole being bounded by expanses of sandy foothills, studded with German barbed wire and occasional minefields.

At this point on the coast, the German West Wall must have been considered practically impregnable, for with all roads leading to the coast running high on the top of the dykes and effectively sealed at strategic points by massive road blocks, the advance inland of any invader would have been well-nigh impossible.

I well remember inspecting a small cluster of houses and an innocent looking farm at a road junction. All buildings had been evacuated and within the original walls, and under tiled roofs, strongpoints and blockhouses of enormous strength had been constructed. Viewed even from a short range it was difficult to detect the presence of such a bastion, so complete was the camouflage.

Upon the disbandment of HQ 22 Group RPC, the Company came under the command of HQ 16 Group RPC (Lt Col Warde) together with 59, 212 and 243

Coys and a very happy relationship resulted.

The effect of demobilization and the need for general economy in manpower, stores, transport, etc, was now making itself felt in many ways, and soon the Company was 'mothering' a variety of smaller units such as the Town Major, PCLU staff, YMCA and Mobile Canteen staffs. Larger units too came under our wing from time to time, and on one occasion the massed pipe bands of 52 (L) Division (200 strong), on a courtesy visit to Rotterdam, were fed and accommodated for a short period.

Economy in equipment and stores was now being emphasised by visits to Units of the Army Inspectorate of Equipment, whose proverbial power and diligence usually had the desired effect (ie return of surplus stores) long before the actual visit. After an extremely thorough examination by this body, the Company received an excellent report which brought forth congratulatory messages from DL, 21st Army Group and the Area and Group Commanders.

With the advent of winter and a slight easing in labour commitments, sport and recreational training came to a fore, and after a series of trials the Coy fielded football and cross-country teams of quite high standards. The latter, competing in the Area Championships, won the Northern Zone Cup and medals, and three members of the team later represented the Area in the L of C Championships held in Brussels.

Christmas 1945, was a joyous and hilarious affair, for there was much to celebrate.

Victory was complete and, for the majority, release to civilian life was a matter of a month or two. With ample rations, supplements by a double NAAFI issue of beer, cigarettes and chocolate, the proceeding really went with a swing.

Xmas Day being rounded off by a most enjoyable dance, which was attended by many Dutch civilians, who joined in the fun whole-heartedly.

By this time the life of the Coy was rapidly drawing to a close. All around us Units were disbanding while others, forming the occupation forces, were moving off into Germany. We waited and wondered until with the departure of Major D W P Gibbs, came movement orders once more.

This was to be our last journey and the destination was Belgium. Our last duties, to provide guards and administer a German POW Camp at Zandevoorde, Ostend, while 'running-down' prior to disbandment. Our OC for this last operation was Major W McConnell.

Quietly and efficiently the job was done until in February 1946 the signal '307 Coy RPC disbanded' was despatched to all concerned.

So ended the life of a typical Coy of the Royal Pioneer Corps, which though comparatively young in life was placed beside the veterans of Dunkirk, had seen a very fair share of service, roughly 12 months having been spent in the UK and 2½ years abroad, including North Africa, France, Belgium and Holland.

We had made many friends on our journeys; endured tropical heat and lowland snows; had met in Kipling's words 'With triumph and disaster,' and in the end we could say in all truth that we had upheld the Corps motto and our labour had helped to conquer all. ■

Royal Pioneer Army Emergency Reserve

In 1950 the Army was short of manpower and the government decided to form the Army Emergency Reserve (AER)

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

IN 1950 the Army was short of manpower and the government decided to form the Army Emergency Reserve (AER). Volunteers would be required to serve for five years, completing a two-week camp once a year.

At that time the National Army consists of an Active (or Regular) Army and a Reserve Army, which included the Territorial Army and the Army Emergency Reserve.

The Active Army was composed of: a. Regulars, men and women who enlist voluntarily and b. National Service men, who are called up for compulsory military service.

Men who enlist voluntarily did so for 22 years with the exception of the Brigade of Guards, into which a man may enlist for 3 years, and some specialists who may also enlist for 3 years if they have certain civilian qualifications on enlistment.

A man who enlisted for 22 years had the right to transfer to the reserve at the end of

6 or 9 years from the date of attestation, or to terminate his service after 12 years or any succeeding period of 3 years from that date. (Note: in addition to the 6 or 9 year option a 3 year option was initiated in the early 70's).

National Servicemen served for 2 years with the Colours and part-time for a further three and a half years in the Territorial Army (TA) or the Army Emergency Reserve (AER).

The Territorial Army was made up of:

a. Men who may have voluntarily engaged for an initial period of 2, 3 or 4 years (and who subsequently re-engage for further periods of 1, 2, 3 or 4 years)

b. National Servicemen who have completed their 2 years' service with the Active Army and have passed on to do three and a half years compulsory reserve service, during which they are normally required to undergo training for a maximum of 20 days, including one continuous period of 15 days in annual camp.

The AER, consisted mainly of technical or specialised units, came into being in 1950

and was designed to complete units and formations to strength in technical and trade personnel on mobilisation.

It is maintained by the voluntary enlistment of civilians, for periods of 2, 3 or 4 years (which may be extended by periods of 1, 2, 3 or 4 years), and by National Servicemen directed to it instead of to the TA for their part-time service.

This reserve was composed of three categories: AER 1, with liability for service at home and overseas in a peace-time emergency short of war; AER II, with liability to be called up on threat of war; and AER III, which consisted entirely of volunteers who are qualified electronic technicians.

The AER generally do 15 days annual training supervised by Regulars; they receive bounties of varying amounts, together with army pay and allowances during training. National Servicemen serving with the AER were allowed to become volunteers.

The booklet below shows the terms and conditions of the RPC Army Emergency Reserve. ■

INTRODUCTION.

The object of this small pamphlet is to try and put into simple words and meanings the conditions of service in the Royal Pioneer Corps (Army Emergency Reserve), which forms part of the Reserve Army. This pamphlet deals entirely with the potential volunteer and normally one who has seen previous Military service in some branch of the Army, Royal Navy, or the Royal Air Force. It will also deal entirely with the requirements of the RPC (AER) and should not be read as applying in full detail to Other Arms of the AER.

There can be no doubt about the urgent need for an adequate Reserve Army by which we can destroy any false illusions that an aggressor may have regarding a quick victory, should he contemplate an attack, and through which probably deter him entirely. There can also be no doubt about the necessity of a strong Reserve Army with a strong backbone of volunteers fired with that Yeoman Spirit that produces real live Units. Such Units we require in the RPC (AER) and such Units are essential if the Reserve Army is to function to capacity if ever it is required. We all know that without the "Royal Pioneer" the Army's task will be retarded. We must still maintain the record quoted by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field-Marshal Sir William Slim that "The Pioneers always seemed to be where they were required and at the right time no matter where the action was taking place."

The position at present in the RPC (AER) is that we have approximately 40 Units and have a fair percentage of the rank and file necessary to fill these Units on Mobilisation. These people, that is, Corporals and below, come from the National Service men of the Royal Pioneer Corps who are completing their part-time service in the AER. They are first-class soldiers who compare very favourably with those Pioneers of the Beach Groups, Airfield Construction Coys, and other Units that we knew so well during the War. You may say from this, "What are they worried about?" And there is a very simple answer. We require volunteer experienced Sergeants, Warrant Officers and Officers to fill such appointments in our RPC (AER) Units. It is not fair to expect the National Service man of two years' whole-time service to fill such appointments, and it is the object of this pamphlet, therefore, to explain exactly what the conditions of service are for those Officers, Warrant Officers and Sergeants who are prepared to give a small proportion of their time to serve with these Units.

GENERAL.

The overall general policy for the RPC (AER) is to provide a reserve that may be used in the following circumstances.

1. To be called out on permanent service when the Royal Army Reserve or any part of it is called out by Proclamation and in that event to serve in any part of Her Majesty's Land Forces in any part of the world. (This usually means in time of War).

2. To be called out on permanent service in the U.K. without Proclamation in defence of the U.K. against actual or apprehended attack.

NOTE—It does not include, to be called out on permanent service, for service outside the U.K. with out Proclamation when warlike operations are in preparation or in progress. This only applies to Category AER I which is not included in the RPC (AER).

3. In addition to the above, it is incumbent upon the RPC (Army Emergency Reservist) to complete a 15 day Annual Camp sometime during the Summer of each year for which he receives normal rates of pay and in the case of Other Ranks a bounty and will be described later on. There is no additional camp training or attendance at Drill Halls included in his service. The 15 days in camp is his sole peace-time commitment.

OFFICERS.

Certain vacancies exist for Officers in the RPC (AER) and the following may be considered.

- (a) Officers who have previously held a commission on a full-time basis.
- (b) Certain University students, and
- (c) Volunteer or Reservists who have completed an Annual Camp and are recommended by their O.C. for a commission.

Medical Standards required of an Officer in the RPC (AER) are high and in accordance with Table I of the PULHEEMS Administrative Pamphlet 1950. This means they must be fit to serve in any part of the world.

The age limits are, minimum 18½ and maximum, Lieutenants 40 years, Captains 45 years, Majors 48 years, and Lieutenant-Colonels 50 years.

The duration of engagement is 4 years which may be extended on application under certain conditions.

Pay and Allowances whilst in Annual Camp are exactly as for the Regular Army. The following minimums are given:—

2/Lieutenant ... 17/6d. per day.

Lieutenant ... 19/6d. per day.

Captain ... 21/6d. per day.

Major ... 23/6d. per day.

Lieut. Colonel ... 25/6d. per day.

In addition Marriage Allowance at the rate of 18/6d. per day, where applicable is issued whilst in Annual Camp.

There is no bounty for an Officer of the RPC (AER) as he serves in Category II (A).

The method of a previously commissioned Officer obtaining a gazettement to the RPC (AER) is for him to apply to HQ AER (RPC), Hermitage Camp, Wrexham, for the necessary forms of application and full details of service which will be sent to him without obligation. After he has completed and returned the forms he will be normally required to attend an interview with a senior Officer of the RPC, before he is gazetted. On gazettement he will receive a modified outfit allowance of approximately £30 for the purpose of buying certain items of clothing. He will not be required to purchase S.D. or No. 1 Dress, and he will be given certain free items of clothing including battledress, boots, etc.

An Officer who wishes to resign on compassionate grounds after gazettement may submit an application to do so but will be required to refund a certain proportion of his outfit allowance if the resigns within three years of gazettement.

Gazettement normally takes place in ones old W.S. rank. Higher temporary or Acting rank apply as in the Regular forces. The RPC (AER) Officers' appointments are open to ex-members of all Arms and Corps of the Army. There are certain Quartermasters vacancies at present.

OTHER RANKS.

There are at present many vacancies existing in the RPC (AER) for ex-W.O.'s, C.Q.M.S.'s and Sergeants of all Arms. There are also many vacancies for truck drivers and clerks. Conditions of service for the Other Rank is as follows:—

The ex-W.O. or Senior N.C.O. is normally re-granted his old W.S. rank after attestation. In order to comply with the enlistment procedure

he is required to be enlisted by a Recruiting Officer for either 2, 3 or 4 years, which may be extended if he wishes, but attestation must be carried out in the lowest rank. His previous W.S. rank is re-granted immediately it is known and it is later confirmed as Substantive rank.

Medical standards are high and require a volunteer to be able to serve in any part of the world.

Age limits are, minimum 18 years, upper 45 years, except in the case of Specialists and Tradesmen were it is 50 years. A Warrant Officer or Colour Sergeant may be regarded as a specialist in certain circumstances.

His obligations are as described above. For his 15 day Annual Camp each Summer he receives normal rates of pay and allowances as in the Regular Army, plus a bounty of £7.10s. and a proficiency allowance of £1.10s. 00d. Basic rates of pay vary considerably according to the volunteers previous service but for a married Sergeant his pay in camp, including his bonus, amounts approximately £27 and in the case of a Warrant Officer £30.

Clothing, accommodation, messing and travel to and from camp are free. There exists at present, good promotion prospects for those suitable. Attestation is carried out by the local Army Recruiting Officer.

NATIONAL SERVICE MAN.

In addition to the above there is the National Service Man who whilst completing his compulsory part-time service may elect to become a Volunteer for a period of not less than 1 Camp more than his compulsory quota. He is not entitled at present to a bounty until his last and voluntary camp.

ANNUAL TRAINING.

In order to foster keen Unit team spirits the RPC (AER) Coys. are based upon definite geographical areas, e.g. 105 (Yorkshire) Coy. RPC (AER), 63 (London) Coy. RPC (AER), etc., etc. and in these Units one will find people from those areas. Each Coy. assembles in camp each year at a pleasant spot named Overton-on-Dee, North Wales. The Camp which overlooks the River Dee is exclusive to RPC (AER) and during the Summer approximately 6 different camps are held, each containing 6 RPC (AER) Coys. Some of these Coys. are Smoke Coys. and have the latest mechanical apparatus. Training for other Coys. includes basic infantry training, including firing an Annual range course.

There is ample sport and recreation in camp. There are cadres for those N.C.O.'s who consider they would like to brush up their training before taking over their Sections. Please do not refrain from joining because you may think you are rusty. It is natural to become so after 6 years away from the Service and it is expected.

If you require further information please write to the undersigned or call at your local Army Recruiting Office. You will not be pressed to join if you do not wish. Alternatively you may wish to talk the matter over with a RPC (AER) Officer in your district. His name and address will be supplied if you wish.

G. W. B. WISE, Major,
Commander,

HERMITAGE CAMP, HQ, Army Emergency Reserve,
WREXHAM, Royal Pioneer Corps.

Training and Building of the Pyramid

The full story of the training and building of the pyramid at the Festival of Remembrance at The Royal Albert Hall, 1966 by members of The Royal Pioneer Corps

Report: Ex Cpl (23652392)

John McDonough

Pictures: RPCA Archive

PRIOR to the selection of personnel to train to build the 206 Company's pyramid at the Royal Albert Hall I was sent to Bicester to attend a Defence & Employment Course. This course lasted between 12 and 16 weeks, the idea of the course was to train RPC personnel how to deal with both the normal duties of a Pioneer whilst in Barracks together with the defensive duties of protecting a Brigade Headquarters in the field.

Three points of the defence around the HQ was covered by Pioneers and the fourth was covered by RMP personnel. The training involved a lot of marching, road running and route marching of anything up to 30 miles at a time. When I left this course I thought I was super fit – later I found out differently!

Two weeks after my return to Long Marston the selection of personnel to build the pyramid started. After all the training I had been doing while at Bicester the basic training of marching and running was a doddle.

The selection of men started in mid April 1966. A total of 60 men turned up for selection. 20 men were needed for the exercise of building a pyramid out of ammunition boxes and a further eight men and one junior soldier to perform a display of past, present and future soldiers. The officer who thought up this exercise and presented the concept to the organisers of the Festival of Remembrance was Capt Mike Howard of 206 Coy RPC. He came up with all the training needed to build up the men's strength to be able to build a pyramid out of full ammunition boxes. After discussion with the organisers it was decided that instead of boxes filled with life ammunition they would be filled with sand to the exact weight of ammunition.

The training started on a Monday after everyone had presented themselves for selection. At 0900 hrs we left on a 5 mile march (cold turkey), we started off on a quick march which we kept up for the first mile. We stopped for a short break of about 5 minutes and then continued the march again in quick time for the remainder. When we returned to camp we continued marching taking short breaks and then marching some more. This went on for

the rest of that day. At the end of the first day five had dropped out leaving 55 men. The remainder of the week continued the same way and by Friday the number had dropped to 50.

On Monday we reported for training at 0730 hrs, dress was Boots, fatigue trousers, T-shirt and, of course, beret. We were told that this week would be a little different, the march would consist of part run and part walk march. We started off at a fast walking march for the first half mile followed by a double march for the second half mile. At the end of the first mile we stopped for 5 minutes and then continued with a fast walking march for half mile followed by a double march and then a 5 minute stop. This continued for a full five miles when we returned to camp and went straight onto circuit training. This consisted of press ups, step ups, throwing medicine balls to one another, pull-ups and then more marching. Apart from a break for lunch this training went on all day.

Tuesday followed the same as Monday and by the end of the first three days the numbers had dropped to 40 and by the end of the second week the numbers were only 35.

The real training began at the start of the third week. It started with a five mile double march followed by a 5 minute stop and then continue with the double march for five miles. This time when we returned to camp we went first to circuit training followed by something new. As we had 35 men left we were split into five-man teams. Capt Howard explained that each party would have a five-man team and four teams would be required.

This new type of training turned out to be the worst to date; five of us had to stand in a line facing another five man team. In between us was a full size telegraph pole, about 16-18 feet long and about 18 inches thick at one end going down to 10 inches at the other. One team had to pick up the telegraph pole and pull it into their chests. The next instruction was to extend the arms and let the pole run to the palm of the hand and hold it there for a few minutes and then let it run back into the crook of the elbow and then pull it back onto the chest. This exercise went on for five times and, as the pole came down for the fifth time, it had to be thrown to the other team opposite. They had to repeat the exercise and then pass the pole

back. By the end of the third day of this special training the number of men was down to 30.

This type of training continued, the day started at 0800 hrs with a five mile road run. The road run lasted about 1 hour and 15 minutes and was followed by circuit training for 30 minutes and then the telegraph pole exercise for another 30 minutes.

Capt Howard explained how he wanted the exercise to be carried out explaining the number of ammunition boxes required and how he wanted the first two layers to be made up. These two layers were to be made up by units of four ammunition boxes banded together. The first layer was to be made up of 25 units of 4 boxes each, totalling 100 boxes. The second layer was to be started one box width in from the edge on all sides; the total number of units needed was 16 units of 4 boxes each, totalling 64 boxes.

The next three layers were of single box units, again these layers had to start one box width from the edge on all sides, the total number required for the third layer was 27 boxes. The fourth and fifth layers again had to be one box width from the edge and required 8 boxes and then 2 boxes. From the top of the fifth layer the boy soldier had to stand for the display. (Ed note: this boy soldier was Dave Liptrot MBE who left the army as WO1). The total number of boxes needed to build the pyramid was 201.

By the end of the fourth week we had all the ammunition boxes needed. From the fifth week incorporated into the weekly training was studying the method of building the pyramid. This involved working out how to keep the four box units together while transporting them and building the layers. We started by putting one box long ways with the second box running from the side making one side of the unit square. The third and fourth boxes were placed on the sides of one and two. The centres of these units were empty.

The next problem was to band these four boxes together to keep them stable enough to carry. No matter how we tried banding them, although they looked good while lying on the floor, as soon as we tried to lift and move them they kept falling apart. We tried all types of combinations but none of them worked.

For weeks we continued training every

morning i.e. running 10 miles, followed by circuit training and then telegraph pole training. Every afternoon was taken with building the pyramid and trying to get round the problem of the units of four boxes and keeping them together. Eventually after everyone had made a suggestion, which none appeared to be working, one of the guys suggested that we try putting a wooden box in the centre of the four boxes to keep them stable. Capt Howard agreed to this suggestion and it worked, we had finally cracked the problem of the base units. The necessary number of wooden boxes were made and they were then painted the same colour as the ammunition boxes so that they would not be seen by the audience both in the hall and on television.

The training went on all year, apart from personnel taking leave the rest of the time was training, training and more training. By the end of September everyone knew exactly what they were doing either standing on the eight corners of the Pyramid or in the team building the Pyramid.

On the Saturday before the Festival the final team assembled at camp to load up everything that was going with us to the Hall, all went onto one four ton vehicle.

On Monday the whole team assembled on the parade ground at Long Marston in preparation for leaving for London. We left on an Army bus with our entire suitcases stacked at the back; the bus was followed by the four tonner. On arrival at barracks we were left to get settled and to sort out our meals, i.e. find the cookhouse.

After breakfast on the Tuesday morning we had a quick pep talk and were then ready for our normal training at 0800 hrs. The full squad (all 29 of us) came out of the barracks onto one of London's main roads at a quick march, Capt Howard decided we were moving too slow because he ordered us to double march (I think this was because a lot of traffic had built up behind us!). We kept this pace until we reached one of London's parks and continued at this speed for about ten miles. We then told to squat while he explained the itinerary for the week. Today more training in the park with a packed lunch sent in from the barracks, Tuesday much the same. Wednesday was training in the morning and then taking all our equipment to the Albert Hall in the afternoon.

We arrived at the Hall at 1100 hours to find that the team ahead of us hadn't finished moving their stores so we had to wait until 1230 hrs. The stores had to be taken into the building through one of the front entrance doors, along a passage inside the hall, down the stairs to the edge of the arena. Here they had to be lifted over the railing around the arena and then taken to our storage area. It took us one and a half hours to complete this task. The Coldstream Guards saw us start unloading and estimated it would take us three hours – they forgot we were Pioneers!

Thursday was another day of training first our normal morning jog to and around the Park and in the afternoon in barracks as we had been authorised the use of the gymnasium. At 1700 hrs Capt Howard called us together and informed us we were to be stood down until 1700 hrs the following day when we would receive our

final briefing. The briefing ended at 1830 hrs and we were again stood down until 0630 hrs the following day.

Saturday morning arrived – 'D Day' for Display. We had a five mile run returning to barracks about 0930 hrs. Following a leisurely shower and a snack we were then stood down until lunch. We left to travel to the Hall at 1430 hours arriving at 1530 hrs. The reason we had to be inside the Hall so early was because we had to enter the building through a side entrance, walk through the auditorium climb over the fence, cross the arena and then go to the basement before the arrival of the audience.

I felt the atmosphere in the waiting room to be electric, from the room we were in we could not hear anything from outside. When the show began all the information came into the room over a tannoy. The rooms had been organised to speed up the movement of the teams who were to appear in the show. The second team following the first team came from a different area so there was no congestion in the stairwells or the corridors. As one team was leaving the arena the next team was already in the entry positions. Eventually we were called to stand by, that meant we had to wait in the corridors next to our entry point. All of a sudden we were called into the arena and from then on all was just a blur!

I was in Team C in the front row on the right facing the Queen. For some reason the exercise was made into a race, this came out of the blue for us. As soon as we got the go we went hell for leather loading up a trolley with the four box units, we placed our boxes into place and had to rush back for the single boxed and reload the trolley with them. Back to the pyramid and complete the display at the same time as everyone else and still keep the pyramid safe and ready for the troops to do their display.

After the completion of the troops display the four teams had to start and dismantle the pyramid, stack the boxes onto the trolleys and move them back to the storage

area. Once we had the trolleys back to the storage area we had to double to the assembly area in front of the Queen and wait for the order to come to attention for the salute.

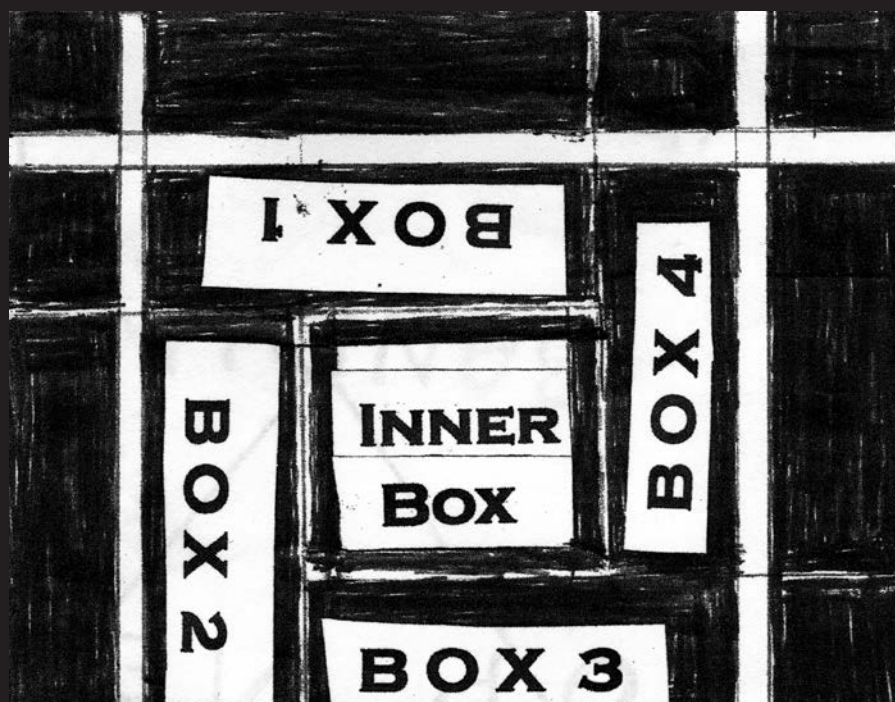
Because we were racing to finish, the steering bar at the front of my trolley started to swing from side to side and it took all of my strength to stop the trolley from jack-knifing. I believe our team arrived at the assembly area in second place, but as I said earlier it all seemed like a blur. As fast as it started it was over and we were back down stairs.

On completion of the final display we were called into the arena for the final part of the festival, the prayers and the two minutes silence and, of course, the flutter of the poppy petals. When I used to watch this part of the festival I used to notice the number of troops that blinked their eyes when the petals landed on their faces. I cannot speak for others but I made sure I kept my eyes wide open, I was thinking "these petals represent a person that died for me to have a life".

After the show was finished all the troops had to stay in the arena until all of the audience had left the building. While they were filing out I heard someone in the front row say "I didn't know there was still Pioneers in the British Army, I thought they had been disbanded at the end of the war". Another said, "That was a stunning display". My heart was swollen with pride just for being part of the display.

You may think a lot of this is made up; believe me it is all true. As I was recalling the event the more I was writing the more I was remembering, I believe when I was looking at the petals over the years it kept all the memories alive. I was 30 years old at the time of the festival, I am now 81.

The reason I wrote this recollection of the training the building of the pyramid was to put all the doubters to rest once and for all and to explain to the those who thought the ammunition boxes were empty. There is nothing further from the truth. The boxes were weighed and checked by an independent officer from the Royal Army



Ordnance Corps.

We returned to the Royal Albert Hall on the Sunday morning to collect our stores i.e. the ammo boxes and trolleys and, once again, we had to carry the stores out of the hall and it took us only an hour and a half to complete this task.

It had taken the RPC a long time to get an invitation to perform at the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall and after 522 Company's fiasco in 1967 they were never asked to perform there again. 206 Company had taken the Corps out of the dark ages and brought them into the light, one year later 522 Company sent the Corps back into the Dark!

In May 1967 I was posted to a D & E Platoon at 5 Inf Brigade, Tidworth, we were billeted with a Signal Squadron and came under them for discipline.

Most of that year passed without any problems until the Festival of Remembrance and 522 Company's fiasco. The Kineton misfit Brigade went to the Royal Albert Hall on the crest of the wave that 206 Company had set in motion. Because of their mismanagement, lack of preparation and lack of any real skill they did the RPC a disservice and made the Corps the laughing stock of the whole Army.

For months after their exhibition every member of the Corps had to apologise for the farce. When the Signalmen, who always thought they were superior to us, saw their performance we were treated lick muck. After they had had their fun for two or three months they eventually said "The performance this year was not as good as last year when they built the pyramid!"

At least I had a saving grace, I told them that I had been one of the team on the

pyramid – that put a dint in their jokes.

If the "Joke" of an Officer from 522 Coy had bothered to research the subject like the Officer from 206 Coy he would have known that water was not allowed in the arena of the Hall as the floor was all varnished wood and that a substitute for water is "SAND" – the material our ammo boxes were filled with.

(John left the Corps in November 1978 and started work at Newcastle University in the security department of the University Police in January 1979 and worked there until he retired in July 2002, aged 65 years 10 months. In January 2003 he went to the Caribbean for a holiday and in February 2005 returned and has lived there ever since.)

He finished his article with the following sentence: "You might have noticed I have contempt for the misfits from 522 Coy that brought down the integrity of the RPC"

Ed note: The following are extracts from The Royal Pioneer:

Issue No 89 dated Dec 66:

The Handling Display for the Festival of Remembrance is well under way and has aroused a tremendous amount of interest in and around the camp. Capt Mike Howard the Project Officer is busy getting everything ready for the Open Day on 29 Oct. It is now a familiar and much watched sight to see Sgt "Stew" Clapperton pushing his men through the routine time and time again. The men employed on the project have really taken it to heart. LCpl Hodges who trapped his hand, ripping off a finger nail in the process, only left the team for sufficient time to have his injury dressed, he was soon back tackling his task with just as much vigour and enthusiasm. This gives some idea

of the spirit of these men.

Issue No 90 dated Mar 67

Following our successful Handling Display we received many congratulatory letters.

Here are a few extracts:

From Ralph Reader "It may interest you to know that when Her Majesty left the Albert Hall that evening she remarked how much she had enjoyed the presentation by the Royal Pioneer Corps."

From the QMG General Sir Allan Jolly to DAPL, "You must have felt proud of them."

From Brigadier RD Austin DAPL, "It reflects glory upon the Unit the Group and the Corps."

From Lt Col W Pope, "This one show has been the best thing that has happened to the Corps for years."

From Lt Col RG Whelband, "In my twenty-six years with the Corps there have been many proud moments but Saturday's event was the proudest of them all."

From Lt Col GF Donovan, "There is no doubt it was a great triumph for the Corps."

Our thanks and appreciation to Capt Mike Howard, Sgt "Stew" Clapperton and the men of the team who worked so hard to make the display such a great success.

The following is an extract from Issue No 94 of The Royal Pioneer dated March 1968, (Were you part of the team, can you explain what went wrong, did you witness it either at the Hall or on television?):

"The Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall took place on 11 Nov 67. Capt Estop, CSM Markham, Sgt St Hill and party to London and did their stuff in true Pioneer Fashion. It shows that "Log Rolling" can pay off, and our congratulations to them all." ■



D-Day Normandy

Memories

An interesting story by an ex 85 Company Pioneer Corps Soldier, that was previously published in the March 1995 Association Newsletter

Report: Mr J Wiegand, ex 85 Coy PC
RPCA Archive

IN February 1943 we left Somerset and joined Combined Operations to train for amphibious landings on HMS Dundonald, (a concrete ship), at Troon Harbour.

For the next two months we jumped in and out of the Clyde and left in April after the Duke of Gloucester's Inspection. We marched to Ayr Racecourse and the 1st Battalion of the Ox and Bucks LI. For the next six months we trained for opposed landings on Scottish, Welsh and English beaches.

In November we moved to Cromarty Firth in the Highlands and learnt to waterproof vehicles for wet landings, which we practised once and twice a week. On Boxing Day 1943 at Dukes Camp, Inverary, we made five wet landings from our landing craft in depths between 30 and 50 inches, in rain that did not stop. At Bughead next month, 13 men died on frozen beaches in stormy weather.

In warmer Sussex in April 1944, we were newly kitted out: a 3 ton Dodge, a 15 cwt Chevrolet, (this one I landed in). As a DR, I also had issued a 350cc OHV Triumph. Then we moved to a closed camp at Becton By-Pass from which, on Saturday 3 June, we drove to the Royal Albert Dock to board a scruffy collier from Middlesbrough. Pat Collins and I co-drive the Chevy. My Triumph was changed for a 125cc James, which was in the back – along with 12 loaves of white bread and a hundredweight of potatoes.

We left the Dock that afternoon and anchored opposite a public house at Southend for 24 hours while "Ike" heard the weather forecasts and made up his

mind. He did and we left the safety of the Thames to sail across the Channel. On Monday night, against the rules, I went below and slept in the cab, to be woken next morning by a great deal of noise. Pat shouted, "It's started and breakfast is ready." From the deck we had a grandstand view of the invasion. The mortars were going off in salvos and the airborne were truly impressive landing the other side of the fall of shot. The armada was heading to the RE and Pioneer built Mulberry Harbour.

At 3 pm and a mile off shore, we were hoisted out and loaded on to an LCM, driven by a Commando. We stopped within 200 yards of the beach, which we had watched being shelled at 30 minute intervals. Our driver said that "Jerry" was regular and we would wait until after the next salvo, go in fast, unload and get off the beach as fast as possible. As soon as four shells exploded; we were in. The LCM dropped its ramp on to an anchored Hippo raft and we rolled ashore. We wet our tyres in six inches of water.

I saw my first dead body sloshing about among obstacles and flotsam. We were at Nan/White on Juno. Following our coded map, we turned left to Berneires rail station. While Pat went in for information, I released the breather tapes on the engine. We were directed to the assembly area on the higher ground. Dead cattle lay in the fields. A drunken Frenchman greeted us with a few line of "Tipperary" and an empty cognac bottle.

We arrived and were told that a German counter attack had cut off the roads between Juno and Sword, our destination. We slept beneath the truck. The next morning we reached Douvres la Deliverande, where an Ox & Bucks private had a string of prisoners. He said we could

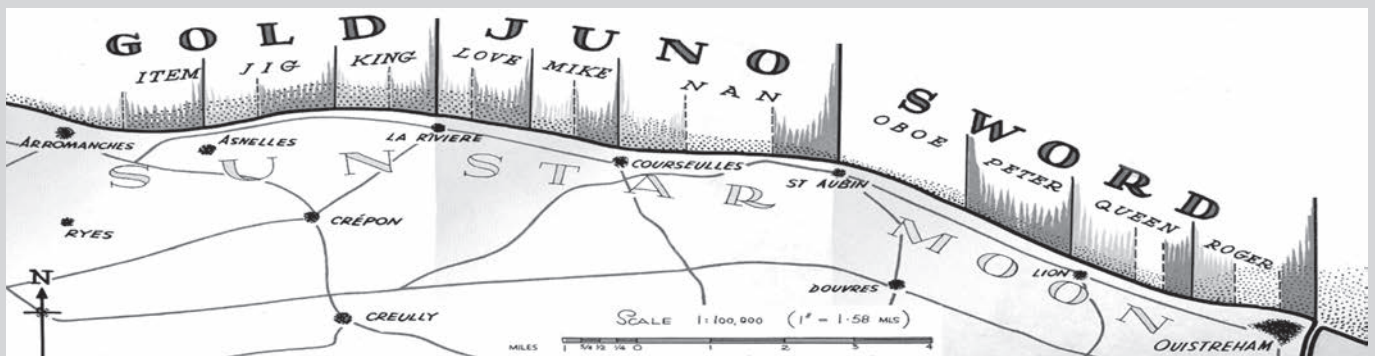
go no further, so we returned to the assembly area, stripped all the waterproofing from the engine and spent another night under our vehicle, with the sight and sound of tracer and 16" naval shells, rushing into Caen like express trains.

Clear to go next dawn, we were stopped a mile beyond Douvres by a large crater. A CMP was directing all traffic across a field. We started to follow the long line, 15' between each vehicle. The two trucks in front of us were hit and exploded in flames. We turned out of line, went for the crater and climbed out in booster gear, then on to Hermanville. An MP directed us along the beach road, lined with stacks of ammunition and an RAF LAA battery. A sudden burst from a machine gun strafing us halted traffic.

All jumped out to see six enemy, including the gunner and radio op, running 200 yards away. A stay-behind party, against which at that range our Stens were useless. I heard a shout, "One each for you lot", then a Bofors sounded. The enemy and the five shells reached the field's edge together.

The gunner was told off. But as I looked around, the gun was already loaded and elevated for the four ME 110's strafing the beach and road from 100' up, a more difficult target. When they were gone, I rolled out from beneath the truck and Pat came out from behind a stack of grenades.

The traffic thinned and we went to Ouistreham, to find 86 Coys' bivouac area in a garden by the beach. The CSM welcomed us, "Where the hell have you been". Then the next wave of ME's came over. I dived into the nearest hold and landed on Major Backhouse, our OC. I later learnt that we had 17 casualties that first day, five fatal. ■





■ Only one Pioneer short enough to get his face in! Picture: God knows!



■ Pioneers, Bicester 24 Feb 18 Picture: Someone who needs a better camera phone!



■ Major Billy Dilkes in his new Pioneer scooter! Picture: Mr Mraken



■ Pioneer dinner Grantham Picture: Someone who needs a better camera phone!



■ Remembrance Parade - journey home Picture: Someone who was awake!



■ Craig Winspear & Matthew Elliott in the Invictus Sydney Games Trials Picture: HRH Harry



■ Field of Remembrance Picture: Not another picture of Dusty!



■ Only Fools and Forces at Founders Day

Picture: David Jason



■ Glen Lath and Fitzroy with Nigel Farage

Picture: Neil Kinnock



■ WO1 and Mrs (Capt) Donaghue at the Ulster War show for the Army Benevolent Fund

Picture: Paddy



■ Spencer Norman

Picture: King Arthur



■ Field of Remembrance

Picture: Someone who needs a better camera phone!



■ Brig Higginbotham and Steve Layzell at Scott Memorial Edinburgh

Picture: Steve Layzell



■ Lisburn Remembrance Parade Andy Moore Dougie Durrant Wayne McDowall Ricky McCracken and Marty Thomas

Picture: Steve Davis

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



Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archives

A FEW more great photographs depicted in this issue. Above we have some Pioneers photographed during machine gun practice - probably trying to shoot at a barn door)

The photograph to the right is a very rare photo of a Pioneer getting cammed up! Anyone know who this Pioneer is?

The great photograph on the facing page depicts an officer of the Pioneer Corps leading his men through a smokescreen during training in Northern Ireland, 29 July 1943.

Over the page we have Pioneers of 522 detachment in the Falklands, dated 4th August 1982 (their names are added underneath the photo. Underneath that we have a rare photo depicting the Labour Corps 187 Coy Band, dated 1917.

On the facing page we have some clean Pioneers! Enjoying a bath after labouring on air raid wreckage in October 1940.

Over the page we have some Pioneers standing in front of a big rock and a Pioneer recruitment training poster.

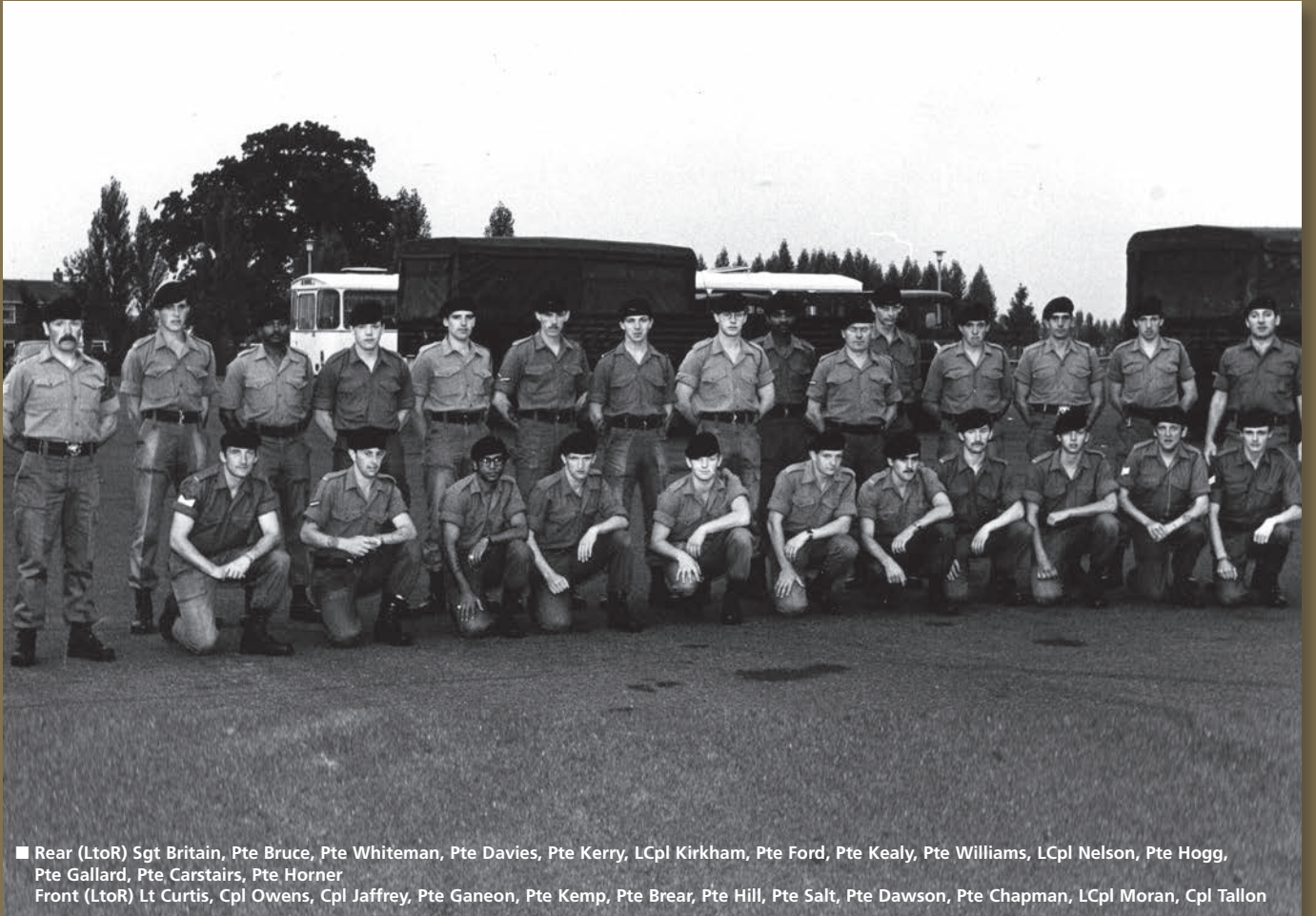
Then over the page again, we have a stunning photograph which has Pioneers laying prefabricated bitumised strips (PBS) for a new runway at B10/Plumetot, Normandy, as a Hawker Typhoon of No 198 Squadron, RAF takes off on the airstrip. ■



**Digging
through the
archives...**

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





■ Rear (LtoR) Sgt Britain, Pte Bruce, Pte Whiteman, Pte Davies, Pte Kerry, LCpl Kirkham, Pte Ford, Pte Kealy, Pte Williams, LCpl Nelson, Pte Hogg, Pte Gallard, Pte Carstairs, Pte Horner
 Front (LtoR) Lt Curtis, Cpl Owens, Cpl Jaffrey, Pte Ganeon, Pte Kemp, Pte Brear, Pte Hill, Pte Salt, Pte Dawson, Pte Chapman, LCpl Moran, Cpl Tallon











After basic Infantry training you will join your section in a Pioneer Company. Everyday work includes more training in military skills to ensure that your unit is always ready for operations. You will be taught the kinetic skills of manual handling as well as the operation of mechanical handling equipment to ensure that you can support your unit in the movement and handling of stores under any conditions.

Your training and skill will help you to achieve promotion—prospects have never been better and you will have every chance of improving your status and pay as well as the chance to retire with an excellent pension if you choose to join for a full career. You will learn about worksite and personnel management as you progress up the promotion ladder, and the opportunity

is there for you to join certain professional bodies because of the skill and experience that you gain during your service. Since the last war Pioneers have served in many foreign countries but more recently training, exercises and operations have taken Pioneers to North America, Hong Kong, Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus and Germany and for peace-keeping tasks to Northern Ireland.

Aspects of your Career as a Pioneer



Press Cuttings for 1981-1990

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the years 1981-1990. 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 1981-1990.

The Times 7 Sep 81 FROM OUT CORRESPONDENT, DUBLIN

Shan Fingh Virdee, aged 20, an off-duty, member of the Pioneer Corps, from Birmingham, was killed and another soldier was wounded when gunmen burst into a flat in Belfast early on Saturday.

The soldiers are thought to have been lured to the flat by two women, who escaped after four or five gunmen carried out the attack.

Police said that the flat, at Stranmillis Park, in the university area of the city, was either unoccupied or had recently been rented. A spokesman described it as a "respectable" area and said that normally the soldiers would have had nothing to fear by going there

Northampton Mercury and Herald 13 Nov 82

MEN WHO CLEAN UP THE FALKLANDS

It's cold, dirty, dangerous work – but they do it with a smile

More than 100 soldiers who trained for the Royal Pioneer Corps at Northampton's Simpson Barracks are now serving on the Falkland Islands.

Their work, in increasingly deteriorating winter weather, is with clearing dangerous Argentinean ammunition, much of which is buried. They also build huts and roads, repair damage caused during the fighting and generally help with rehabilitation.

Apart from the officers heading the Pioneer contingent, an important RPC position is that held by Warrant Officer Rick Ledgeway, who is Garrison Sergeant Major of the entire Army force – some 5,000 men.

Until leaving for the Falklands last July, WO1 Ledgeway was Regimental Sergeant Major at Simpson Barracks. He is 37 and lives at Hackleton with his wife Valerie, daughter Anne (1*) and son Stephen (15).

Pioneers have been involved with the Falklands operation from the first days of the fighting. A detachment went to the South Atlantic on the QE2 and helped establish the first bridgeheads.

These men returned home after the conflict ended and were replaced along with additional groups.

One of these – some 53 men – went out in August under the command of Major Darrel Ingle. They flew from RAF Brize Norton in a VC10.

Lieutenant Chris Johnston, the unit's

platoon commander, writes: "We landed to refuel at Dakar, then continued to Ascension Island, arriving in the middle of the night.

Lying offshore was the ferry MV Norland doing temporary duty as a floating barracks.

We were flown out to the ship by helicopters, and as each 12 men went on board, 12 eager Scots Guardsmen leapt into our seats on their way home.

The ship looked a bit war-worn and rather different from when it plied between Hull and Rotterdam.

There was a timetable in my cabin for bus services in those two cities!

But on April 21, Norland had loaded up with 2 para and was the first ship into San Carlos water for the invasion.

After the battles were over, she took Argie prisoners home – and on one trip carried over 2,000 of them – almost twice her normal load.

Major Ingle was in charge of 700 troops aboard, plus four women and two men with long hair!

They were a concert party going out to provide entertainment. The ship sailed 3,400 miles south.

The voyage was just what a cruise should be. We were well fed and enjoyed tropical sunshine.

The sea remained calm and the mountainous waves expected never showed.

We saw flying fish, dolphins and that famous bird of the southern hemisphere, the albatross, gliding effortlessly over the ocean.

After four or five days it became too cold to remain outside but the troops were kept busy with PT and weapon training with firing from the stern of the ship at rubbish targets.

There were also lessons on what we could expect – lectures on minefields, first aid and helicopter drill.

The weather changed and a gale was raging with horizontal sleet when we arrived and the Falklands looked extremely bleak.

A disappointment was that we did not meet HMS Invincible. We expected the great carrier to come close alongside as we were escorted in to Port Stanley, but the nearest she came to us was 100 miles. Out escorts were a couple of her Sea King helicopters.

Major General David Thorne, CO of Falklands Land Forces, came aboard and welcomed us with: "I need you, I need you all. And if you are not busy, it will be my fault.

"And if you are not busy you will be sent home," he added.

So we all chuckled and decided to look idle when ever he reappeared...

The Times 29 Nov 83 DOG LICKS DUKE AND SHAMES PIONEERS

Word reaches me from Ulster of an unfortunate hiccup in a dog-handling obedience demonstration, staged last week at Lisburn by the Royal Pioneer Corps for its Colonel-in-Chief, the Duke of Gloucester.

As the demonstration reached its climax on the parade ground of Army headquarters, a guard-dog named Clodagh broke ranks, shunned the commands of his hapless handler and sprinted for the Duke. The dog then clamped itself on the Royal shoulders and licked the Duke's face while the handler bellowed to regain control.

Happily the Duke, who knows his Pioneers, took the welcome well but Clodagh has now been back-squadded. "She's got to start her training all over again," said an uncomfortable officer yesterday.

Northampton Chronicle & Echo 28 Mar 84

PIONEERS DESERVE THE HONOUR

Nearly 24 years separate the Chronicle and Echo headlines "Take over day at Quebec" and "Town's top honour for the Pioneers", and these words mark the history of the Royal Pioneer Corps in Northampton.

The Pioneers moved into Northampton's Quebec Barracks – now renamed Simpson Barracks – in 1960 and they are to be granted the Freedom of the Borough tomorrow.

The history of the Corps and its intimate association with Northampton has been recorded in a series of unique scrapbooks kept at the HQ Museum at Simpson Barracks.

Major Bill Elliott, who is in charge of the museum, has collected Press cuttings for many years to compile the books, and two large volumes are devoted to the Pioneers activities in Northampton.

The Chronicle and Echo has maintained a keen interest in the Corps and figures largely in Major Elliott's scrapbooks.

There was a lot of Press coverage when the Pioneers marched into Northampton in 1960 and the then Quebec Barracks were expanded and modernised to accommodate them.

The Corps soon settled into their new base, establishing closer links with it in 1961 when they renamed it Simpson Barracks.

The name Simpson was chosen as a tribute to General Sir Frank Simpson, Colonel Commandant of the Corps until January 1961.

In 1963 the Corps was awarded the honour of having a train named after it. The diesel locomotive D45, "The Royal Pioneer Corps" took to the tracks in

November 1963.

Moving into the seventies the Pioneers continued to combine their military duties with involvement in the community.

They put on spectacular firework displays for the town's Guy Fawkes celebrations and show that they are game for a laugh at the town's local "It's a Knockout" contests.

In 1977 they took on a more serious role in the town acting as an auxiliary fire service during the national firemen's strike.

Members of the Corps demonstrate their physical prowess in many different sports and often raise money for charity – one member even pulling a cannon from John O'Groats to Northampton in one fundraising attempt of the seventies.

The scrap books are brought right up to date with material concerning manoeuvres in Germany and involvement in the Falkland War.

The Corps as it exists today was formed in 1939 and was originally responsible for all non-technical labour during the Second World War. Eight thousand men and officers lost their lives during that war.

Until 1960 it was based at the Hermitage Camp near Wrexham.

From the history of this very professional band of soldiers it is clear that the Royal Pioneer Corps is very deserving of the "Town's top honour" – the Freedom of the Borough, which is to be granted at a ceremony attended by the Corps Colonel-in-Chief, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester.

**Salisbury Plain Herald 22 Jan 85
THE 'CORPS OF DRUMS' OF THE
FORMER ROYAL PIONEER CORPS
Established 1952 Disbanded c1984
Article by Jerome Gatehouse**

The Pioneers were first organised in 1917-19 as The Labour Corps to support the Armed Forces. They were recruited from Great Britain and Allied countries. With the threat of war towards the end of the thirties the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was formed on 17 October 1939. It was title was changed to Pioneer Corps in 1940. On 26 November 1946 His Majesty King George VI decreed that in recognition of its service the Corps should have the distinction 'Royal' added to the title. During the war the Pioneers earned the name of 'the handymen of the Army'. They were retained as part of the Regular Army in 1950.

A depot and training centre was set up in Wrexham in 1950 and it was in 1952 that an un-official 'Corps of Drums' was formed. All members were volunteers who undertook this work as an extra-mural activity while at the same time continuing to train and work at the normal tasks of the Corps. The Corps consisted of drums, bugles, cymbals, etc and was used for passing out parades at the depot. In September 1960 the depot moved to Wootton, Northampton.

The Corps of Drums achieved a high standard during its existence thanks to hard work and the able direction of its Drum Major. During the seventies and early eighties the Corps of Drums performed marching displays at the Open Days of the Corps held during June or July each year. The Corps of Drums numbered twelve plus a Drum Major, and two long serving members in 1971 were Pte T Begg, side

drum, and Pte HR Watkins, bugle. In 1971 the Band of the Corps of The Royal Engineers, (Chatham) also took part in its Open Day.

On 11 June 1977 HM The Queen graciously approved the appointment of HRH The Duke of Gloucester as Colonel in Chief, Royal Pioneer Corps.

Unfortunately by 1984 with the reduction in the size of the Army The Royal Pioneer Corps was no longer able to support a Corps of Drums, so sadly it was disbanded.

At the end of March 1984 The Royal Pioneer Corps was presented with a Freedom Scroll by the Borough Council of Northampton. It was received by Richard, Duke of Gloucester in the presence of the Colonel Commandant General Sir George Cooper and the Director of Pioneers, Brigadier 'Freddy' Lucas. In March 1993 the Corps exercised its final Freedom with a Parade through Northampton accompanied by the Band of the Grenadier Guards. The salute was taken by its Colonel-in-Chief and the Mayor or Northampton Councillor Frank Tero.

The Regimental Quick March Pioneer Corps was written by Professor Norman Demuth, a Captain in the Pioneer Corps. He wrote the March at the request of the Commandant in 1943. In June 1982 Lieutenant Colonel RA Ridings, Director of Music Coldstream Guards composed a march entitled Pioneer Spirit dedicated to his brother, the late Brigadier NTA Ridings CBE, of the Royal Pioneer Corps, and to the Corps in general.

Regimental March: Pioneer Corps
Associated March: Pioneer Spirit

**The Times 22 Jan 85
CORPORAL IS ACCUSED
OF TRIPLE KILLING**

An army corporal appeared in private at Edinburgh Sheriff Court yesterday charged with the murder of two soldiers and a retired army officer.

Corporal Andrew Walker, aged 30, of the 1st Battalion The Royal Scots, a Scotsman based at Ritchie camp, Kirknewton, Midlothian, was remanded in custody and is expected to appear again next Monday. He is also accused of the robbery of a £19,000 army payroll.

The depute fiscal, Mr Kenneth Maciver, said the soldier had been charged with last Thursday's shooting of Major David Cunningham, aged 56, formerly of the Royal Pioneer Corps, Staff Sergeant Terence Hosker, aged 39, of the Royal Army Pay Corps, and Private John Thomson, aged 25, of The King's Own Scottish Borderers.

**Daily Telegraph 10 Sep 86
PIONEER CORPS DROPS PICK AND
SHOVEL REPUTATION
By Gerald Bartlett, Defence Staff**

The Royal Pioneer Corps, scorned by old soldiers as "The Pick and Shovel Brigade" has acquired a new reputation as one of the British Army's most valuable and efficient support forces with some of the cream of recruits.

Instead of the often unintelligent unfit and ageing Army drop-outs associated with the 1914-1918 War Labour Force, today's Pioneer soldier is a highly-trained fighting infantryman plus quasi-civil engineer, skilled stores keeper and industrial plant operator.

He is capable of doing "a bit of anything

and everything", from clearing minefields to putting up buildings to plant maintenance, defence and security duties at military installations and taking his place on street patrols in Ulster.

Corps officers are frequently university graduates, trained at Sandhurst, attracted to the corps by its reputation for training some of Britain's finest personnel officers.

Inferiority complex

A high proportion of the Corp's 117 officers serve in Germany where The Royal Pioneers is exclusively responsible for recruitment and personnel management of a civil BAOR labour force in excess of 20,000.

Pioneer Corps officers and soldiers are subjected to the same medical and educational tests as the rest of the British Army, but they have to compete for entry into a logistics support force which is always near full strength.

Some corps officers admit they suffer from an inferiority complex born of their Corps' historical connection with bearded peasants who earned a pittance clearing roads and digging holes for advancing armies.

Brig John Hickman, 50, director of the Pioneer Corps, said: "We do not dig bogs and trenches for the rest of the Army.

"In fact, we do not have picks and shovels in our hands any more than any other part of the Army. Our job is to give manpower support for key Army units and installations in this country and for all three services in locations abroad.

"To try to describe the Pioneers' work succinctly is an intractable problem with which I have wrestled for many years. It can't be done. In practice, it involves managing an increasingly wide spectrum of skills, many of them highly specialised."

Brig Hickman said: "One hears of slighting references to the 'Pick and Shovel Brigade' but I simply smile wanly at these words, coming as they do from the ill-formed. Nothing could be further from the truth and it bears no relevance to our modern role."

The Corps's new cap bade, two crossed Pioneer battle-axes and a Pioneer sword joined in a wreath of honour, changed ceremonially at the Corps HQ, Simpson Barracks, Northampton, in February last year, symbolises the multiplicity of its tasks.

Essential supplies

As corps officers say, wars are not won by fighting soldiers alone. Before combat troops can begin to engage the enemy enormous amount of detailed planning and preparation has to take place – often at short notice.

Men and equipment have to be in the right place at the right time, whether on exercise or in battle. Ammunition, fuel and other essential supplies have to be available immediately they are required.

The British Army's Labour Corps was formed in 1917 from infantry battalions and in two years a number of gallantry awards were won by its members. This corps was disbanded in 1919 to reappear in 1937 in the shape of infantry and cavalry reservist units under the general administration of the Royal Engineers.

In 1939, the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was formed. It became the Pioneer Corps in 1940, King George V conferred the title, Royal upon the Corps in 1946 in

recognition of its 1939-1945 work – a distinction earned by no other corps or regiment in so short a time.

23 Oct 87 – Bicester Advertiser Part played by pioneers recognised

Local soldiers with 518 Company of the Royal Pioneer Corps have helped colleagues gain the coveted Wilkinson Sword of Peace for 1986.

The company, based at Sty David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester was with 25 Engineer Regiment in "Operation Flogger" in the Falklands between November 1986 and March 1987.

As a result of their efforts 25 Engineer Regiment has been awarded the Wilkinson Sword of Peace and has received it in Germany recently from General Sir George Cooper, a colonel commandant of the Royal Engineers and a former Colonel commandant of the Royal Pioneers.

But 518 Company were not forgotten as, they have received a poignard, specially made by Wilkinson Sword, for their help to the engineers in winning the award.

Major Martin Featherstone, OC 518 Company, received the poignard from Lieut Col Kevin O'Donoghue, CO of the 25 Engineers.

In turn Major Featherstone presented 25 Engineers with a half size scale model of a Pioneer Sword made at very short notice by Bassett Lowke, model engineers of Northampton.

This is the second time the Pioneers have been associated with the Wilkinson Swords of Peace as 23 Group of the RPC at Graven Hill – of which 518 Company is part – won it themselves for outstanding community work in various parts of Britain.

Oxford Mail 11 Oct 90 Troops all set for the Gulf Kit bags packed

Two hundred young soldiers from the army's Pioneer Corps were put through their paces on an assault course at Bicester garrison before flying to the Gulf at the weekend.

The men, from 518 Company of 23 Group, will be providing heavy lifting expertise and back-up support for the tanks and men of the 7th Armoured Brigade – the Desert Rats – currently heading for Saudi Arabia from Germany.

Training Commanding officer Lt Col Chris Everett said: "The last two weeks have been very hectic and we are now waiting for the official word to move. A platoon had already gone."

The men, average age 20, will be responsible for the unloading and movement of heavy equipment from docks to army depots and bases.

"They will also assist in defence and security of bases, and that is a very important role." Said Lt Col Everett.

"None of us have had experience in the Gulf, but we have been to Belize many times and we are getting a great deal of advice from the Ministry of Defence about climatic and health factors.

"Anti-chemical warfare is just part of our standard training. All the men know of the need to drink plenty of water and avoid heat stroke."

He added: "I would say that the morale of our men at the moment is very high."

Private Jason Connolly, 20, from

Plymouth, who joined the Army in August, said: "I'm just going to drink a lot of water and try and stay in the shade as much as I can."

Oxford Star 11 Oct 90 Soldiers Fly to the Gulf

Soldiers based in Bicester are expected to fly out to the Gulf within the next few days.

More than 170 Royal Pioneers from the Bicester-based 518 Company, part of 23 Group Pioneer Corps, will soon be departing for Saudi Arabia to provide support for the troops already in position.

Bicester Advertiser 12 Oct 90 Bicester Contingent To Join Gulf Force

Soldiers based at Bicester expect to fly out to The Gulf within the next few days.

More than 200 Royal Pioneers from Britain and Germany will soon be departing for Saudi Arabia to provide support for the 7th Armoured Brigade, also known as The Desert Rats.

The majority of them – about 170 men – are being sent from Britain and are from the Bicester-based 518 Company, part of 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps.

An advance party of 30 other men from 518 Company, including the officer commanding 518 Company, Major Colin Code, are already out in The Gulf, having left Bicester earlier this week.

This advance party is establishing a headquarters so that when the main body of men arrive, they can be briefed on their tasks and duties.

The 170 men of 518 Company have known of their deployment for about a month and have been in training, the emphasis of which has been on hygiene and the avoidance of heat exhaustion.

North-east Saudi Arabia is the destination for the contingent of more than 200 Royal Pioneers.

Lt Col Chris Everett, commanding officer of 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps, told a press conference on Wednesday that as part of Operation Granby, the 7th Armoured Brigade was being deployed to The Gulf.

As part of that operation, they would need a great deal of logistic and other service support and part of that support would be provided by the Royal Pioneer Corps.

Lt Col Everett said they would be providing support to the 7th Armoured Brigade, which would include defence and security duties.

They would also be providing support to the Royal Engineers in construction tasks and also to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps in stores handling, both manually and with mechanical handling equipment.

Northampton Chronicle & Echo 16 Oct 90

Pledged to Keeping the Peace

Today nearly 200 men from Northamptonshire based Royal Pioneer Corps set off from the Oxfordshire countryside to face an uncertain mission in the dry and dusty desert heat of Saudi Arabia. They will be supporting UN troops massed along the border against 'the forces of Saddam Hussein. Morale is high as 518 Company prepare to face the task ahead 3,000 miles from home...

Morale was high, the Colonel said, as we

stood watching his men undergoing final training at Bicester Barracks in brilliant October sunshine.

The men of 518 Company, we Group, The Royal Pioneer Corps, were preparing to move out: the purpose of the exercise last week, to give the media a short demonstration of the skills and readiness of the troops which would make the Colonel's men so valuable out in the Gulf in support of 7 Armoured Brigade, on their way to the Middle East from Germany.

They were ready for the task ahead, the Colonel added proudly as we watched the men scrambling in full battle dress across the assault course at Bicester Barracks, where 518 Company had been receiving their final training in the last few days before setting off for the Saudi to provide heavy lifting expertise and support for the tanks and men of the famous Desert Rats.

The grey haired Colonel, Commanding Officer of 23 Group at Bicester Barracks said his men were excited to be going out there.

They were ready for the task ahead. For some time now, he admitted, he had been waiting for the signal to confirm that his men would be needed to join the forces out in the Gulf.

And as he stood watching, his boys put on a fine display for the men from the media: kit layout, assault course action and specialised driving skills. It was a taste of the sort of flexibility which makes the Northamptonshire based regiment so valuable as a support unit in any trouble spot.

It's hard to imagine what goes through the mind of a man such as Lieutenant Colonel Chris Everett at such a time. Pride, certainly. Anxiety, excitement – a feeling that maybe the Colonel would have given his right arm for the change to accompany his men out there into the unknown. Who knows. Certainly the Colonel was giving nothing of his private feelings away that morning.

"Morale is very high. Most of the men are really very excited to be going and doing what they will be doing." He said. He wasn't, he admitted, unduly surprised when the call came to prepare the company to move out. "For some time had been told that there was a real possibility that we would be asked to send men to the Gulf, so that in my own mind I was able to prepare for when the call came."

But it has still been less than a fortnight since the Pioneers knew they were heading for Saudi. A time of nervous excitement and mixed feelings among the men and last-minute preparations.

The greatest peril facing the 200 men, drawn from the UK and Germany, will be the heat, said the Colonel. "None of us have had experience in the Gulf, but we have been to Belize many times and we are getting a great deal of advice from the Ministry of Defence about climate and health factors. All we have been able to do is to give briefings to help the men cope with the conditions out there.

"Anti-chemical warfare is just part of our routine training," he said in anticipation of that question all the media people seemed to be asking. The more immediate enemy would be the heat, he said, smiling, "All the men know to drink plenty of water and avoid heat stroke. The last two weeks have

been very hectic, but we are ready and it has simply been a question of waiting for the official word to move," he added.

But ready for what? No-one seemed to be sure. Not the men, not the Colonel – not even the Ministry of Defence. In addition to the support of 7 Armoured Brigade and the Royal Engineers, defence and security' is the official blanket term for the Pioneers role out in the Gulf.

But what exactly would that mean. I asked the Colonel? He was unable to say. The men from 518 Company would fulfil whatever tasks they would be asked to carry out.

There would, however, be said to be a major transport role to play. And in defence and security terms, the safeguarding of the British HQ Supplies of ammunition and equipment for both 7 Armoured Brigade and the Royal Engineers would also figure largely. And yes, in the event of war, a special Pioneer unit would be assigned with the grisly task of body recovery, though everyone's praying it won't come to that.

But the men's first tasks will be to acclimatise to the extreme heat and fluctuations in temperature – baking temperatures in excess of 40 degrees centigrade which, at night can fall rapidly by more than 20 degrees.

The men, average age of 20, have been fully briefed in how to avoid dehydration and heat exhaustion and will have to drink between 20 and 40 pints of water a day. They will also be issued with new equipment, including special light weight clothing to cope with the searing heat.

But most of the men were looking

forward to going out to the Gulf and getting on with the job, said Captain Paul Hancock, who will be travelling with them to Saudi, "Whenever soldiers are taken off routine tasks they are always happy and certainly the excitement has been building here over the last two weeks," he said.

Corby soldier, Ivor Fraser, 28, with 10 years' experience had mixed feelings, "Morale is very high and everybody has been enjoying the training," he said, as he gathered the kit together spread on the lawn outside one of the barrack buildings and put away carefully his anti-chemical warfare suit and mask.

"Obviously, if an attack comes while we are out there it's the hardest thing any soldier has to face. But if you are a soldier you have to be prepared to fight, although we are only going out as a peace-keeping force."

Indeed his sentiments seemed to sum up the general feeling among the men at the barracks that day.

It was only yesterday that the official order to move came.

As dawn broke above the sleepy Oxfordshire landscape this morning the men climbed aboard their coaches and headed off on their 3,000 mile journey to the Gulf and line up against the forces of Saddam Hussein, not certain what to expect, or why they will see their loved ones again.

Wives and sweethearts were there to bid an emotional farewell to the men of 518 Company.

So was the Colonel, who gazed proudly as the coaches pulled out of Bicester

Barracks and headed off into the unknown.

Bicester Advertiser 7 Dec 90 More Off to Gulf

More soldiers from Bicester are going to The Gulf to join those who went in October.

The new contingent of more than 100 will be going from 187 Company, 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps, based at St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester, and also from Simpson Barracks, Northampton.

In October about 200 soldiers from 518 Company in Bicester and Germany were sent to Saudi Arabia.

Townspeople have been urged by Mr Donald Blee, a town councillor, to send Christmas cards to local soldiers in Saudi Arabia.

Capt Mohammed Omar Usman, adjutant of 23 Group, said: "We wholeheartedly welcome Christmas cards, which we hope will be tasteful as they will be shown to Arabian colleagues in Saudi Arabia."

Cards should be sent to Headquarters, 23 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps, St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester, OX6 0JU, preferably by Monday.

Oxford Mail 20 Dec 90 Festive Cheer for Troops

Bicester families have responded to appeals to back up British troops in the Gulf with Christmas cards and parcels to more than 100 men from 23 Group of the Royal Pioneer Corps based at St David's Barracks, Graven Hill. The men are in Saudi in support of the 7th Armoured Brigade. ■

We have more generals than operational tanks

Dr Frank Ledwidge, author of "Losing Small Wars, British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars. Wrote in The Times on 29 Dec 17

**Report: Norman Brown
The Times 29 Dec 17**

DR Frank Ledwidge, author of "Losing Small Wars, British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars. Wrote in The Times on 29 Dec 17. The US armed forces contain on average one general or admiral for every 1,400 troops.

The US Marines are somewhat less lavishly led, with one general (one star – UK Brigadier/commodore, air commodore equivalent – or above) for every 2,400 Marines.

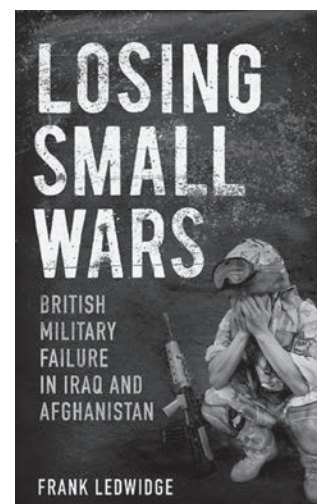
Roughly 150,000 British soldiers, sailors and airmen are led by no fewer than 440 Brigadiers or above, making a ratio of one general officer for every 340 service personnel.

The UK has pro rata four times more very senior officers than the US Army, Navy and Air Force and about six times more than the US Marines.

We have more generals than operational tanks, more admirals than frontline ships and about one combat fast jet for each air commodore and air marshal.

Despite repeated promises to render our forces less top-heavy the proportion has not significantly changed in many years, indeed the most recent statistics show that there are eight more very senior officer this year than last.

Moreover, there are still only 16 women. At a time of savage cuts in real defence capability, one wonders where there is a case nor for taking a look at our remarkably large senior officers' cadre for the next round of 'efficiency savings'. ■



Terence John Vine

I WRITE to you to thank you for the kind and comprehensive research carried out by Norman Brown regarding my grandfather's time in the Pioneer Corps.

The detail that Norman came up with was quite excellent based upon my Grandfather's name (Terence John Vine) and his army service number. My grandfather's memory is not good, so a large part of his time serving in the Corps was forgotten. I have passed on his details to him and my family were interested to know that he is due some medals. I thank Norman for his information as to the medals and who to contact.

I enclose a cheque as a contribution to the charity and the work you do. I hope that my donation will help out a veterans need with their weekly shopping, a Christmas meal or other expenses.

Alexander Webb

He was solid Gold



■ Pte Danny Thompson, Pte Ronald Beckman and last but not least Pte John Bogan Picture: Danny Thompson

I RECEIVED my Pioneer Magazine this morning Norman, thank you so much. I just love reading it. I came across an article about a young chap called John Bogan

I was sorry to hear of his death. I know that I served with him at RAF HENDON-JSATC.

You could never have a quiet night in the NAAFI with him, he was solid Gold. The last photo I have is of three of us.

Pte Danny Thompson, (myself) Pte Ronald Beckman, and last but not least Pte John Bogan.

Danny Thompson

Desmond Bryant, aka Dusty

Reminiscences of my time at Kineton

IT WAS good to see the Corps well represented at the Cenotaph on television, the Interview with Mrs Wood and then the interview with Desmond Bryant, I suppose it is not politically correct to call him Dusty. He was the first person I met on transferring to the Corps.

Stories about Maj Atkins: When I first met him he said you might be a Red Devil but I am a Pink Imp.

When Capt Monkley was inspecting the Guardroom at 1000hrs on a Tuesday he was in the large cell no prisoners.

Maj Atkins came in and called me out, whereupon he locked the cell door, put the key in his pocket and left camp for about 90 minutes leaving Capt Monkley locked up for that time.

Maj Hill, OC 518, had a Lotus Europa which fitted under the barrier and regularly drove under it. Maj Atkins over a weekend had it lowered - you can imagine the consequences on Monday Morning.

Pete Collins

THE FOLLOWING reminiscence of Kineton was sent from Australia by ex Pte John Young (23180740) ex 251 Coy RPC, CAD Kineton 1955 to 1959.

The current magazine is as interesting as previous copies. I have noted over the years the inevitable movement towards military rationalisation that inevitably reduces many capable men and women, from their chosen life's path, with many unable to stay within the military as their career.

This of course is not something endemic to Britain, but is reflected here in Australia. During my six years in the Royal Australian Air Force as an Armament fitter we went from F86 Sabres (Korean War) to French Mirage 3's to F111 advanced fighter/bombers all in 6 years.

The progress was simply electro-magnetic armaments to a full digitised cockpit.

The sophistication in the armaments field forced many armourers into digital training and not stores servicing.

I have watched the shuffling on the sinking Pioneer ship and I am sure that many Pioneers in this modern world, will have the opportunity to upgrade their careers into this sophisticated and automated world.

The references to unsavoury issues that were reported in the newspapers, two come to mind.

1. The war between English soldiers and the Americans was an inevitable outcome.
2. You cannot have a National

Serviceman on 7/6 pence per week less health and tax compete with a 20 foot Chevrolet Impala running on free Avgas, paying no taxes on imported items to England, with unlimited cheap cigarettes and liquor.

3. At least one of the parties is going to miss out in the social arena of Banbury.

4. I was a pay clerk at the time with exactly those cash emoluments. Buy 10 Woodbines, razor blades and a half of Mild and you could not afford the bus fare to and from Banbury.

5. The RAOC base Commander ordered a single line identification parade and the walking wounded among the USAF tried to identify their assailants. Futile but diplomatic.

The second event was the train crash with a TCV September 1958. At the time, I was WO Bryce's gopher and the resident ration storeman. I had issued the normal weekend rations which included. 1 tin large plum jam, 1 tin large marmalade, 1 bottle chicory essence, 1lb tea, 2 trays of eggs, bacon or speck, butter and carnation milk, canned fruit. They would have got four large loaves of unsliced bread, milk, and fat for cooking, from the cookhouse.

I knew several of the lads, fortunately they survived.

Spending a couple of years in the lines, I often wondered why there were so few near things.

John Young

Pioneer wins pride of Barnsley Award



■ Pioneer John Hatfield

Picture: John Hatfield

I AM not really sure what to say about this award, but I do know that when I was nominated as a candidate for the award came as a shock, I did not and still don't know who it was that nominated me!

When I left the army I hit rock bottom and was living on the streets for a number of years as a homeless veteran who had taken to drink, during this period I approached The Salvation Army for help in getting off the streets, they soon found me a hostel in my home town and it was there that I started to turn my life around. It was at this time I was diagnosed with PTSD and was referred to Combat Stress The Armed Forces Mental Welfare Charity who confirmed the diagnosis.

I will now quote verbatim from the Barnsley Chronicle the local paper and sponsors of the Proud of Barnsley Awards.

"Army Veteran John Hatfield pulled himself back from the brink after 12 years of military service.

He became a volunteer with SSAFA formerly known as Soldiers, Sailors Airmen and Families Association who provides lifelong support to those who have served in the military and their families.

After collecting his award John said I am over the moon.

It came as a surprise to be nominated and it came as a surprise to have won.

I came with the idea that if I didn't win, I would still have had a nice night.

But I was shocked to say the least as nice things don't happen to me."

John Hatfield

Ed Note: Well done John. Justly deserved!

New vines for 2018



■ Pioneer Nic Pratchek, growing some Pioneer wine!

Picture: Nic Pratchek

AS WITH these things it is sad (referring to the death of Lt Col Ross Bennett) - but hey 89 is a damn fine innings!

I love my polo shirts - Should have got a medium really as my E/large is actually way to big but still wear it regardless.

Just the other day I had to explain to someone what my shirt was all about - and

I did with great pride!

Photo of me with some of my new vines for 2018....

I say, why buy the stuff when you can make your own...

Kind regards from the sunny other country, (Australia)

Nic Pratchek

Pioneers recruited from Palestine

HI NORMAN,

On Saturday 17th of March I will be travelling to a place in Poland that a lot of people will not of heard of.

Lamsdorf this is the location of Stalag 344 later to be known as Stalag VIII.

Stalag VIII was a prisoner of war camp where Members of the allied forces were held.

The reason that I am going is because on Saturday it will be the 73rd Anniversary of the liberation of the camp.

I would like to share something that some of you may or may not find interesting.

The Regimental Sergeant Major of the camp was RSM Sidney Sherriff he was the senior ranking soldier in the camp and therefore the man in charge of the allied prisoners.

During the war prisoners would receive comfort parcels from the red cross, as it happens there were Prisoners in Stalag 344 who were Palestinian Jews.

We all know how the Nazis felt about Jews and true to form they decided that the Palestinian Jews could not receive care parcels as they were meant for British

Soldiers.

RSM Sherriff made the decision on behalf of all prisoners in the camp that if the Palestinians could not have their parcels then no prisoner would accept theirs.

This decision was backed by every man in the camp despite threats from the German authorities, they stood firm and united and eventually the authorities changed their decision.

The reason that I am sharing this with you is twofold.

Firstly the Palestinian Jews were members of our beloved Pioneer Corps they were indeed fellow Pioneers recruited from Palestine.

Secondly on Saturday I will have the honour of the company of a Mr Andrew Sherriff and his daughter the Grandson and Great Granddaughter of RSM Sidney Sherriff.

I will be offering my thanks to Mr Sherriff for the decision made by his Grandfather on behalf of our Pioneer Brothers.

Tony Ryan

Ed Note: This interesting article is also published in this newsletter on page 9

Not all of us still look like we did

MANY THANKS for the magazine. So sad to hear of Chris Hardy's untimely death. As Rod Othen noted, he was commissioned into the QLR and in fact joined my company as Province Reserve at Ballykinler on his first posting.

He was an excellent platoon commander and, in fact, one of our early successes was down to him and his guys making a substantial arms find in the Armagh area.

Love the magazine but I do wish that you would put captions to the pictures – not all of us still look like we did 20+ years ago you know!

Well done you.

Mike Le Masurier

Major Rogers

IT IS a good few years since I was in contact with you about my father Major Tom Rogers. Just wanted you to know that he is still going!

We celebrated his 99th birthday on 27th November. He is determined to reach 100! Those Pioneers certainly have longevity! If he makes it to the century.

Will let you know!

Sara

War Diaries

I AM hugely impressed with your ultra high speed response to my request (2 hours!) - but I suppose we should expect nothing else from such an efficient military organisation on its toes! But this would have been in your own time, so double thanks for that.

In the fullness of time once records have been acquired from Glasgow, I'm sure the War Diaries from you will be the icing on the cake.

We'll be back in touch; in the meantime many thanks again & keep up the good work.

Ian Stevens

WO2 Tommy Atkins



■ Pioneer John Winterburn collecting on Virgin Trains

Picture: John Winterburn

THANKYOU you both for another very good Pioneer magazine. There are two things that I would like to ask you about.

The first is about Ian Brian Freeth do you know if he was in 196 Company as I was, we all went to Long Marston every day so I think that I may know him I was with 196 Company from November 1956 till September 1958.

In March 1957 I was NCO of the unit

armoury.

The 2nd thing is about WO2 Tommy Atkins could you tell if he was the WO2 in 1956 as we had a WO2 by the same name. If it was him could you please say hello to him for me as he helped me a lot when I was there, we also so had a Staff Sergeant called Johns who also helped me.

Thank you both for all you do for us.

John Winterburn

Serve in North Africa and land on D-Day

MANY THANKS for your amazing and prompt response, my friend Manya will be delighted to know about this. Her father was a rather shady and strange character.

He claimed to have tried to be a Conscientious Objector having spent several years before the War studying in Berlin (the latter we believe to be untrue).

Then said he served with the Yorks and Lancs Regiment at the start of the War (which he didn't).

Then that he transferred to the Intelligence Corps and was with them on D Day as either a Lieutenant or a Major (which has a grain of truth in that he was with the Pioneer Corps landing at D Day plus 16).

He then definitely stayed on in Germany where we believe he was some kind of Civil Servant for a while and said he was involved in 'hush hush' work, which we also believe to be untrue.

He died a few years ago and Manya was horrified to discover that he had been

running another family at the same time as his own that he had started in Surrey.

I am trying to help Manya bring some closure to all this.

Some years later he became a member of the British National Party and held fairly extreme right wing views, I met him and he was not a very pleasant character.

Still it takes all sorts and your information will be very helpful indeed in allowing Manya and her remaining sibling, not to mention Harry's surviving sister who is 97 and still going strong in New Zealand.

He claimed to the BBC that he was a Major in British Intelligence who was at El Alamein and D Day!

Michael Purton

Ed note: Henry Baxter joined the Pioneer Corps from the Non Combatant Corps and served in 207 Coy, 72 POW Camp and 252 Coy before transferring to the Royal Army Service Corps on 5 Jul 44 – he did not serve in North Africa or land on D-Day.

Legion d'honneur



■ Pioneer Hugh Rooney

Picture: Ian Rooney

I AM writing to you on behalf of my father and I wonder whether you could enter it in your magazine. Hugh Rooney is 95 years young and defended his country during the 2nd World War in which he served in 296 Company. He served under Maj Kent and had the pleasure of receiving The African Star, Italy Star, The France & Germany Star, The Defence Medal, The War Medal and the 1939-45 Star.

Last year he received a letter from the French Embassy to inform him that the President of France had appointed him

the rank of Chevalier in the Ordre National de la Legion d'honneur.

This was for his help in liberating France from the Germans. Please find enclosed a picture of my father wearing his medals with pride, including the French medal.

Ian Rooney son of Hugh

Ed Note: 5837080 Hugh Rooney initially enlisted into the Suffolk Regiment on 15 Jan 42, was transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 12 Mar 42 and served until 23 Jan 47

THE PIONEER

■ MANY thanks for our Magazine which arrived yesterday morning makes great reading always look forward to it. Our thanks go to you and your son Paul for all the hard work you have done for the Associations this year

Christine Powell

■ YOU may wish to note that my mother Mrs Lorna Pope, widow of Lt Col GW Pope (ex Commandant Simpson Barracks) will reach her 100th birthday on 3rd Feb (fingers crossed). She still enjoys reading The Pioneer (albeit with a magnifying glass!)

Jenni Tarsnana

■ NORMAN, once again thank you for my Pioneer magazine, it's a joy to read through it and catch up with the past. I hope and look forward to seeing yourself and others at Reunion in June.

SW Hall (Ginge)

■ NORMAN, Thank you and everyone involved in organising the parade at the Cenotaph and the bus from Northampton. It was good to catch up with old friends and see Cudgie Smilie and a few others that I have not seen for a while. Great parade and great turn out. I will see you all again next year. P.S. Got my magazine thank you Norman Brown, will read it when I get it off my wife!

Kev Young

■ ANOTHER great day yesterday had by all, I hope everybody got home safely? My first time at the cenotaph in London and a great day I had

Paul Mardell

■ BIG THANKS to Steve Henderson, Jayne Parker and Dale Eaton for introducing me to the parade I've had an absolutely amazing weekend thank you Norman and the RPCA for the ticket and last but not least all my red and green brothers for being here.

Jed Bourne



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

Pioneer War History

I HAVE greatly enjoyed reading the War History of the Pioneer Corps from the disc. I have learnt more about the war than I have all my life (76years).

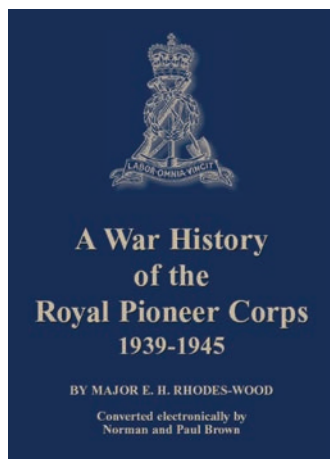
It made me want to cry and also laugh out loud.

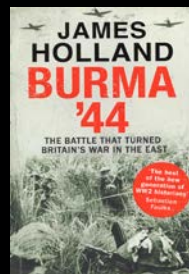
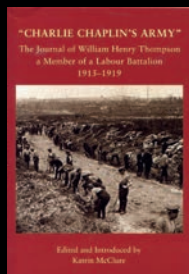
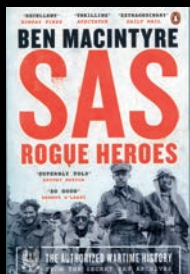
I thought it extraordinary that there should be a good photograph of the Pioneers bringing equipment in at the time and place where my father was.

I now have some idea of the work the Pioneers did!

I need to read it again as I really only concentrated on the time I have recorded for Bernard John Gallagher 49978284 (my father).

Kind regards,
Patsy Fletcher





SAS Rogue Heroes

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IN the summer of 1941, at the height of the war in the Western Desert, a bored eccentric young officer, David Stirling, came up with a plan that was radical and entirely against the rules: a small undercover unit that would inflict mayhem behind enemy lines.

Despite intense opposition, Winston Churchill personally gave Stirling permission

to recruit the toughest, brightest and most ruthless soldiers he could find.

So began the most celebrated and mysterious military organisation in the world: the SAS.

Now, 75 years later, the SAS has finally decided to tell its astonishing story.

It has opened the archives for the first time, granting the renowned historian Ben MacIntyre full access to SAS treasure trove of unseen reports, memos, diaries, letters, maps and photographs, as well as free rein

to interview surviving Originals and those who knew them.

The result is this universally acclaimed book: an exhilarating tale of fearlessness and heroism, recklessness and tragedy. It's the story of renegade men taking monumental risks.

SAS ROGUE HEROES – THE AUTHORISED WARTIME HISTORY
AUTHOR: BEN MACINTYRE
ISBN 978-0-241-18686-2

Charlie Chaplins Army

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THIS journal from the First World War is a very rare record of the experiences of a member of a Labour Battalion in the British Army, and of the events in Belgium and France as he lived through them.

William Henry Thompson of Cottingham in East Yorkshire describes his journal as 'a rough sketch of my experiences', but it is a vivid, detailed account of his daily life from

1915, when he registered for service in the army, until 1919, when he was discharged on grounds of ill-health.

He is observant and critical of army life, giving a summary of a typical day in the life of Labour Company soldiers, telling us about the variety of work that they were expected to do, and describing their travels across France and Flanders as they followed the major battles of the war.

He also shows his love of music, the arts and churches.

The title "Charlie Chaplin's Army", is a

quote from the journal.

It is one of the many disparaging names given to members of Labour Battalions by front-line soldiers.

The complete edition of the journal is illustrated with contemporary photographs and maps.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN'S ARMY – THE JOURNAL OF WILLIAM HENRY THOMPSON A MEMBER OF A LABOUR BATTALION 1915-1919
EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY KATRIN MCCLURE
ISBN 978-1-907730-60-3

Lady Death

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

LYUDMILA PAVLICHENKO was one of the most successful – and feared – female snipers of all time. When Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 she left her university studies to join the Red Army. Ignoring offers of positions as a nurse she became part of Soviet Russia's elite group of female snipers.

Within a year she had 309 confirmed kills, including 29 enemy sniper kills.

Renowned as the scourge of German soldiers, she was regarded as a key heroic fighter for the war effort and, in 1942, on Stalin's personal orders, she travelled as part of a Soviet delegation to the West, fundraising in Canada, Great Britain and the USA. Dubbed "Lady Death", she spoke out about gender equality in the Red Army and made the case for the USA to continue the fight against the Nazis in Europe. The folk singer Wendy Guthrie wrote a song about her exploits – "Miss Pavlichenko" – and she visited the White House, where she formed

an unlikely but long-lasting friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt.

In November 1942 she visited Coventry to thank workers who paid for three X-ray units for the Red Army.

She also visited a Birmingham factory as part of her fundraising tour.

LADY DEATH – THE MEMOIRS OF STALIN'S SNIPER
AUTHOR: LYUDMILA PAVLICHENKO
(FOREWORD BY MARTIN PEGLER)
ISBN 1784382701

Betrayed Ally

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IN THE last Newsletter we published an excellent article by Mr John Ham on the Chinese Labour Corps so it is felt appropriate to print details of this book. Though distant, The Great War helped China emerge from humiliation and obscurity and take its first tentative steps as a full member of the global community where it is now so indisputably established. Paradoxically how this cataclysmic change came about and China's role in The Great War has been largely neglected. After the end of the Qing Dynasty in

1912, President Yuan Shikai seized power. In August 1914, at the start of the war, he offered Britain 50,000 troops to recover the German colony in Shandong, but this was refused. In 1916 China sent a vast army of labourers to Europe and the Chinese Labour Corps' contribution building and repairing roads, railways, canals and trenches was invaluable.

In 1917 she declared war on Germany despite this effectively making her real enemy Japan an ally; the motives were to earn a seat at the post war peace conference, regain Shandong and, generally, reduce the foreign intrusion into China. The betrayal came when Japan not China,

was awarded the former German colony. This insult inspired the rise of Chinese nationalism and communism, enflamed by revolutionary Russia. The scene was set for Japan's incursions into China and thirty years of bloodshed.

One hundred years on, the time is right for this accessible and authoritative account of China's little-known role in The Great War and assessment of its national and international significance.

BETRAYED ALLY – CHINA IN THE GREAT WAR
AUTHORS: FRANCES WOOD & CHRISTOPHER ARNANDER
ISBN 978-1-473875-0-12

Turning point for the war in the Far East

Report: Maj Mike Tickner
Picture: Supplied

THE Battles of Kohima and Imphal are generally considered as the turning point for the war in the Far East. In remote mountains just inside India, the 14th Army met the full force of the Japanese's invasion of India.

The garrisons were surrounded but stood firm with casualty extraction and resupply by air. After brutal and often hand-to-hand fighting, the Japanese were finally forced to withdraw and, although Japan was not defeated, she was now not going to win the war.

James Holland convincingly argues in his latest book that this turning point occurred two months earlier at the Battle of the Admin Box in Burma. Although brigade sized defensive "boxes" had been used in the Western Desert, for example Knightsbridge Box, they were never resupplied by air. At the Admin Box, elements of the 7th (Indian) Division were surrounded but still able to fight because of regular air resupply. Most importantly casualties could be flown out.

This game changer meant that a casualty, who might have previously died in the jungle, could now be in an operating theatre in India only a few hours after wounding. Slim's training ethos was "soldier first" which paid dividends as this scratch force containing admin personnel were able to resist the Japanese who finally withdrew. Withdrawal was not part of the Bushido code.

Holland is a good story teller able to inter-weave the campaign's strategy with the experiences of the ordinary soldier.

Backed by a good selection of personal accounts, his narrative has pace and atmosphere as he paints the picture of the land and air war. His opening chapter is particularly effective, building tension as he describes how the 7th (Indian) Division realised through progressive sighting reports that they were about to meet a major Japanese offensive head on.

His style enables him to convey large amounts of technical detail. Without resorting to long lists of facts, the description of 25th Dragoon's conversion from the

Lee to the Sherman tank provides the reader with a good understanding of the characteristics of each vehicle, the attitude of the soldiers and life in a fighting armoured vehicle.

His account of the air war and the Japanese bombing of Calcutta is particularly good, covering an area of the Far East campaign often omitted in many other historians.

"Burma '44" is well written and entertaining book providing another perspective on part of the Burma campaign which is often over shadowed by later battles.

Holland is able to convey large amounts of detail and describe the complexity of war on land, in the air and on the sea while portraying the misery of the ordinary soldier fighting a ruthless enemy in the most brutal terrain. Most importantly, the author understands the essential role of the logistician which is a most valuable point.

BURMA 44 – THE BATTLE THAT TURNED BRITAIN'S WAR IN THE EAST
AUTHOR: JAMES HOLLAND
ISBN: 9780-593-075-852



The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

BENNETT ROSS JULIAN (478951 PREVIOUSLY 2548109) EX LT COL (QM) (AGED 89) 25 OCT 17

Lt Col Ross Bennett transferred to the Royal Pioneer Corps in 1955 in the rank of Sergeant from REME, he initially enlisted in 1951.

His early postings in the Corps were at the Depot firstly at Wrexham and then Northampton before being posted as CSM at 206 Coy RPC at Long Marston in 1962. He was then promoted to WO1 and posted back to the Depot at Northampton.

He was commissioned on 8 May 1965 and quickly posted to A Det 908 PCLU in Little Aden (about 20 miles from Aden and the same location as 24 Ind Bde).

In 1967 he was posted to C Det 2 PCLU and then, staying in BAOR, posted as OC 453 MCLG. In 1969 he was appointed to a QM commission and posted to HQ 23 Group RPC, Bicester as QM taking over the post from Maj Jimmy Atkins (the handover was described in the Corps Magazine as a Laurel and Hardy sketch!).

In 1972 he returned to BAOR as AO HQ 13 Group RPC at Bielefeld where he remained until 1977 when he was posted as QM RPC Trg Centre. In 1979 he was posted to Belize as Camp Commandant HQ British Forces Belize. The following appeared in the Sep 80 Corps Magazine; "We congratulate Maj (QM) R Bennett on his forthcoming promotion to Lt Col, the first Quartermaster of the Corps to attain that rank."

Another entry in the Sep 81 Corps Magazine recorded "Lt Col Bennett RPC organised the party for the outgoing WRVS lady, he incidentally organises most things in Belize."

He returned to HQ 23 Group RPC in 1982 and finally retired in Feb 1985.

The Corps Magazines are full of entries appertaining to his shooting abilities, the following are a few examples:

1961 came 2nd to Sgt Wolstenhole in Individual small-bore match

1966 part of the Pioneer winning team in the Aden Forces Pistol Club

1971 RPC Central Rifle Meeting – Match 2 Hermitage Trophy 1st, Match 5 Corps Twenty Cup 2nd

1972 Member of winning team in the Unit Team Small Bore A Trophy

In retirement he spent most of his time on charitable functions both for his local church and also for the RNLI, where he was working until 2 weeks before his death. He also went out of his way to attend funerals for his former "soldiers".

Col RM Lee writes:

"It is with profound regret that the death of Lt Col (Retd) Ross Bennett RPC is reported. Ross passed away on 25 October 2017 after a short spell in Dorset County Hospital at the age of 89.

Ross was an extremely proud, loyal and professional soldier, who dedicated his working life to the Army, the vast majority

of his service committed to the RPC, with whom he concluded his time as a Late Entry Lt Col. However, Ross' career started as a boy soldier at age 14, encouraged into the Army by his father who was a policeman. His early service was in 1944 when, as a young REME craftsman, Ross found himself in a base workshop at Aldershot, repairing battle-damaged tanks brought back from D-Day. There, at the canteen, Ross met his future wife Eileen.

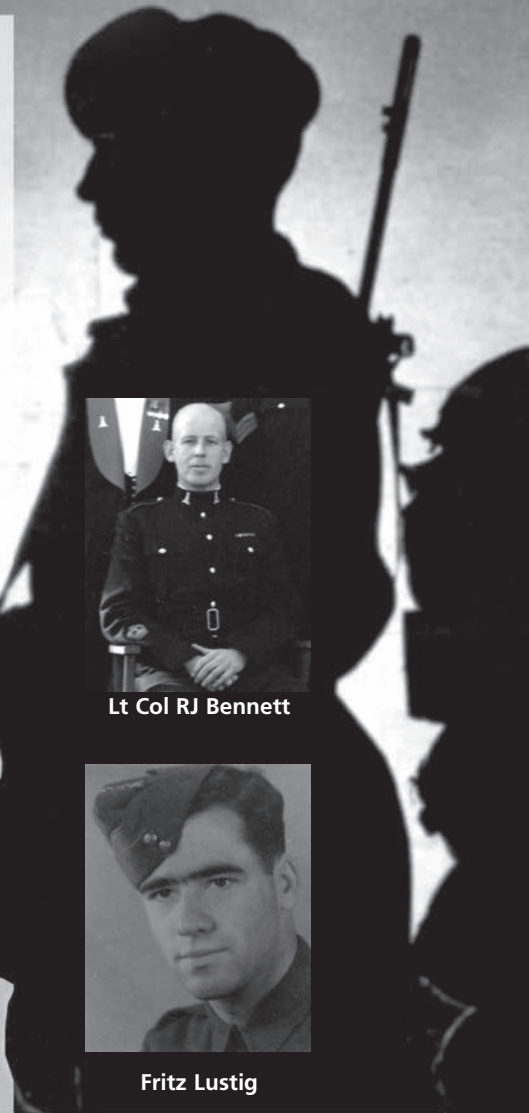
Ross' regular service spanned 41 years, concluding with his retirement as a Lt Col in 1983 having gained a chest full of campaign medals and a mention in despatches. He travelled widely, the period characterised by the Cold War and the sunset of Empire. Thus Ross found himself moving between the UK base, postings in BAOR, CSM in Cyprus in 1963 on an emergency tour, a stint in Sudan, Captain in Aden in 1966-7, Quartermaster in Northampton and finally as the Camp Commander of British Forces in Belize, to name a few. Uniformed service was followed by 10 years as the RO Camp Commander at Stanmore. Ross was a loving husband and a devoted father, who played a huge part in his family's life, and was always full of fun and encouragement.

Upon retirement, Ross and Eileen moved to Lyme Regis where they remained for the rest of their lives. To adjust to civilian life, they were determined to get involved in local society, which meant joining the church, the RBL, the RNLI, Lyme's Monmouth Club and running many charitable activities. Ross was a true gentleman: honourable, selfless, quietly religious, and with a great and genuine interest in encouraging and supporting others. Many people have benefited from his friendship, inspiration, personal example, sage advice and common sense.

To the end, Ross maintained a ramrod military bearing, the courage and conviction to be counted, and was a source of support to his community, his comrades and his cap badge, including Pioneer reunions and days.

Ross was predeceased by his beloved wife Eileen and leaves behind his children Terry, Rosslyn and grand-daughter Kathryn, to whom we extend our heartfelt condolences."

Col Gary Cooper writes: Hi Norman, Many thanks for forwarding the sad news concerning Lieutenant Colonel Ross Bennett's death. Both Ross and his late wife Eileen, were great friends of ours. We first met shortly after I joined the Corps in 1971, the following year I went to Bisley with Ross when he was the RPC Shooting Team Captain. In 1973/74 we were both serving in 13 Group, he in Bielefeld whilst we were in Minden. His last posting was to the Depot and Training Centre and, as luck would have it, we found ourselves there at



Lt Col RJ Bennett

Fritz Lustig

the same time. In addition to being an outstanding soldier and Quartermaster, Ross was a loyal friend to us and many others, including those within his adopted town of Lyme Regis where, on retirement, he devoted his time to charitable work within the local community.

Our condolences are sent to his daughter Rosslyn and family and Terry his son.

Ross will be greatly missed by us all; a true officer and caring Gentleman.

SMITH DEAN B (24477808) EX PTE (AGED 57) 7 NOV 17 (SERVED 1978-83)

EVANS JOHN (23961846) EX PTE (AGED 77) 20 NOV 17 (SERVED 1966-72)

SALMON JOHN ARTHUR (13113121) EX PTE (AGED 95) 28 MAR 18 (SERVED 5 MAR 42 – 5 MAR 47)

His son John writes, "He was a subscriber to your magazine Pioneer, and enjoyed all the stories, and articles which it contained, we had many a discussion on various subjects, from the magazine."

LUSTIG FRITZ (13803534) EX WO2 (AGED 98) 18 DEC 17

After arriving as a penniless refugee in England, 22 year old Fritz worked in Cambridge. The local Refugee Committee found him an unpaid job with a jobbing builder. His three siblings, an older brother and two older sisters, had already been able

to leave Germany and in April 1940 his parents managed to escape to Portugal via Italy so Fritz's immediate family all survived the holocaust.

Fritz was interned as an enemy alien in the early summer of 1940 and sent to the Isle of Man where he spent several months behind barbed wire in Peveril Camp.

In Oct 40 he grasped a way to be released early from internment; he enlisted voluntarily into the Pioneer Corps and was sent to Illfracombe (3 Centre Pioneer Corps) in North Devon for training with hundreds of other refugee émigrés. When his Commanding Officer, Colonel Coles, realised that he played the cello, he was drafted into the Continental Pioneer Corps Orchestra, an early form of ENSA, and performed in concerts as well as some acting alongside Coco the Clown. Fritz was frustrated at not fighting properly. In May 1943 he seized the chance to transfer to a top-secret unit, the Intelligence Corps Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Service (CSDIC) – part of MI19. He spent three years as a "secret listener" between the two units at Latimer House and Wilton Park, both in Buckinghamshire. Here he served in the rank of Sergeant and was later promoted to Sergeant-Major. It was here that British Intelligence bugged the conversations of over 10,000 German POW's in their cells in the cellars of Latimer House and Wilton Park, including U-boat crew, Luftwaffe pilots and German army officers.

His story has been told in "The M Room" by historian Dr Helen Fry. Our thanks go to the RBL Riders & including Chris Elvis Oram for making his way up from Dudley for the escort from the church in Pontefract to the cemetery in South Kirkby. As usual the veterans responded to the call - well done guys you know who you are. Finally on behalf of the veteran family can I thank Kim, Michael and the family for the hospitality shown afterwards - Kim said that Peter has left a big hole in her life, hopefully we can help to fill a small part of that hole. God Bless Peter John Heppinstall - R I P Sir - Duty Done.

MUTCH ALAN FREDERICK CBE BRIGADIER AGED 93 7 DEC 17

Brigadier Alan Mutch was born in April 1924. In October 1939 he joined the Army as an apprentice tradesman at the Army Technical School, Arborfield.

After qualifying as a skilled tradesman he gained rapid promotion and was a Warrant Officer at the age of 21.

He was commissioned into the Royal Mechanical & Electrical Engineers in October 1951 and served in many appointments in that Corps, the last being as Chief Instructor of the Far East Training School in Singapore.

In 1955 he was granted a Regular Commission in the Royal Pioneer Corps.

After a short spell at the Depot, Wrexham he was posted to 405 Company RPC before going to Aden in 1959 as OC 908 Pioneer Civil Labour Unit.

Other regimental appointments followed until 1964 when he went to Strathclyde University to attend the Diploma Course in Personnel Management. This was followed by a posting to Malaya to command 1202 Pioneer Civil Labour Unit.

In 1969 he was promoted to Lieutenant

Colonel and took over command of 23 Group early in 1970. He moved to Germany to command 13 Group in 1971.

He returned to Bicester in 1974 to command 23 Group again, but this time in the rank of Colonel.

On 13 January 1978 he was appointed Director Army Pioneers and Labour.

He was appointed ADC to HM The Queen in May 1979.

He was appointed Honorary Colonel Commandant RPC on 3 November 1983.

Since his retirement in 1980 Brigadier Mutch lived in Ferndown, Dorset where he spent much of his time at his favourite recreation – golf.



Brigadier Mutch

PRINGLE GEORGE (13056425) EX PTE (AGED 100) 15 JAN 19 SERVED 18 JUL 40 UNTIL 23 MAY 46

We published fascinating details of his service in the following Association Newsletters: October 2008 Page 9, April 2009 Page 15, April 2010 Page 18. We also published George's account on Salerno in the April 2005 issue on Page 14.

CAIRNS JC (24315191) EX PTE (AGED 62) 3 JAN 18. SERVED 1972-1976

STEERS GEOFFREY WILLIAM (24198417) EX PTE (AGED 71) 28 JAN 18 SERVED 1969 – 1983

WHITTINGSLOW EK (22066450) EX PTE (AGED 87) 4 NOV 17 SERVED 1948 - 1950

WILCOX JOHN EX SGT 15 FEB 18

The Association does not hold his service details

HUMPHRIES ALFRED (22590867) EX LCPL (AGED 84) MAR 18. SERVED 20 SEP 51 – 19 SEP 53



Lcpl Humphries

WARDALE SIR GEOFFREY KCB (13047720) EX PTE (AGED 97)18 DEC 17 SERVED JUL 40 – OCT 41

Later Second Permanent Secretary at Department of Environment 1978-80, KCB 1979 (CB 1974) .

FRANCIS AG (GEORGE, KNOWN AS CONNIE) (23961663) EX SSGT (AGED 79) MAR 18. SERVED 1963 – 22 JUL 85

SALUSINSZKY FRANCIS (13805675) EX PTE (AGED 100) 17 FEB 18

Enlisted at Cambridge and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 21 Apr 41 and transferred to the Royal Engineers on 8 May 44.

Born Ferenc Saluzinszky in Budapest, Hungary on 12 January 1918, Frank Selby first moved to the UK in 1936 to read Economics at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. He returned to make Britain his permanent home in 1939 when, under pressure from the Nazis, his father Imre Saluzinszky was forced to give up his position as editor-in-chief of the Az Est newspaper group

Saluzinszky decided to Anglicise his name and to join the Pioneer Corps of the British Army – a move that happily helped him meet his future wife and business partner Elizabeth Guttman, also from a Jewish-Hungarian family and then working for the French resistance in London. Frank and Elizabeth married in 1948 and within six years had set up Rex Features, a picture agency that become a lynchpin of Britain's newspaper business.

Combining hard news, light features, and showbiz articles, Rex Features grew steadily over the 1950s, building a network of correspondent agencies across Europe, America, and Asia. It scored a hit in the early 1960s with Dezo Hoffman's photographs of The Beatles, and by 1963 had grown enough to rent its first offices, on King Street, Covent Garden, central London.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 Rex Features expanded into Eastern Europe and Russia, and by the 1990s it had opened Rex USA. Digitisation allowed the company to grow exponentially, and by the time Frank retired in the early 2000s, it was a UK market leader. Frank and Elizabeth remained devoted to each other until the end; Frank celebrated his 100th birthday on 12 January 2018, and died at home in Elizabeth's arms on 17 February 2018.

BUCK THOMAS NEVILLE (418130) EX COLONEL (AGED 85) MARCH 2018

Colonel Tom Buck retired from the Army in 1986.

He was commissioned into the Welsh Regiment as a National Service Officer in 1951, he then served with the Federal Army of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1955 as an infantry officer until dissolution of the Federation in December 1963. He was commissioned into the Corps on 1 January 1964 and was immediately seconded to the Northern Rhodesia Armed Forces as OC Tactical Wing at the School of Infantry Ndola. Subsequently he served in 5 PCLU, 13 Group, HQ BAOR (P&L) as DADPL 3 and later as ADPL (Industrial Relations). He attended the University of Strathclyde in 1971-72. He was appointed Commander Labour Resource HQ BAOR in February

1983 before assuming command of 23 Group RPC in December 1983.

His interests included dogs, shooting and caravanning, he was also a registered MOD Assistant Deer Manager.



Col Tom Buck

BAILEY WILLIAM EX PTE (AGED 93) 15 MAR 18

The following appeared in the newspaper "Newbury Today":

HUNGERFORD has bade farewell to a celebrated Second World War veteran at a special service of thanksgiving for his life.

In a distinguished military career, William Bailey was one of the first, and youngest, allied soldiers to liberate the Nazi death camp at Belsen and was honoured by France for his part in its liberation.

On Thursday, April 5, a memorial and thanksgiving service was held at St Lawrence Church, Hungerford.

Mr Bailey, affectionately known as Bill or Billy by his family, died peacefully on March 15, aged 93.

He spent his last six weeks less than a mile from where he was born almost a century ago, at Hungerford Care Home, where he was lovingly cared for by staff, and visited daily by family and friends.

Mr Bailey was born on December 20, 1924, in a small cottage at Radley Bottom, Hungerford Newtown, and was one of five siblings.

Later, the family moved to Hungerford and when Mr Bailey was only 18 years old he joined the Pioneer Corps to support the war efforts during the Second World War.

They fought through France, Belgium and Holland.

Mr Bailey married Edna in 1952 and they had three children – Alan, Douglas and Sheila.

He was a country gentleman, and enjoyed spending his time beating and walking his dogs.

Local people enjoyed Mr Bailey's homemade sloe gin and both he and his well-trained spaniels were highly thought of at Hungerford Cricket Club, where the dogs would fetch lost balls, saving many man hours.

In 2016, Mr Bailey was awarded the Legion d'honneur by the French government for his role in the liberation of France in the Second World War.

The award, dating back to 1802, was established by Napoleon Bonaparte for acts of bravery and is the highest decoration France can bestow.

In heartfelt speeches, two of Mr Bailey's granddaughters shared stories of their memories of his vibrant life.

Mr Bailey's youngest child, Sheila, said afterwards: "We had a beautiful celebration of my father's life, and even the sun stayed shining for us."

Mr Bailey was laid to rest beside his wife Edna, and just across from his son Douglas.

After the service a wake was held at The Bear Hotel, Hungerford.

LUSBY FRANK (22561829) EX SGT 31 MAR 18 (AGED 85). SERVED FROM JAN 51 TO SEP 62.

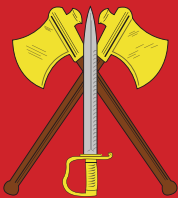
BROMLEY LESLIE (24523000) EX LCPL 28 APR 18 (AGED 59) SERVED FROM 1979 - 1995

TIMMS SW (SEAN) (24789568) EX PTE
Ex member of the Corps of Drums.

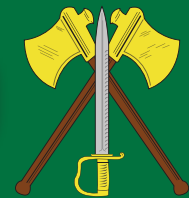


Pioneers paying their respects to Sean Timms

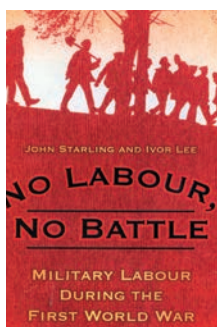
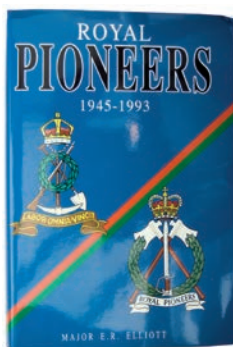
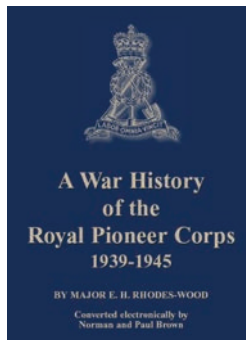
Pictures: Cudgie Smilie



Association Shop



Please support the RPC Association and place an order today...



VISIT THE NEW PIONEER SHOP AT

www.facebook.com/pg/royalpioneercorps/shop
More items are being added all the time - there are new Pioneer red and green tops and even Pioneer red and green socks!



And finally...

Dewsnap's getaway and the annual Royal Pioneer Corps Association Reunion, we have over 100 booked in so far, to book let me know ASAP

Report: Norman Brown
Cartoon: Supplied

FRENCH farce and Hollywood drama have it that traditional refuge for a man in danger of being caught in bed with somebody's else's wife is under the bed itself, in a wardrobe, or among the wide-open spaces beyond the window.

Sergeant Ian Dewsnap, alerted by a bass 'Yoohoo, darling, I'm back' and the thump of baggage being grounded in the sitting room of the flat, unhesitatingly chose the window. He did this partly because it was available and open, and partly because in no circumstances did he want a confrontation with the injured party. The injured party was Captain of the local rugby team and was very short tempered.

Dewsnap's initial getaway was entirely successful, but he recognised unemotionally that he was in the early

stages of an intricate day. The ground-floor flat was a subdivision of an old Victorian house on the outskirts of Oxford. The garden was large and bordered by dense thickets of rhododendrons and azaleas. It was ten o'clock on a Sunday morning. Dewsnap, as was proper to a person being groomed for higher promotion, took as his starting point a precise definition of his problem.

This came out as: how does a stark naked Sergeant, sheltering on a Sunday morning in a clump of rhododendrons in a garden, negotiate the ten miles to his camp at Bicester, without attracting attention to himself.

After gloomily admiring the phrasing that he had chosen to summarize his dilemma, Dewsnap examined methodically the courses open to him.

He could stay where he was until nightfall and then sneak back across country. Feasible, but it carried two disadvantages. It was early April and he would probably develop

pneumonia. And that rugby hooligan might take it upon himself to do some Sunday gardening with consequent mayhem in the shrubbery.

Break into a house and steal some clothes? Too risky. A conviction for nude burglary would do his career no good.

Steal a car? Same objection.

Telephone a friend for help? Naked men in public call boxes invite comment and anyhow his money was in the pocket of the trousers that he hoped Gladys had had the wit to hide successfully.

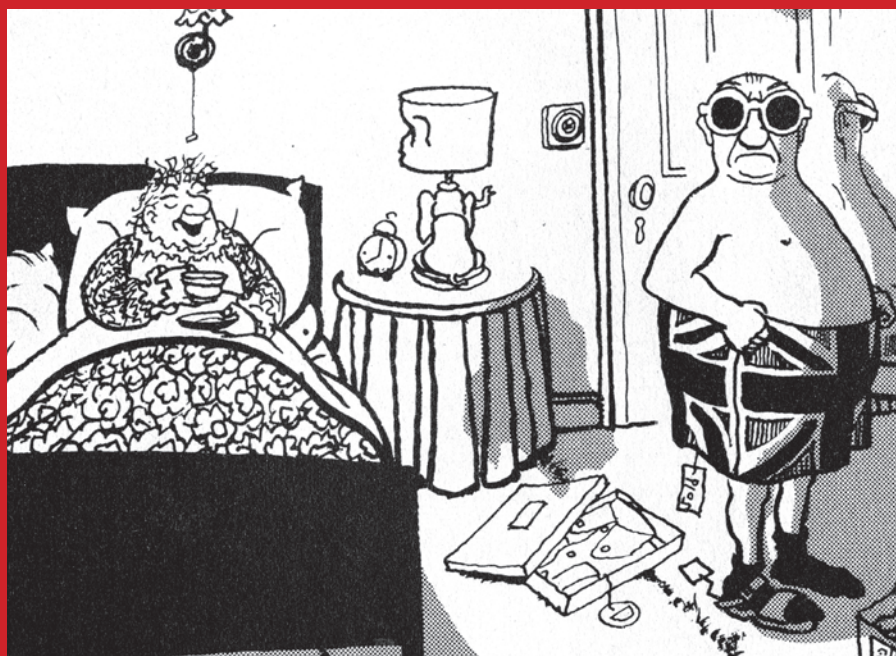
He was becoming progressively colder as he weighed these considerations. His teeth chattered. Clearly he must move soon. Where to?

Well somewhere closer to his camp at Bicester for a start. Why not make his way cautiously across the half mile or so of common that separated him from the A34 and lie up somewhere near the main road? He could then exploit any chance opportunities that came up, although he was unable to imagine what they might be.

He broke carefully from cover, crossed a gravelly track, and headed over the common. The common was prolific in heather and bracken and scrubby clusters of birch and brambles. To anyone taking no chances and reasonably knowledgeable in fieldcraft, it was easy to evade morning dog walkers, occasional church-goers, and talkative children with model boats on their way to play at the pond.

He selected as his first hiding-up place a clump of broom. It lay beside a footpath that ran up a shallow embankment to the verge of the A34. Here he examined the multiple lacerations slashed by gorse and brambles. They were painful but not too bad. The same with the big toe that he had stubbed on a stone.

It was time to ponder on his next move. The pondering did not prosper. About the only thing he could think of was to try to jump a truck. But for this to be profitable would demand an unlikely conjunction of happenings. A slowed truck, a driver looking



Pity our flight was cancelled Geordie, Benidorm will never know what it missed

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News
- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Your Letters
- Pioneer Reunion
- Blast from the Past
- Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery
- Book Reviews
- Press Cuttings
- And much more!





elsewhere, no observers, and the truck going to the right place, which would be one of the lonely lanes near Bicester. If all that fell into place, and if.... But what was this? He was conscious of a persistent, dull, drumming sound, interspersed with heavy breathing, coming from the direction of the path, coming closer.

He peered cautiously through the foliage. Jogging towards him was a sweating, preoccupied, plump man, dressed in singlet and shorts, breathing strenuously. Behind this fat athlete was a succession of others of differing sizes, seemingly hundreds of them, stretching away as far as the eye could see. Some wore singlet's, some windcheaters, some were stripped to the waist. All looked intensely introspective, concentrating on aching leg muscles and distended lungs.

This was it. Ian picked a small gap in the line, moved unobtrusively from cover, and joined in the exertions of enthusiasts getting themselves into shape for the London Marathon.

He was pleased to find that not only could he jog among them in comfortable, unremarked anonymity but that they were going in the right

direction. They scrambled up the bank to the A34 in single file, turned left, and ran towards Bicester, and St David's Barracks, and sanctuary.

Once on the road the single file became ragged. Runners coalesced into small, panting groups. Ian tucked his nudity thankfully into the middle of one of the groups and began to work out how to disengage himself when he reached the entrance to St David's. Nothing much to it. A quick short spring to the main gate, some jokey lies about how his shorts were ripped to uselessness by brambles, a telephone call to the mess, and he would be home and dry.

A healthy looking runner whose breathing was better than most trotted up beside Dewsnap and became inquisitive.

'Excuse me', he said, 'I'm something of a student of running techniques. Do you always run in the nude?'

Dewsnap considered it.

He'd better do something to placate this nut. Otherwise the fellow, presumably some sort of official or coach, might make later embarrassing inquiries about the identity of the demon starko strider.

'Yes,' said Dewsnap, panting, 'cuts down wind resistance. Also exposure of the maximum skin surface stimulates blood flow.'

'Thanks,' said the inquirer, dropping away astern.

They were now surging through Bicester onto the A41 when Dewsnap became aware once more of a presence at his shoulder.

'Excuse me,' said the inquisitive voice, this time puffing noticeably, 'I see that you're running in bare feet. Do you always run in bare feet?'

'Yes', panted Dewsnap, 'if you get the soles hardened, it's fine. The total energy saved over long distances by not having to carry the weight of shoes, however light, is enormous.'

'Thanks,' said the student of technique. He dropped away again. He was back, infuriatingly, as the entrance to St David's approached.

'Excuse me, he panted.

'Yes.'

'Do you always wear a contraceptive when you run?'

'No,' called Dewsnap as he began to sprint for the camp entrance, 'but it was raining this morning when I left home.' ■

THE PIONEER



PIONEER REUNION 2018
Over 100 booked in so far.
Still time to book in, if you get a move on!
15th - 18th June 2018

■ Over 100 people booked in for the Reunion so far. There is still time to book if you get a move on!

Picture: Paul Brown



And finally 2...

New Data Protection Policy rules - please let us know 'Yes' or 'No' and finally I'm becoming a Chelsea Pensioner :)

Report: Norman Brown

IN order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), effective from 25th May 2018, the Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) Association has revised and updated its privacy policy in order to strengthen data protection and to ensure members have control over their personal data and its use. GDPR places greater emphasis on the documentation that data controllers must keep to demonstrate their accountability.

Background Information - The RPC Association is fully committed to ensuring the privacy of its members and users of the www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk website. This Privacy Policy explains how we use personal data to deliver services provided to members and the measures taken to secure this data. This policy may change occasionally so please check this statement from time to time. The RPC Association has a number of subordinate branches/clubs, currently these include: RPC Officers' Dining Club, The WOs' & SNCOs' Pioneer Reunion Club, the Northampton Branch, the Northern Branch, the Bicester Branch, the 39/93 Club and the Nostalgia Group. All subordinate branches of the RPC Association are covered and bound by this privacy policy. The RPC Association has compiled a database of some 22,000 who have joined the Association since it was formed in 1946, 1,500 are known to have deceased and the current active members is approximately 2,950.

Who is Responsible for the Data Security - The Controller of the RPC Association is designated as the organisation's 'Data Controller'. The Data Controller is responsible for ensuring the RPC Association and its subordinate branches/clubs comply with the provisions of GDPR.

What is required to comply with General Data Protection Regulations Article 5 of GDPR required that personal data shall be:

- Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to individuals.
- Collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research or statistical purposes shall not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes.
- Adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed.
- Accurate and where necessary kept up to date, every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data are accurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay.

e. Kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed; personal data may be stored for longer periods insofar as the personal data will be processed solely for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes subject to implementation of the appropriate technical and organisational measures required by the GDPR in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals.

f. Processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures. Article 5(2) requires that: A Data Controller shall be responsible for, and be able to demonstrate, compliance with the principles.

How We Collect the Information - We Hold The RPC Association collects personal information from you through your Membership Application Card and any other forms what you have submitted and through any emails that you send to us.

We also collect information automatically each time you visit the www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk website or the RPC Association Facebook Group, Facebook Page and Facebook Messages. This information, which records what parts of the website you visited, is only used as aggregate information, not as identifiable individual information.

Use of Cookies - If we use 'cookies' to identify you when you visit the RPC Association website we will display the regulatory message informing you what we are doing. A cookie is a small amount of information which is sent to your browser and stored on your computer's hard drive, which then enables our web-server to collect information back from your browser each time you visit our website. You can find out more about the use of cookies at www.cookiecentral.com. No information is collected that can identify any one individual user of the website.

What Information Do We Hold About You - We hold basic contact details, rank (where known), name, initials, service number, postal and email address and landline and mobile telephone numbers. For some members we have a few additional elements such as date of birth, dates of military service where provided. None of the data we hold would be classified as 'Sensitive Personal Data' as this generally relates to bank and medical details.

What We Do With Personal Information - We use the personal

information that you give us to keep a record of RPC Association membership and to be able to contact individual members. The postal address is required so that we can send you your copy of 'The Pioneer' the Association newsletter. We will also use this data to contact you from time to time via email, telephone or postal mail to inform you of Association events and other items deemed to be of interest to members. Date of birth, service number, dates of military service is used to uniquely identify an individual.

How We Ensure The Accuracy Of The Information - To ensure the accuracy of the information we hold we will from time to time request individual members of the RPC Association to update the information we hold on them and confirm it is accurate. We also request and rely upon members to inform the Controller of any changes in their personal details by writing, emailing or telephoning the Controller.

Who Do We Share The Information With - The Association shares what information it holds about identifiable individual members with those who have a legitimate reason to have access to the data in their capacity as Chairman or Council Members of the RPC Association or one of the subordinate branches/clubs. The RPC Association will not share any information we store about you with any other individuals or members of the Association without the express consent of the individual.

How We Ensure The Security And Privacy Of The Data - The data is stored on a server and access to that part of the system where data is physically stored is via a User ID and Password login process. The number of personnel who have been issued with a User ID and Password is strictly limited to people who would have a valid requirement to process personal data. The data file is encrypted and can only be opened and read by the input of a secure password.

The number of personnel who have been issued with the password is strictly limited to people who would have a legitimate requirement to process personal data.

What If You Would Like Us Not To Contact You In The Future - You can write, email or telephone us at our address in the contact details to request us not to contact you again in the future.

What If You Would Like Your Details Removed From Our Records - Once again, write, email or telephone us at the address below and we will, at your request, delete your details from our records. You will not hear from us again.

Deceased Members' Information - The Association does retain limited personal data of deceased members including name,



rank, date of birth, service period and date of death for historical purposes unless specifically requested otherwise.

Further Enquiries Contact the Controller RPC Association, who is the Data Controller, at: RPC Association, c/o BGSU, St George's Barracks, Arncott, Bicester, OX25 1PP. Telephone: 07868757642. Email: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

For more information about GDPR and your rights visit the following site: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Ed note: if you wish to continue to receive the Newsletter and keep in touch with the Association we do need you to respond to this item. If you have already done this via email there is no requirement to do so again. If not please let us know that it is alright for us to retain your data, you can do this by (a) email to: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com or (b) by text to 07868 757642 (insert your service number so we can identify you or (c) by a short note to the above address.

We now need you to positively opt in and give your consent to hold and use your personal data.

This explains what you must do if we are to stay in contact with you. It also details the RPC Association policy for holding personal information.

STAYING IN CONTACT

Although you have given us your contact information and, implicitly, your agreement to contact you with RPC Association news, including The Pioneer and emails, we now need your explicit agreement for this to continue or not. Therefore, the ACTION NEEDED OF YOU, as soon as possible, is to reply:

YES: If you wish the RPC Association to retain your information in order that we can maintain contact Or

NO: If you want us to delete the information we hold and no longer contact you.

If you do not reply by 25 May 2018 (this is for members who can be contacted by email) or 3 September 2018 for those without email, we must assume 'No' by default. Your records will be deleted and you will receive no further communications from the RPC Association.

You can change your preferences in the future by contacting the RPC Association.

RPC ASSOCIATION DATA PROTECTION, PRIVACY AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

General The privacy and security of your data is very important to us. This policy explains what we collect and how we use and safeguard it.

Personal Data and Collection Your personal data is any information which identifies you, or which can be identified as relating to you personally (for example, name, address, phone number, email address). We will only collect the personal data that we need, and provided by you,

for the uses set out below:

a. We will record whether you are a subscribing member of the WOs' & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club (the only part of the Association where subscriptions are required) and will process bank standing order mandates but we will not retain these or record any banking information about you.

b. There is no change to the information we have collected.

c. Information will be destroyed when no longer required or irrelevant.

d. We do not hold sensitive information (eg racial origin, political persuasion etc).

What is the Information used for? We will use your information to:

a. Communicate with you and keep you informed of RHQ The RLC and Forming Corps news and activities.

b. To service your Association Membership. This includes sending information by email and mail, for example The Pioneer.

c. Dealing with your enquires and requests.

d. Administering membership records.

Protecting Your Information Your personal information will:

a. Only be used for purposes stated and only information we need will be collected.

b. Only be seen by those in HQ The RPC Association who need it to do their work.

c. Not be shared with any third party, including other Association Members, without your permission.

d. Be retained only for as long as it is required for the purpose collected.

e. Where necessary, be kept up to date.

f. Be protected from unauthorised or accidental disclosure

g. We will provide you with a copy of your personal information on request.

Changes you provide, inaccurate or misleading data will be corrected as soon as possible. The above principles apply whether we hold your information in electronic or paper form.

Your consent By providing us with your personal information you consent to the collection and use of it as described in the policy. You can change your preferences at any time in the future by contacting HQ RPC Association. ■

Following the death of his wife Rowena, Tony found himself alone a lot of the time.

"When you are a couple, you socialise with other couples, but that wanes when you lose your partner."

Tony found ways to keep himself busy in the day time, but the evenings were long and hard.

"Once that door closes, it's not quite the same. There's no one to say 'do you want a cup of tea?' at the end of the day, so you don't bother. The joy of doing everyday tasks such as cooking and keeping the house in order had been sucked out of me in the absence of someone to share them with."

Tony joined the Royal Hospital Chelsea as a Chelsea Pensioner in January 2017. As soon as he arrived for his four day stay, he knew he was at home. Tony had long dreamt of becoming a Chelsea Pensioner and will always remember the pride he felt on the day he walked through the gates as a full time Chelsea Pensioner.

Since becoming a Chelsea Pensioner, Tony has a renewed vigour for life and is an active member of the Royal Hospital community. Tony has instigated a tea morning on his Long Ward and three mornings a week now. Tony and a few of his fellow Chelsea Pensioners sit down for a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat. He is always volunteering to accompany other pensioners to hospital

visits and enjoys going out and representing the Hospital in his Scarlets, especially during the Remembrance period, collecting money for the Poppy Appeal.

"There's nothing like the camaraderie and friendship here - we help each other and have a bit of banter along the way. The staff are so friendly, they're doing a fantastic job and have made the Royal Hospital a home that I hope to be in for a long while."

The Royal Hospital Chelsea provides sheltered, independent living for people like Tony in some of the most beautiful and historic buildings in the UK.

To apply to become a Chelsea Pensioner you must be a retired soldier over the age of 65 and able to live independently on our long wards. As a resident of the Royal Hospital you will be an ambassador for your home and the wider veteran community.

HOW TO APPLY

Contact the Chelsea Pensioner Admissions Officer

Call: 020 7881 5204

Email: admissions@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk

THE PIONEER



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